

Utah Disability History: Transportation



PHOTOGRAPHY/ GERALD SILVER
Protesters who want wheelchair lifts on all UTA buses blocked southbound traffic on Main Street for 15 minutes Thursday.

wheelchair protesters. They stopped buses and crawled from a wheelchair to a seat in September of 1985. "There are a lot of people who can't be here [demonstrating] because they can't ride the bus," he told reporters at the time. "It's a Catch-22 situation."

The protesters' demands weren't met immediately. Buses with lifts were phased in on some routes at first. Lift technology improved. Today, "100% of UTA's fixed route bus and TRAX light rail service is wheelchair accessible with lift-equipped or low floor buses and trains," says the UTA website.

Smith said consumers can still meet a big barrier between a problem and a solution, but he can now go anywhere that public transit goes.

People with disabilities in Salt Lake City had tried for nine years to get public transportation the polite way. Then they tried confrontation.

Public transportation for people with disabilities was problematic in the 1980s. It was expensive. Wheelchair lifts on buses broke down a lot, and most buses didn't have them at all. Utah Transit Authority officials argued that lift-equipped buses were largely unused even when those buses were available. Most curbs would not allow wheelchair users to roll from the walk to the bus.

For the most part, people with disabilities had to use a different system in the Salt Lake City area. Their door-to-door service was segregated, people who used it had to prove they needed it, and it only went to work, the doctor or the hospital.

Activists wanted a system that took them all the places a person without a wheelchair could go.

Mark Smith, the current information specialist at the Access Utah Network, was one of many Salt Lake ADAPT (American Disabled for Accessible Public Transport)