Designing for Individuals who are visually impaired or blind

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Accessible Design for the Blind
NACTO Designing Cities Conference
October 25, 2012
What do we mean by visually impaired or blind?
Intersection as seen by someone with “normal” vision
Central vision loss
Peripheral Vision Loss
Overall acuity loss
Totally blind
Pedestrians with low vision (many of our growing elderly population)

- May have difficulty with depth perception
  - Problems in judging location of vehicles
  - Problems in judging approach speed of vehicles
- May have reduced contrast sensitivity
- Difficulty reading signs and signals
How do pedestrians who are blind or visually impaired get around?
Yes! people who are blind do travel independently to new places

- Travel to unfamiliar destinations for shopping, errands, visiting friends, children’s activities, work, or other purposes, just like those who are fully sighted
- May have to figure out intersections and intersection crossings when they arrive at them
- May be unaware of changes and may make dangerous decisions when familiar intersections have been changed
Techniques and aids used by individuals who are blind or visually impaired

- Sighted (human) guide
- White cane
- Dog guide
- Telescope or other low vision aids
- No aid
Aids and techniques for obstacle and curb detection

▲ Long white cane - used as a probe of the walking surface, identification
Aids and techniques for obstacle and curb detection

- Dog guide
- Guides around obstacles
- Stops at curbs or drop-offs
- Low vision aid, such as telescope
  - Used only for specific tasks, i.e., reading sign
Orientation and alignment cues

- Slight slopes and changes in surface textures
- Specific textures that are detectable
- Sidewalk and/or grass line or building line
- Traffic – both parallel to travel path and perpendicular to travel path
- Accessible pedestrian signals
- Other pedestrians, sun, other cues
- Awareness of intersecting streets and general layout of area
Street crossing tasks

- Locate edge of the street
- Determine where to begin crossing (locate crosswalk)
- Establish crossing direction and alignment
- Determine traffic control and use pushbutton, if necessary
- Decide when to begin crossing
- Maintain alignment during crossing
Traditional street crossing strategies

- Walk up to corner
- Maintain travel direction
- Listen through a signal cycle
- Cross with the surge of traffic traveling parallel to crosswalk
- Maintain direction by listening to vehicles and other cues

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Designs that make travel safer

▲ Additional care is needed to make streets and sidewalks accessible to individuals who are visually impaired
▲ Sidewalk design features
▲ Street crossings and access to information about signals
Sidewalks
Would this sidewalk design be a problem for someone who’s visually impaired?
How about this sidewalk for someone who’s blind?
Clear straight sidewalk path with grouping of furniture
Avoid obstacles (protruding objects) that cannot be detected by cane.
Tree maintenance needs attention
Barrier where crossing is closed
Street crossings
Blended transitions – can’t tell where the plaza ends and the street begins
Add detectable warnings (truncated domes) to indicate location of street
NOT detectable warnings
Detectable warning = truncated domes
Crosswalk offset from corner can be problematic
Provide guidance to crosswalk
Crosswalk in line with sidewalk
Potential treatments – wayfinding

▲ Design of sidewalk
▲ Tactile features or fences
▲ Sound cues from audible signals

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Signal features intended to help pedestrians may not be usable without accessible pedestrian signals

- LPI
- Exclusive pedestrian phases, including at midblock crossings
- Protected left turns
- Pedestrian pushbuttons
Traffic cues may not be available or usable where there are:

- Low volumes of traffic parallel to crosswalk
- Crossing major street
- T intersections (crossing top of T)
- Exclusive pedestrian phases
- Leading pedestrian intervals
- Heavy turning traffic volumes
- Masking sounds
Pedestrian Pushbuttons

▲ Is there a pushbutton?
▲ Where is it?
▲ Have I found the pushbutton for the street I’m crossing?

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Access may be provided by Accessible Pedestrian Signals (APS)

Features of new APS
- Speakers at the pushbutton
- Pushbutton Locator tone
- Audible and Vibrotactile Walk indications
- Tactile arrow
- Automatic volume adjustment
Pushbutton-integrated APS

- Pushbutton locator tone during FDW and DW
- Rapid tick WALK indication
Pushbutton-integrated APS

△ Pushbutton locator tone during FDW and DW

△ Speech WALK indication
APS Location is critical

- Provide information to the user through proximity to the departure point
- Signal can be quieter due to proximity
Installation recommendations

- Beside the landing of the curb ramp
- Separated by more than 10 feet from other APS on corner
- Nearest the crosswalk line furthest from the center of the intersection
Installation example - APS aligned with crosswalk lines

Reachable from level landing, within 10 ft of curb, within 5 feet of crosswalk lines
Modifications that make programs and facilities accessible to pedestrians who are blind or who have low vision are helpful to **ALL** pedestrians.
Questions??

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