

INCITEMENT INCITEMENT INCITEMENT INCITEMENT INCITEMENT

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Escalating the Issue: ACCESS NOW!

By Jim Parker

Since mid-January the State of Texas has seen the demand for access to public transit systems in Texas escalate. From Houston to Dallas to Austin to San Antonio, ADAPT (American Disabled for Accessible Public Transportation) has been forcing the issue through such tactics as: picketing; leafleting; attending meetings; mailouts; civil disobedience; arrests; and, requests for jury trial (in Houston). All the while the 'chant' of "We Will Ride" filters through all levels of the disability community, as well as APTA (American Public Transit Association, the official lobbying arm of public transit systems in the country). And the words are being heard by local, State and Federal elected officials.

THE BATTLE IS BEING WON!!!!

Such a strong statement is backed up by the recent Report to the President by the National Council on the Handicapped. The report, "Towards Independence", calls

for access to all public transit systems through the purchase of accessible vehicles and making systems accessible through architectural barrier removal. The report states what ADAPT has been saying for years — that transit access is THE key link in independence for disabled people.

ADAPT continues its effort to press for full access to the nation's transit systems. In El Paso, ADAPT will hold a workshop on the nuts and bolts of organizing around the issue of access to public transit on Saturday, April 12, at the Lighthouse for the Blind (9:30 a.m.-4 p.m.), 100 Dunne Street. Lunch, coffee, etc., will be provided.

Currently, El Paso is working (for the 3rd time) toward the passage of a Rapid Transit District, which would fund transit through enactment of a sales tax (one cent or less). It is in the interest of all transit disadvantaged El Pasoans to begin NOW to organize for access to the system, or else we'll be in the same situation as we currently find ourselves — no option beyond HandiSCAT. And, I

seriously doubt that HandiSCAT has ever been handy!

In Houston, ADAPT people have been 'raising' the consciousness of the public through civil disobedience and picketing against the lack of access to public transit. Houston saw 7 members of ADAPT arrested and jailed for stopping Metro buses on January 15. The "Metro 7" were charged with a Class B misdemeanor and will go to trial in April. The defense, will be one that emerged from the civil rights battles in the '60s — if there is social and economic impact to the struggle and all other avenues have been tried, then there is a right to protest through civil disobedience.

The action has been ongoing in Dallas against the exclusionary policies of DART (Dallas Area Rapid Transit). Twenty ADAPTERs were arrested in January for blocking buses and snarling downtown traffic for over 6 hours. All were fined and released. In February, 8 ADAPTERs were arrested for stopping buses at selected locations. The outcome of the ticketing has yet to be determined.

In Austin, ADAPT worked long and hard to force Capitol Metro to purchase its 100 new buses lift-equipped. The press for change in San Antonio has been slow due to the unwillingness of local organizations to address the issue and riders of VIA Trans seem afraid for fear of being dropped from the workshop and set some goals for addressing the lack of access (only 20 para-transit vans to serve the disabled population in San Antonio). And, following confrontation with Mayor Henry Cisneros last May at an APTA convention in San Antonio, the Mayor has agreed to go before the VIA board and speak to the issue of access for disabled people on public transit.

Remember: When the economic crunch slams into the disabled community full force, that without organization to lead to action we'll be at the mercy of the 'handouters', who for years have decided how we should live our lives! But, . . .

"WE WILL RIDE!"

APTA Conference in Cincinnati

Are you saving your pennies? ADAPT will be converging on the APTA Southwest Regional Conference in Cincinnati May 17 through 22. It should be an intense week. With bridges, which buses use, leading in and out of the city, with APTA officials telling the Disability Rag "lifts on buses are inevitable: (see Jan/Feb 1986 issue) things should be hopping both inside and outside of the conference. This is history in the making. It will be well worth the trip. More next issue.



ADAPT Set for El Paso Workshop

Are you tired of SCAT telling you where and when to ride?

Do you have a right to ride the public transit, SCAT, your tax dollars pay for?

Are you fed up with doing nothing about it?

Are you tired of meetings and NO action, testifying to public officials and STILL NO TRANSIT ACCESS?

Are you ready for change?

El Paso and ADAPT go way back. El Paso ADAPT members have been involved with national ADAPT for many years now and in June of 1983 ADAPT demonstrators held up buses in downtown El Paso for many hours. Simply trying to get one of the few lifts to operate at that action produced a cloud of dust and papers and some of the

best media we have gotten in Texas. It was at a conference on transportation and disabled folks who are serious about fighting for their rights. The El Pasoans are activists of few words for the most part. It will be interesting to see the reaction and results of this workshop.

The nuts and bolts of organizing for action will be the topic of the workshop, which will cover why and how to organize. In addition some of the reasons people do NOT organize will be discussed; we are taught from birth onward many reasons not to act together and effectively work for our rights and many times we act as our own enemy. If you are interested in making some changes for the better come on down. The workshop will be at the Lighthouse for the Blind, 100 Dunne Street, from 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday, April 12th. Organized, united, committed we can make a difference.

We will ride.



Post photo by Manuel Chavez
Auberger says he's been arrested 15 times.

A Civil Right? You Bet!

"Access is a civil right" is the chant of hundreds of ADAPT demonstrators across the United States. Transit officials and media people often scoff at this idea however. "No where in the constitution or bill of rights does it guarantee that citizens have a right to transportation" they say. Continuing their line of reasoning they claim the little para-transit services they do provide is going way beyond what the law currently requires. "Be happy getting what you get and stop being a pest."

ADAPT's answer: "So what. You miss the point." Our constitution plainly states "all men are created equal." It does not say (as some seem to think) "all men are created equal, but some are more equal than others." Nor does it say "all men are created equal. . . except handicapped people." As equal citizens we are all equally part of the public. As equal members of the public we should all be equally entitled to use of public facilities and services . . . including public transportation.

Taxation without representation was one of the main issues that caused our forbearers to begin their struggle for independence. American colonists were being taxed and their tax dollars were being sent back to England and not being spent to assist the folks

in the American colonies (some was even being spent on troops to repress them.) This got the colonists so angry it caused a revolution. Today similar treatment is common for disabled citizens. Our tax dollars (sales tax, federal taxes, sometimes state and local taxes and sometimes school fees) are used to pay for public transit services which are designed to exclude us. But apparently that should not make us mad. We should keep quiet, be good and act nice.

Most of the laws and regulations governing disabled people's transportation are a joke. Section 504 which once grandly demanded at least 50% accessibility for mainline bus systems now meekly requires 3.5% of Section Five funding. In a kind of 'fox guarding the hen house' move transit directors were allowed to whittle down regulations guaranteeing accessible transit. Some states, like California and Michigan, have transit access laws as do some local communities, but for the most part we no longer have laws to point to. We must, therefore, call on human rights, on the righteousness of our issue to make our case.

Access is a civil right? At the fundamental human and moral level it certainly is a civil right.

ARREST

The actions of ADAPT bring the system's assumptions about disabled people to light through confrontation. The general assumption is disabled people are docile, pitiful folks who must (at best) be protected from the troubles of the real world. When you sit in front of a bus, when you repeatedly and forcefully state an opinion different from the opinion the authorities attribute to "the disabled" you are confronting these assumptions. How far this confrontation goes is, to a great degree, up to each individual. But the success of ADAPT has been based on the fact that at least some disabled people are willing to get arrested for civil disobedience to a system that denies us our rights. Many of the actions are necessarily so confrontational that arrest is almost a certainty for those in the thick of the fray.

Arrest is a heavy thing. Cops are unsettled by the idea of locking up poor little poster people. We, who have been taught for so long to "be nice" good crips, are unsettled by being seen as stepping so far out of line. (Once past the initial fear there is a real sense of power in knowing you felt so sure of your goal it is worth going through the arrests.) Being locked up means a very real loss of

control. Once you are in custody you are basically at their mercy. Los Angeles County Jail was a good example, where lost paperwork and who-cares-attitudes led to folks spending days inside without medication, etc. . . It is just these things that make arrest so heavy that also make our willingness to go through with it so important. Unfortunately it takes that kind of statement to show our commitment is real, our desires are something to be listened to.

So far our experiences with arrest have been short term. Except for LA, people have not spent the night but have been released the same day. With limited accessibility, limited (if any) attendant services jails are ill prepared for handling large numbers of disabled people. Our disabilities present problems for the authorities; but these problems are not insurmountable. Eventually, and probably in the near future, someone or several someones will have to spend time, a good deal of time, in jail. It will take that before we will be taken seriously, before our fight for civil rights will be seen as such. It is important that we be prepared for this when we prepared to be arrested. We need to be deciding how we will handle this as individuals. . . and as ADAPT.



George Cooper discusses the reasons for his protest with reporters in Dallas.

Fighting Among Ourselves

"We have met the enemy and he is us" — Pogo

This is no where truer than in the disability community. The power structure has us fighting among ourselves. Mainline accessibility is para-transit 100% lift-equipped buses versus multi-modal. They sit back and watch us fight while they continue their paternalistic treatment of disabled people. It is to their advantage to let us fight because it obscures the true issues, civil rights and integration.

Why do we let this happen? We let this happen because we are unsure of being "just like everybody else". Some of us don't believe we should be part of the mainstream. To many "being part of" is frightening. After years of being oppressed it is difficult to immediately become assertive. It is a process that takes time.

Some of us are impatient and have little time for the "Tiny Tim's" of the world. The truth is, it will take all of us.

Independent living philosophy talks about choice without 100%

mainline — there is no choice. Let us join together and fight the real enemy — a society that considers us as second-class citizens. Join with ADAPT and make a statement that you believe disabled people should be "part of" instead of "apart from".

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ADAPT Returns to San Antonio

By Bob Kafka

The phone rang. "It's Mayor Cisneros' office. He wants ADAPT to know that he will be going to the VIA Board to support a multi-modal system, including lifts on mainline buses. He wanted you to know before your workshop on March 1st."

I said thank you, hung up and smiled. People power really can work.

It's now up to you San Antonio. Sixteen people showed up on Saturday morning and discussed strategies on how best to make VIA accessible to disabled people. There were many new faces and a few old timers. Of course a couple of "spies" from VIA were there to make sure nothing sinister was being planned. Basic organizing techniques and ideas in how to hold Mayor Cisneros to his word were discussed. It was evident that the disabled community is in agreement in their position: a multi-modal system.

The problem is how to make the position a reality. Wayne Cook, Executive Director of VIA, has a strangle hold on the decision

making process within the system. His discriminatory attitudes and actions run deep and throughout the system. When ADAPT demonstrated in San Antonio last year, drivers told disabled riders ADAPT cared nothing for local people and they worked hard to keep local folks away. Riders dare not even make the drivers wait a few minutes while they finish a conversation. The system dictates the lives of its users and does not want to hear of any changes. What Wayne says is — is!

The need for an ongoing ADAPT presence in San Antonio was agreed upon. A decision to meet again and to work on mainline accessibility was one outcome of the meeting. Workshop participants also agreed to pressure Mayor Cisneros to meet with the VIA Board, since he has promised twice but has not yet acted.

Cracks are beginning to develop in the discriminatory VIA system. Consumer groups, city officials and ADAPT members are in agreement on mainline accessibility. The push must come from local folks. The time is now. We will ride in San Antonio!



San Antonio workshop had 16 workshop attendees.

Passing Resolutions for Access at Political Conventions

Are you interested in trying a political strategy for lifts on buses? Austin ADAPT member Bill Scarborough has written an excellent explanation of how to pass a resolution for accessible public transit (or any other issue) from your precinct convention and hopefully carry it on up to the state convention where it will become part of the platform of your party. If people from around

the state work to pass the same resolution the impact will be much greater. For a copy of Scarborough's pamphlet write or call Austin ADAPT headquarters. (512) 482-8543.

The Primary Election and precinct conventions in Texas are May 3rd. If you are interested, do not delay. Below is the proposed resolution.

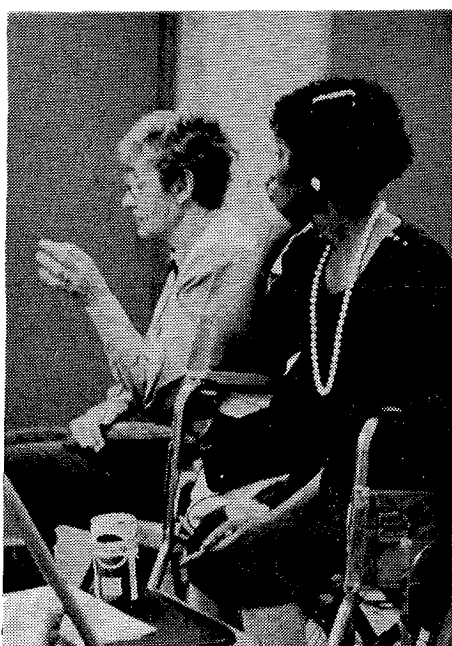
Resolution Disability Accessible Public Transit

Whereas, there are people throughout Texas who through no fault of their own are prohibited from using public transit vehicles, which their taxes pay for;

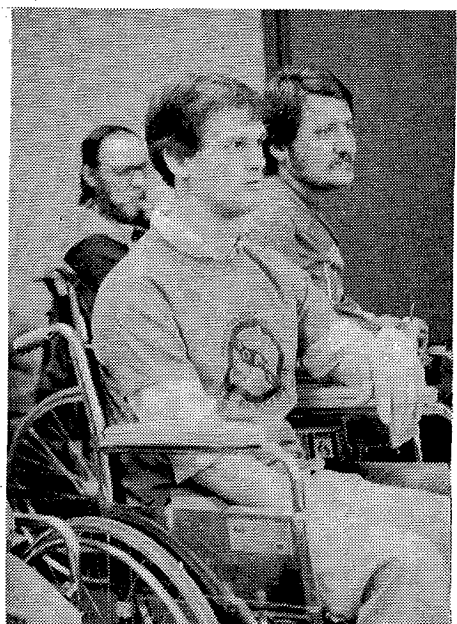
Whereas, modern technology permits disability accessible vehicles at reasonable cost;

Be it resolved, by the

of Precinct _____
that Texas law should provide that all new public transit vehicles purchased be disability accessible (with lifts, etc.); that public officials be urged to speak out for and work for disability accessible public transit vehicles.



Houston's Metro Seven Plead Not Guilty



Mike Auberger was the last of the defendants to enter the courtroom on Monday, March 3rd. Mike was wearing his ADAPTT-shirt as were the six others who were charged with obstructing traffic in downtown Houston on February 12th. Their strategy on the day of

the action had worked perfectly. Rand Metcalfe, Lee Sanders and Judy Ziegler got the local Houston folks out to the corner of Main and Texas to picket and to get signatures on a petition. They had told the media that ADAPT would be holding an action on Lincoln's birthday to symbolize our fight for freedom just as Lincoln had freed the slaves. The plan was to divert the attention of the police and the Houston Metro security at this location while the real action was to take place 6 blocks to the south. Main Street became a sea of blocked buses. The police, some on horses, were taken by surprise. ADAPT had struck again. The demonstration did not take long but the point was made. The disabled community of Houston was not going to take it any longer. Seven people were arrested and were charged with a Class B misdemeanor. The court date was set for February 19th, but later changed to March 3rd. According to Texas law the accused had to show up in person, so here we were in front of Judge Ross in County Court #10.

The court room was filled with people in wheelchairs. Once again the local community showed support. The media was anxiously pacing outside the courtroom waiting for the drama to unfold. The plan was simple. All seven of us, now dubbed the "METRO 7", were going to plead not guilty and a motion to dismiss the charges was to be made. This motion was based on a little used statute commonly known as the "Martin Luther King law", which says that if a person's social, political or economic rights are being violated, civil disobedience is a permissible tactic. Our 5 lawyers, all running for political office, made the motion to dismiss to Judge Ross. He asked to see a copy of the statute and stated that it seemed like a good defense. He set the date to hear the motion for dismissal and the date for the trial on the same day, Thursday, April 17th. If the motion for dismissal is denied the trial will be held immediately after.

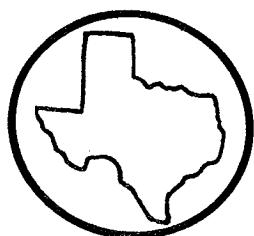
The significance of this case may be historic. If Judge Ross rules to dismiss the charges, it

will be a legal admission that not having lifts on buses violates the rights of disabled people. Though this fact is well known by disabled people, it will be the first time the system has acknowledged our rights in a court of law.

As the METRO 7 rolled from the courtroom, the media gathered to learn our reaction to the Judge's action, and to find out what our next steps would be. Rand Metcalfe, local Houston organizer, explaining this was just the first step in achieving our civil rights, stated determinedly "WE WILL RIDE".



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Around The State

Dallas

Under the eyes of the police and DART staff, ADAPT's troops hit the Dallas streets again with their usual "crack para-military precision." For four hours the afternoon of March 4th, twelve ADAPT members, wearing "We Will Ride" stickers, carried signs, passed out leaflets and tried to ride the buses. Police were out in force; "they were everywhere" said Dallas ADAPT organizer George Cooper. From Griffin to Akyard on Commerce ADAPT waited at bus stops asking if buses were lift equipped and trying to ride those that were. No arrests were made, although the action caused quite a stir, and public support was strong. None of the lifts worked and one bus was tied up for 45

minutes as supervisors and staff tried to make this supposedly readily available transit equipment work. Dallas, which can afford to dress up its Hop-A-Ride downtown buses like pink bunny rabbits (this is no joke,) cannot seem to afford to make the seventy some odd lifts it does have function. One wonders how transit officials can say with a straight face that no disabled people ever ride.

In an interesting twist of events, black activists and City Council members blocked buses to protest poor service to the black community. Although they stopped short of arrest, Dallas City Council members Diane Ragsdale and Al Lipscomb stood in

front of a bus with organizer Larry Hanes in an incident separate from ADAPT's action. While ADAPT got no media coverage, the black activists captured the headlines.

More ADAPT actions are planned for the near future.

Houston

Apparently disabled folks are not even supposed to roll down the street in Houston. After the court appearance ADAPT members decided to go down and visit Kieper, director of Houston's METRO. When there were no curb cuts or one cut per block, ADAPT riders did what most wheelchair folks do in these situations, they went into the street. In single or double file they proceeded across town until the cop car screeched up in front to block our path and demand we somehow use the inaccessible sidewalks. They ignored the facts that were pointed out to them and continued their demands, so the train of twenty five or so ADAPT people just slipped on around them like water through a sieve. The cops threatened arrest, and for what? For taking a walk and refusing to do the impossible. How can people think we have rights when we can't even take a walk?

El Paso

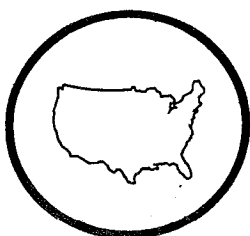
El Paso will be the site of the next ADAPT of Texas workshop. (See article.) There already is a strong contingent of ADAPT members in El Paso but the city has one of the worst transit systems for disabled people in the state of Texas, at least if not one of the worst in the country. With the upcoming budget cuts at the federal level and state dollars disappearing as the price of oil plummets, it is not a pretty picture for transit in any city.

Austin

ADAPT of Austin is waiting! The next 100 buses that arrive in Austin in July will have lifts, and twenty more 30 foot buses are ordered with lifts. Half of the trolleys have lifts too. These were major victories, but the true test is yet to come. The Capital Metro Board still has no policy on lifts for future buses purchased. Austin ADAPT is strategising about ways to bring about a Board policy of 100% mainline accessibility. National ADAPT has offered to help make this a reality.

ADAPT

WE WILL RIDE



Around The Nation

Check out the "Village Voice" (if you can find a copy.) This national magazine has done a big spread on ADAPT. We haven't seen it yet but all reports are good. Maybe disability rights has fought its way out of the closet.

Do you have pictures or info from your city which you would like to submit to *Incitement*? We especially need pictures. We can't promise to include everything sent, but we will try to include as much as we can. Please send to the Austin ADAPT address.

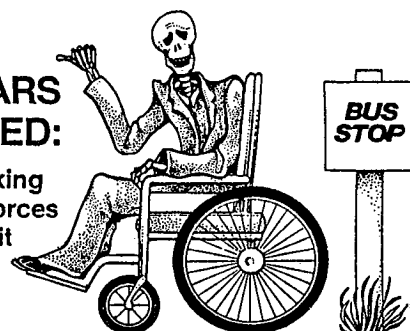
Massachusetts...

According to "Together" a newsletter published by the Information Center for Individuals with Disabilities, Massachusetts has begun a program of accessible bus service BETWEEN cities. With six "lift-equipped coach-type" buses to start with disabled riders will be able to travel "through-out the state." The Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority has half of its new GM buses lift equipped at the rear door. They claim this will mean the lifts will work faster and be less easily damaged (it also means you have more room to get on.)

And In Utah...

FOR NINE YEARS WE HAVE TRIED:

Persuasion and Talking
Studies and Task Forces
A Limited Paratransit
UTA Agendas and
Meetings and
Meetings and
Meetings...



Now it is Time to Board the Bus!!!

Salt Lake ADAPT, creators of the skeleton flyer featured above and in the last issue, is negotiating with their transit authority, keeping an eye on developing plans and waiting for the spring thaw when the mood for actions is stir-

ring in people's veins. Barbara Toomer, SL ADAPT member, writes "we've negotiated for nine years and until we clogged up the system, we were not listened to." They are applying for grants and looking forward to Cincinnati.



We Will Ride in El Paso!

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