

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) System Access



Overview

Both public and private transit must be equally accessible to everyone and meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. This includes not only accessible equipment and features on transit buses such as lifts or ramps and kneeling features, but access to transit and transit stations must also be ADA-accessible. Pedestrian accessibility must be ADA-compliant and may include features such as truncated domes/ detectable warning surfaces at curb ramps. Other techniques for ensuring access include designing stops or stations to facilitate level boarding and with ramps so that riders can negotiate elevation changes or elevators and ramps within stations. However, ADA requirements are not only limited to equipment, facilities, and access. Riders must be given adequate time to board and allowed for their service animals to board.

A complimentary paratransit service must be provided for fixed-route systems 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, utilizes the door-to-door approach with scheduling in advance. This service offers several discount programs to the qualifying groups, as well as offers service to the general public at full rate. ACCESS Paratransit primarily serves people with disabilities, clients of human service agencies, and people 65 and older.

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.

Port Authority's Values

Equitable, Accessible

Analysis

Fixed-route service, one that operates along a prescribed route and fixed schedule, must accommodate all persons regardless of ability. This service has bus vehicle ADA 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. New construction or alterations to all existing transit facilities, including busway and light rail transit stations, are required to meet the following accessibility standards established by the USDOT.

- Accessible paths of travel...
 - Should be as close to the general circulation path as possible
 - Minimize distance where possible by using ramps, elevators, and other accessible features
 - If roadways are being resurfaced or otherwise altered in a bus rapid transit (BRT) system, curb ramps must be installed at affected crosswalks

- Boarding ramps and bridge plates...
 - 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
 - Utilize short bridge plates when necessary to span gap
 - Wheelchairs must have access to all accessible train cars available to passengers without disabilities in each train station
- Bus stops and shelters
- Curb ramps, doors, elevators, escalators, and emergency alarms
- Fare collection, gates and turnstiles, grade crossings, and parking
- Passenger drop-off areas, platforms edges, and rescue assistance areas
- Restrooms, signs, stairs, public telephones, water fountains, and wheelchair spaces

Title II of the ADA protects people with disabilities from discrimination in public transportation and guarantees them equal access to public transit systems. According to the National Household Travel Survey performed by the U.S. Department of Transportation, 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. ACCESS Paratransit is a

coordinated, shared-ride paratransit service provided by six service providers operating from seven locations within Allegheny County. Service is provided door-to-door with advanced reservations to the general public, but mainly serves people with disabilities, clients of human service agencies, and individuals 65 and older. At an average of 5,000 trips on weekdays and 1.5 million trips annually, it is among the largest coordinated systems in the country.

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
- Fareboxes must be located so that they do not obstruct passenger flow when boarding
- Fixed-route systems must have signs designating seating for passengers with disabilities, with at least one set of forward-facing seats marked as such
- Vehicles must have sufficient maneuvering space for wheelchairs and handrails and stop controls should be within reach of wheelchair securement locations
- Vehicles must have a boarding device (lift or ramp) so that passengers using wheelchairs or mobility devices can reach

a securement location onboard (lifts much have a minimum design load of 600 pounds and must accommodate a wheelchair measuring 30" by 48")

- o Ensure that personnel are trained to operate vehicles and equipment safely and how to properly assist individuals with disabilities in a respectful, courteous way

Since the passing of the ADA, all buses purchased after 1990 must be accessible to persons with disabilities. On most fixed-route buses, the stairs at the front door fold out into a lift or a ramp. Accessibility features must be maintained, or the transit agency must take reasonable steps to accommodate the individuals with disabilities.

With a goal of 100% system accessibility, upgrades to fixed guideway stations should be prioritized based on walkshed completeness and demographic analysis. The need is expressed by the existence of non-accessible stations and ADA-compliant but still difficult to access stations—the bus network is fully accessible, and the BRT/LRT network should be as well. In coordination with local stakeholders, policies should be implemented to ensure the paths accessing transit is ADA-compliant. This pedestrian infrastructure may include:

- o ADA-accessible ramps with truncated domes/detectable warning surfaces at curb ramps
- o Bus boarding and alighting areas
- o Location of accessible routes
- o Ramps and elevators where necessary, so that riders can negotiate elevation changes

Peer Examples

New York City's MTA

In 2019, MTA unveiled their 2020-2024 capital plan which included the announcement of

specific stations getting accessibility upgrades. Altogether 70 stations will be made ADA-compliant. Stations were decided based on ridership, demographics, and whether or not 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 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

- o Construction and design required on facilities, purchase of new technologies/equipment.
- o Training for operators to understand the needs of riders with disabilities and be sensitive to them.
- o Coordination with other entities to ensure access to transit stops and stations.

Resources

[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](#)