

**ACCESSIBILITY OF URBAN PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES  
(A SLR 2019-2025)**

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**ABSTRACT**

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Accessible public transport underpins equal participation in city life, yet many people with disabilities still face trips that are harder, slower, and less safe than they should be. Using PRISMA methods, we reviewed English-language studies in Scopus from 2019–2025. The initial search returned 1,217 records. After refining the query and screening titles/abstracts, 243 remained; 180 full texts were assessed; and 64 studies met the criteria for synthesis. Across the “trip chain,” barriers clustered in four places: the physical environment (gaps, steps, and weak first/last-mile links), information (ticketing and journey details that are not accessible), service (unreliable assistance and staff who lack training), and cost (fares and device expenses). The most promising fixes paired universal design upgrades with service and governance reforms—for example, step-free access, trained staff, and accessible real-time information, sometimes complemented by paratransit/on-demand integration or targeted fare relief. Because outcomes and study designs varied widely, we employed narrative synthesis rather than conducting a meta-analysis. Important gaps remain: rural and intercity contexts are understudied, and evidence for intersectional groups (e.g., women with disabilities, wheelchair users) is thin. We ask two questions that stem from these patterns: which barriers and facilitators most frequently influence the four domains, and how do multicomponent packages compare to single measures in improving access, travel time, safety, and participation.

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**BACKGROUND**

Urban public transport becomes truly accessible when the entire trip chain works as one system: step-free approaches, level boarding, usable information, predictable assistance, and affordable fares. When any one link fails, an out-of-service elevator a platform gap a few centimeters too wide, a ticketing app that a screen reader cannot parse—the whole journey can unravel for riders with disabilities (Mansilla

and Boucher 2024a). This review adopts a trip-chain lens to understand where barriers most often occur and which combinations of measures actually move the dial.

Small “interface” details often decide whether a trip proceeds: curb height and slope at the bus stop, the reliability of lifts, or the tolerance between platform and vehicle floor. Before–after and cross-sectional studies show that network-scale-level boarding and low-floor fleets reduce boarding times and improve perceived safety, but the gains are fragile without maintenance and compatible stop geometry (Aarhaug and Elvebakk 2015; Ferreira and Leite 2021a). Corridor programs beat spot fixes because benefits are not lost at the next segment (De Vos, Cheng, and Zhang 2025).

Information converts potential accessibility into real mobility. Riders need access to critical, real-time fields—lift status, platform changes, accessible routing, even crowding that affects maneuvering—delivered in plain language and formats that assistive tech can use (Chruzik and Krzyżewska 2024; Goralzik and König 2022b). Where those fields are missing or fragmented across agencies, uncertainty grows and people avoid unfamiliar routes (Mathews 2025; Rickly and Halpern 2021b).

Service and operations can unlock—or negate—the value of good hardware. Frequent pain points include unannounced platform switches and ramps not deployed in time. Evidence indicates that disability-led, co-designed training, paired with clear standard operating procedures and refreshers, makes assistance predictable and dignified (das Neves and Unsworth 2023b). Participatory methods such as guided photovoice help translate lived experience into day-to-day practice (Scott et al., 2025).

Affordability and administrative design are part of accessibility, not afterthoughts. People “cancel trips in their head” when the total burden: money, extra time and energy, plus the risk of failure, looks too high (Stafford 2023b). Concessions have real effects when eligibility is simple and portable across modes/apps; cumbersome verification erodes their value (Kett, Cole, and Turner 2020).

Lived-experience studies foreground the emotional labor of uncertainty and the micro-negotiations required to complete routine journeys. Ethnographies and qualitative work document workarounds, aborted trips, and the social dynamics that shape perceived safety—especially for blind/low-vision riders and wheelchair users (Mansilla and Boucher 2024a). Commuter-to-commuter interactions and crowding can amplify or dampen these effects beyond what infrastructure alone can solve (Lopes 2024; Nielsen 2024).

On-demand and ride-sourcing services offer promise for first/last-mile and off-peak gaps, but without equity guardrails can reproduce old inequities. Studies of wheelchair-accessible vehicle (WAV) availability report longer waits and patchy coverage unless contracts require parity KPIs (Hassanpour and Bigazzi 2021; Wali 2024). In lower-income or dispersed-demand contexts, evidence suggests on-demand should complement, not replace, universally designed fixed routes (Yan, Zhao, and He 2021).

Emerging modes bring a chance to “lock inclusion in” from the start. Work on autonomous people movers emphasizes building universal design into the initial specifications, wheelchair access, multimodal wayfinding, inclusive disruption communication—because retrofits cost more and deliver less (Jaydarifard, Gomez, and Dwyer 2025). Designing for accessibility up-front avoids re-creating old barriers in new wrappers.

Synthesis across recent reviews highlights methodological fragmentation: heterogeneous measures, thin reporting on maintenance/fidelity, and small, single-site samples (Mindell et al. 2025; Park 2025). These gaps argue for emphasizing outcomes that riders feel and operators can measure—perceived access, reliability (including variance), minor incidents, and participation, while documenting the package of interventions actually implemented (Couette 2024).

Guided by the social model of disability and mobility-justice perspectives, we therefore pose two questions. RQ1: Which barriers and facilitators most commonly shape accessibility across the physical, information, service, and cost domains along the urban public-transport trip chain? RQ2: How

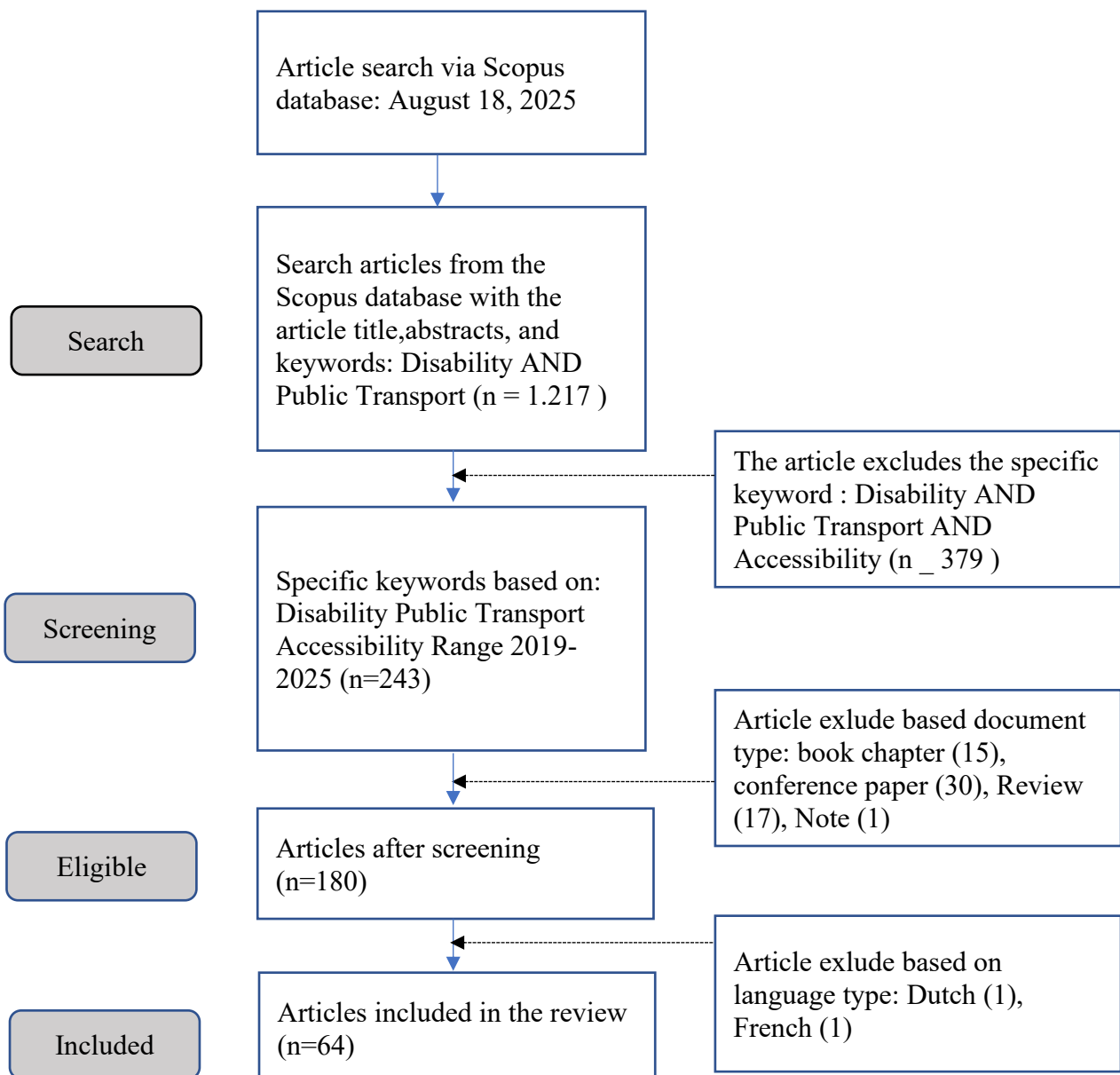
do multicomponent packages compare with single-component fixes in improving perceived access, travel time, safety, and participation for persons with disabilities?

## RESEARCH METHOD

### Design and reporting

We conducted a systematic literature review guided by PRISMA 2020. The protocol (scope, eligibility, and analysis plan) was drafted a priori and is available upon request. Given heterogeneity in designs and outcomes, we used narrative synthesis rather than meta-analysis.

### Prisma Diagram SLR analysis



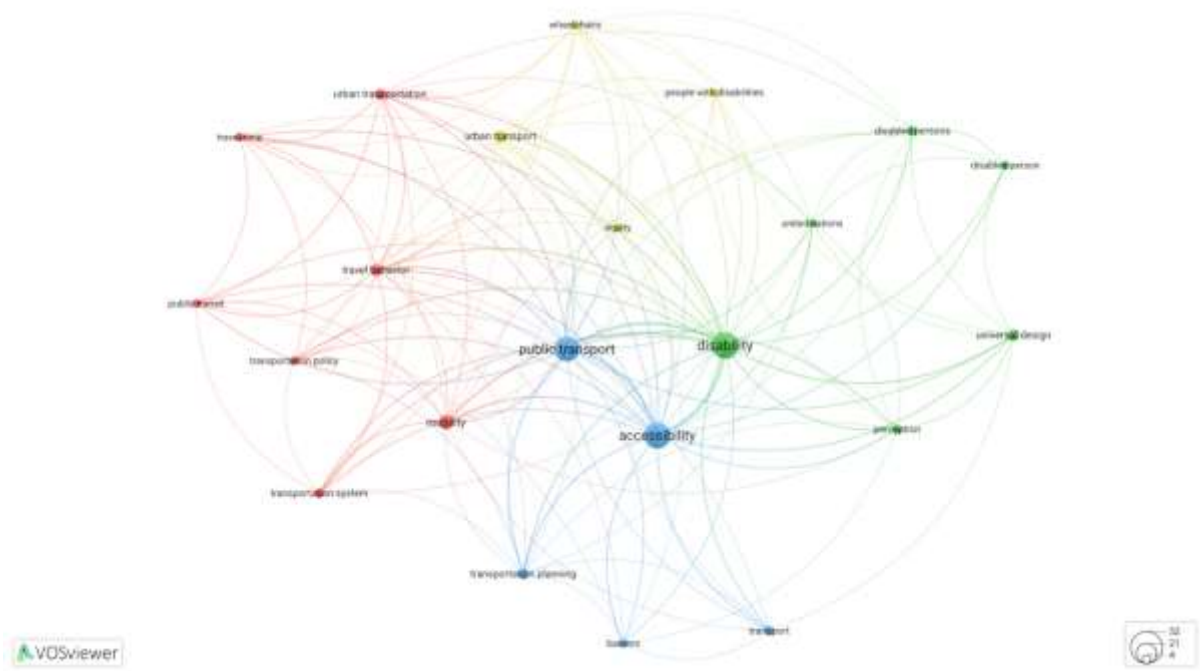
*Figure 1: Systematic Literature Review Information Flow using PRISMA*

The search was conducted on the Scopus database (search on August 18, 2025) using the initial terms “Disability” AND “Public Transport,” which yielded 1,217 documents. Refining the query using a combination of more specific keywords for the 2019–2025 range (Disability, Public Transport, Accessibility) narrowed the corpus down to 243 documents to be filtered at the title/abstract level. This process ensured relevance to the study objective—public transport accessibility for persons with disabilities—while maintaining replicability because all steps were based on Scopus exports.

The title/abstract screening stage resulted in 180 articles for further consideration. At the eligibility stage, records were excluded due to unsuitable document types (book chapter = 15; conference paper = 30; review = 17; note = 1; total = 63) and due to language (Dutch = 1; French = 1; total = 2). After full-text assessment, 51 documents were excluded on the grounds of content/methodology, leaving 64 studies included in the review. This flow adheres to the PRISMA 2020 framework and all figures are tracked from the search results and documented screening in the appendix.

### **VOSviewer Bibliometric Analysis**

To understand the conceptual structure of the corpus, we performed keyword co-occurrence analysis using VOSviewer on data exported from Scopus. Author and index keywords were combined, then a co-occurrence network was constructed and total link strength (TLS) was calculated as a measure of the connectivity of each term with other terms. The results were visualized in a term map where nodes represent keywords and node weights reflect frequency of occurrence, while edge thickness reflects strength of connectivity.



Source : Output VOSviewer Software

Keyword	Occurences	Total link strength
Disability	37	134
Accessibility	35	127
Public Transport	32	111
Mobility	11	38
Urban transport	6	34
Travel time	4	28
Transportation planning	6	27
Urban transport	7	27
Universal system	7	26
Equity	4	25
Disable persons	4	23
Transportation system	5	21
Wheelchairs	4	20
United Nation	4	19

Barriers	4	16
Transport	5	16
People with disabilities	4	15

Source : Output VOSviewer Software

The results show a core triad that dominates the landscape: “Disability” (37 occurrences; TLS 134), ‘Accessibility’ (35; 127), and “Public Transport” (32; 111). Relatively prominent supporting terms include “Mobility” (11; 38), “Urban transport” (6–7; 27–34), “Transportation planning” (6; 27), “Travel time” (4; 28), “Universal system” (7; 26), “Equity” (4; 25), “Disabled persons” (4; 23), “Transportation system” (5; 21), “Wheelchairs” (4; 20), “United Nations” (4; 19), “Barriers” (4; 16), “Transport” (5; 16), and “People with disabilities” (4; 15). This pattern shows that the issues of physical and informational accessibility are closely intertwined with the discourse of equity and planning, while the dimensions of assistive devices (wheelchairs) and travel time emerge as specific topics that intersect with service performance measurement.

Methodologically, this VOSviewer map has two functions in the Methods section. First, it provides triangulatory validation of the SLR focus: the strength of the relationship between “Disability–Accessibility–Public Transport” confirms that the corpus studied is consistent with the research question. Second, it helps identify thematic gaps for further analysis—for example, the weaker connectivity of the term equity compared to core terms, or the relative rarity of explicit links between wheelchairs/travel time and service and governance clusters. These findings were then used to guide the preparation of sub-sections of the results (e.g., grouping of barriers/drivers) and to formulate the next research agenda and measurable performance indicators.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

### Barriers and Facilitators Along the Trip Chain

#### Physical environment (approach paths, stations/stops, vehicles)

Level boarding, low-floor buses, generous sidewalks, and reliable elevators make boarding and alighting quicker and safer. Studies of urban rail networks show that reducing the platform–train gap/step is associated with fewer minor incidents and a higher share of “trips completed as planned” (Ferreira and Leite 2021b). Yet a single weak link—an out-of-service lift, a ramp that is too steep, or a narrowing footway—can sever the entire trip chain (Mansilla and Boucher 2024b).

Retrofit programs implemented as network packages, not isolated assets, tend to yield more stable results: stations, stops, and pedestrian corridors are upgraded together, so benefits are not lost in the next segment. These packages reduce boarding/alighting time and raise perceived safety among wheelchair users and others with mobility limitations (Ferreira and Leite 2021b; Mansilla and Boucher 2024b).

#### Information and wayfinding (planning, ticketing, real-time)

Pre-trip and in-trip information acts as a “multiplier” for physical design. When trip planners and ticketing are screen-reader compatible, written in plain language, and include access-critical status fields such as elevator outages, platform changes, and accessible routes—anxiety declines and riders are more willing to try unfamiliar routes (Goralzik and König 2022a). At multimodal interchanges, the clarity of user interfaces and data transparency determines whether new services widen or narrow access (Chruzik and Krzyżewska 2024).

On the ground, consistent tactile and auditory cues reduce navigation errors for low-vision travelers. The challenge is that fragmented standards across operators often make the experience uneven, so some of the benefit disappears when changing modes or jurisdictions (Goralzik and König 2022; Rickly and Halpern 2021).

### **Service and operations (assistance reliability, staff practice)**

Good hardware still needs reliable people and procedures. Frequent pain points include sudden, unannounced platform changes and ramps not deployed in time, leading to missed connections (das Neves and Unsworth 2023a). When staff are trained with co-designed materials developed by persons with disabilities, interactions become more dignified and predictable (das Neves, Timmer, and Kaushik 2025a).

Training effects last longest when paired with clear SOPs, regular refreshers, and supervision that links behavior to service performance. Participatory approaches such as photovoice also help operators internalize lived experience and translate it into day-to-day practice (Scott and Casey 2025a).

### **Cost and administrative friction (fares, devices, time/energy)**

Many riders “cancel the trip in their head” when they anticipate the total burden not only money, but extra time, effort, and the risk of failed connections. Evidence shows trips not made increase as these frictions accumulate; fare concessions that truly work across modes and apps can bring some of those trips back (Stafford 2023a).

However, the value of concessions evaporates when eligibility processes are complex or inaccessible. The cost of assistive devices and vehicle adaptations also shapes mode choice, so targeted financial support can expand everyday travel options (Unsworth and Chua 2020a).

## **Multicomponent Packages vs Single-Component Fixes**

### **Perceived access and rider confidence**

Packages combining level boarding + real-time accessibility information + trained staff consistently reduce anxiety and increase willingness to experiment with new routes. The impacts are most visible for wheelchair users and low-vision travelers who depend on route certainty and reliable assistance (Goralzik, 2022; das Neves, 2023).

Confidence also rises when platform changes and disruptions are communicated quickly in usable formats (audio, visual, app). Where these three elements are in place together, reports of “failed trips” fall and satisfaction increases (Scott, 2025; Goralzik, 2022).

### **Travel time and reliability**

Network-scale physical interventions—such as level boarding and correct curb/stop geometry cut boarding/alighting time and stabilize door-to-door travel. Explicit disruption SOPs help reduce missed connections and day-to-day variance (Ferreira, 2021).

Consistency is the key: time gains quickly erode when elevators frequently fail or ramps are not deployed. When maintenance keeps pace with design, variance falls and intermodal connectivity improves (Ferreira, 2021).

### **Safety and minor incidents**

Fixing the platform–train interface (reducing gaps/steps) and standardizing tactile–auditory cues correlate with fewer minor incidents such as slips and trips. Before–after evaluations in rail networks show downward trends in these events when the package is implemented comprehensively (Ferreira, 2021).

For guide-dog users and low-vision riders, clear paths and consistent environmental signals also reduce “hesitation moments” that often precipitate minor incidents. Here, continuity of standards across stations and operators is decisive (Rickly, 2021; Ferreira, 2021).

### **Participation and independence**

When physical access and service practice move in step, people travel more often and report stronger independence. Adding workable concessions encourages routine trips shopping, work, study that may previously have been avoided (Stafford, 2023).

Conversely, complicated or inconsistent verification requirements make part of the benefit disappear. The best results appear when design, operations, information, and cost relief reinforce one another within a single package (Stafford, 2023).

### **Role of on-demand/paratransit (as a complement)**

On-demand services effectively bridge first/last-mile gaps and extend coverage off-peak when tied to equity KPIs—for example, parity in wait times and service areas. Without such guardrails, research on WAV ride-hailing finds persistent inequities in availability and delays (Hassanpour & Bigazzi, 2021).

In lower-income contexts or dispersed-demand areas, the balance between on-demand and fixed routes should be tuned to local preferences and travel patterns. Evidence shows context-specific trade-offs, so on-demand is best positioned as a complement to the main network, not a replacement (Yan et al., 2021).

### **Emerging modes and design from the start**

For new modes such as autonomous people movers, building universal design from the outset prevents old barriers from reappearing in new systems. User surveys highlight wheelchair access, multimodal wayfinding, and inclusive disruption communication as prerequisites, not afterthoughts (Jaydarifard et al., 2025).

This approach also reduces expensive retrofits later and speeds public acceptance. When access standards are embedded in technical specifications, operators can maintain a consistent experience across corridors more easily (Jaydarifard et al., 2025).

## DISCUSSION

This review shows that accessible public transport is not the result of a single fix but the outcome of a system where infrastructure, information, everyday service practice, and affordability work together. Read through the social model of disability, most barriers we observed are not “in the person” but in how cities are built and operated. A wheelchair becomes a “non-issue” when stations are step-free and buses offer level boarding; the same wheelchair becomes a problem the moment a lift is out of service or a ramp is not deployed (Ferreira, 2021; Mansilla, 2024). Put simply, people are not disabled by their bodies as much as they are disabled by gaps, stairs, outages, and inconsistent procedures.

### Mapping : What Makes Transit Accessible

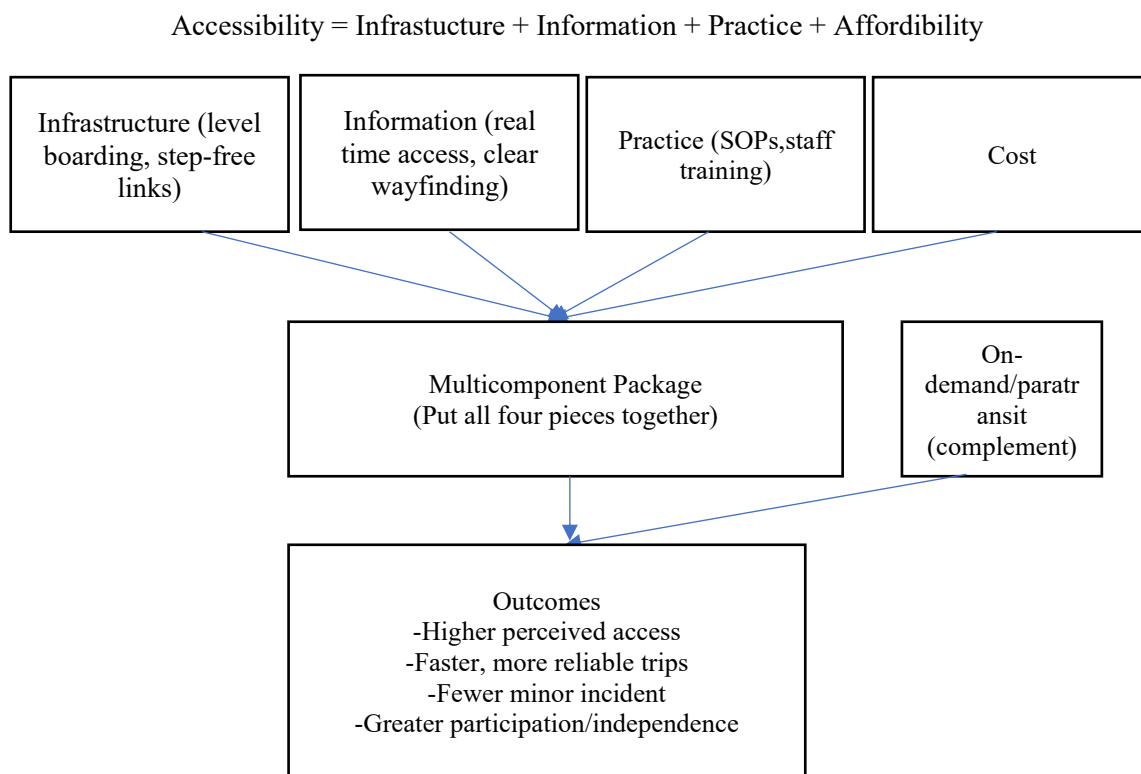


Figure 2: Accessibility System Package

The first concrete implication is to treat the physical domain as a network job, not a spot repair. Studies are consistent: level boarding and low-floor fleets reduce boarding time and raise perceived safety, but only when curb/stop geometry and approach paths are fixed in parallel. A smooth vehicle interface is not enough if sidewalks to the stop are cluttered or slopes are too steep. Programs that upgraded stations, stops, and pedestrian links together produced durable gains; those that upgraded assets one by one produced fragile gains that vanished at the next segment (Ferreira and Leite 2021c; Mansilla and Boucher 2024c).

The second implication is that information converts potential accessibility into realized accessibility. Riders plan and adjust trips under uncertainty. They need to know if a lift works now, whether the platform has changed, how crowded the carriage is for maneuvering, and where the step-free route actually goes. When journey planners and ticketing are screen-reader compatible, written in plain language, and include access-critical real-time fields, riders report lower anxiety and are more willing

to try unfamiliar routes (Goralzik and König 2022b). At interchanges, clean user interfaces and transparent data make the difference between a service that widens access and one that quietly filters people out (Chruzik and Krzyżewska 2024). For blind/low-vision travelers, consistent tactile–auditory cues reduce hesitation and navigation errors; fragmented standards across agencies undo the benefit at boundaries (Rickly and Halpern 2021b). In sociological terms, good information lowers the cognitive load that cities often shift onto disabled riders.

Third, service practice matters as much as hardware. Many failures in our corpus are classic street-level problems: unannounced platform changes, missed ramp deployments, and uncertainty among staff. These are not solved by more steel alone; they are solved by clear SOPs and training that is co-designed with persons with disabilities. Where agencies adopted disability-led training with refreshers and supervision, riders reported more dignified interactions and fewer “failed trips” (das Neves and Unsworth 2023b). Photovoice studies show why: when front-line staff see lived experience, “help” shifts from discretionary kindness to rights-conscious practice (Scott and Casey 2025b). In short, good practice unlocks the value of good infrastructure; bad practice negates it.

Fourth, affordability and administrative friction are part of accessibility, not add-ons. People routinely cancel trips “in their head” when total burden—money, time, energy, and risk of disruption—looks too high. Integrated concessions work when eligibility is simple and portable across modes and apps; they fail when verification is confusing or exclusionary (Stafford 2023b). The cost of assistive devices and vehicle adaptations also shapes mode choice and frequency (Unsworth and Chua 2020b). From a mobility justice lens, this is about who carries the extra costs, not only in cash but in paperwork, waiting, and uncertainty. Fare policy and admin design are therefore levers for participation, not mere finance tools.

Putting these pieces together explains why multicomponent packages beat single fixes across outcomes. The largest and most consistent improvements in perceived access, time reliability, minor safety incidents, and participation appear when three elements move together: (1) network-wide level boarding/step-free links with maintenance; (2) disability-led SOPs and training so assistance is predictable; and (3) usable real-time accessibility information so riders can plan and re-plan (das Neves, Timmer, and Kaushik 2025b; Stafford 2023b). Packages do not just add effects, they stabilize them. A ramp without deployment discipline works off-peak and fails at rush hour. A low-floor bus without adequate curbs looks good in photos and performs poorly in service. A station with lifts but no outage alerts is accessible until it isn’t. The system either stacks supports or stacks frictions.

What about on-demand and paratransit? The evidence suggests they are best used as complements. They bridge first/last-mile gaps and extend off-peak coverage when tied to equity KPIs—especially wait-time and coverage parity for wheelchair-accessible vehicles. Without guardrails, technology reproduces old inequities: riders who need WAVs face longer waits and patchy availability (Hassanpour and Bigazzi 2021). In lower-income or dispersed-demand settings, the balance between on-demand and fixed routes is context-specific, which strengthens—rather than weakens—the case for a universally designed core network supported by targeted complements (Yan et al. 2021).

A forward-looking note concerns emerging modes such as autonomous people movers. The simplest lesson is also the cheapest: lock inclusion in from the start. Write wheelchair access, multimodal wayfinding, and inclusive disruption communication into the initial specifications. Early design choices set paths that are hard to change; retrofits cost more, deliver less, and arrive late (Jaydarifard et al. 2025). New technology is a chance to avoid re-creating old barriers in new wrappers.

## CONCLUSION

This review set out to clarify what most commonly enables—or prevents—accessible urban public transport for persons with disabilities, and whether multicomponent approaches outperform single fixes. Synthesizing 64 Scopus-indexed studies (2019–2025) with a PRISMA-guided method, we read the evidence through a trip-chain lens spanning four domains: physical infrastructure,

information/wayfinding, service and operational practice, and affordability/administration. For the first research question, the most frequent barriers were small but decisive breaks in the trip chain (platform gaps/steps, steep or unreliable ramps, lift outages, narrow or obstructed approaches), inaccessible or incomplete information (especially real-time access status), inconsistent assistance and unclear procedures, and out-of-pocket and administrative costs that lead to “trips not made.” The most consistent facilitators were network-wide level boarding/low-floor fleets with dependable maintenance; usable real-time accessibility layers and consistent tactile–auditory wayfinding; clear SOPs and disability-led staff training; and simple, portable concessions that work across modes and apps.

For the second research question, the evidence points to a clear pattern: multicomponent packages reliably outperform single-component fixes on outcomes riders feel and operators can measure—higher perceived access and confidence, faster and more reliable trips, fewer minor incidents at gaps/steps, and greater participation/independence. In practice, the packages that travel best combine (i) network-scale level boarding and step-free links, (ii) operational protocols and training that make assistance predictable, and (iii) real-time information riders can actually use to plan and re-plan. On-demand and paratransit services play a complementary role—bridging first/last-mile gaps and off-peak coverage—when tied to equity KPIs such as wait-time and coverage parity for wheelchair-accessible vehicles.

Findings carry straightforward implications. Treat accessibility as infrastructure × information × practice × affordability, and fund/contract it as a system move, not a list of isolated assets. Retrofit at corridor or network scale so benefits are not lost at the next segment. Publish access-critical fields (lift status, platform changes, accessible routes) in apps and on-site displays; standardize tactile/auditory cues across operators. Institutionalize disability-led training with refreshers and supervision so good hardware yields good service. Design concessions that are simple at the point of use and portable across modes, and monitor their effects on trip frequency and participation. Where on-demand is used, embed equity KPIs in procurement and oversight.

The review also has limits. Heterogeneous designs and measures constrained meta-analysis; many studies were single-site with small, non-probability samples. Reliance on a single database (Scopus) may miss practice innovations and grey literature. Evidence remains thin for intersectional groups (e.g., women with disabilities, riders with combined mobility and sensory/cognitive impairments) and for rural or intercity contexts. Future work should prioritize a core outcome set for accessibility (including variance, not only averages) to enable pooling; stronger reporting of fidelity and maintenance; and comparative evaluations of system packages (design + operations + information + affordability) across different governance and urban forms, including LMIC settings. Cost-effectiveness analyses that account for avoided “trips not made,” reliability gains, and dignity-related benefits would help move decisions from pilots to policy.

In sum, accessibility improves most when cities stack supports rather than frictions. The actionable path is clear: build and maintain step-free networks, make access information visible and usable, make assistance predictable, make concessions work at the tap, and use on-demand to fill gaps under equity rules. Done together, these shifts convert potential accessibility into everyday mobility and participation.

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