



# News

JANUARY, 1985

## UPDATE:

# TRANSPORTATION!!

Open letter to CTD Member Organizations/Members:

As we continue in the beginning of a new year, it is my strong hope that our member organizations and individual members continue, and if need be begin, to develop and implement a plan of attack for dealing with the wholly inadequate transportation system as it relates to the needs of disabled Texans and Americans.

No longer can disabled citizens allow for public dollars to be spent on systems not usable by all citizens. Transportation for most disabled people is either individually owned and operated, segregated (para-transit) or 'not-in-operation' (regular transit).

With the current administration's projected desire to dig deeper into the social slice of the federal budget, transportation outlays included, it is imperative for disabled persons/organizations to rally together for support of fully accessible transportation. If we are to be solid in our footing in advocating for equal rights and access when it comes to expenditure of tax dollars, then we must strongly resist continuation of separate, unequal transportation. Special needs must indeed be addressed, but the first order of business must be demanding that all disabled people be able to use all tax supported transit systems, no matter the city.

Disabled people know full well the value of freedom of movement and to have that, there must first be the option of using the public service as a full partner. Disabled people can never be free in movement with the current systems--so called demand-response. As an example, El Pasoans currently wait up to three weeks (if you can get on the list) for a single ride! If that's what we work for in terms of equal access, then we're doomed to be second class citizens.

In the past two-plus years there has been some heavy pressure brought to bear on the American Public Transit Association (APTA) by American Disabled for Accessible Public Transit (ADAPT). Demonstrations at APTA's national convention in Denver (1983) and Washington D.C. (1984) have focused on and intensified the issue of equal access.

In Washington D.C. there were about 125 disabled people from across the country (Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, Louisville, Tampa, Dallas, Austin, El Paso, etc.) who paraded down the streets of the Capitol, picketed at the different convention sites, stopped buses and traffic, crossed police lines were arrested and jailed to graphically demonstrate the unequal policy set down by APTA--no lifts on buses, as policy; individual cities may do as they please.



Examples of the lack-of-access problem in Texas' transit systems are: The Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) 'agreed' to the wishes of the disabled community and was to purchase 134 wheelchair accessible buses, only to renege on the promise and purchase all of the buses, BUT without lifts and instead double the size of paratransit; Houston Metro provides no mainline access for disabled, only "demand-response" Metro Lift; VIA in San Antonio utilizes 20-plus lift-equipped para-transit vans to "fill the needs" of the transit disadvantaged; in El Paso people wait up to three (yes, THREE) weeks or more to get a single ride on Handy-SCAT.

The problem being that paratransit fills only a very small percentage of the needs of disabled Texans who can and would use accessible fixed route transit, once the commitment to full mainline access has been made. In this day and time there is no "freedom living" for disabled without the full partnership of access to all transit systems. Currently in Austin the disabled community is awaiting (January 19 election day) the outcome of the proposition of creating a taxing authority (Capitol Metro) to expand and improve the transit system. However, at this writing, there is NO commitment to anything beyond expansion of paratransit and a small "demonstration" project of mainline accessibility through the purchase of 25 lift-equipped buses out of a total purchase of 353 new and replacement buses. This type of "commitment" is designed to demonstrate failure of mainline accessibility. Only full, unqualified commitment to 100 percent accessibility of all buses purchased will in the long term, make the system viable for all persons.

One of the results of the civil disobedience by disabled persons in Washington was a meeting with Jack Gilstrap (Executive Director of APTA), Warren Frank (newly elected president of APTA), and an APTA lawyer in Chicago on December 6th. While philosophical differences were not resolved (lift policies) it was agreed that members of ADAPT will be presented to the APTA Executive Board at APTA's Board Meeting in San Diego, February 9, 1985 to present the ADAPT resolution (passed by CTD at the 1984 Delegate Assembly).

With such strong inroads to the APTA organization, it is imperative that the disabled community follow-up on the local level. We, CTD member organizations, must push our local government to implement a policy of 100 percent access to the transit system through the purchase of only 100 percent accessible buses; purchase of only accessible buses; and, telling all bus manufacturers that cities will purchase only 100 percent accessible buses. Austin, Dallas and Houston currently are planning purchases and/or changes in their transit systems to meet the future needs of their citizens. We all must press for FULL access!!! We MUST respond as part of the citizenry and demand, not ask, for access. Freedom of movement is essential for disabled people to break the bonds of imprisonment within the community ...transportation is the KEY to unlock doors to education, employment and the community at large.

There is much work for all of us and in 1985, we in Texas, have the opportunity to help lead the way in the transportation issue. Please direct your interests to me through the CTD central office.

We Will Ride!

Jim Parker

CTD Board Member





## ADVOCATE CALLS FOR DEDICATION TO CHANGE

By Gene Ormsby

Wade Blank, co-founder of Denver's Atlantis Community, who has been joined by some disabled Texans in a national struggle for completely accessible public transportation, says disabled people are not "righteous enough" about their cause and have not fully intellectualized their oppression.

Blank, a non-practicing Presbyterian minister who first gained national attention by leading demonstrations of disabled persons against the Denver Area Regional Transportation District, has told the CTD Newsletter in a telephone interview that disabled people must thoroughly define their oppression.

They must intellectualize and verbalize their oppression more than they have in order to identify the common enemy and the common problem and then act against it, said Blank.

Recently, Blank, who is the non-disabled founder of Americans Disabled for Public Transportation, led a group of about 125 disabled persons representing 20 states during a protest demonstration in Washington, D.C., to draw attention to the plight of the disabled in regard to inaccessible public transportation.

He is also a founder of Access Institute, a training arm of Atlantis, an independent living center, to teach disabled persons skills in community organizing and disability rights issues. Through Access Institute, Wade has engineered several demonstrations against McDonald's, the giant hamburger chain, in an effort to make the restaurants more accessible to disabled people.

Blank practiced civil obedience in the 1960's with black leader Martin Luther King, Jr., and has attempted to teach disabled people some of the philosophy and techniques used by King, but Blank believes the disability rights movement is far behind the black movement.

"I think there are reasons that the disabled movement is far behind the Black philosophy," said Blank. "The black oppression here in this country had been written about and discussed and philosophized about for a hundred years--before the Civil War and in the writings of the early 1900's. There were some early maneuverings in the movement. Sometimes we think the civil rights struggle of the '50s and '60s just sort of happened, but it had a lot of fertilization of the ground before it sprang. The disability rights movement doesn't have that tremendous history of oppression," Blank continued.

"I think that the disabled community, generally speaking, is not convinced at all by education or anything else that it is oppressed. I think that it is just beginning to dawn on a lot of people now, so we are light years behind the black struggle," Blank said. "There has been little written. Even white liberals who are able-bodied have had little to say about the disabled oppression. It has been a hidden oppression."

Every issue that affected the blacks affects the disabled, said Blank. "The right to ride public transit, the right to sit at any counter they want to, the right to an equal education, the right to accessible polling places, are all the same issues. The difference is that one group is black and the other is disabled."

Blank was asked during the interview if disabled people were victims of acts of omission rather than acts of commission, since there were specific laws prohibiting blacks from eating at the same lunch counters with whites and forcing them to sit at the back of the bus.

"You have other kinds of laws," said Blank. "You have local option, in the case of transportation. You have laws where the Catholic Church says that disabled people can't marry able-bodied people. You have laws where if a person is put in a nursing home, they lose basically all their civil rights, because they're under Welfare or Medicaid. They don't have a right to leave a nursing home. Anybody who has been in one knows it's hard as hell to leave 'em, because people take power over you. In some states you're not allowed to have children if you have a disability--if your blind or if you have epileptic seizures. In Minnesota they took a child away from a blind mother just about a year ago. And even though there's no law against disabled people voting, the steps (at polling places) are there which has about the same effect as a law."

Blank said there actually were no laws prohibiting blacks from voting, but election officials threw up barriers by making them bring their birth certificates and giving literacy tests, which later were ruled discriminatory and illegal.

Black leaders such as King "made a conscious decision to take risk", said Blank. "I think that is what is lacking right now in the disabled movement, not because of lack of dedication but because it's so new that those who are disabled have never really had anything to risk in the first place, and now the only thing that they're able to risk is their independent living jobs. It's true that when those who are oppressed get accepted by the system, somehow, in terms of a salary that pays \$21,000, that's a helluva bribe, and it becomes a question of whether the \$21,000 is more important than the struggle. You can't be a leader unless you run the risk."

It is not clear to many disabled people that there is a struggle, Blank said. "They're not convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt that they are due equal treatment. If a person who is a wheelchair user goes into a restaurant, like McDonald's, and all of the tables are inaccessible because of fixed seats due to some modern fad, he should have an immediate reaction of righteousness about being screwed over. I don't think most disabled people have that. When the righteousness begins to settle in, then you're going to see the leadership develop."

The disability rights leader said he believes disabled people from Texas whom he has met are beginning to act on their oppression and have an "unusual dedication to change".



## CTD's Editor's Note:

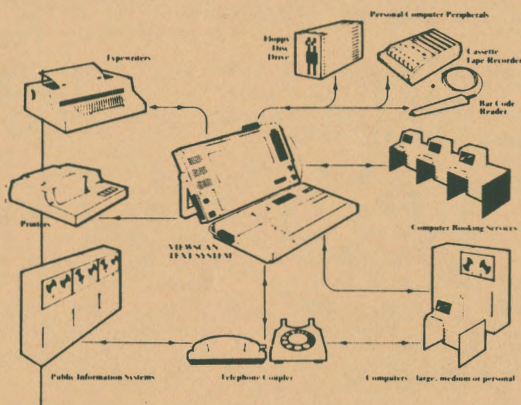
The CTD News is edited and published monthly by the Coalition of Texans with Disabilities, a state-wide cross disability consumer group. Any member who wishes to submit future articles for publication should send them to: CTD, P.O. Box 4709, Austin, Texas 78765. The deadline for submitting articles is the first of each month for that month's edition.



# Upcoming Events

## TRANSPORTATION WORKSHOP

The dates of March 22 and 23, 1985 have been set for the CTID co-sponsored Transportation Workshop. The Workshop will be held in San Antonio (location to be announced) and will include a presentation on the 22nd by the Paralyzed Veterans of America on the Federal Transportation Organization, Statutes, Regulations, and Funding System plus the Status of Selected Litigation, WMATA "On Call" Service and Travel for the Handicapped - Air, Train, Services. There will also be a presentation on the 23rd by the National ADAPT representatives outlining their approach to accessible transportation. Mark your calendars and plan to attend.



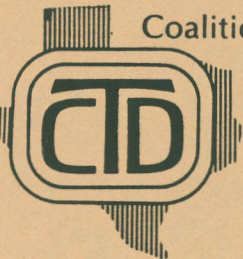
## DISABILITY & COMPUTERS

On February 14th-16th, 1985 at the Sheraton Crest Hotel in downtown Austin, the Texas Planning Council for Developmental Disabilities is sponsoring a conference entitled INDEPENDENT LIVING THROUGH COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY FOR PERSONS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES. It will be held in conjunction with the Texas Computer Education Association's annual conference in Austin on the same dates. Persons with developmental disabilities, service providers, professionals, parents, advocates, researchers, and vendors will offer presentations, demonstrations, and exhibits focusing on technology which involves direct user interaction to enhance independent living, education, and economic self-sufficiency for persons with a developmental disability.

Format, exhibit, related event, housing, CEU credit, aid for special needs, and registration information is available from:

Dick Schoech  
 University of Texas at Arlington  
 P.O. Box 19129  
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 817/273-3964





Coalition of Texans with Disabilities

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