

Kelly Mack Testimony for a Hearing on Bill B26-0684 — Deployment of Automated Vehicles: July 13, 2026

Summary

- Disabled people have endured decades of transportation discrimination and inequality, including the entire DC on-demand transportation service industry (both cabs and rideshares) largely remaining inaccessible and unreliable despite disabled advocates recommending improvements for more than 10 years.
- DC and federal laws clearly state the expectation that disabled people have equal access to public accommodations (including transportation services) and the right to not be discriminated against in their efforts to experience the same goods and services that nondisabled people enjoy.
- Disabled people are generally very interested in safe and accessible automated vehicle service due to persistent transportation inequalities.
- DC government and AV companies have been aware of the need to make this service accessible for many years and the solutions to do so.
- DC Council must clearly mandate accessibility requirements from the start of AV passenger transportation service and policy language recommendations are included for this purpose.

Introduction and Persistent Problems with Accessible On-Demand Transportation Services

Thank you for the opportunity to testify at this Committee on Transportation and the Environment Hearing about bill B26-0684, “Autonomous Vehicle Deployment Authorization Amendment Act of 2026”. My name is Kelly Mack. I am a DC resident with a permanent disability and I use a power wheelchair for mobility. In addition to personal advocacy about on-demand transportation service, I am also a member of the Multimodal Accessibility Advisory Council¹ (or MAAC), which is a Mayorally-appointed advisory body that advises on making local transit and public space in the District more accessible to persons with disabilities.

Like the majority of disabled people, I do not drive and thus rely on publicly-available transportation services, including cab and ride shares, for traveling throughout the city to attend appointments, run errands, meet friends, and enjoy the plentiful restaurants, culture, and entertainment. During my entire time living in DC (more than 25 years), I have experienced ongoing and significant challenges in obtaining on-demand transportation service as a wheelchair user. I generally receive requested service at a far lower success rate than nondisabled people. Additionally, wheelchair accessible vehicles (or WAVs) are only typically

¹ <https://www.maacdc.org/>

available during limited hours and not 24-hours as nondisabled people experience. During years of previous Accessibility Advisory Committee (or AAC) meetings with the Department for Hired Vehicles (or DFHV), performance oversight hearings², a recent public forum³, and through media interviews⁴, I have shared the many barriers and problems with accessible cab service in DC and the continuous discrimination I have experienced as a disabled customer.

It's also worth noting that I am but one disabled person out of thousands living in DC or visiting the city, that has been refused accessible on-demand transportation service. Others can and have attested to regular refusal of service with their guide dogs or not being able to get home safely late at night. There are many more stories out there of missed appointments, failed travel, and ongoing harm to the lives of people with disabilities just trying to go about their day.

Ongoing, persistent discrimination like this is exhausting to endure and many people may not have the time, energy, and resources to complain each time they experience it. I know people who complained, received no response, and ultimately gave up on trying to receive accessible on-demand transportation service. I filed a number of complaints over the years with the hope of improving service through learned experience and recommendations. The majority of these companies have fought these complaints every step of the way, yielding zero voluntary service improvements.

I am providing this background because in 2012, DC Council passed a bill to improve accessible cab service and create the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) at DFHV. These were hard fought wins for disabled advocates and the arguments continued at AAC meetings when cab companies dragged their feet in complying with the law. Additionally, over the years the Department for Hired Vehicles has failed to properly enforce DC law and regulations mandating accessibility, resulting in worsening accessible cab service⁵. What little gains in the miniscule level of accessible cab service eroded with the permitting and growth of rideshare operators in DC. These companies were given carte blanche to operate in the city with zero accessible vehicles. Only a lawsuit against Uber⁶ resulted in that company (and only that company) having to provide some wheelchair accessible vehicles. The gain in ride shares has resulted in a decline in cabs because the ride shares had few rules to follow under the law. Wheelchair accessible vehicles have grown even scarcer and their service even harder to secure.

All of this is what disabled people at the time predicted would happen and it will occur all over again if DC does not mandate clear accessibility requirements from the start of any plan for autonomous vehicle passenger service deployments in the city.

² My previous DFHV performance oversight hearing written testimonies can be shared on request.

³ <https://iims.dccouncil.gov/Hearings/hearings/2335>

⁴ See two recent media stories about WAV cab service lacking in DC: <https://www.nbcwashington.com/investigations/i-call-it-the-yeti-the-hunt-for-wheelchair-accessible-taxis-in-dc/3888416/> and <https://dcist.com/story/22/12/06/d-c-is-falling-short-of-its-taxi-accessibility-requirements-what-went-wrong/>.

⁵ <https://thewash.org/2024/12/10/wheelchair-users-stranded-dc-law/>

⁶ <https://equalrightscenter.org/timeline-lawsuit-uber-2024/>

Let me be crystal clear: ***there is no known example where an entity has voluntarily offered an accessible transportation service.*** Hope is not a plan. The only plan for accessibility that has ever worked is through mandates, either legislatively or through costly and lengthy litigation.

To share just a few examples of the long history of transportation discrimination against disabled people and what it took to remedy these problems:

- Denver Bus Protests — In 1978, after polite requests were ignored disabled people protested inaccessible buses by blocking the vehicles with their bodies and wheelchairs. The standoff lasted 24-hours and resulted in expanding available accessible bus service.⁷
- Greyhound Bus Lawsuits — Disability advocates have had to sue Greyhound multiple times to address problems with inaccessible buses and service.⁸
- Amtrak Lawsuit — In 2022, Amtrak settled a lawsuit over accessibility violations and disability discrimination.⁹
- NYC Cab Lawsuit — In 2024, only after a long lawsuit (more than 10 years), legal settlement, and a court ordering that all new cabs entering service must be wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAVs) until the operating fleet was 50% accessible was anything close to equivalent service established for disabled customers.¹⁰ It should be noted that this level of accessible cab service is far superior to what DC currently experiences as the city continues to lag behind due to a web of legal loopholes and evasions by the cab and rideshare operators.

The list of inaccessible transportation barriers, protests, and lawsuits goes on. These are just a few of the persistent transportation issues disabled people have had to fight by laying their bodies on the line and spending years and scarce resources mounting litigation — and in many of these cases when existing law was already firmly established.

Accessibility and Anti-Disability Discrimination Laws

Both federal and DC statutes (and their implementation regulations) support the legal standard of full accessibility, equity, and anti-disability discrimination that is yet to be fulfilled for disabled people in receiving the public accommodation of on-demand transportation (currently in the form of cab and ride share service and pending the approval of autonomous vehicle passenger service).

⁷ <https://www.coloradovirtuallibrary.org/technology/accessibility/accessibility-quick-tip-who-were-the-gang-of-19/>

⁸ <https://www.justice.gov/archives/opa/pr/greyhound-lines-resolve-americans-disabilities-violations>

⁹ <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-opens-investigation-flx-north-america-flxibus-and-greyhound-disability>

¹⁰ <https://www.justice.gov/archives/opa/pr/amtrak-pays-over-2-million-individuals-disability-settlement>

Americans with Disabilities Act (1990)¹¹

The ADA clearly states that “No entity shall discriminate against an individual with a disability in connection with the provision of transportation service” and:

“Private entities that are primarily engaged in the business of transporting people and whose operations affect commerce shall not discriminate against any individual on the basis of disability in the full and equal enjoyment of specified transportation services. This obligation includes, with respect to the provision of transportation services, compliance with the requirements of the rules of the Department of Justice concerning eligibility criteria, making reasonable modifications, providing auxiliary aids and services, and removing barriers (28 CFR 36.301-36.306).”

Another section mandates wheelchair accessibility specifically and equivalency in service:

Subpart D-Acquisition of Accessible Vehicles by Public Entities

§ 37.77 Purchase or lease of new non-rail vehicles by public entities operating a demand responsive system for the general public.

“(a) Except as provided in this section, a public entity operating a demand responsive system for the general public making a solicitation after August 25, 1990, to purchase or lease a new bus or other new vehicle for use on the system, shall ensure that the vehicle is readily accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities, including individuals who use wheelchairs.

(b) If the system, when viewed in its entirety, provides a level of service to individuals with disabilities, including individuals who use wheelchairs, equivalent to the level of service it provides to individuals without disabilities, it may purchase new vehicles that are not readily accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities.

(c) For purposes of this section, a demand responsive system, when viewed in its entirety, shall be deemed to provide equivalent service if the service available to individuals with disabilities, including individuals who use wheelchairs, is provided in the most integrated setting appropriate to the needs of the individual and is equivalent to the service provided other individuals with respect to the following service characteristics:

- (1) Response time;*
- (2) Fares;*
- (3) Geographic area of service;*
- (4) Hours and days of service;*
- (5) Restrictions or priorities based on trip purpose;*
- (6) Availability of information and reservations capability; and*
- (7) Any constraints on capacity or service availability.”*

¹¹ <https://www.ada.gov/law-and-regs/ada/>

In reviewing these requirements for wheelchair access of on-demand transportation services in the ADA and regulations, it is clear that taxi and rideshare companies have never achieved these standards and continue to violate the law. The number of wheelchair accessible vehicles used in these services in DC remain low, resulting in reduced availability, long wait times and restrictions in hours of service, reduced geographic area, discrimination, and repeated denial of service. Disabled people in DC, particularly wheelchair users, do not receive anywhere near equivalent on-demand transportation service under the law.

DC Taxicab Service Improvement Amendment Act (2012)¹²

DC statute also requires that: “Taxicab service in the District shall be accessible to the disabled and in compliance with the ADA and the Human Rights Act of 1977”. This means that under both federal and DC law, cab companies are failing in their responsibility to provide accessible and equivalent service and not to discriminate against disabled people.

Further, as of 2018, at least 20% of each taxi fleet should have comprised wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAV). Additionally, the DFHV Accessibility Advisory Committee recommended that DC move toward a 100% WAVs fleet requirement in a 2014 report¹³. Although the law required these Committee recommendations be “given great weight” to increase baseline requirements, DC has yet to meet even the minimal 20% WAV rule six years (and counting) after it was scheduled to go into effect.

Several other violations of this law continue, including dispatch practices and wait times, despite continuous advocacy from the AAC and disabled members of the public. In testimonies presented over years, disabled customers have shared stories and data of ongoing WAV service failures, discrimination, and denials of service and seeing little to no improvement. There has accumulated a great deal of evidence in the call to revise DC law and regulatory oversight of on-demand transportation services.

DC Human Rights Act (1977)¹⁴

DC Council established a strong statute specifying the illegality of discrimination for any reason, including that of disability.

§ 2-1402.01. General.

“Every individual shall have an equal opportunity to participate fully in the economic, cultural and intellectual life of the District and to have an equal opportunity to participate in all aspects of life, including, but not limited to, in employment, in places of public accommodation, resort or amusement, in educational institutions, in public service, and in housing and commercial space accommodations.”

¹² https://lms.dccouncil.gov/downloads/LIMS/26386/Signed_Act/B19-0630-SignedAct.pdf?Id=104527

¹³ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1amXkoc9BtURxNGHr54qEQhoaM6IVo_YN/view?usp=sharing

¹⁴ <https://code.dccouncil.gov/us/dc/council/code/titles/2/chapters/14/units/A>

The law specifically prohibits denying, directly or indirectly, any person the full and equal enjoyment of the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, and accommodations of any place of public accommodation. Both taxicabs and rideshares meet this definition, as they provide a transportation service available to the public.

In sum, by refusing to provide sufficient numbers of WAVs, the persistent discrimination disabled people (specifically wheelchair users) experience in not receiving service or experiencing ridiculously long wait times (compared to nondisabled customers) for on-demand transportation (cab or rideshare) in DC is a violation of DC's Human Rights Act.

My hope in sharing these lessons from history is two-fold in reminding:

- DC Council that the law already strongly supports requiring accessibility of public goods and services through the DC Human Rights Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act; and
- that DC Council must ensure autonomous vehicles deployed in the city for passenger service are fully accessible or witness further discrimination and segregation of disabled people that will result in more lengthy and expensive litigation.

What we do now will either further segregate people with disabilities by denying them yet another option for equal and accessible transportation, or: revolutionize their lives through truly embracing this innovation by requiring full accessibility from the start.

Disabled Interest and Activism Concerning AVs

Following the lessons of history and statute, let us choose to embrace accessibility as a crucial aspect of the deployment of autonomous vehicles (AVs).

A 2024 market study¹⁵ estimates 40 million people live in the U.S. with some kind of disability, and that the market is sizable for these individuals as far as transportation/travel needs. In general, disabled people are very interested in safe and accessible AV service because a high percentage of this population does not drive and experiences significant gaps and challenges with transportation.¹⁶ Having an accessible service to address these issues would be transformative in their lives for employment, commerce, and traveling to medical appointments, among other transportation needs. Accessible AV transportation options would also support economic development with access to employment opportunities for people with disabilities, per a study from the National Disability Institute.¹⁷

The disability community has been at the forefront of promoting driverless vehicle technology as a potential revolutionary step forward in accessible transportation. In 2016, I attended a federal agency meeting about the potential of autonomous vehicles to revolutionize transportation for

¹⁵ <https://opendoorsnfp.org/2020-2/>

¹⁶ <https://www.bts.gov/travel-patterns-with-disabilities>

¹⁷ <https://www.nationaldisabilityinstitute.org/reports/autonomous-vehicle-adoption/>

disabled people and older adults (who also experience transportation challenges when they are no longer able to drive and must adapt to changing health and disability status)¹⁸. Additionally, a national advocacy organization, The Disability Rights and Education Fund (DREDF), has been vocal for many years about the basic requirements needed to ensure accessibility¹⁹.

In 2020, the National Science & Technology Council and the U.S. Department of Transportation issued a report²⁰ that affirmed the importance of developing fully accessible AVs:

“AVs hold enormous potential to promote the independence, economic opportunities, and social well-being of older Americans and persons with disabilities by offering independent mobility for daily activities. Reducing transportation related obstacles would enable new employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities and could save billions annually in healthcare expenditures from missed medical appointments. Ensuring that AVs will meet the needs of Americans of all abilities will require carefully thought-out inclusive design to ensure widespread usability and market potential for persons with all types of disabilities—visual, auditory, cognitive, mobility, and others.” (page 3)

AARP weighed in as well in 2021 with a report on the development of AVs²¹ stating that:

“This research reveals a perennial flaw in our technology adoption process, at least in the mobility arena: the current default of designing for a broad clientele of mobile individuals is insufficient. The framework identified in this report is an important but only preliminary step to ensuring that the needs of harder-to-serve populations, such as frail older adults and people with mobility disabilities, are met.” (page 2)

Additionally:

“Policy development and a conscious effort to drive beneficial outcomes are reliant on addressing the appropriate roles for the public and private sectors. Moreover, our research found limited attention being given to addressing the needs of hardest-to-serve older adults and people with disabilities—those with limitations (physical, cognitive, multiple disabilities, financial, technology access/understanding) or certain specific needs (transportation that accommodates mobility aids, low-income, rural location). These populations could see an overall reduction of transportation options due to the possible impacts of AVs and new shared mobility on public transportation.” (page 3)

Companies developing AVs have been well-aware of the interest in this technology by disabled people and older adults seeking better accessible transportation options. Disability advocacy groups, government agencies, and others have engaged with these companies to push for

¹⁸ <https://www.nadtc.org/news/blog/autonomous-vehicles-the-disability-and-aging-communities/>

¹⁹ See this checklist from 2018: <https://dredf.org/fully-accessible-autonomous-vehicles-checklist/>

²⁰ <https://www.transportation.gov/sites/dot.gov/files/2020-02/EnsuringAmericanLeadershipAVTech4.pdf>

²¹ https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/5d9f83b8b237fa6c07d5d69d/602cb83a17ae6903c1477673_Framework_OlderAdultMobilityFactors_02.14_Compressed.pdf

accessibility of this service from the start of deployment. It cannot be argued that there hasn't been plenty of time and opportunity to include accessibility during the development of the technology. People with disabilities must not be left behind now that the technology is reaching fruition.

U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth²² reminded AV companies (yet again) earlier this year about the need for accessible service. ***With the history of meetings, outreach from disability advocates, and existing laws (like the Americans with Disabilities Act from 1990), there is no credible excuse for companies to say they didn't know about the need for accessibility and are unprepared for it.*** Accessibility should have been planned throughout the many years of technology research and testing – especially considering that more than \$100 billion has been spent on AV development in this nation²³.

At this point in time, only [May Mobility](#) is offering AV WAV service in limited areas. They partnered with BraunAbility²⁴, the world's leading manufacturer of accessible transportation solutions, to develop an ADA-compliant AV WAV²⁵. In 2022, a pilot of the service (including WAV option) was conducted in Grand Rapids, MN²⁶. During its first two months, their AVs drove more than 15,000 autonomous miles and experienced 75% repeat ridership. Indicating the level of interest by disabled riders, an incredible **24% of rides included wheelchair users**.

AV companies have previously cited a lack of research and availability of accessible solutions, which is patently false. Abundant initiatives have researched accessibility needs and how they can be met with AV technology. (See the U.S. Access Board 2021 series on "Inclusive Design of Automated Vehicles" and resulting reports²⁷.) A variety of access barriers for AVs (mobility, sensory, and cognitive) have been raised for many years, researched, and possible solutions presented²⁸.

One issue regularly raised concerning AV WAV service is automated securement for wheelchairs. Two options already exist to address this concern:

- [QUANTUM Automated Wheelchair Securement Station](#) and
- [UDIG: Universal Docking Interface Geometry](#).

²² <https://www.duckworth.senate.gov/news/press-releases/duckworth-pushes-tesla-and-waymo-to-ensure-autonomous-vehicles-are-safe-and-accessible-for-all-americans>

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²⁴ <https://www.braunability.com/us/en/about-us/news-events/may-mobility-advances-av-accessibility.html>

²⁵ <https://maymobility.com/posts/may-mobility-advances-av-accessibility-leads-industry-with-development-of-first-ada-compliant-toyota-sienna-autono-maas/>

²⁶ <https://maymobility.com/locations/grand-rapids-minnesota/>

²⁷ <https://www.access-board.gov/av/>

²⁸ <https://www.access-board.gov/av/report.html>

Additionally, elements of vehicle design and boarding ramps for accessibility are already well-understood and can be accommodated.

Essentially, what is missing is the will of AV companies to adopt inclusive design practices that would accommodate all customers – including people with disabilities. We must take their lack of action as the truth of their intentions. AV companies will not “voluntarily” adopt accessibility as a priority, so it must be mandated by DC Council.

Policy Recommendations

Learning of the release of draft legislation to permit the deployment of automated vehicles in DC and that it included scant reference to accessibility and meeting the needs of disabled passengers, the MAAC sent a letter to DC Council members on May 18 advising that any legislation permitting AV deployment **must** include accessibility requirements for disabled customers²⁹.

The letter recommended specific language and warned against permitting “referral to another service”, which has been approved in other jurisdictions for AV companies. This approach is inequitable and would strain the already limited number of accessible and operating on-demand (both cab and rideshare) accessible vehicles in DC (just like what happened when rideshare service was originally deployed in DC without any accessible vehicle mandates) — not expand on existing scarce accessible transportation options. In addition, AV companies are advocating they be allowed to refer disabled customers to the same exact WAV on-demand transportation providers that their business model aims to replace. The growth of inaccessible AVs will lead directly to the destruction of the already meager WAV on-demand transportation services.

To be blunt, 36 years following the Americans with Disabilities Act (and years after the other DC laws previously cited) I should not have to say it, but feel that I must: ***separate and unequal transportation service for disabled people is just not acceptable.*** The desire of AV companies to eschew responsibility in accessible and equal service is reprehensible. Suggesting that they can send wheelchair users to other services for accessibility is both unequal in service (hours, wait times, experience, and likely cost) and plainly discriminatory. If this were presented as a solution for other minority groups, it would be immediately discarded as illegal and unacceptable.

The MAAC recommended two concepts be included in any AV legislation to be considered by DC Council:

1. A general requirement for compliance of nondiscrimination laws that includes specific reference of people with disabilities in providing equitable passenger AV service; and
2. A requirement that all AV service providers must provide accessible service directly (specifically prohibiting a 'referral to another service'), including: a wheelchair-accessible vehicle (WAV) fleet minimum of 10% at launch, scaling to 25% by year three, and 50% by year five of operation, with milestones enforceable through service penalties and/or

²⁹ Submitted for the hearing record on June 22, 2026.

permit non-renewal; provision of an accessible smartphone app compliant with WCAG 2.1/2.2 Level AA standards; and an accessible onboard interface for emergencies in the vehicle.

Since this is a new and developing technology and service, it would be advisable that legislation also requires that whatever DC government agency is appointed to regulate companies providing AV passenger service (such as DDOT or the Department for Hired Vehicles) engage regularly with disabled stakeholders (either by attending MAAC meetings or convening a similar advisory group) and act swiftly on recommendations they may provide for improving service.

The MAAC further recommended that any AV legislation explicitly permit and encourage pilots of automated transit buses and shuttles, including extensions of the 2025-2026 Beep/Adastec pilot conducted in partnership with USDOT. Low-floor transit buses are already wheelchair accessible by design, making automated transit the category of AV service where accessibility is most readily achieved and most directly beneficial to disabled riders. Automated shuttles additionally offer a promising first- and last-mile solution for residents in areas underserved by Metrorail and Metrobus, including many neighborhoods east of the Anacostia River. The April 2026 DDOT report³⁰ documents that shuttle pilots face genuine operational challenges around weather, speed, and ridership, and for that reason MAAC recommends the legislation authorize and support such pilots rather than mandate them — with a requirement that pilot outcomes be reported to the MAAC and to the Council.

It is important to note that other credible organizations support mandating baseline accessibility for approving AV passenger deployment. In their recent white paper³¹, Families for Safe Streets connects accessibility with safety:

“Transportation technologies can either reduce existing inequalities or reinforce them. AV deployment must be designed to ensure that safety and mobility benefits are shared across all communities.

A safer transportation technology that excludes wheelchair users, passengers who are blind or deaf, or people with cognitive disabilities does not deliver safety benefits to those individuals at all — for these large groups of people, an inaccessible AV is not a safer option, it is not an option. And when an AV fails to accommodate a wheelchair user, provides no reliable way for a blind pedestrian to understand its intentions, or leaves a passenger with a cognitive disability without support during a trip disruption, the result is not merely an inconvenience or an equity failure — it is a safety failure. A system that cannot communicate clearly with all road users, accommodate all passengers safely, or provide adequate human assistance when automated systems are insufficient is not a fully safe system. It is a system designed to be safe for some people

³⁰ https://ddot.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/ddot/DDOT%20Research%20Report%20State%20of%20U.S.%20Automated%20Vehicle%20Policy_April%202026.pdf

³¹ <https://files.elfsightcdn.com/eafe4a4d-3436-495d-b748-5bdce62d911d/13f5c8ef-aa42-4e51-944b-eae9c1d9dc0f/Safety-First-Always-An-FSS-Framework-for-Autonomous-Vehicles-June-22-2026.pdf>

and not others. Accessibility is therefore not a feature to be added later. It is a threshold condition on which other safety benefits rest.” (page 67)

Thus far, no considerations of the impact of algorithmic bias have been explored in the debate about AV deployment planning. As DREDF details in a 2022 paper³², this is a critical issue that must also be addressed:

“Autonomous vehicles (AVs) have the potential to transform access to transportation and related infrastructure for people with disabilities. AVs and new technologies also come with significant risks of embedding and perpetuating bias and discrimination that permeate society. This brief considers bias within pedestrian detection and collision behavior algorithms, lack of disability representation in the datasets used to train and test AVs, and the need for ethics frameworks that give full recognition to disabled people’s humanity and fundamental rights. Policy measures to mitigate the identified risks are proposed.”

Finally, a bill permitting AV deployment should proactively mandate provision of equal service for people with disabilities. To achieve comprehensive accessibility for disabled people, four categories of requirements must be added to legislation permitting AV deployment to ensure accessibility for disabled people:

1. Wheelchair accessible for loading and securement;
2. Accessible human machine interfaces (HMI) so that disabled passengers and pedestrians can communicate with and understand AVs and be controlled by riders simply and effectively in multiple ways (through an accessible app, audio, and visual cues) etc;
3. Detect and respond appropriately to/with disabled pedestrians (service animal users, wheelchair and other mobility device users, etc); and
4. Protect the safety of disabled riders and pedestrians, including people with darker skin tones and gender non-conforming people.

While the above four points encompass the broader issues of AV accessibility, a more comprehensive list of specific accessibility recommendations has been developed with disabled experts and can be a tool used for planning policy and regulation to support AV deployment³³. (A draft list of policy recommendations for DC AV implementation has been compiled³⁴ and language can be provided on request.) Specific accessibility features development should be conducted by AV companies in active partnership with disabled stakeholders and the [U.S. Access Board](#), an independent federal agency that advances accessibility through leadership in accessible design and the development of accessibility guidelines and standards.

³² <https://dredf.org/addressing-disability-and-ableist-bias-in-avs/>

³³ <https://dredf.org/fully-accessible-autonomous-vehicles-checklist/>

³⁴ <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Jg1TMR6igzuQ3cQP6mzm7exaUOoEbgCGUQWlxqabLU/edit?usp=sharing>

History shows that failing to robustly require transportation accessibility results in segregated, inaccessible, and inequitable services that deny people with disabilities a fundamental freedom: that of moving about freely and in their community. Despite DC Council's previous efforts and intentions: to this day, on-demand transportation service for wheelchair users in DC is sparse and unequal. This limited service will decay further with AVs if accessibility is not required and supported through regulations and enforcement.

AV companies have been busy lobbying states across the nation to persuade legislatures to grant them immunity and shield them from accessibility mandates³⁵. This is a re-run of what rideshare companies achieved during their swift rise nationwide in the on-demand vehicle space and must not be repeated. Strong leadership is needed now to ensure this does not happen again with the deployment of AVs.

Disability advocates are, understandably, gravely concerned about AV companies pushing legislation through DC Council to allow testing and implementation of AV passenger service without requiring baseline accessibility requirements because it is repeating history and the grievous mistakes that have been made many times when it comes to slow or no adoption of accessibility in transportation services.

(1) Accessibility has not been required in other jurisdictions across the U.S. and it is resulting in growth of yet another inaccessible and/or segregated transportation service for disabled people. When a "referral service" is implemented and fails to provide equal offerings (limited accessible vehicles, service hours, etc) the same pattern of discrimination is replicated and the limited existing WAV service is destroyed.

(2) Because retrofitting public transportation across the United States (see the history of bus³⁶, rail³⁷, and air travel³⁸ — which is still highly inaccessible for many) takes decades or never happens at all.

The pattern is that if accessibility is not implemented from the start, it is very hard to achieve later, takes a very long time, or may never happen at all (see the New York City subway as another example, which may never become fully accessible³⁹). Now is the time to be bold in ensuring accessibility of this new transportation, whereas slow-rolling and deferring until later (which never comes) has proven to be a road to years of unrelenting and unnecessary discrimination.

³⁵ <https://wheelchairtravel.org/autonomous-taxis-not-accessible-state-preemption-laws/>

³⁶ <https://www.rtd-denver.com/community/news/2023/we-will-ride-historic-events-of-45-years-ago-recognized>

³⁷ <https://www.npr.org/2025/07/17/nx-s1-5468634/amtrak-federal-report-passengers-disabilities>

³⁸ <https://pva.org/news-and-media-center/recent-news/air-travel-inhumane-35-years-after-acaag/>, <https://newmobility.com/how-to-make-air-travel-more-accessible-a-conversation-with-kelly-buckland/>, and <https://travelnoire.com/airline-protections-wheelchair-dot-pause-what-to-know>.

³⁹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/22/nyregion/nyc-subway-accessibility-disabilities-elevators.html>

DC Council has a vital role to play in standing up for disabled constituents and installing firm safety and accessibility requirements for deploying AV passenger service.

DC's disabled residents welcome and encourage ongoing engagement on questions of AV safety and accessibility because it is a new and developing technology. We seek opportunities to discuss and refine legislation and regulation to make it optimal for our city's needs.

Thank you again for your time and thoughtful consideration of this testimony.

— Kelly Mack, disability rights advocate and member of the [DC Multimodal Accessibility Advisory Council](#)