

# Quest

## PODCAST



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### **Episode 23: Advocacy, Accessibility, and the DOT November 16, 2022**

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Mindy Henderson: Welcome to the Quest Podcast, proudly presented by the Muscular Dystrophy Association as part of the Quest Family of content. I'm your host, Mindy Henderson. Together we are here to bring thoughtful conversation to the neuromuscular disease community and beyond about issues affecting those with neuromuscular disease and other disabilities and those who love them. We are here for you to educate and inform, to demystify, to inspire and to entertain. We are here shining a light on all that makes you, you, whether you are one of us, love someone who is or are on another journey altogether. Thanks for joining now. Let's get started.

I am so excited to tell you about our guests today who are here to discuss accessible transportation. First up, Kelly Buckland is a person with a disability who has been actively involved in disability issues since 1979. He served for over 20 years as the executive director of the Living Independence Network Corporation. Buckland has been honored with numerous state and national awards, including the University of Ohio President's Medallion, the Hewlett Packard Distinguished Achievement and Human Rights Award. Outstanding alumni of Boise State University and outstanding alumni of Drake University. And today he works as a disability policy advisor for the Office of Assistance Secretary on Policy at the US Department of Transportation.

My second guest is Michael Lewis. Michael has spent over a decade working on disability rights for various organizations. His passion for disability policy advocacy stems from his experience as an individual with Cerebral Palsy. As a Director of Disability Policy at the Muscular Dystrophy Association, Michael leads MDAs advocacy efforts on Capitol Hill and with federal agencies to defend and expand access to civil rights education, economic independence and employment and accessible recreation and travel for people with neuromuscular diseases and other disabilities.

Well, Kelly and Michael, thank you so much for joining me today. I'm thrilled to have you here. Kelly, let's start with you. Would you tell us just a little bit more about yourself and your role at the Department of Transportation and what your focus is?

Kelly Buckland: Yeah, sure. Well, I've got a disability. I've had a disability for about 52 years now. Use a wheelchair, quadriplegic. So I was injured in 1970, so I mean, it was a long time ago, right? It was actually July 26th, 1970, so it the ADA was signed on the 20th anniversary of me breaking my neck. So it was kind of a nice little anniversary present from President Bush. Right?

Mindy Henderson: My goodness.

Kelly Buckland: Anyway, so I have lived a long time before the ADA and then post ADA as well. So I know a lot about what changes have been made and really about what changes we still have to make and have spent most of my professional life in independent living. I ran a Center for Independent Living in Boise for six years. I then ran the State Independent Living Council in Idaho for 15 years, and then was the director of the National Council on Independent Living for 12 years. Retired from there, and then came back to work when President Biden appointed me to this position just a little over a year ago. So I've been here about a year.

During that whole time I worked a lot on transportation issues. And I was frustrated by all of the same transportation issues other people are frustrated by. So this gives me a chance right now to really work intimately in those and a new policy basis. My current position is I'm the Disability Policy Advisor in the office and the secretary. I work across all modes of transportation and focus mainly on policy issues affecting people with disabilities.

It's a great time to be here. There is a lot of money that's going out of this department. We have money from the Infrastructure Jobs Act. We have money from the bipartisan infrastructure bill. We have money through the recently passed Inflation Reduction Act. So there's a lot of money going out here on a lot of different projects. Some of those are specifically targeted, we'll probably talk about this later, specifically targeted toward people with disabilities. But even the larger piece, we need to make sure that when it's implemented, it's implemented correctly so that it's done so it's accessible to people with disabilities. That's kind of my past and kind of what my position is now.

Mindy Henderson: Fantastic. Thank you for all of that information. So it's fantastic. It sounds like you've got really both a personal and a professional interest in what we're talking about today.

Kelly Buckland: Yep.

Mindy Henderson: Fantastic. Okay, well I definitely want to come back to a number of the things that you just mentioned, but also with us today. I mentioned we have Michael Lewis with the Muscular Dystrophy Association. Michael, would you tell us a little bit about your role with MDA and the work the advocacy team at MDA does?

Michael Lewis: Yeah, many. I am the Director of Disability policy for MDA. So I am conjunction with my for college and the advocacy department lead MDA, the advocacy effort on Capitol Hill and with federal agencies defending and defending people with neuro muscular diseases that [inaudible] to provide them employment opportunity to educational opportunity as well accessible travel and recreation. And my colleague who complied, a director of [inaudible] her and by Vice President of Public Policy, Paul Melmeyer. We also advocate for scientific and FDA related policies to equip [inaudible] with treatment to develop the neuromuscular disease community that we represent.

Mindy Henderson: Perfect. Thank you for the information and I'm a huge proponent of the work that you and your team do for MDA. It's really impressive all of the work that you're small but mighty team does. In fact, I know Paul Melmeyer, your boss, was just invited to the White House, which we're very, very proud of.

Michael Lewis: Exactly. Yeah. So it's certainly busy and we got closer to the midterms and the [inaudible] when the midterms and started the new Congress in January [inaudible].

Mindy Henderson: Nice, nice. Well, Kelly, I'm going to bring it back to you. There's so much to talk about. You referenced a lot of the things that I want to talk about, and the Department of Transportation and Secretary Buttigieg recently have been shining a spotlight on accessible transportation. There's a lot of advocacy happening in the world today to try to further accessibility for public transportation, which covers a lot of different areas. We've been excited to hear the secretary talk about his priorities around accessible transportation and the visibility that he's bringing to the issues. So he's talked about his desire to fund projects to make public transportation more accessible. Has the funding of those projects already been secured or am I oversimplifying it? It may be something that happens in stages. Would you explain to us where that is?

Kelly Buckland: Yeah, well actually both of those things are true. Those bills that I talked about before, the Infrastructure Jobs Act, the bipartisan infrastructure bill, and the Inflation Reduction Act, and others, have all put money into transportation at the Department of Transportation. So the whole bipartisan infrastructure bill covers a range of things, like a large range of stuff, including roads and bridges, bus stops, air terminals, train stations. Basically we are rebuilding America and that money is here, but those bills fund us over the next five years. So we get chunks each year. So we've got this year's money and then we'll get next year's money, and so on, each year of those five years. So it is coming in clumps, but we do have money right now that's going out the door. As a matter of fact, we're sending out a new notice of funding opportunity almost every week.

So the latest one that's going to go out is from the Federal Rail Administration. They're purchasing new cars. There's a lot of NOFOs, as we call them, going out almost every week. So what I really encourage people to do is keep your eye on the Department of Transportation's website because they get posted up there every time one goes out. You can see that probably in the latest news section, the newest NOFOs that are going out. But there's some that nonprofits are available to apply for as well, or eligible to apply for as well. So there's a good reason that MDA might want to keep an eye on that themselves, plus nonprofits in the community.

Mindy Henderson: I see. Okay. That's great to hear. And I believe I had heard that it's something like, I don't know, 25% of buses and trains remain inaccessible to people with disabilities. Are those the kinds of things where the focus will be, or can you talk a little bit more about the tangibles in terms of what the DOT will be implementing?

Kelly Buckland: I think what you're referencing is there's about, and the figures I've seen is around 25% of the rail stations remain inaccessible. So if you're riding Amtrak, 25% of the stations are not going to be accessible.

Mindy Henderson: That's significant.

Kelly Buckland:

You can get on there and you can't get off there. So that means there's a lot of cities that people with disabilities cannot take Amtrak to. There's just no way to get there on Amtrak. You can't get off, can't get on. So the All Stations Accessibility Program is focused on that. The NOFO in that, notice of funding opportunity on that went out in September... Well, no, that NOFO actually went out on the anniversary of the ADA. So it's been out there, and now we're receiving applications in regards to that notice of funding opportunity. We need to get an update about where exactly we are in regards to applications, but we've already been receiving applications.

But the goal is to make every single Amtrak station accessible. And Amtrak is making some stations accessible anyway, but this is focused on not just Amtrak stations, but all train stations. So subways and so forth also, we'll have the availability to get money to make those stations accessible. And what we don't want to do is see them make pieces of it accessible. If they're going to apply for money to make their station accessible, we want to see the entire station made accessible. From the front entrance on, we want to make sure that the entire station is made accessible and it's made accessible to all people with disabilities. So not just ramps and that kind of stuff, but communication for people who are deaf, issues around people who are blind needing a way of finding stuff. So all of those things need to be improved in regards to accessibility.

Bus stations, there's no specific focus on bus stations, but there's certainly a lot of money going out that could be used to make bus stations accessible, which a lot of those do remain inaccessible, but I'm not exactly sure what the name or the number is around bus stations. Then we've been doing a lot of work looking at the actual cars that are being made for Amtrak, the regional trains. We haven't looked at the long haul trains yet, but those will be coming next. But we're going to basically be replacing all of the Amtrak trains. There's not only has the Department of Transportation been looking at those lockup train sets, but so has other organizations that, or stakeholders, they've been looking at those too.

The new trains are going to be really a big improvement over what we currently have. I'm really excited to see those things get on the rails. Unfortunately it's going to take about five years from building them to getting them delivered, to getting them on the rails and actually put into service. That's going to be about five years, and then probably 10 years before we see the long haul trains replaced. But I'm really excited to see that happen. It's going to make a big difference.

Mindy Henderson: That's amazing. And you kind of read my mind, I was about to ask you about the cars themselves. Michael, I want to come to you in just a second, but you mentioned the Amtrak cars. What about the subway stations? I don't live in New York City for example, but I hear that even if a station is accessible, let's say, and the elevators are working and you can get down to the trains and all of those things, sometimes that just the gap between the platform and the train is an issue. Are there things being done to address those sorts of issues?

Kelly Buckland: Again, most of that is going to be through grants, out to local entities that are running those. In Chicago, it'll be the Chicago Metro Authority or whoever it is in Chicago. In DC, it'll be Washington Metro and Train. Anyway, that's another place where local advocates really need to play a role. You need to make sure what your local transportation agency is doing in regards to applications so that they're applying for this money. Then you need to make sure that they're applying to make them accessible. Then when they do get the money, you need to keep an eye on things to make sure that they're doing it in a way that is accessible.

Mindy Henderson: Okay, so that's interesting. This is a situation where the DOT has made the money available, but these independent entities have to come and request those monies, is that right?

Kelly Buckland: Yep. Well, and we require them to follow the ADA in 504, but I think we all know how that works. You need to also have people on the ground in the local area keeping an eye on stuff to make sure that it's done appropriate. It's hard to go back and fix it once it's in place. So it's really better to watch and make sure that those are done correctly from the beginning.

Mindy Henderson: Right. Michael, do you have something to add?

Michael Lewis: Yeah, [inaudible] that Mindy and I were talking about last, which is, is there money within the bipartisan infrastructure bill that was passed last year, is there money for the routine maintenance accessible facility, because living in the metro DC area, many years ago, it was not uncommon to go to a metro station and the elevator would be out of order, or the escalator wouldn't work. And I know the Washington metropolitan area transportation authority runs the metro, they did a big huge multi-billion dollar overhaul of the entire system four or five years ago. Is there there money in this bill for other entities to do maintenance on existing that accessibility stations?

Kelly Buckland: So it would depend on the program. I have to say yes and no, depends on what program you're talking about.

Michael Lewis: Okay.

Kelly Buckland: When it comes to metros or in train stations, there's money to rebuild them and make them accessible, including the elevators. Maintenance, I believe is then the responsibility of the local area to then maintain it. For instance, like we're installing 500,000, half a million electric fueling stations across the country on interstate highways. We've approved all 50 states for the grants and two territories, Puerto Rico and Washington DC. So their plans have already been approved. The money's starting to flow. They're going to start building these electric fueling stations, they need to be made accessible. There is money in that program to then maintain the machines, the electric fueling stations. But I believe unlike the all stations accessible, I think once they get the money to make it accessible, it's then up to them to make the maintenance happen. But I'm not sure about that, but I can find out and get back to you.

Mindy Henderson: Okay. I want to go back to timing for just a second, and you already answered my question about the question I was going to ask about timing for completing the project of the railway cars and things. What about though the things like subway stations, and the things like elevators and the different pieces and parts that make those accessible? Or is that all just dependent on those independent organizations coming and requesting the funds to take action on those things?

Kelly Buckland: Yeah, I mean we are focused on making sure that all of the stations that are not accessible, getting made accessible, but we can't force a local area to do it, right? They're going to have to apply for the money. But we're going to be providing a lot of that technical assistance to them in applying so that they know how to apply what's required in the notice. But we're going to be announcing that money over the next five years too.

Mindy Henderson: Okay.

Kelly Buckland: You'll see chunks of it go out each of the five years. It's not all going to go out at once. That's a lot of money. So it's several billion at a time. So the All Stations Accessibility Program includes, I think, it's 1.2... No, it's 1.75 billion specifically just to make rail stations accessible

Mindy Henderson: And that includes subways and things.

Kelly Buckland: Yep.

Mindy Henderson: Okay.

Kelly Buckland: 1.75 billion is a lot of money. So you'll see several million go out each year of the five years. I think this year it was in the hundreds of millions. It was like 200 or 300 million, something like that.

Mindy Henderson: That's fantastic. So it sounds like we could expect to see some really huge improvements over the course of the next five, maybe 10 years. But what can we as local individuals in those cities do to hold those independent groups accountable to request the funds and do the work to make the stations and things accessible?

Kelly Buckland: People should be contacting them now. You should be contacting your local transit authorities if it's your city. They're the ones that run most of the buses. Counties also run buses. Cities like larger cities run the trains, train systems like subways. So I would be contacting those entities now and including your state transportation agency too, and finding out what they're doing. What are they applying for? And if they're not applying, why not? Tell them what the needs are in that city or that county or that state? What needs to be done? Where are the transportation problems in your local area? That's really what people know best and that's what they should be advocating to be getting fixed.

The first stage to fix those is to apply. There is a public engagement requirement in the applications. So once they do apply for the money when it's awarded, they have to then engage the public, including people with disabilities in the local areas to engage them about how it should be done. But to what extent they do that, you can't make them contact everybody. So it's really the more people play a role in this and the more they are responsible for their own advocacy to make this happen, the better.

Mindy Henderson: Great.

Michael Lewis: So in other words, Kelly, activists need to lobby the local transit authority to make acceptability a funding priority, not the federal government saying, "You have to do this." But they have to make it a priority and apply for the funding?

Kelly Buckland: Yeah, and the local people with disabilities know best what their needs are and what needs to be fixed in their local communities. Those entities that are responsible for this really need to hear that and then apply for money to fix it. Then they need technical assistance and help from advocates to make sure it's done and accessible.

Mindy Henderson: Great. There's so much to talk about on this topic, and I want to pivot in just a second and talk about air travels specifically, but I have one more question for you. I live in Austin, Texas where public transportation is definitely not ideal for someone living with a disability. It's a city where there is not a lot of foot traffic or easy access to hopping on and off of public transportation. Is there anything in the plans to address any of these kinds of issues where the layout and the infrastructure of a city is just not set up well as a framework for accessible public transportation?



Kelly Buckland: Yeah. I would say yes and no. I mean, we're not going to tell people where to provide transportation. That's really what you would need to do because where it needs to be. We are working with Access Board and the Department of Justice very closely on developing public rights of way accessibility guidelines. And the Department of Justice, the Access Board and the Department of Transportation have all been working on putting those rules together. Believe it or not, 32, almost 33 years later since the ADA was passed, we never have had accessibility guidelines developed for public rights of way, which is sidewalks, roads, bridges, crosswalks. All that kind of stuff is public rights of way.

So they've been using stuff that is comparable, or compatible I guess. We do have standards for sidewalks and we do have standards for parking and that kind of stuff. So they've been using those, but this'll be the first time that we've had a comprehensive set of accessibility guidelines for public rights of way. And that will guide all of this money that's spent. Some of it is directed directly at making sidewalks and crosswalks and bus stations and that kind of stuff accessible. But we're putting out that accessibility guidelines so that when they are building stuff it will be built accessible.

Mindy Henderson: Gotcha. Okay. So let's talk about air travel, which is a whole other can of worms. The secretary has also been very outspoken in support of making air travel more accessible for individuals with disabilities, which is music to my ears. Specifically bathrooms, and making it possible for individuals to drive wheelchairs onto airplanes rather than being separated from their mobility devices. I think that we all know this is a complicated issue with a lot of moving parts. So as Secretary Buttigieg has said, Air trouble is really the last form of public transportation where an individual has to be separated from their mobility device in order to make use of that transportation. One thing that surprises people is that air travel is not covered under the ADA. Why was travel, air travel, excluded with the creation of the ADA?

Kelly Buckland: I was involved in disability rights back then, I wasn't involved in those negotiations. But what I've heard, and I've heard this from very credible sources, the Air Carrier Access Act passed in 1988. So that's right about the time we were working on ADA, which was signed two years later. What I've been told is that when the negotiations were going on around the Americans With Disabilities Act, air travel was excluded specifically because the Air Carriers Act had just been passed. So it was like, you don't need to include that because you already got a separate bill passed to cover air travel. So that's what I've been told is why it's not in the ADA.

Mindy Henderson: Okay. Are you able to expound for us on what's currently mandated in the Air Carriers Act in terms of accessibility for individuals with disabilities and maybe what's not currently mandated?

Kelly Buckland: So it's not a lot, right? So the department just published the Air Carriers with Disabilities Bill of Rights and the secretary announced those at the ADA anniversary. They are out there. You should look at them. There's 10 of them. It's kind of like the 10 Commandments. That's really the rights that people have under the Air Carrier Acts.

All those things that are delineated under the Air Carrier Access, or the air carriers, their travelers' with disabilities Bill of Rights really is pretty inclusive of what's required of the airlines. So the rules get a little bit more specific about how that stuff gets done, but it's really those 10 broad things. So what's not included is you can't sue. You can't sue the airline/ there's no right. Under the ADA, if your rights are violated, you can sue in court. Under the Air Carrier Access Act, you have no right to sue, so there's no private right of action. That's what I was trying to think of. So you can't sue an airline. That's the main thing I think that's missing is the ability to sue.

Mindy Henderson: So you can't claim a violation of your civil rights right now in a lawsuit against an airline. Is that accurate?

Kelly Buckland: Yeah, if you feel like your rights have been violated under the Air Carrier Access Act, you file a complaint with the Department of Transportation and with the airline, and then that's dealt with by the Department of Transportation and the airlines. But there's no court settlement, if you will.

Mindy Henderson: Okay, that's helpful. So just to make sure I'm hearing you correctly, it sounds like the ADA or accessible air travel was not included in the ADA because, theoretically, it was assumed that all of the needs were covered under the Air Carriers Act. Did I get that right?

Kelly Buckland: Yep.

Mindy Henderson: Okay.

Kelly Buckland: Specifically I think that was the message from Congress because that's the message they were hearing from the airlines.

Mindy Henderson: Gotcha. Okay, and I talk to people about this topic all the time. And as I said, making it possible for individuals to drive a wheelchair onto an airplane is actually not as simple as you would think. When I'm talking to people they say all the time, you can strap a wheelchair down in a car, in a bus, all of these things. Why can't you just do that in an airplane? But there are a lot of obstacles and roadblocks that need to be overcome. Could you talk a little bit about what the roadblocks and obstacles are that we would have to overcome to be able to allow individuals to drive a wheelchair onto an airplane?

Kelly Buckland: Well, I don't know that I know all of them.

Mindy Henderson: Okay.

Kelly Buckland: I'm not sure I can tell you that. I do know that's what we're going to be doing. We're going to be doing research about the barriers that exist to making that happen. So what happened was in the Air Carrier Access, or in the FAA's reauthorization, there was a requirement put in there that the access board do a feasibility study to find out if it was feasible for people to be able to fly their wheelchairs. So the access board contracted with the Transportation Research Board to do the feasibility study. So they did that and they wrote their report. They said, "Yes, it's feasible. We see nothing blocking the ability to do that." They then recommended that the Department of Transportation take responsibility, and I think specifically FAA, take responsibility for mapping out a plan of how we get to that end.

So that's what we're going to be working on and that's in the policy priorities at the department to do. When the secretary talks about this, that's what he's referencing is that we're going to be mapping out a plan to get from where we are today to people being able to board an airplane in their wheelchair. One of the barriers was crash testing wheelchairs so we would know which wheelchair you could take onto a plane. What we have found out is that a lot of wheelchairs were already crash tested. So if you have a WC 19 compliant wheelchair, you should be able to fly. It has to withstand 16 G forces. Airplane seats have to withstand 16 G forces. Most of the wheelchairs that are crash tested can withstand 20 G forces. So they already meet that 16 G force requirement. So that may not be as big of a barrier as we thought it was.

Mindy Henderson: Right.

Kelly Buckland: The Transportation Research Board determined that you could use what they call a pallet method in the floor to secure the chairs of the floor, and it'll withstand those G forces. So that may not be that big of a problem either, but I can't really tell you what the barriers that remain are. But mainly it's the seat.

Mindy Henderson: Okay.

Kelly Buckland: It's ability to have a place to drive your wheelchair onto, so you have to have a seat that's removable. But there's a lot of pushback around being able to actually take it off and then bring it and put it back. Airlines don't want to see that. I think safety experts aren't real hot about that either, because putting in and out a lot of times there's a lot of room for human error in regards to whether it gets put in right or not. So I think we may be looking at folding seats. But that's a lot of the research that we're going to be doing is around those remaining barriers. But I don't think it's as complicated as really a lot of people think it is.

Mindy Henderson: Yeah. I think from what I hear, and Michael feel free to chime in. I know you spend a lot of time working on this particular issue as well, but from what I hear, it's an engineering problem that needs to be solved. I think a lot of the questions to your point have been answered, but I think there are still some engineering problems that need to be solved. And I think for also, from what I hear, it's an economic problem that needs to be solved because when you talk about making room for wheelchairs on an airplane in which space is a very hot commodity, you run the risk of losing access to seats, and the airlines have less of an ability to sell the volume of seats that they would like to sell and that sort of thing.

Those are kind of the biggest categories of problems that I've heard. Then I guess I would throw out there, you mentioned wheelchairs and with the customization and the variability in wheelchairs today, no one wheelchair is the same as another. So I think that, from what I hear, creates another set of problems. Michael, what are your thoughts?

Michael Lewis: The one thing that's important keep mind is that [inaudible] they set the standard for wheelchairs in terms of wheel base and so on and so forth. Those are the WC 18 and WC 19 standard for power wheelchairs. So at the base, the wheel base and stuff, the majority of them within the [inaudible] above the base were the seat is, and the adaptive equipment is, that where the variation comes in to play. But the wheel base that would be you would be secured by an onboard restraint system they're pretty uniform. If you were to cause the economic impact, the airlines don't want to lose the revenue. Every other method of transportation, whether it is Amtrak or the city bus, or the taxi cab company even, they're all covered by the ADA. And so they've all had to make these modifications to accommodate wheelchairs. So really the economic argument doesn't... I mean that's really nice that we don't want to spend the money, but every other method of transport had over the past 21 years, both in the aftermath of 9/11 and during the most recent Covid epidemic, a pandemic rather, the American tax payer [inaudible] to the tune of hundreds of billions of dollars twice now.

So the argument is, you might lose a seat, but if we could design a seat that could move so that a person without a disability could occupy that space when a person in a wheelchair is not aboard the flight, there's really no argument to be made that that's going to cost them money. Because a recent survey showed that a lot of people in wheelchairs now avoid flying all together. So really, in my opinion, the matter of the FAA and [inaudible] and wheelchair manufacturers themselves were getting around the table and making up those wheelchair standards were FAA cabin interior standards. I guess the question I would have for you, Kelly, is could the DOT issue a mandate for there to be a wheel chair spot on planes, being a regulation? Or is that something that would need to be enacted by congress?

Kelly Buckland: Yeah, I think that's right. So I think it is within DOT's power to do that by regulation, but it may need to be done by an act of Congress to make it happen. So I also think there are things we should consider incentives for airlines to do this.

Mindy Henderson: Yes.

Kelly Buckland: Instead of just mandates, we could talk about mandates and incentives. But like under the ADA, we'd give tax breaks to companies that make changes to their buildings. We do that already. Why not do something similar with airlines? It's a thought to take into consideration. I was just up at a meeting in Seattle the end of September with a group called All Wheels Up and they had airplane manufacturers, Boeing and Airbus was both there. They had airlines, I think Alaska, Southwest, Jet Blue, there were some others that were there as well.

DOT was there and the wheelchair manufacturers were there. Engineers were there. So we were all talking about just the things you talked about, Michael. You really described that very well. So I think the only thing that I would add is that there's also, I think, a business case to be made, the money that airlines could save by not having to do all the repairs to wheelchairs. I mean, they're damaging 26 wheelchairs a day. They also, I'm sure have workplace injuries from the people lifting these chairs onto the conveyor belts and taking them off. Plus, I think they are having a bunch of expenses, transferring people from their chairs to the aisle chairs to the airplane that some of that would be eliminated. So I guess really what I'm getting at is I think there's a lot of cost savings that also should be taken into consideration that would result from doing this as well.

It is not just a cost effort. Then I also think, like you said, Michael, all those other forms of transportation had to make those accommodations and they just have to transfer the cost across their entire business enterprise. It's the same with airlines. I mean they're making billions in profit. So I mean if they just distributed some of that cost across their entire business enterprise, it probably wouldn't amount to all that much money. So that's another way to make up the revenue laws. I think there's a lot of area here to do negotiations, and I think Michael is exactly right. It's really getting all those people around the table and having those conversations and coming up with a plan that everybody's agreed to and that we can move forward with.

Mindy Henderson: It feels like a very solvable problem to me.

Kelly Buckland: It is. [inaudible]

Michael Lewis: I mean, I think you could also make the argument, millions of baby boomers are retiring every day and they have been for the last several years and they will continue to do so. And as they get older, they're going to be increasingly relying on wheelchairs or other mobility aid. Someone made the argument at the meeting that Kelly was just talking about that baby boomers have a lot of disposable income to travel and retirement. So as they experience more mobility issues, if the airlines don't figure out a way to accommodate these people that have the money to spend, they're going to be in big trouble because that's going to be a large part of the market, retirees.

Mindy Henderson: Agree.

Michael Lewis: Even cruise lines have accessible [inaudible]. Not all of them, but a lot of them do because that's their clientele. It's elderly people that rely on walkers or wheelchairs or what have you.

Kelly Buckland: Well they're also, under the ADA, they're required if they're doing business in the United States, they're required to-

Mindy Henderson: Exactly.

Kelly Buckland: Have accessible ships.

Mindy Henderson: Yeah.

Kelly Buckland: We do it on ships, we do it on buses, we do it on taxis, trains, every other form of transportation except air.

Mindy Henderson: Agreed.

Kelly Buckland: It's time to do it.

Mindy Henderson: Oh my gosh, I could not agree with you more, and I think this is a conversation that I would love to continue having. I think we could sit here for a few more hours discussing all of the issues and things. But Kelly, I can't thank you enough for your time. I know that you're an incredibly busy person. I want to just wrap things up by asking you and then Michael, I have a question for you. But Kelly, for anyone who's listening, what are the most effective things we can all be doing to make progress toward creating more accessible transportation and air travel in this country?

Kelly Buckland: Well I think it's, like I said before, I really think that people need to be involved in their local level and need to be telling those local entities what the needs are, get them to apply for money and then make sure it gets implemented in a way that's successful. When it comes to air travel, I really want to encourage people to continue to file complaints with the Department of Transportation. So it's on the website, it's under the FAA's Consumer Protection Division. So if you go there, it's real easy to file a complaint. Please do. I think a lot of people have lost faith in filing complaints with the Department of Transportation. They're not sure it goes anywhere, but numbers matter. If we're going to make the case, or making it so that people can fly in their wheelchairs, the more complaints we get and the more stories that we see in the news and the more noise we have out there around this, the easier it is for us to get people around the table to talk about solving this problem. So have you seen the commitment that came out from airlines?

Mindy Henderson: I'm I'm sorry. Have I seen?

Kelly Buckland: The airlines put out a commitment to make air travel excessive and safe for people with disabilities? Have you seen that?

Mindy Henderson: I have not seen that.

Kelly Buckland: Well, I think what it shows is noise that people have been making that's been heard. So we can't let up at this point. We got to keep the pressure up. It's working so we got to really keep the pressure up so that we can get it to where people can drive their chair onto the airplane.

Mindy Henderson: It's very true. There is absolutely power in numbers and I personally feel the momentum that's been building around this topic. So I definitely agree with you. It is not the right time to take our foot off the pedal. We've got to keep going and keep making noise. Michael, if there are-

Kelly Buckland: Great transportation analogy.

Mindy Henderson: Yes, exactly. Exactly. Michael, if there are individuals who would like to get involved in the work the MDA advocacy team is doing or learn more about things like the FAA reauthorization legislation, how can people who are listening do that?

Michael Lewis: Well, good question. I would encourage them to go to [MDA.org/advocacy](https://mda.org/advocacy). All of our current legislative and regulatory initiatives are listed there. As Kelly mentioned earlier, the Federal Aviation Act is up for reauthorization next year. So MDA and other disability rights groups are going to be making a really big concerted effort to make sure that we get as many, if not all, accessibility priorities included in that, including the Air Carrier Access Amendments Act, a spot for the wheelchairs on planes. [inaudible] because the FAA reauthorization is a must pass piece of legislation, the FAA wouldn't allow planes to fly that were first not reauthorized, nobody could fly. So it really presents a great opportunity to get a lot of these longstanding priorities included in that legislation. And they can also follow us on Twitter. I believe it's MDA Advocacy. Just type that in the search bar on Twitter, and you can follow all of our postings about [inaudible] and what to get involved there.

Mindy Henderson: Perfect. Fantastic. And we'll have all of this information in the show notes as well so that people can come back to it and hopefully take action. Kelly and Michael, I can't thank you both enough for your time. This is a conversation that I am passionate about and I'm excited about all that the DOT is doing to support progress in this area. And there's a lot more work to do, but I feel the change coming. So thank you for your time today.

Kelly Buckland: It's been my pleasure. I do think this is really, as we've been saying in the department, it's really once in a generation opportunity with this bipartisan infrastructure bill to really change the face of transportation and rebuild the country. So like I said, it's an exciting time to be here and it's an exciting time for transportation.

Mindy Henderson: So true. And who doesn't want to rewrite the history books, So everybody needs to jump on board and do our part. Thank you.

Michael Lewis: Thank you. Take care. Bye bye.



Mindy Henderson: Thank you for listening. For more information about the guests you heard from today, go check them out at [mda.org/podcast](https://mda.org/podcast). And to learn more about the Muscular Dystrophy Association, the services we provide, how you can get involved, and to subscribe to Quest magazine or to Quest newsletter, please go to [mda.org/quest](https://mda.org/quest). If you enjoyed this episode, we'd be grateful if you'd leave a review. Go ahead and hit that subscribe button so we can keep bringing you great content and maybe share it with a friend or two. Thanks everyone. Until next time, go be the light we all need in this world.