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**Traveling Poses a Unique Set of Challenges for People with Blindness**  
*SILC Council Members Highlight Transportation Obstacles for Individuals Living with Blindness*

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SACRAMENTO, CA — Getting from “here to there” can be challenging and require patience from most everyone. But for people with blindness or visual impairment, overcoming mobility challenges often takes more than just patience – it takes planning, flexibility and, at times, courage – particularly given the public’s lack of awareness and compliance with safety and anti-discrimination laws. Despite regulations, such as California’s [law](#) mandating drivers to yield the right-of-way to people with white canes and the federal [Air Carrier Access Act](#) addressing discriminatory restrictions against individuals with disabilities, barriers to safe and accessible transportation still exist.

“Although Independent Living Centers in California provide a variety of services and resources to make mobility less challenging for people with blindness such as orientation and mobility training,” noted [California State Independent Living Council](#) (SILC) Executive Director Liz Pazdral, “the average person has no real sense of what it takes for a person living with blindness to get from one place to another.”

For SILC Council Member Jacqueline Jackson, who lost her vision at age 11, the biggest barrier is not being able to go where she wants to go when she wants to go.

“I’m always subject to someone else’s timetable, whether I’m using public transit or getting a ride from someone,” said Jackson. “Things have gotten much better with trains and planes because employees have received more training and are more accommodating. With taxis, however, there’s a large trust factor since we can’t see the meter and have to rely on the driver’s honesty.”

Ardis Bazyn, SILC Council Member and owner of Bazyn Communications agreed, “Transportation is the biggest hassle when you lose your vision. You can’t just hop in your car and go. You’re much more dependent and have to rely on others’ schedules. And finding the right location to catch public transportation can be challenging, especially if there’s no one nearby to ask for directions.”

According to Bazyn, buses present a very real set of difficulties. For example, crossing intersections without audio signals to get to a bus stop can be dangerous. Also, if the volume of audio announcements on buses is turned down, people who rely on their auditory senses can miss their bus stops. And some buses don’t stop at regularly scheduled locations if people aren’t standing when the bus approaches.

“I can’t see the bus coming, so this can be problematic for me,” said Jackson. “If others are at the bus stop, I ask them to let me know when my bus is arriving. And when getting off the bus, I have to depend on others to tell me which way to go if I’m unfamiliar with my destination.”

Paratransit service represents an alternative transportation option; however, it’s not available everywhere, is more expensive than buses and can take longer because it’s a shared ride.

Challenges extend beyond public transportation for people with blindness. Both Bazyn and Jackson use white canes when walking, particularly when they’re alone. Bazyn began using a white cane

immediately after losing her vision at age 20; however, Jackson held off for 30 years because of the associated stigma. While a white cane creates awareness for drivers and pedestrians, many people don't obey the law or follow common courtesies and fail to yield the right-of-way to a person with a white cane. And since people with blindness can't see their surroundings, when they hear automobiles honking nearby, they can't decipher what it means, which can be startling and dangerous.

Jackson, who never leaves home without her white cane, told of friends whose white canes were broken – one by a driver making a right turn on red who ran over the cane and the other by a person who stepped on the cane while running through an airport. When this happens to someone, there's no immediate way to get a replacement cane.

For the most part, Bazyn and Jackson find people are very willing to help. For Jackson, it's wonderful when she encounters a "jewel of a person" who makes getting around easier, but there are times when people can be too eager to help.

"Some people are overzealous and try to take my cane or grab my arm rather than asking how they may assist me," said Bazyn. "We need to be assertive, not aggressive, and explain how we want to be assisted because many people don't know what to do."

Jackson concluded, "I'm very excited about all the new technology that will increase my independence, such as smart phone apps that tell me the color of my clothes or where I'm at when riding a bus. But I'm most excited about cars that will drive themselves. I'll mortgage my house to buy one, step out of my car, put out my white cane and keep on going!"

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*The California State Independent Living Council (SILC) is an independent state agency which, in cooperation with the California State Department of Rehabilitation, prepares and monitors the State Plan for Independent Living.*

***The SILC Mission: To Create Policy and System Change for Independent Living***