



# Behind the Scenes

## More than my chair



It was April 20, 1996 when my life as I had known it changed. It was an asthma attack that brought me to the hospital. Upon arriving, I was found to have no pulse and no brain activity, "clinically dead" as doctors put it. After aggressive life saving measures, I was intubated (put on a ventilator) and lapsed into a 3-month coma.

Doctors held no hope for my survival, yet, in what can only be described as a miracle, I woke up.

After 5 months in the hospital, I was transferred to

a transitional living center in Pomona, where I relearned to eat, speak, bathe and dress myself; it was like starting over.

And that's exactly what I did: I started over.

There's a saying, "Sometimes it's the journey that teaches you a lot about the destination." I had to embrace and appreciate that I was given a second chance in life and that's where I found my purpose in living.

After a seven-year absence from the college that I was forced to withdraw from, I returned to Loyola Marymount University.

I used Access every day, five days a week, on a standing order. Pick up at 6:30 am and return at 4:30 pm. Learning to navigate the campus was difficult in a power wheelchair, yet I did it.

In May 2004, I completed my Bachelor of Arts in Political Science. Access transported me and my family to my graduation.

In 2005, I was offered a grant to continue my studies at LMU and, once again, I needed transportation to and from my home to the school. Masters classes are later in the day, so I took the opportunity to work at Loyola Marymount before going to class.

Once again, I needed to rely on Access for my transportation. I was on a 3-day standing order. Depending on what time my class ended, my return was either at 7 pm or 10 pm. Access never let me down. In 2008, I graduated with a Master of Arts degree in Pastoral Theology with an emphasis on Bioethics.

In 2005, I was appointed to serve on the City of Los Angeles Commission on Disability, where I served until 2020. Serving in this capacity taught me that when I speak up for the disability community, I'm also speaking up for any or all communities that have sat on the sidelines for far too long.

In 2008, I became the City of Los Angeles' Mayor's Appointee to the Access Board, now serving under three

administrations (Villaraigosa, Garcetti and Bass). At first, the position seemed difficult, trying to balance what's best for the agency and what's best for the riders, since I myself am a rider and every decision I made would also affect me. Working my way up the ranks, I was elected as Board Secretary and, for the first time in Access history in 2023, was elected as the first "everyday rider" to become Board Chair. Just this past July, I was elected again to serve my second term as the Board Chair. What an honor!

Access has not only allowed me to return to school, but with them, I found my VOICE.

Access has allowed me to live as independently as possible; whether it is meetings, shopping, or hanging out with friends. Who would have thought that I would be where I am today after doctors had written me off almost 30 years ago.

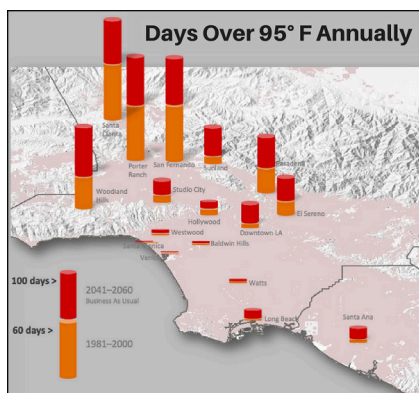
Thank you Access for all you've given me and the hundreds of thousands Angelenos with a disability. I would not be where I am if it wasn't for Access and the amazing providers.

**Theresa May de Vera**  
**Chair, Access Services Board of Directors**

## The Heat is On: How Access prepares for the heat

It's no secret that temperatures in the Los Angeles area continue to increase on an annual basis. According to the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, "All across Los Angeles, we're feeling the effects of climate change, like more very hot days and heat waves later in the summer. Scientists predict that climate change will continue to cause even more extreme heat in the future. Coastal areas and central Los Angeles will experience three times more days of temperatures over 95°F, and the San Fernando and San Gabriel Valleys will have even more extremely hot weather."

As shown in the graphic below, the heat may be particularly intense in the inland valley regions. However, not even seaside Long Beach will be spared.



Access has a significant role to play in helping to protect our riders from heat. To that end, staff monitors the weather on a daily basis. If a heat wave is anticipated, contractors are alerted so they may take steps to prepare. Every vehicle is inspected before operation, checking the air conditioning among other items. Vehicles are subject to comprehensive preventative maintenance inspections, which help ensure the cooling systems are in top notch shape. Access Road Safety Inspectors consider proper function of air conditioning to be a safety critical item and will investigate reports of substandard cooling.

**SOURCE: UCLA, LOS ANGELES COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH**

Riders can prepare by traveling with water whenever possible and booking trips outside of the peak heat of the day, which typically is between 2pm and 4pm. While Access and its contractors strive to provide quality vehicles, in the event that the air conditioning is not functioning please alert the driver and report the matter to Access at 1-800-827-0829.

**Alex Chrisman**  
**Emergency Management Coordinator**

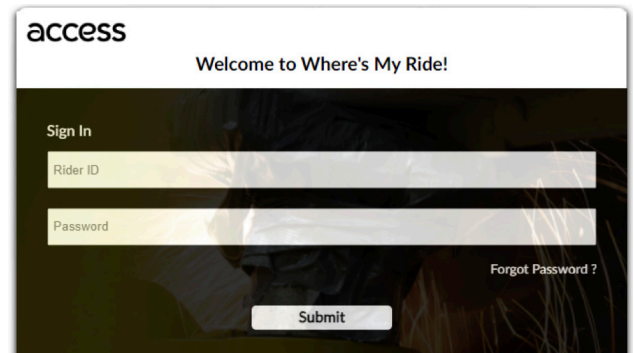
## Access staff visits Where's My Ride developer's headquarters

Bill Tsuei, Director of Information Technology, and I recently went to Washington, DC to meet with USDOT staff in the Mobility Innovation department and IT Curves, the company that developed the Where's My Ride app and serves as a technology consultant for Rider360, Access' customer database software.

Access has been working with USDOT on the Accessible Autonomous Vehicle and Access Traveler Mobility App projects. During this visit, we provided project updates to Dr. Gwo-Wei Tong, Director of Mobility Innovation, and shared our vision of applying autonomous vehicle technology and services during the 2028 Olympics and Paralympics Games which will be held in Los Angeles.

We also visited the headquarters of IT Curves to meet the developers face-to-face. We discussed several topics ranging from engineering resources, help desk operations, to Microsoft Cloud software development. We agreed that one of the toughest challenges for software developers is cybersecurity, and the most exciting is the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into more products and services.

**Thomas Lee**  
*IT Project Manager*




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## Commendations

"I would like to acknowledge my driver Hailat. I noticed the driver is very kind and respectful with the riders and drivers. He is a very cheerful driver."

**Henrlen Diaz**  
*Rider since August 2022*

"I stated the driver Melanie Smith listened and was a very good driver. I felt safe with her and appreciative that she arrived on time."

**Frances Perini**  
*Rider since September 2011*