

4/23/24 People with Disabilities Focus Group

Description: A small group discussion was held with people who were living with a disability or who work on behalf of disabled people living or working in the Duluth-Superior area.

What We Heard – Comments:

- “It’s about dignity and respect -- sidewalk conditions affect our ability to live in the world as a healthy and whole person. We forget about the humanity of it.”
- “I’m super excited about the NLX (northern Lights Express passenger rail service between the Twin Cities and Duluth)
- “I moved to Duluth (from Cloquet) because it has better transportation options for me. But I hate to say it, but STRIDE is really hit and miss. Sometimes they don’t pick me up and also don’t let me know. And people without disabilities don’t have to schedule their trips days in advance, like you have to with STRIDE.”
- “STRIDE is kind of a joke. I stopped using it.”
- “The regular DTA drivers need better training on using wheelchair restraints – they often don’t know how to use them – it’s embarrassing because I’m slowing everything down.”
- “Mobility limitations can have a combination of physical, emotional, and/or financial causes, all of which need to be addressed in different ways.”
- “Limited financial resources and social support are big factors for many people with disabilities.”
- “I often feel like I’m trapped at home during the winter. It’s hard for me to get to the bus because people don’t shovel. And I don’t want to walk in the street, especially on the hill.”
- “Isolation is a serious problem for many people if they don’t have mobility options.”
- “Actually for me in the winter, it’s easier to wheel in the streets than on the sidewalk. But it’s kind of scary, like I’m taking my life in my hands just to go to the grocery store.”
- “It seems like sidewalks are a huge part of our transportation network that’s being ignored. Like the saying goes, build it and they will come.”
- “They also say, move it or lose it. It’s already hard enough because I can’t walk very well without a walker. I need to be able to keep doing that, but it’s hard sometimes. Hard because it doesn’t always feel safe, like just to cross the street. ”
- “Transit-oriented development would be great” – that living situation would make it much easier to use the regular (non-STRIDE) bus service
- “If I’m using my wheelchair, sometimes I can’t reach the pedestrian buttons (at signalized intersections) – they’re placed too high on the pole.”
- “We need to be more intentional and more equitable (in how we design our streets)

Key Takeaways:

- This community of people regards disability-friendly transportation facilities as ultimately being about respect -- for all persons, regardless of age, ability or income.
- Routinely approach all street design from the perspective of people of all ages, abilities and incomes – especially in urban and suburban areas.
- Year-round accessibility and sidewalk snow removal need to be addressed as a bigger priority in the community, especially as it pertains to individuals with limited mobility.
- Desired improvements to intersections and crosswalks include traffic signals that give a leading pedestrian interval, flashing beacons, and placement of pedestrian buttons that are low enough to reach for a person in a wheelchair.