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Mobility Matters: Interdisciplinary Partnerships to Create More Accessible Cities

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Mobility Matters began somewhat serendipitously. In 2017, with the birth of Portland State University's Orientation and Mobility (O&M) program through an Office of Special Education Program grant, I had the good fortune of connecting with Dr. Robert Wall-Emerson as PSU's external evaluator on Project COMET: Certified Orientation and Mobility Educators in Training. As a gifted researcher and leader in the field of O&M, it was logical to maximize Wall-Emerson's time in advising our newly hatched program by inviting others to learn from him during his time in Portland. PSU has other affordances that make it a great university to nurture an O&M program. Not only does PSU host [TREC](#), U.S. Department of Transportation research and dissemination center, Portland enjoys a connected transportation infrastructure. So with those assets in pocket, Mobility Matters launched on March 8, 2018 with Dr. Wall-Emerson serving as keynote and guests from the Oregon Department of Transportation and

the Federal Highway Administration sharing the day with an interdisciplinary crowd.

Image1. Dr. Robert Wall-Emerson keynotes at inaugural Mobility Matters (2018)



[Video montage highlights from MM, 2018](#)

[Mobility Matters, 2018 website with handouts](#)

Last year's event expanded to include more knowledge sharing on wayfinding and innovations for safer crossings at intersections as well as the use of Smart Paint in city testbeds such as Columbus, OH and Tampa, FL. Our second summit also supported deeper engagement with partners from the city of Portland who are integrating accessible planning into Smart City efforts. Our partners from the American Printing House for the Blind

(APH) also played a leading role in at Mobility Matters, not only by presenting on their efforts to build more accessible communities but in co-leading a mobile tour of the Millar Library where beacons connected to [OpenStreetMap](#) via [Indoor Explorer](#) are supporting better access for travelers with visual impairment. From preliminary research that was presented at Mobility Matters, 2019, researchers at PSU found that while there are many kinds of wayfinding apps in general, adults who are visually impaired or deafblind often must use multiple apps to find the environmental information needed while navigating through urban settings (Swobodzinski & Parker, 2019).

Image 2. PSU O&M clinical teaching partners meet with Amy Parker and Robert Wall-Emerson at Mobility Matters (2019)



[Video montage highlights from MM, 2019](#)

[Mobility Matters, 2019 website with handouts](#)

As one of the largest public universities in Oregon, PSU supports interdisciplinary efforts across computer science, engineering and education through its [Digital City Testbed Center](#) (DCTC). Mobility Matters provides a way to center conversations around testbeds and Smart City to include people with disabilities. This year, PSU is pleased to be emphasizing youth leadership in developing accessible solutions. Using a participatory action research approach, PSU will partner with [DeafBlind Citizens in Action](#) and other leaders with disabilities to host a transportation youth leadership workshop prior to the Mobility Matters summit. Also in conjunction with Mobility Matters, 2020, Dr. Martin Swobodzinski and I are partnering with colleagues at APH on a research project called: [Seamless Wayfinding by Individuals with Functional Disabilities in Indoor and Outdoor Spaces](#).

Conferences have always played a large role in our O&M community, shaping our code of ethics, solidifying our shared knowledge base, and serving as a springboard for collective action (Weiner, Welsch, & Blasch, 2010). While our O&M specific conferences serve a vital purpose for internal professional development, it is important to have venues for sharing our craft in interdisciplinary dialogues with designers, policy makers as well as with practitioners who create physical infrastructure in our

communities. We have a responsibility to influence and promote universal design with individuals who have disabilities. By partnering with advocates who bring their lived experiences to conferences as well as professionals in the field of visual impairments and deafblindness, we fulfill the intent of the O&M Code of Ethics to create more inclusive communities. If you live close to Portland or just love the idea of collaborating with different professions, join us at this year's Mobility Matters. Agencies, vendors, and universities are also welcome to sponsor tables to exhibit projects or research at our summit.

References

- Swobodzinski, M. & Parker, A. T. (2019). A comprehensive examination of electronic wayfinding technology for visually impaired travelers in an urban environment: Final report. NITC-RR-1177. Portland, OR: Transportation Research and Education Center (TREC).
- Wiener, W. R., Welsch, R. L., & Blasch, B. B. (Eds.). (2010). Foundations of orientation and mobility (3rd ed., Vols. 1-2). New York, NY: AFB Press.



Mobility Matters 2020

Portland State University's College of Education is excited to reprise this 3rd annual interdisciplinary summit. We invite disability specialists, urban planners, engineers, transportation professionals, students, and community members to discuss the nexus between design, innovation, technology, and access.

This year's themes will focus on **Youth Leadership: Growing Interdisciplinary Solutions Through Partnerships** and **Smart Design = Accessible Design**. We'll explore opportunities for regional coordination across adjacent metropolitan areas, with an emphasis on the Cascadia region.

March 18, 2020

**Portland State University
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Register now!

mobilitymatters2020.sched.com

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