Hadley

Transportation Ideas from the Hadley Community

Presented by Ricky Enger

**Ricky Enger:** In a previous episode, we asked you, our virtual neighbors to share your tips on finding transportation with vision loss. In this episode, Steve Kelly joins us as we share the results. I'm Ricky Enger, and this is Hadley Presents. Welcome to the show, Steve.

**Steve Kelley:** Hey, Ricky. Glad to be here. Thanks for asking.

**Ricky Enger:** Yes, so glad to have you. Now, I may have lured you here under false pretenses. I think I told you there was a bag full of cookies, but it's actually a bag full of mail. We've got a great mail bag.

**Steve Kelley:** Is it chocolate chip mail by any chance? Oatmeal mail?

**Ricky Enger:** Well, maybe we'll have to dig in and find out. I do think it's full of really good stuff though. We've got some great tips that people shared when it comes to transportation with vision loss. It's never a straightforward process, but it was so good to just get some messages from people sharing, whether they're in a big city or a smaller town, how they are dealing with those things. So, you ready to dig into the mailbag and see what we got?

**Steve Kelley:** Oh, let's go. Yeah, absolutely.

**Ricky Enger:** All right. Let's pull out the first piece of mail and see what we have.

From Marion, Oak Ridge, Tennessee. First, I want to reiterate what Tara said at the end of the Hadley Presents podcast about budgeting for transportation in your monthly budget. My dad grew up during the depression and was very frugal, but he advised me to set aside a certain amount of money in my monthly budget for taxis. This was before rideshare. He said, you don't have all of the expenses that other people do for running a car, gas, insurance, maintenance, et cetera, so you should be able to use a taxi when the buses aren't running conveniently for you. This was extravagant talk coming from my dad, so I took it to heart. It can also be applied to expenditures we have to make on adaptive aids and technology. My transportation advice is something that I have really benefited from for the past 19 years that I've lived in a town with a population of 30,000.

There are no fixed bus routes, just paratransit and taxis. I started hiring young adults and paying them an hourly wage. They would have to have a car, and they would drive me on errands, help me to shop, and also help me at home with paperwork and jobs around the house. Because of their life changes, I went through several over the past 19 years. Some were better than others, but all were well worth the money. Some were grown children of friends, and some were adult children still living at home that my friends knew. A couple were adults from my church. I would save up my shopping and errands and what I needed help with at home for that block of time, and it worked out great for me. The advantage of paying someone rather than asking friends or even my family for assistance is that I don't feel that unavoidable guilt of being a burden or an inconvenience, and I can keep moving through my tasks and errands without having to chit chat or offer a meal or coffee in return. It can be challenging to find a new assistant when one leaves, but I find that it's very worth the effort. So much has improved with screen reading technology, apps and AI that I can do many tasks at home on my own, but the errands and help with shopping is invaluable. I've also told the young adults to use me as a reference if they want to when they have been reliable, responsible, and helpful.

Wow. That's a ton of great tips, Mary, and thank you.

**Steve Kelley:** Sure is.

**Ricky Enger:** Have you done something like this, Steve? You live in a fairly small town. Is that kind of approach when there aren't services, you kind of figure out somebody who knows somebody?

**Steve Kelley:** In some ways, I was fortunate enough to have a driver for years when I worked, so I would sometimes use the driver for errands in between clients or something like that, and then we did have a ride service for three years. It was great because like she said, I think one of the great things about having a service where you actually pay for it is you're not relying on the partner or the generous neighbor next door. I don't know about you, but I am reluctant sometimes. I totally get what she's saying. I think anytime you can set up something with a ride service or even one of the volunteer organizations, even in small towns, oftentimes if you go to the local area Agency on Aging, you might find that there is actually a group of volunteers or paid service that you can use.

**Ricky Enger:** It just feels better to kind of have that transactional nature where you each know what you're getting into.

**Steve Kelley:** Yeah. The other thing that she pointed out too, which I think is so huge, especially for those of us who drove at one point, start adding up what it costs per mile for gas and insurance, that's about a thousand dollars a year. You've got registration, and then if you've got a car payment that could be anywhere from two to $400 a month. When you start adding that up and you think, oh, I'm not driving anymore, that is a chunk of money that you have. You can look at that as just my transportation budget right here, what I was putting into a car before. So that's a helpful way to look at it, I think. It makes it a little less painless.

**Ricky Enger:** Yes. Let's reach in and grab our next piece of mail then.

From Meredith in Philadelphia. I have macular degeneration and live in Philadelphia. If you live in a big city, the regional public transportation authority, for me it's S-E-P-Y-A, will have resources for you. In Philly, they have trainings to show you how to get on and off a bus or train safely with your cane. Ways to call a bus over to stop for you and other tips for navigating the system. They will also help you apply for a reduced fare card and paratransit. I want to put out a call for people to be patient with themselves. If blindness comes quickly, we are learning how to literally do everything over again. Mastering assistive technology is challenging, and often we tackle one thing at a time. Friends and relatives can get impatient and wonder why we don't use something obvious, but we are working our way through an enormous number of adjustments as fast as we're able.

Man, that feels relatable, doesn't it?

**Steve Kelley:** I was just thinking, oh my. Yes. That's very relatable for sure.

**Ricky Enger:** Yeah, people wanting you to, well… why don't you just… and fill in the blank. But we all move at different speeds, and even using something like rideshare is not always straightforward for people, right?

**Steve Kelley:** Oh, it's not. I think anyone who has spent their whole life getting into a car whenever they wanted to, driving wherever they needed to, that sort of independence, it is a different ball game when you're no longer able to do that. Oftentimes, especially in rural areas, you have not learned anything about public transportation. That's all new to you, and then you throw in a little vision loss to complicate things, and that makes it a little bit more challenging. One of the things that I did want to say after listening to that is I want to remind people that there are professionals called orientation and mobility specialists. Those folks teach those skills, and I just don't think a lot of people realize that there are professionals like that out there that teach that.

**Ricky Enger:** That's a great point. I love that Philadelphia, I don't know how many other cities do this, but they actually have someone as a part of the transportation authority who will go through some of those skills as well. Now, that would be in addition to an orientation and mobility specialist. They address some of those things. Like, “I don't live in a city with a great bus system, so calling over a bus to stop, how do you do that?” It's not obvious.

**Steve Kelley:** That's a bonus. I know that the O&M instructors in Portland taught all of that and I suspect that there were some great folks at the metro station and the train station, but I don't know to what degree they went that far. That's wonderful.

**Ricky Enger:** Absolutely. Alright, what's next from Rick?

My wife and I use Lyft in our area. Lyft is connected with our paratransit service, so we pay the same amount that somebody would pay on a regular paratransit ride. What this does is it saves people who are ambulatory from taking up space on the van where they put wheelchairs and it saves our county money because they're not paying for van service to take one or two people and nobody else. So, it's saving gas and drivers who may pick up other people who use wheelchairs.

Yeah, that's really cool. And what Rick is talking about is something we got a ton of calls about. Which is, some places have what’s called an ADA voucher. Other places it may be called something different, but essentially, like Rick said, you're paying the amount that you would pay for paratransit, but it's connected to Uber or Lyft. So, it turns out that this is not only done on a state-by-state basis, it's actually, in some cases, the county or even the city that does things separately from any other city or county in the state. So, what you have to do is contact your local transportation authority to see what they have available. Some places will have that. You're just asking about an ADA voucher or shared, I don't know if they would call it shared ride service. Have you heard this referred to in any other way, Steve?

**Steve Kelley:** No, I really haven't. Although it's such a creative idea. I think it's just trying to maximize what's available out there and probably minimize the overall cost.

**Ricky Enger:** Exactly. So, if you can contact your local transit agency, they are the best source of figuring out whether this is available in your area. All right. What's next up?

From Morag, Ontario, Canada. I was born with limited peripheral vision loss to the extent of being legally blind due to a birth defect. I was diagnosed with tunnel vision in my early teens, about three years prior to applying for a driver's license. Realizing that driving would not be an option, my family encouraged me to be as independent as possible. My older sibling made a similar decision not to drive and took on the role of being my public transport trainer. This included navigating buses, trains, planes, travel, and the navigation of larger urban centers. These skills have been invaluable in my ability to develop resiliency skills to travel safely.

Here are a few tips. Reach out to local vision loss rehabilitation services for orientation and mobility training. Public libraries are an excellent resource for information on support and services. Start with a list of goals that have small targets to achieve that lead to a larger target to achieve. Learn more than one route to your destination. This is invaluable when you need to change routes due to emergencies, construction, et cetera. Use of GPS based apps for transit and navigation are helpful to have on a cell phone as a resource. Practice makes perfect. So do your homework. The more experience you gain, the more confident transit user you will become.

That's awesome. I could sort of hear you mentally cheering during certain parts of that.

**Steve Kelley:** Yeah, it's so true. I was just thinking about my own experience trying to transition from driving to getting to work in Portland, which is about a half an hour away. It started with just a bus service from the next town over up to Portland. I'll go ahead and confess, I was so proud of myself when I started taking the bus. I didn't push it any further than that at first. It was just like, “Hey, I ended up in Portland.” Then I'd walk to work from there, it was two or three blocks, but after a little bit, then I started adding something. It's like, oh, let me grab the metro from here to go to the coffee shop that's just downtown, and so on and so forth. I think that's kind of what she was addressing. I think you can overwhelm yourself with this stuff, especially if it's brand new. So, take it one piece at a time. I love that suggestion.

**Ricky Enger:** Yeah, it's always a good reminder. You can't do everything at once, and once you break it down a little bit, it becomes a lot more easy to take on.

**Steve Kelley:** Yeah, and I loved her idea about checking in with the library. I think for those of us who have been driving most of our lives, we don't understand or may not understand some of the public transportation options. So just connecting with somebody who knows that stuff and letting them know what you're trying to do, they can help you piece it all together.

**Ricky Enger:** Okay, reaching in and grabbing yet another mail piece, what do we have?

From Jeff. I enjoy driving a lot, but now low vision has put an end to that opportunity in life. How do I survive? Using my wife who can still drive locally, friends, and paratransit services through my county and Uber using the direct phone number that you can call for a ride? Yes, my iPhone has voiceover, but the small screen is hard to navigate. For me, location is the key to being able to walk to almost all my needs, and I planned it that way. I can walk within five minutes and have what I need for my independence. Miss driving a car, but it could be worse.

Oh, that's awesome, Jeff. And he brings up a really well kept secret, unfortunately. Steve, did you know that you could just use a standard phone, you can call Uber using a phone number?

**Steve Kelley:** To be honest with you, I didn't realize that there was just a phone number. I think for a lot of our members it is going to be huge.

**Ricky Enger:** Exactly. Because it's like Jeff said, you got voiceover, but if you're still making that transition and it's not intuitive for you yet, you're kind of hunting and pecking around this tiny screen trying to figure it out. It's not always straightforward. There is go-go grandparent, but as of about a year ago, I think Uber has a line that you can call and it's 8-3-3-USE-UBER, so it's 833-873-8237. You can do this from any cell phone. In other words, it does need to be able to accept texts, but it doesn't have to be a smartphone. So, you can call and they'll help you set up an account if you don't already have one, and then you can either schedule something for right then or you can schedule it for up to 90 days in advance. They'll text you the information about your driver. I just think that's really cool.

**Steve Kelley:** Oh, I think it's huge. I don't know about you, but there have been times when you're either in an airport or you're someplace and you're trying to multitask, and the idea of sitting down and dealing with that app sometimes it's just like, oh my gosh, really? To be able to just make the call maybe while you're on the run or something like that. To me, that would be a whole lot easier. Thank you Uber.

**Ricky Enger:** Yeah, exactly. And thank you, Jeff for the tips. And if you have that freedom, love how you kind of planned to move to an area where you can choose where the grocery store is five minutes away or whatever, that's great.

**Steve Kelley:** I think he's right. I mean, as you start thinking in the future, that's one of the things that you do want to think about. What sort of public transportation options do you have, or do you want to make it so close that you can just walk or bike ride maybe, if that's still comfortable for you. So those are definite considerations.

**Ricky Enger:** Right. Okay. I think we have one more in here, and I don't believe it's a bag of cookies, but I think it is something good. Let's find out.

**John:** My name is John. I'm a vision impaired person from Orange County, California. I was listening to the podcast on transportation and the ins and outs of that, and I just would share with you my tip. I had an Uber driver five feet away from me waiting for me. I couldn't see the car and intermediary intervened and said, “That’s your car, John.” So, what I did was I changed my name in Uber, John Blind White Cane and my last name. So, when it pops up on the Uber system in the car with the driver, they know to look for a guy that's blind or mostly blind, but with a white cane. And ever since then, I have never had a problem hooking up with the car. I don't see cars very well. They need to look out for me because I won't recognize what car I'm getting into. That's my hot tip for the day. Be safe. Thanks so much. Hadly.

**Ricky Enger:** What a clever idea that is! I had never thought of that. My method of doing this is when the driver is five minutes away, six minutes away, there's a text feature and you can message the driver. I'll say something like, blind woman, blue shirt, black pants with a cane. But his way is a lot more efficient than mine.

**Steve Kelley:** That whole texting feature, I know that that's available and I've done it in the past myself, but again, it's not always convenient, especially if you're on the run. Finding that driver, even with low vision, no vision, can be challenging.

**Ricky Enger:** Especially if you're in an area where there are tons of cars going past. I was at the airport recently and that is noisy and chaotic for sure.

**Steve Kelley:** On one of my trips to Chicago, I specifically took a red ball cap with a letter R on it, that's what I used. I think I had called a cab service, which was also Uber or whatever, and just let them know, I don't see well, but I'm wearing a cap that's red with an R, and that worked flawlessly. There are ways, but I do like John's tip. That's a good one if you don't mind doing it.

**Ricky Enger:** Wow. Well, this was a really cool chance to get some ideas from our virtual neighbors. It's nice to hear what others are doing and we can all learn from each other with that.

**Steve Kelley:** Yeah, I love the feedback. They were some great emails with great tips.

**Ricky Enger:** Absolutely. Do you have any tip that we didn't cover? I know I don't. I think they all did a fantastic job.

**Steve Kelley:** I do too. I think when I listened to the podcast, there was a lot said about advocacy, and I think that that's so important. You do have to kind of step out and do a little bit of research. And again, think about the orientation and mobility specialist or the local agency on aging. I think that those are great places to check, and this is something that they do on a regular basis. They stay up on some of these local resources, so check in with those folks and be prepared to make some phone calls. But it's amazing. Even in rural areas like my area, there are still different groups. Some of them volunteer, some of them paid cab services, but you do have to look sometimes.

**Ricky Enger:** Yeah, for sure. And if you need some assistance looking, give us a call at Hadley. We're happy to help break it down a little bit and maybe get you that number for your local area agency on Aging.

**Steve Kelley:** I know that you and I have both done that. We do that a lot for members. People call up looking for resources, and we get on a database that we're familiar with the APH directory or something similar and look those numbers up for people. So please, I hope everybody feels comfortable giving us a ring for that sort of information.

**Ricky Enger:** Yes. So that's 800-323-4238. We're always happy to help. Steve, thanks so much for dropping by. This has been really cool. A lot of fun.

**Steve Kelley:** Thanks for the invite, even though there were no cookies, I had fun, Ricky.

**Ricky Enger:** Yes, me as well and thanks for listening.

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