

# Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) System Access



## Port Authority's Values:

Equitable, Accessible

### Overview

Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 protects people with disabilities from discrimination in transportation and guarantees them equal access to public transit systems. Both public and private transit must be equally accessible to everyone and meet the ADA's requirements. This includes not only accessible equipment and features on transit buses, but also access to transit and transit stations.

The National Household Travel Survey, performed by the U.S. Department of Transportation, reported that approximately 25 million people have a travel-limiting disability. According to the Bureau of Transportation Statistics, 1% of all Americans — about 3.6 million people — are homebound because of a disability. For persons with disabilities who are not able to use fixed-route service, ADA requires that public transit operators provide complimentary-demand response service. Passenger trips on demand-response services increased from 68 million in 1990 to 209 million in 2019.

Fixed-route systems must provide a complimentary paratransit service as a means of mobility for individuals unable to use the fixed-route transit system. The most flexible paratransit services offer on-demand, door-to-door service from any origin to any destination within the service area.

Allegheny County's paratransit service, ACCESS Paratransit, is a coordinated, shared-ride paratransit service operated by six service providers from seven locations within

Allegheny County. It offers the door-to-door approach to the general public with scheduling in advance. It mainly serves people with disabilities, clients of human service agencies, and individuals 65 and older. This service offers several discount programs to the qualifying groups and to the general public at full rate. At an average of 5,000 trips on weekdays and 1.5 million trips annually, ACCESS is among the largest coordinated systems in the country.

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) is charged with ensuring public transit providers comply with the US Department of Transportation's (DOT) regulations implementing the transportation-related provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. The regulations in 49 CFR Parts 27, 37, 38, and 39 set specific requirements that transit providers must follow to ensure their services, vehicles, and facilities are accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities.

### Analysis

Public transportation accessibility provides mobility to people with disabilities. Transit stops and stations, paths to transit stops and stations, and transit vehicles must all be accessible.

New construction or alterations to all existing transit stops and stations are required to meet accessibility standards established by the USDOT.

- Ramps and elevators need to be installed, where necessary, so that riders can negotiate elevation changes
- Each train station must facilitate access for riders in wheelchairs to be able to board all accessible cars in a train which

are available to passengers without disabilities

- Stops or stations need to be designed to facilitate level boarding and be equipped with ramps so that riders can negotiate elevation changes
- Transit vehicles must have level boarding by ensuring train doorways and station platforms are at the same level (gaps between them must be narrow enough passengers can cross without difficulty) – if not using a ramp or lift to provide level boarding, must submit demonstration of equivalent facilitation to FTA
- Transit vehicles must utilize short bridge plates when necessary to span gaps

In coordination with local stakeholders, policies should be implemented to ensure that paths accessing transit are ADA-compliant. This pedestrian infrastructure may include:

- ADA-accessible ramps with truncated domes/detectable warning surfaces at curb ramps
- Bus boarding and alighting areas
- Location of accessible routes
- Accessible paths of travel:
  - Should be as close to the general circulation path as possible
  - Should be as short as possible while allowing transit riders to negotiate changes in elevation
  - Should be upgraded with curb ramps at affected crosswalks if roadways are being resurfaced or otherwise altered in a bus rapid transit (BRT) system

Bus or rail vehicles that operate along a prescribed route and fixed schedule must accommodate all persons regardless of ability. These services have ADA-mandated vehicle requirements including stop announcements, destination information on vehicles, lifts and

ramps, illumination, slip-resistant surfaces, and fareboxes, pull cords, and handrails must be placed in an accessible area, but also so as not to obstruct.

The ADA requires that public transportation services:

- Comply with accessibility requirements in newly purchased vehicles
- Make good faith efforts to purchase or lease accessible used buses
- Remanufacture buses in an accessible manner
- Provide paratransit (assisted transportation) where they operate fixed-route bus or rail systems, unless it would cause an undue burden
- Provide adequate information on services in accessible formats for persons with different types of disabilities, including stop announcements and destination information on vehicles
- Locate fareboxes so that they do not obstruct passenger flow when boarding
- Provide signs on fixed-route systems designating seating for passengers with disabilities, with at least one set of forward-facing seats marked as such
- Provide sufficient maneuvering space within vehicles for wheelchairs and handrails and stop controls should be within reach of wheelchair securement locations
- Provide a boarding device (lift or ramp) within vehicles so that passengers using wheelchairs or mobility devices can reach a securement location onboard (lifts must have a minimum design load of 600 lbs. and must accommodate a wheelchair measuring 30" by 48")
- Ensure that personnel are trained to operate vehicles and equipment safely

and how to properly assist individuals with disabilities in a respectful, courteous way

- Riders must also be given adequate time to board and allowed for their service animals to board.

### **Peer Examples**

#### New York City's MTA

In 2019, MTA unveiled its 2020-2024 capital plan which included the announcement of specific stations getting accessibility upgrades. Altogether 70 subway stations will be made ADA-compliant. Stations were decided based on ridership, demographics, and whether they were major transfer stations or complexes. MTA's website provides station information regarding which stations are ADA-compliant along with street elevator locations and transfers to other modes of transit.

#### Salt Lake City, UT

A new study co-funded by the Utah Transit Authority (UTA) found a 5.9% increase in boardings after ADA improvements were made at a series of bus stops in Salt Lake City. There was an increase in boardings on scheduled-service buses and a reduction in paratransit use. The improvements included the addition of shelter and seating, as well as stronger ADA-compliance. Improvements included ADA-compliant concrete pads, connecting those pads to surrounding sidewalk networks, and installing various fixtures such as trash cans, benches, and shelters.

#### **Level of Effort for Implementation:** High

- Construction and design required on facilities, purchase of new technologies/equipment.
- Training for operators to understand the needs of riders with disabilities and be sensitive to them.

- Coordination with other entities to ensure access to transit stops and stations.

### **Resources and Notes**

[U.S Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration](#)

[National Multiple Sclerosis Society](#)

[National Aging and Disability Transportation Center](#)

[Metropolitan Transportation Authority](#)

[National Institute for Transportation and Communities](#)

At the time of writing (September 2021), the US Senate approved transportation infrastructure legislation allocating funding for legacy rail transit systems to bring stations into compliance with ADA through the All Stations Access Program (ASAP). This funding source, if it enters into law, should be pursued as a funding source to bring non-compliant portions of Port Authority's LRT system into compliance with ADA.