



TRANSED 2018: My Personal Journey

By Sally Swanson, AIA

My personal journey toward universal accessibility took me to Taipei, Taiwan, earlier this year for the TRANSED 2018 conference. Originally created by the United States Transportation Research Board in 1978, TRANSED, the International Conference on Mobility and Transport for Elderly and Disabled Persons, is held every two or three years in locations world-wide.

The theme of the TRANSED 2018 conference was “Mobility for all: Connecting the World with Accessible Transportation.” This event took my passion for accessibility to new heights and touched me profoundly with the level of excellence exhibited by all presenters. It allowed me to imagine the significance of this meeting, and more importantly our cause, extending far beyond political borders to touch every man, woman, and child.

The focus of the TRANSED conference was to tie all elements of society together; to provide transportation to everyone whether in urban cities or far-flung rural mountain settings. An interesting proposal shared by one presenter involved the goals of cross sectional integration, connecting mobility, fleet, regions, and services.

Challenges emerging from the transportation service gap between urban and rural areas brought forth learning opportunities for students of transportation to work with the local community to solve transit problems and respond to social expectations. The educational sector was also tasked to work with the government as well as private industries promoting accessible technologies and foundations offering their services.

As an aside: during the conference I lost a part of my hearing aid and staff literally came to my rescue and worked with me to locate a provider, going so far as to take me there to get the part. From a personal perspective, it isn't often I felt so well taken care of, looked after and respected. Those who structured the conference demonstrated the same level of care, commitment and dedication to detail that resulted in a focused point of view that an inclusive society is possible. If you feel it, see it, then you achieve it. It seemed in



startling contrast to this country where the feeling conveyed is what the law says and not from the heart. Yes, the United States is a divided country, but the victory of TRANSED 2018 needs to be shared and embraced.

Whether one is elderly, rich or poor, or a person with disabilities I discovered in Taiwan that there were so many services to accommodate each and every one. Upon arrival I was given a pamphlet called the *Illustrated Charter of Pedestrian Rights* which spoke to the heart of transit-oriented Universal Design considerations. Donkey Move, whose name I found enchanting, is a ride sharing service that bridges the gap between urban and rural areas. The College of Humanities and Social Sciences in Taichung City, Taiwan has established the Benefit Academy with two important core concepts: “public private collaboration” and “common good for the society”. And, Infinitaiwan is the most engaging, and apparently very popular, travel guide team specializing in accessible tours for persons with disabilities. Talk about lifting one’s spirit in a foreign land.

There are two concepts which have informed my life’s work and lend themselves to comprehensive mobility and transit. Fundamental to the inclusive planning framework experienced at TRANSED are Universal Design (UD) and Wayfinding concepts that have long informed the work of Sally Swanson Architects, Inc (SSA). There exist a range of definitions of UD, but all are informed by values including justice, equity and inclusion. UD is not a building code, but rather a broader set of principles that guide a wide range of design-related disciplines.

One perspective defining the concept of Wayfinding is to see it as a means of spatial problem solving. It is knowing where you are in a building, or another built environment, or even in nature. Wayfinding, when done comprehensively, is in a sense intuitive. It provides certain cues helping to move you toward your desired location from your present location. These themes inform sound planning and lay the groundwork for planning that is just, equitable, inclusive and socially responsible. Whether focused on development of new transit systems or the modernization of those already in place, the need to demonstrate recognition and inclusion of this aging population will only grow in importance.



Through implementation of the concepts of Wayfinding and UD, SSA is furthering the concepts of justice, equity, and inclusion. Reflecting on the needs in our country, one doesn't have to look far to see an aging population across the United States; a population that is facing increasing mobility challenges.

I would like to especially commend the Eden Social Welfare Foundation for organizing this conference which brought like minds together to work together to create an inclusive society.

Amazingly, after nearly four decades on this professional path, I feel like I'm just getting started. I'm happy to share that I have - at long last - become a member of the Transportation Research Board (TRB) Art and Design Excellence in Transportation Committee Member.

For nearly 40 years, as the CEO and Founding Principal of SSA, I have sought to create an inclusive environment. Thanks to the extraordinary planning efforts in making this year's conference come to fruition I want to acknowledge those whose dedication to this important mission made TRANSED Taipei a great success. What a tight team effort that showed how working together to solve problems – such as an accessible planet – was possible when you gain support. Whether related to travel, technology, integrity, teamwork, or care for one another, it was clear that with sufficient public and private support, anything is possible. The joy contained in this professional gathering was practically euphoric.

As SSA continues to influence transit planning, I welcome the opportunity to champion the themes that have both informed my life's work and help ensure a greater degree of participation and access among persons from all walks of life.

In closing, it has been announced that TRANSED 2021 will be held in the United States. I can hardly wait.