

# Disability Rights Advocates Call for Transportation Equity

March 1, 2012 - by **Sandy Thomas**

At a recent briefing on Capitol Hill, civil rights, human rights, and disability rights advocates discussed how federal transportation policies can be improved to meet the needs of one of the nation's most transit-dependent communities: people with disabilities.

Co-hosted by [The Leadership Conference Education Fund](#) and [The American Association of People with Disabilities](#) (AAPD), the February 23 briefing coincided with ongoing negotiations around the current surface transportation bill in the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate. Many transportation equity advocates have opposed the most recent House version of the bill, saying it would severely limit access to affordable and accessible public transportation and safe roadways for the most transit-dependent communities, including people with disabilities.

As AAPD and The Leadership Conference noted, people with disabilities make up about [6 million \(40 percent\)](#) of the almost 15 million people in this country who have difficulties getting access to the transportation they need. The situation is so dire, they said, that about 560,000 people with disabilities never leave home because of transportation difficulties.

Among the issues that panelists discussed during the briefing were challenges and recommendations for accessing public transportation, paratransit, taxis, public rights of way, and transportation funding from an urban and rural perspective.

“Accessible hardware [on buses] are not enough, if taxis are accessible then it reduces the need for other complex forms of transportation,” said Jim Weisman, senior vice president and general counsel at the [United Spinal Association](#). He emphasized the need for accessible taxi vans as a requirement under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Billy Altom, executive director of the [Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living](#), recommended accessible transportation that includes systems, services, routes, and stops in order for transportation to address the needs of all people. “Systems that are accessible to individuals with disabilities are great for all,” he said.

Other panelists included Kelly Buckland of the [National Council on Independent Living](#) and Marilyn Golden of the [Disability Rights Education Defense Fund](#).

Wade Henderson, president and CEO of The Leadership Conference on Human and Civil Rights and The Leadership Conference Education Fund, delivered welcoming remarks for the afternoon session and underscored the need for such an event. “Transportation policy,” he said, “is a key civil rights issue and one that is critical to ensuring opportunity for all.”

Check out [photos from the event](#).