



Guide Dogs for the Blind

Rideshare Survey Report

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Introduction

Guide Dogs for the Blind (GDB) cares deeply about the quality of life and self-realization of our graduates. We are committed to supporting our alumni after graduation as well as advocating for the equal treatment of individuals who are visually impaired across North America.

Guide dog handlers, including our alumni, have reported issues with rideshare denials for many years. From driver claims of pet allergies, to denials that do not offer any explanation for refusal of service, guide dog handlers and advocacy groups have raised concerns about this growing trend. This sparked our interest in exploring existing research on this topic.

We found that as the disability rights movement makes gains around the world, academic researchers have made progress examining the lived experience of individuals with disabilities in a variety of social settings. Among those studies, a small portion have focused on the



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experiences of blind and visually impaired individuals who work with guide dogs as mobility aids. GDB's study detailed in this report has benefited from this small but growing literature on the lived experiences of the blind and visually impaired and the booming rideshare industry. Bleach, Fairchild, Rogers, & Rosenblum (2020) explored the challenges of improving transportation systems for people with vision loss and recommended actions, several being: including people with vision loss in transportation planning, receiving feedback from individuals with a more diverse set of needs, create consistent legislation at all government levels, and updating certification programs to ensure best-practice information for all passengers and their unique needs, overall these recommend actions may help transportation more accessible for many groups, not only the visually impaired.

When examining the relationship between trust, transportation, and accessibility through ridesharing, it has been found that blind and low vision individuals assess trustworthiness based on interactions with the driver, strength of ties, and technology (Brewer & Kameswaran, 2019). This data is used to start a discussion on how other systems can facilitate trust for people with vision impairments by considering the role of conversation, affordances of system incentives, and increased agency. In an investigation into lived experiences of people with disabilities using app-based rideshare services, it was found that ridesharing use depends on prior experience with transportation and smartphones (Cochran, 2022). Additionally, the authors discussed that age and length of disability are related to rideshare use. It's posited that policymakers should address the barriers to using rideshare services and work to resolve these issues through new policies and greater public awareness.

Looking ahead to future trends Fink, Holz & Giudice (2021) outline the necessity for a policy framework that guides the design of fully automated vehicles (FAVs) to include the concerns of visually impaired individuals, addressing increased accessibility in legislative and design recommendations. Their research echoes their peers' in noting a growing problem of denials



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directed at blind and visually impaired individuals working with guide dogs, highlighting that drivers admit to not only declining rides for those with guide dogs, but when accepted, taking alternate routes to increase the fare. The prospects of improvements to policies appear unlikely to the authors because of the current rulings in favor of rideshare companies such as Uber and Lyft, arguing that as “private peer-to-peer technology providers, they are not subject to ADA liability, instead offering their own disability policies” (Columbia University 2020).

Unfortunately rideshare denials due to guide dog users is not exclusive to the U.S. Gabias (2015) examines the rights of guide dog owners in British Columbia through an account on the legal protections and challenges faced by guide dog owners in the region, particularly regarding their rights to access public spaces and transportation with their assistance animals. The author writes of a Human Rights Tribunal hearing where a visually impaired individual with a guide dog was denied service from a taxi service, the driver allegedly refusing due to allergies. The author advocates for the preservation and enforcement of the rights of guide dog owners, emphasizing the importance of upholding equal access and reasonable accommodation for individuals with visual impairments, urging awareness to the rights of individuals with guide dogs.

Lastly, Zebehazy, Rosenblum & Thompson (2022) report on the problem affecting the country of India and the Impact of COVID-19 on transportation of adults with visual impairments that is reported comparative to similar issues experienced in the U.S.. Their data shows a continued concern with the growth of rideshare denials for guide dog handlers especially addressing the anxiety of potential rideshare denials with guide dogs to vet appointments. A statement given reported feelings of isolation and overall distress when the laws in place to protect visually impaired individuals are disregarded. To conclude, although researchers have been hard at work improving our understanding of the lived experiences of people who are blind and visually impaired, much more work needs to be done to shine a light on the accessibility challenges associated with public transportation and emerging economies like rideshare.



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In an effort to identify the ever-increasing challenges our graduates face in patronizing rideshare services, GDB surveyed its alumni in the US and Canada in January and February of 2023. The goal of the research was to identify common experiences among surveyed individuals that reveal a need for intervention and/or increased awareness in order to improve the daily experiences of alums and members of the broader blind community. More specifically, GDB set out to explore three key questions:

1. How are rideshare denials impacting guide dog handlers in US and Canada?
2. Are rideshare denials impacting certain demographic groups more than others?
3. How widespread are self-reported rideshare denials among GDB alumni?

Methods and Materials

The 16-question survey was deployed in order to investigate GDB guide dog handlers' lived experiences with rideshare denials. When we embarked on this project, the research literature lacked an accounting of the psychological, social, and economic impact of rideshare denials on guide dog handlers; this information gap led us to our research in this area. (GDB) is the largest and guide dog school in North America and the second largest in the world. GDB serves clients in the US and Canada and has created over 16,000 guide dog teams since its founding in 1942.

Survey design feedback was offered by members of GDB Alumni Association Board of Directors to ensure questions were relevant and clear to the alumni population sampled. Once the slate of 16 questions was refined to the satisfaction of all 11 members of the Board, the survey was scheduled for dissemination in the first two months of 2023. A link to the survey was included in an article in GDB's alumni newsletter for those interested in participating. All participants provided consent forms for their individual participation and acknowledged they had the right to stop their participation in the survey at any time and for any reason without penalty.



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Once launched, between January and February 2023, 185 individuals completed the survey (mean age = 49 years, range = 18–75 and above; 62% female; 77% identified as white; 44% identified as married; 37% reported living in an urban environment). All responses to the 16-question survey question were collected on an excel sheet for analysis. Next, a thematic analysis was applied to question 11 which was the only open-ended question on the survey. Question 11 read: “What, if any, are the reasons why you hesitate to bring your dog on rideshare rides?”

Key Findings

As noted above, 185 guide dog handlers participated in our survey. The vast majority of those surveyed (82%), utilize rideshare services. A large portion of this group (circa 80%) use rideshare for 2 or more purposes including travel to work and school, travel to health and medical appointments, and for social/other outings such as visiting friends, attending church, running errands, or other purposes. Frequency of rideshare usage varied among respondents, with 7% using rideshare daily, 35% using it weekly, and 25% relying on it only once a month.

Further, analysis of the data obtained through an open-ended response uncovered some dramatic insights. Not only did 83% of respondents report that they had experienced rideshare denials, their answers uncovered three critical categories of impacts driven by the denials:

1. Psychological Impacts

More than 46% of respondents reported experiencing psychological impacts, which are defined as moderate-to-severe feelings of anxiety, frustration, degradation, abuse, demoralization, stress, tension, uncertainty, worry, brought on to guide dog users as a direct result of rideshare denials.



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Sample Responses:

- Respondent A: “Constantly having to take screen shots of driver details and vehicle locations just in case a driver decides they don't want a dog in the car is exhausting and immensely stressful. You never know when you'll have to justify yourself and your dog and why equal access is a right. The anticipation of barriers is just as exhausting as the barrier itself. This is so problematic in my hometown, I opt for taking more expensive taxis because that industry is more regulated and I encounter issues far less frequently”.
- Respondent B: “Recently, I would estimate at I have been denied service or significantly delayed about 20% of the time. Because of this, I have tried very hard to avoid using rideshare even though it's the most convenient option otherwise for me. It has created unnecessary frustration and anxiety and sometimes I opt to stay home with my dog and just have my husband go on errands, or modify my plans otherwise so that I can avoid using the service. I am not comfortable leaving my dog when I go out if it all possible so while I haven't chosen to leave him at home, this is not because of comfort with rideshare it is because working my dog is the way I am most comfortable navigating in public.”
- Respondent C: “It is 50/50 - it seems I will get denied service before the car arrived (they see me standing there with my dog and pass by) or when they arrive they tell me I can't bring my dog. If I am going to an appointment I usually have to leave earlier assuming that I will be denied at least once and leave time to request another ride. There have been time when if I do not think I will be gone a long period of time, I have left my dog at home to prevent the stress of having to deal with this.”
- Respondent D: “Rideshare has the ability to change the lives of blind people. Indeed, it has made my life easier in many ways, but, denial of services has made me late for



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work, job interviews, doctors appointments, meetings and recreational activity. It is humiliating and demoralizing”

- Respondent E: “I am very unhappy when I was rejected when they see me with my guide dog! I am not sure because of the guide or my blindness. I lost self confident (sic) of myself.”
- Respondent F: “I have been denied service repeatedly because of my guide dog even in inclement weather. These experiences have traumatized me.”

2. Social Impacts

Social impacts were the second most reported type of impact from respondents with 27 percent saying they had suffered a net loss in social activities and community participation as a direct result of rideshare denials.

Sample Responses:

- Respondent A: “When my mother was able to travel, I took her places on Uber and Lyft. However, I did not take my dog because I did not want to have a driver refuse us and leave my mother, (who is over 90 years old) and I waiting in very cold or very hot weather. If I really need to go somewhere quickly, I will not take my dog.”
- Respondent B: “It has made me dread using these services, but I feel like I have no other choice. They are the cheapest around in the most convenient. I have even put that I have a service dog in my name so the drivers could work it out among themselves who's going to take me or not. It is so traumatic to have your ride pull up and then be arguing with the driver no matter how much you try to educate them. When my son was 10, we had a traumatic experience we're an Uber driver would not take us. The driver and I called the cops on each other. And my son, and I never got



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to where we needed to go. Needless to say, it was a year before my son would even agree to ride in an Uber with me”

- Respondent C: “I stopped using Lyft or Uber for the most part because of bad experiences and not wanting to deal with the stress of the experience being bad. I stopped going to certain places or go out of my way to find another form of transportation which is less convenient if the ride sharing would not be such a problem with the dog. The experiences or threat of having the driver give me a bad time, leave upon sight etc. prevents me from going out.”

- **Economic Impacts**

Approximately 16 percent of respondents cited economic impacts, which include the expenses incurred by guide dog users and the undue circumstances, such as missing a flight or job interview, that indirectly cost them time and money, as a direct result of being denied access. These losses can be profound to guide dog users, but they also often end up causing profit losses to the rideshare companies, because guide-dog-using customers discontinue service.

Sample Responses:

- Respondent A: “Had to wait for another vehicle or pay extra for the pet services which they now incorporate.”
- Respondent B: “It takes longer to use public transit, but I do because I don't want the experience of waiting for a ride and then being refused. It saddens me that we are still having issues with guide dog access. Not much has changed since I got my first dog in 1975.”
- Respondent C: “The majority of times that I use Uber, when I order a ride I will send a text that I have a guide dog for blind. Almost every time I ride, the drivers will cancel the ride after I state I have a guide dog. I will normally have to request a ride



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two or three times before getting a driver who is ok with my dog. The most recent experience was one week ago where two drivers cancelled my pick up at my doctor appt and the third drove off when he saw I had a guide dog. I was charged for this driver's ride and a cancellation fee. I did report this and was refunded the fees after three emails. I will note that drivers who are ok with having a guide dog are very friendly and comment on how well behaved my dog is".

Our study did not find that there were any discernable patterns in rideshare denials as it pertained to demographics. Rideshare denials were experienced by respondents of all ages, genders, races, etc. further illuminating how pervasive and pernicious rideshare denials are for guide dog handlers.



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How Do We Move Forward?

- The data generated by studies like GDB's, can be used to educate rideshare companies as well as advocacy groups as it reveals the widespread negative effects of these denials
- More research is needed to understand the revenue loss to the industry from denials and cancelled memberships
- Additional research is also needed to investigate the drivers' perspectives in order to propose solutions that will have some buy in from drivers.
- Focus groups should be conducted with guide dog handlers, drivers, and rideshare administrators to come up with novel and effective policy solutions to the existing denial problem.
- Expanding the sample to guide dog handlers in other countries may reveal useful insights that can be shared with the international community of guide dog handlers.

For More Information

For media inquiries, please contact Barbara Zamost: barbara@zamostpr.com. For more information about the research findings or other queries, please send a message to information@guidedogs.com.

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