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How Federal Infrastructure Funds Can Build More Accessible Transit Systems.

COMMENTARY | By taking significant steps towards increasing accessibility, public transit systems will better incorporate equity and social mobility into their operations.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, as many as 61 million Americans live with some form of disability. Among those millions, one in five is blind or has a mobility disability. As such, nearly 30 million Americans travel less due to limited mobility, yet they disproportionately rely on public transit to get around.

Too often, investments in public transit have ignored the needs of its wide variety of riders. For example, most cities almost completely ignored wheelchair users until the late 1960s and early '70s. After demonstrations by disabled WW II veterans, Congress adopted the Architectural Barriers Act—a precursor to the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act. Today, ramps and curb cuts are ubiquitous in cities and towns of all sizes—and they benefit a range of users beyond those in a wheelchair like the young, the old, people pushing strollers and the temporarily disabled.

For transit, the bipartisan infrastructure law signed into law by President Biden in November provides a once-in-a-generation opportunity to right this wrong by funding projects that will improve accessibility to public transit. It's critical that policymakers and transit agencies get it right and prioritize projects that incorporate the concept of universal design to create inherently accessible transit and better serve all riders.

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Route Fifty

By Aline Frantzen

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