

A travelling crip's temporal expenses

Enka Blanchard, Digitrust, Université de Lorraine

The following temporal expenses list comes exclusively from the author's experience as a crip academic based in France but travelling around the world with their mobility scooter. Everything mentioned happened in recent years and only includes the peculiar, hard-to-plan-for events. Not all events are related to disability but the impact they have is a large part of traveling as a crip, as one has to plan for the unforeseen, lest incidents that would be at best anecdote-worthy for someone else become disastrous.

Not shown are the regular interactions with well-meaning oblivious people, such as the ones who open a door while standing in the doorway, don't listen when we say they're in the way, and get upset when we wait for them to quit helping ineffectively. Also not included – in the goal of confidentiality – are the interactions with organisers of large conferences with tracks on disability and access that forgot to plan for the eventuality that people in wheelchairs might want to participate or attend. Finally, short localised issues have also been excised (e.g. getting stuck on a plane for half a night as the disability service seems to have disappeared, or finding out from multiple drivers that the perfectly accessible buses in a city have orders from city hall not to let wheelchair users inside, without knowing why).

Japan:

Discussing the offer from close relatives to let them plan the trip	5 min
Checking that the infrastructure is accessible and booking the relevant tickets	120 min
Getting to the airport early to go through the disability service	60 min
Flying direct from Paris to Tokyo	720 min
Waiting for attendants to help get out of the plane	20 min
Getting your scooter from the special luggage service	30 min
Dismantling your scooter to get access to your batteries to replug them as you had to follow security regulations to get it on the plane, then putting it back together	5 min
Getting to the airport metro station	5 min
Getting stopped by a guard who doesn't speak English because your scooter is not allowed on the metro, then waiting for his superior to come, and finally waiting for that person's superior (who both only speak Japanese)	20 min

Waiting for the translator to get there too	15 min
Being told that there is a set list of mobility devices allowed, and waiting for them to find the thick outdated binder full of old pictures of Japanese wheelchairs and serial numbers	5 min
Going through it but failing to find your scooter (or any scooter built outside of Japan in the past few years)	5 min
Getting them to understand the concept of wheelchair-accessible taxi and finding out there aren't any	5 min
Waiting for them to answer how you're supposed to leave the airport if you're forbidden from using the perfectly accessible metro but there isn't any accessible alternative	2 min
Getting your interlocutor's boss on the phone, and getting them to call their boss before getting back to the same deadlock	10 min
Threatening the most senior employee present by telling him you will follow him around all evening until he either lets you on the train or you block his way out	2 min
Implementing the threat	90 min
Being allowed and taking the last train to your hotel, leaving shortly after 11pm	60 min
Wandering around without a GPS before finding your hotel	20 min
Checking in, getting to your room, seeing that it is a totally standard room with no space for a scooter, and realising that your relatives didn't even check	5 min
Considering leaving hotel but not seeing any feasible alternative	5 min
Getting stuck on your bathroom's toilet	2 min
Considering spending the night on the toilet	10 min
Falling from the toilet	10 s
Crawling to the bed	5 min
Getting onto the bed	10 min
Finding an accessible cybercafe on the following morning without having a GPS, because you still have no internet on your mobile and can't fix it now	45 min
Visiting more than twelve hotels that were indicated as having accessible rooms, each featuring slightly smaller and more expensive rooms than the last	300 min

Breaking down at the last one on your list, considering getting a basic room and leaving your scooter (and your independence) at the reception	5 min
After complaining and talking to the hotel staff, looking for the legendary hotel with a (cheap!) accessible room in the district	2 min
Going around the neighborhood and missing the hotel twice when passing in front of it, before finding a cheap and perfectly accessible hidden gem haunted by a team of Czech judokas there for a tournament	30 min
Calling your embassy, explaining your problem with taking the train back to the airport, and going progressively higher in the hierarchy until you learn that even the ambassador could do nothing to help you in this kind of situation	60 min
Going to the central train station on your scooter a few days before you have to leave the country	40 min
Explaining your issues and asking whether it would be possible to use the metro	90 min
When that fails, trying to get an authorisation to use the train tickets to Kyoto you had already bought	20 min
When that fails, trying to get reimbursement for your tickets as they're not allowing you to use them	20 min
When that fails, getting an exceptional authorisation to use the metro once to get back to the airport to leave the country	60 min
On the last day, planning an extra two-hour margin and getting to the train station	5 min
Getting arrested as you try to get in	5 min
Fighting with the hierarchy to have the right to leave, and getting them to check with the people you previously talked to in the central station	60 min
Finally getting to the airport after getting the authorisation, with barely enough time to use the disability service	60 min
As you leave, being told very clearly by the station manager that they have your name and face, and orders not to let you out of the airport if you come back, becoming effectively banned from Japan	5 min

Russia:

Planning a trip to Russia to participate in a conference with your Russian partner	a few hours
Getting to the Parisian metro station from your flat with your bags on your scooter	10 min
Waiting for an attendant to be available as disabled people aren't allowed to board the metro alone	10 min
Waiting for the attendant to contact the other station as disabled people aren't allowed to unboard alone	30 min
Taking the elevator to the platform, realising you've missed at least three trains while waiting for authorisation, including the express train, then boarding the slow train that is already fifteen minutes late	5 min
Waiting as the slow train gets stuck on the tracks	20 min
Finishing the metro trip and getting to the airport slightly more than an hour before the flight	60 min
Getting lost and having to take a detour with multiple elevators instead of a few steps	3 min
Hurrying to the airline's desk and getting told that you got there too late, but that something might still be done	5 min
Going to the disabled service, being told that if you were not disabled you would be allowed to board but that it's too late as you have a scooter	5 min
Breaking down and considering cancelling the trip, discussing the pros and cons with your partner	10 min
Getting a ticket for the next evening at a surcharge	20 min
Considering the advantages of sleeping in a hotel at the airport to avoid going through transports again but realising you need a night in your bed to handle the trip	5 min
Getting to the metro station through malfunctioning elevators	5 min
Looking for assistance and finding out that although the metro works for four more hours, the disabled service has closed and you are not allowed to board	5 min

Going up through the nearest elevator to the taxi station	3 min
Asking assistance from taxi drivers to find an accessible taxi, having them distribute the message and waiting for one to show up	40 min
Abandoning that plan, convincing a driver to drive you home in his large taxi, and recruiting three other drivers to fold the scooter and put it in the trunk	10 min
Being told once you get home that as you went up through the wrong elevator to a station that was a hundred metres away from the main station, standard fares don't apply, and paying twice the usual amount	1 min
Going back to the airport the following day	70 min
Spending time uncomfortably at the airport as you overcompensated in case of new delays	80 min
Flying to Russia	200 min
Waiting for the overeager assistance to get to the plane	15 min
Telling the attendant multiple times not to grab you, and repeatedly removing his hands from your sleeves	1 min
Falling off the plane as the attendant suddenly grabs and pulls you	5 s
Waiting on the floor crying, wondering how badly the fall affected your leg	3 min
Using adrenaline to get back up with some help and plopping down on a derelict wheelchair	1 min
Warning the friend waiting for you that this happened and keeping him informed via WhatsApp	2 min
Realising that you have a wrong number and that the person on the other end is messing with you by telling you they are the friend waiting for you just to play a prank	45 min
Worrying that you might be stuck in the airport while finding an alternative way to contact your friend	3 min
Getting the scooter back from luggage claim and having the people around you reconnect the batteries	10 min
Doing a transfer from the wheelchair to the scooter despite the pain	1 min
Finding your friend, rolling into the taxi and driving to the hotel	30 min

Looking for an accessible entrance to the hotel	3 min
Sending the friend inside to ask how to get in, then waiting in the cold for someone to come and open the door	5 min
Having tea in the lobby while putting your leg up with some ice to see if it improves	120 min
Trying to get up and use the bathroom	2 min
Failing and crying because of the pain	5 min
Thinking that maybe you should go to the emergency room and finding one nearby	10 min
Going there on the scooter as it's probably faster than finding a taxi or an ambulance	15 min
Finding an accessible entrance	2 min
Being grudgingly allowed in, explaining your problem and being sent to another hospital because you don't have Russian insurance	10 min
Driving your scooter to the second hospital	15 min
Waiting at the secondary entrance of the second hospital while they insist you should come in despite not being able to	3 min
Waiting for the doctor to show up while being the only patient present at 4am	35 min
Finding an alternative way to x-ray your leg from your scooter as moving is becoming increasingly hard	3 min
Firing a long stream of expletives due to the pain as you spend longer than necessary in the x-ray	1 min
Getting superfluous blood tests that leave you nauseous	5 min
Getting a very painful shot exactly where you broke your ankle and then getting a cast on your leg	5 min
Being shown a bill that features prices nearly three times the online Russian prices then being forgotten in the room for a while after your partner points out the discrepancy, while feeling increasingly nauseous	90 min
Getting kicked out of the hospital without the test results	10 min
Waiting for the x-ray and test results that you were promised	forever

Looking for a place to eat that is accessible and wondering why so many shops have a few steps going up and then back down to street level	60 min
Finally finding a coffee-shop with a tiny table outside that is probably only there for decoration and having your partner climb the stairs to convince the owners to serve you outside (still in the cold, with a scarf tied around your cast)	30 min
Going directly to the conference from the coffee-shop despite being full of drugs as you already missed the beginning	20 min
Waiting in front of the gate for someone to come open, and then for that person to find the person who has the key	5 min
Following them as they try to remember where the elevator is and how to get there without climbing stairs	3 min
Waiting for them to find the key to the elevator that is deactivated by default	10 min
Wondering what to do as no-one knows where the key is or how the elevator works	2 min
Being ushered through corridors into the small room where organisers just moved the conference session you wanted to attend to accommodate you	3 min
Sitting far from the screen as you are stuck at one end of the room and remembering that you left your glasses at your hotel when you went to the emergency room	5 min
Being dumbfounded that the talk with the English title at an international conference is in Russian, and being too full of drugs and sleeplessness to have any shot at understanding anything	20 min
Leaving to get back to the hotel when you learn that all the talks in that session will be in Russian	25 min
Struggling as many sidewalks do not have ramps, forcing you to go back regularly, sometimes creating detours of two kilometres or more	15 min
Wandering the city until you find out that the only accessible restaurant is in an old prison	180 min
Getting back to the airport with the original taxi	30 min
Convincing the security to let you board with your scooter in the hold	90 min
Flying back to France	200 min

Waiting for attendants to come get you at the airplane	15 min
Waiting for the scooter at the baggage claim	40 min
Looking through the airport as the scooter is not there then being told that the scooter is coming but that it's hard to move and explaining that there's just an automatic braking system that can be deactivated	5 min
Finding that this wouldn't work as the scooter arrives in multiple pieces	2 min
Fighting with the company to find a solution that will not leave you stranded	45 min
Getting a temporary wheelchair and a promise that they will fix your scooter, as well as get you a taxi ride home	5 min
Waiting for the taxi	10 min
Going back home and thinking about getting some drinks outside using the secondary scooter you've had since the time you got stranded at home for more than a month as your main one was in the repair shop	60 min
Not finding your scooter as you get home; investigating the issue and finding that the scooter was borrowed by a disabled friend who thought you were coming back the next day	5 min
Trying to get an appointment for an x-ray to confirm the state of your foot	a few hours
Getting a doctor friend to sign some papers for you to get an x-ray as people won't accept your russian story without the documentation you never received	15 min
Finding an accessible x-ray office	a few hours
Getting an x-ray while on a scooter with a cast on your foot	10 min
Waiting as everyone else seems to get their results in ten minutes	75 min
Being called into an office with a livid doctor and worrying about what's happening	5 min
Explaining that the metal in your legs has been there for fifteen years and that you're only here for the fracture that is already healed and barely visible anymore, and being told that the cast should come off	2 min
Trying to find a place that is accessible in a wheelchair and can remove your cast in the next three weeks	a few hours
Failing utterly and removing the cast with the assistance of a friend, a metal ruler, pliers, an exacto knife and a Japanese pull saw	90 min

Finland:

Looking for an accessible flat in Helsinki to attend a large convention there	a few hours
Settling on one where the scooter can be left at the bottom of the stairwell, with an elevator leading to the flat	15 min
Getting to the airport and flying to Finland without trouble	a few hours
Getting to the apartment building from the airport through a remarkably accessible public transit system	40 min
Finding half a staircase at the entrance of the building and finding an alternative way to the interior courtyard	5 min
Finding another staircase from the courtyard to the building and remembering that a scooter got ruined a few years earlier when left outside under Scandinavian rains, then parking the scooter in a small shack in the courtyard and taking the keys	10 min
Preparing oneself for the pain of walking and climbing the steps then getting to the apartment	10 min
Recuperating the next day by sleeping in	180 min
Going down with a friend to get the scooter from the shack but not finding the scooter anywhere	5 min
Trying to understand the instructions printed on the shack's door in Finnish using Google translate and neighbours, and panicking when we realise the scooter might have been taken by a garbage service,	15 min
Calling the numbers on the note but not reaching anyone	3 min
Calling the superintendent of the building and asking for their help	10 min
Finally getting a nearby shopkeeper to reach the garbage truck company who did take it	25 min
Getting the scooter back (for free)	120 min

Touring the USA:

Listening to people tell you about how much more accessible the USA are	25 years
Going to the airport early to go through the disability service	60 min
Being told, for once, that removing the key of your scooter is sufficient, instead of having to dismantle the whole thing to disconnect the battery cables	2 min
Giving instructions on how to deactivate the automatic braking system, as well as your phone number, just in case	5 min
Explaining from inside the plane how the people on the tarmac can dismantle the scooter to unplug the batteries as they have conflicting security protocols	10 min
Suffering the gaze of other passengers as they know that you're the reason why the plane is slightly late	660 min
Looking for an accessible taxi at the San Francisco airport	45 min
Getting the scooter folded and into a normal taxi without damaging the scooter too much	15 min
The next day, going to university on your scooter, then using it for the rest of the day as there is no easily accessible public transit in the region	30 min
Wondering at night why you suddenly ran out of battery, and getting your colleague to pull you back home by tying the scooter to their bicycle	20 min
Finding out that your scooter battery is drained because the night's charge didn't work as you took the wrong charger, not compatible with local voltage	2 min
Looking to no avail for any converter powerful enough in local shops and wondering how you can get to the airport the next morning	40 min
Being saved by your colleague who builds you a converter out of spare parts in their garage, but wondering how you will manage the rest of the trip as the converter is now 40% of your luggage weight	60 min
Finding and booking an accessible taxi to pick you up the next morning as your colleague builds your converter	25 min
Waiting for the taxi to show up the next morning	30 min

Calling the taxi company and being told that they finally decided to cancel as they can't find an accessible taxi	2 min
Getting rejected by every other company operating a disabled service in Palo Alto	20 min
Rushing to the train station with your bags on your scooter while it's raining	15 min
Flagging down a railway employee as the train is about to leave	30 s
Waiting for the special wheelchair elevator to set up (instead of a simple metal ramp)	2 min
Trying to fit inside the tiny wheelchair elevator and getting kicked out from the train as the elevator is probably too small to accommodate you and the train has to leave	3 min
Getting into your colleague's old van and arriving at the airport just in time	45 min
Getting help from the person seated next to you on the plane once you get to NYC, finding a taxi, folding the scooter and putting it into the trunk before sharing the ride to Manhattan	60 min
Trying to book a plane ticket as your plans within the USA changed, using the disabled website	30 min
Fighting with the website until you realise you can't pay with a foreign credit card on the disabled website, or book an accessible service on the foreign passengers' website	120 min
Trying multiple companies and spending hours with them on the phone before realising the problem seems universal and not just a computer glitch	90 min
Getting an American colleague to book your tickets, at the cost of not knowing if they'll fill in the disabled questions correctly	60 min
Looking for a taxi that can get you to Newark airport from Manhattan, where you are now staying with friends, and noticing the \$150 surcharge imposed by accessible taxi services to guarantee that a taxi will be there when you need it	120 min
Driving your scooter to the metro station that leads to Newark airport to check whether it is accessible	35 min
Finding a way in on your scooter	5 min
Being assured by an agent that it's all very simple and you simply need to show up fifteen minutes at a given office before the train leaves	3 min

On the day you're leaving NYC, getting up at dawn and going to the station forty-five minutes early just in case, and looking for the office	25 min
Finding out that the office opens after the train you were hoping to take leaves	1 min
Finding an attendant ready to help	10 min
Being told you just need to take an elevator down	30 s
Convincing the attendant that you tried the elevator and that it is broken	5 min
Going up and down the station with them looking for an alternative	15 min
Finally finding one and getting to the airport	20 min
Leaving three hours late because of problems with the plane, getting to Washington very late at night	240 min
Being forgotten on the plane by the disabled assistance service	30 min
Learning from experience that Washington's sidewalks are not better than St Petersburg's	10 min
Getting a Washington bus driver to lower the ramp and lift a row of seats so you can get in	1 min
Being yelled at as you are seated in the wrong way and that the bus won't leave as long as you are seated this way	3 min
Asking the driver to temporarily raise the other row of seats so you can maneuver but getting told that it's not their problem	10 s
Waiting for them to realise that you're stuck unless they act, one way or another	3 min
Maneuvering once a passenger lifts the seats before finally being on your way	1 min
Trying to get another bus on the way back to the train station but getting ignored by two drivers in a row	25 min
Missing the main train and being stuck waiting for the last train of the day	90 min
Taking the train to Baltimore's suburbs, having looked up the plan to go from the train station to your hotel and decided that you can easily drive seven kilometres on a full battery load, which is much simpler than the hours needed to find an unreliable accessible taxi	60 min

Getting out of the station and following the sidewalk to your hotel in the cold night; considering getting your gloves out but realising you can't open your luggage securely without some help or a table	5 min
Following the side of the road as the sidewalk disappears	5 min
Swearing at your map software as you realise that the pedestrian way that goes to your hotel follows two kilometres of freeway	10 s
Pushing your scooter at full speed to get onto the first freeway exit, following the road as it goes up in a bend	3 min
Avoiding bumping your head against your scooter as it suddenly shuts down due to the heavy load on the battery in the cold	1 s
Panicking as you are on a downward bend in a freeway exit with no lights and no ability to restart your scooter without getting rid of your luggage	10 s
Taking out your phone and turning on your flashlight just as a car barely misses you and screeches to a halt	2 min
Asking for help and for them to put their car in front of you to protect you when the next one comes	30 s
Panicking as the next one arrives before the first driver can move, sighing in relief as the second driver barely avoids you both	30 s
Restarting the scooter with help from the first driver	5 min
Continuing along the road to the next bridge, not indicated as being on a freeway	10 min
Wandering a bit before deciding that the second bridge, which in fact is on a freeway, is better than the utter lack of alternatives	2 min
Panicking as you drive one kilometre on the freeway in the dark in the emergency lane	5 min
Briefly feeling relieved as you finally see a sidewalk but panicking even more as the sidewalk replaces the emergency lane, without any ramp allowing you to get onto it	1 min
Following the freeway in one of the main lanes until you find a way to get onto the sidewalk	1 min
Driving on small roads to finally get to your hotel, and finding a second bridge on the way that does not have a freeway going through it	20 min

Starting to cross the bridge before seeing it's flooded by a half a metre of water	15 s
Going back to continue the quest for a non-flooded bridge	10 min
Calling your colleague in Washington for help as you start to panic while seeing both your phone and scooter batteries getting dangerously low	5 min
Continuing for five kilometres on your way to the second bridge while following a flooded river	35 min
Abandoning your current plans at the first intersection as your batteries are dying, hoping that your colleague might find an accessible taxi at 11pm in the Baltimore suburbs	15 min
Flagging down a car and then a second one and asking for help from well-meaning young Americans wandering around in their truck	5 min
Convincing them not to put the heavy scooter on the roof with flimsy ropes to attach it, then attaching the scooter inside the truck by removing the sound system and tinkering with ropes to keep the trunk door half closed	15 min
Huddling inside with the three people fighting for room with the displaced subwoofers as you learn that they have been cruising and smoking weed for a few hours and are all completely high by now	3 min
Not even considering the alternative of waiting for another solution in the cold	0 s
Finding a bridge that is not flooded	15 min
Getting back to the hotel	20 min
Inviting them for drinks at the hotel bar before learning that they are all greatly underage and wishing them good night	2 min
Getting an accessible taxi the following day thanks to the university hosting you	30 min
Finding out that said taxi cannot bring you back from the university to the hotel due to license issues, then learning that there are no accessible taxis with the correct license to pick you up from the university	3 min
Looking up how to drive the two kilometres from the hotel to the airport	5 min
Driving to the airport under the rain until the road is out of sidewalk and trying to find alternative paths	10 min
Going back to your hotel and waiting for an accessible taxi	30 min
Getting back to France	720 min