

OASIS · AT A GLANCE

Transportation barriers: building mobility without driving

Two out of three autistic young adults do not have a driver's license by 21. The mobility plan for the other two thirds is not a car. It is a layered system of paratransit, NEMT, travel training, family, and rideshare with scripts. Here is how to build it.

BY JIM PALASTY · 13 MIN READ · COMMUNITY LIVING

1 in 3

DRIVING BY 21

Autistic young adults who obtain a driver's license by age 21 (Curry et al. 2018). The other two thirds need a plan built around the fact.

How it works

THREE STEPS

STEP 1

Map the trips



STEP 2

Layer the modes



STEP 3

Build the ride web

Transportation modes and when to use each

Paratransit	Scheduled trips in your city. Curb-to-curb. Low fare.
NEMT	Medical appointments. Medicaid-funded. Book ahead.
Fixed-route transit	Bus, train. Cheapest. Travel training first.
Family or friends	Regular scheduled rides. Written plan.
Hired driver	HCBS waiver, private pay, or agency-based.
Rideshare	With scripts. Alerts. Never for a first trip.
Church or community van	Faith community and civic groups.
Walking or biking	Short trips. Route practice. Safety scripts.

A STORY WE KNOW

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Malik is 24 and does not drive. His family built his ride web over eighteen months. Paratransit for his day program, three days a week. His grandmother for his Wednesday dental appointments. NEMT for his neurologist visits downtown. His uncle for Saturday groceries. A hired driver from the agency for the two evenings his sister is at work. Uber only for the trip home from choir, and only after six months of practice with his mother in the car. He gets everywhere he needs to be. It took a spreadsheet.

MOBILITY IS A SYSTEM, NOT A CAR

What matters, at a glance

Paratransit

ADA-required in most metros. Curb-to-curb ride, scheduled, at a fixed low fare. Certification takes weeks. Apply early.

NEMT

Non-Emergency Medical Transport through Medicaid. For appointments. Free. Book 48 to 72 hours ahead.

Rideshare risk

Uber and Lyft with a young autistic adult carries real risk. Practice scripts. Program family alerts. Never for a first-time route.

Travel training

Free in most transit systems. A trainer rides with your adult, teaches the route, builds confidence. Weeks of practice. Life-changing.

Application window

Paratransit certification can take 2 to 3 months. Reapply every 3 to 5 years. Do not let it lapse.

Ride web

Family, neighbors, church van, day program van, paid driver. Three people plus paratransit plus NEMT. Redundancy.

BRING THESE · CHECK AS YOU GO

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Paratransit application and eligibility letter | ☐ Medicaid NEMT enrollment confirmation |
| ☐ Travel training completion notes | ☐ Written ride web with contact numbers |
| ☐ Rideshare safety script laminated | ☐ AAC or communication card for drivers |
| ☐ Medical ID with allergies and contacts | ☐ Backup fund for unexpected trip costs |

YOUR MOVE

When you are starting from zero, here is how you build the mobility plan

- 1 List every weekly trip. Day program, appointments, groceries, community, family.
- 2 Apply for paratransit certification. Enroll in NEMT. Schedule travel training.
- 3 Map each trip to a primary mode and a backup. Write it down.
- 4 Practice each new route three times before it counts as an option.
- 5 Post the ride web on the refrigerator. Update quarterly.
- 6 Build a rideshare emergency script. Practice it before you need it.

The car keys are not the mobility plan. The spreadsheet is.

RESOURCES NAMED IN THIS POST

nadt.org · <https://www.nadt.org/>

projectaction.org · <https://www.projectaction.org/>

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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