

**RITA**Research and Innovative Technology Administration  
Bureau of Transportation Statistics

## Transportation Difficulties Keep Over Half a Million Disabled at Home

Picture an environment precisely defined by the dimensions of home. Now imagine what it's like never to leave. Finally, consider that a lack of transportation may sometimes be the main reason for such confinement. Transportation plays such an important role in daily living that, without it, a person might be totally homebound.

**How people get around affects every aspect of their lives. A new Bureau of Transportation Statistics survey found that:**

- **Nationally, almost 15 million people in this country have difficulties getting the transportation they need. Of these, about 6 million (40 percent) are people with disabilities.**
- **More than 3.5 million people in this country never leave their homes. Of these, 1.9 million (54 percent) are people with disabilities.**
- **About 560,000 disabled people indicate they never leave home because of transportation difficulties.**

In a nation of over 290 million, the Bureau of Transportation Statistics survey found that almost 15 million people have difficulties getting the transportation they need. And, regardless of the cause, whether due to transportation difficulties or to some other reason, there are 3.5 million people in this country who never leave their homes at all—a national homebound percentage of over 1%. More than half of the homebound, 1.9 million, are people with disabilities. Many suffer from conditions that severely limit their mobility, such as Alzheimer's disease, senility, or dementia. However, the BTS survey found that for over half a million people with disabilities, the reason they never leave home is specifically because they cannot get the transportation they need.

### Transportation Difficulties for the Disabled Homebound

In 2002, BTS conducted a national transportation survey that included both people with and without disabilities. The purpose of the survey was to add to the pool of data available to policymakers for use in designing transportation systems that serve everyone equally. A total of 5,019 individuals, of which 2,034 were people with disabilities, were asked if and how they travel, what problems they experience in doing so, and their levels of satisfaction with the nation's transportation system.

The survey asked respondents how many days per week, on average, they left the home for any reason. For those who never left home, the survey then asked if they were homebound because of difficulties in getting the transportation that they need. Over half a million of the respondents with disabilities identified transportation difficulties as the homebound cause.

[Respondents with disabilities](#) were asked to categorize the kinds of difficulties that made travel outside the home impossible. The one difficulty cited most frequently was the lack of a personal vehicle. Other difficulties cited by respondents included public transportation availability or cost, physical problems that made using transportation too difficult, and personal preferences, such as not wanting to ask others for help or having to depend on someone else for transportation.

## ADA and the Nation's Disabled Population

The 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) aimed to balance the reasonable accommodation of citizens' needs with the capacity of private and public entities to respond. An important focus of the legislation was to provide employment opportunities for, and prevent discrimination against, disabled people. In effect, the ADA strives to eliminate disability as a factor in the rates of employment, education, and income. The data reported in the previous section of this *Brief* indicate that transportation difficulties may contribute to lower employment rates among people with disabilities.

Looking more closely at the disabled population of this country, the Census Bureau reports that nearly 50 million people have a disability. The employment rate for people with disabilities is 57%, compared to 63.9% for nondisabled people. Among those with severe disabilities, the employment rate is about 30%. The mean earnings in 2000 for those with work disabilities was \$33,109, about \$10,000 less than earnings for nondisabled people of the same age distribution.<sup>1</sup>

## Disability Definition

Although no generally accepted definition of disability exists in this country, the BTS survey included questions identical to those used by the 2000 Census to identify disabled individuals. The questions asked about respondents' sensory, physical, mental, self-care, and employment capabilities. Those who acknowledged having long-lasting conditions that negatively impacted these capabilities were defined as disabled for the BTS survey. The BTS survey also asked people to self-identify disability according to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) definition. However, most of the data analysis from the BTS survey will stem from individuals identified as disabled by the 2000 Census questions.

## Accuracy and Reliability of the Data:

The information presented in this *Brief* is preliminary and subject to change. Unless otherwise noted, the data come from the Bureau of Transportation Statistics' national sample survey of the United States noninstitutionalized population entitled, *The 2002 National Transportation Availability and Use Survey*. All sample surveys are subject both to sampling and to nonsampling error. For this survey, the estimated sampling error is  $\pm 1\%$  at the 95% confidence level. The sampling error is larger for demographic subgroups, as well as for survey questions that did not apply to every respondent. The Bureau of Transportation Statistics used a variety of quality control procedures to minimize nonsampling errors.

## For More Information:

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<sup>1</sup> US Census Bureau, *Facts for Features*, CB02-FF.11, July 12, 2002.

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