



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

RURAL TRANSIT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

mnrtap.us

Common Wheelchair Not So Common Anymore

Over the years what once was known as a common wheelchair has evolved into a state of the art mobility device. Some of these new era mobility devices can travel at speeds over 11 miles per hour and have the ability to elevate the passenger to a standing position, therefore enabling individuals to be much more independent. The evolution of the wheelchair combined with other considerations prompted the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) to redefine the definition of a common wheelchair. In 2011, the USDOT eliminated the term “common wheelchair” from its regulations for implementation of the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) and revised Section 37.3 of the regulations to redefine a wheelchair as a device with “three- or more wheeled devices.” Previously, the definition read “three- or four-wheeled devices.”

What does this mean to public transit and specialized transportation providers and drivers? It means that a wheelchair and its occupant must be transported if the lift and vehicle can physically accommodate them (the wheelchair lift’s load capacity is sufficient to support the weight of the wheelchair and its occupant), unless doing so is inconsistent with legitimate safety requirements. Legitimate safety requirements have been defined to include, but are not limited to, such circumstances where a wheelchair:

1. Is of such a size that it would block an aisle;
2. Is too large to fully enter a vehicle; or
3. Would interfere with the safe evacuation of passengers in an emergency.

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Save the date!

May 6-7, 2020

[OTAT Spring
Workshop
in St. Cloud](#)

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) was explicit in the requirements that any safety concern must be based on actual risks, not on mere speculation, stereotypes, or generalizations about individuals with disabilities or about the devices they use for mobility purposes.

Also, these concerns do not apply to securement; a transportation provider cannot impose a limitation on the transportation of wheelchairs and other mobility aids based on the inability of the securement system to secure the device to the satisfaction of the transportation provider or driver. Service cannot be denied to individuals who use wheelchairs just because particular devices may be problematic from a securement point of view. Note that this is not a new requirement, but has always been a part of the original FTA rules.

When considering the wheelchair lift load capacity, it is important to remember the ADA does not permit you to ask an individual how much they weigh or what the combined weight of the occupant and wheelchair is. You can, however, inform the individual of the lift's load capacity and the potential lift failure risks if the capacity is exceeded. If the individual does not self-disclose the over-capacity weight, you must attempt to board the passenger. Drivers should be aware of their company's policy if the lift will not operate and you cannot transport the passenger.

If You Want to Know More

This article was developed based on information developed by FTA. To find out more, FTA has developed an excellent "question and answer" resource on this topic which can be accessed at www.fta.dot.gov/regulations-and-guidance/civil-rights-ada/questions-and-answers-concerning-wheelchairs-and-bus-and. You can also read the full text of these regulatory changes in the Federal Register/Vol. 76, No. 181, available at the FTA website, www.fta.dot.gov/12874_2360.html.

Winter is Here: Are You Ready?

As much as some of us would like to ignore it, winter weather has arrived. Now is the time to make sure that you complete winter maintenance on your vehicles and ready your operators for the season of rough driving ahead.



Photo by Patrick Tomasso on Unsplash

Vehicle Preparations

1. Electrical System

Battery: Cold weather starts require a fully charged battery. Have your batteries checked and replaced, if needed. Also check your alternator or generator, voltage regulator and drive belts.

Ignition system: Damaged ignition wires, a broken distributor cap or worn spark plugs can make starting difficult or may cause a sudden breakdown.

Lights: Make sure that your lights are working and clean. Road grime on headlights can reduce their effectiveness by as much as 90 percent.

2. Brake System

Slowing or stopping the vehicle is even more difficult in snowy conditions. Have your brakes

checked and make any necessary repairs before bad weather hits.

3. Tires

Make sure your tires are in good shape and properly inflated. If you have winter treads, put them on early before bad snow and ice conditions hit. Also make sure the tires are balanced and aligned after changing them out. If you use tire chains, know how to install them safely and use them on all four tires.

4. The Exhaust System

Check your exhaust system for leaks. Winter conditions could mean that leaks that have gone undetected during the warmer months could leak carbon monoxide into the vehicle passenger area. If you get stranded in the snow and have the engine running, open a window slightly and clear snow away from the exhaust pipe to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning.

5. Heating and Cooling System

Change the antifreeze in the cooling system to make sure that it is fresh, and have your entire cooling system checked for leaks. Check your heat settings and make sure that all levels work and all blowers function.

6. Windshield Wipers, Washer Fluid, Glass and Vehicle Exterior

Winter driving conditions require clean windows and unobstructed views. Wiper blades need to be inspected and replaced if they are torn or cracked. Washer fluid should contain some antifreeze and should be refilled every day. To prevent damage to your wiper blades or wiper motor, be sure to clear ice and snow before turning them on.

7. Gas Tank

Use the correct grade of gasoline/diesel for the season and always keep the vehicle's gas tank at least half full at all times.

8. Winter Driving Kit

The following items should be kept on your vehicle in the event of an emergency (these items should be easily accessible and secured on the vehicle):

- Bag of abrasive material (cat litter, sand, salt)
- Small snow shovel
- Snow brush and ice scraper
- Flashlight
- Windshield washer fluid
- Blankets, winter wear
- Paper towels or rags
- Booster cables
- Emergency triangles
- Communication device (cell phone or radio)
- First-aid kit
- Fire extinguisher
- Bloodborne Pathogens kit
- Seat belt cutter



Operator Preparations

1. Select clothing that provides warmth, comfort and freedom of movement. Heavy garments and gloves

offer warmth when outside, but after the vehicle has warmed up, they should be removed. Always stop in a safe spot to remove any outdoor clothing.

2. Use proper personal safety equipment like sunglasses, boots with traction, and of course, seat belts.
3. Remove all ice and snow from the vehicle before driving on the open road. Leaving snow on any surfaces increases the possibility that visibility will be compromised when the vehicle is in motion.
4. Review defensive driving techniques for winter driving and be prepared to handle adverse driving conditions. Remember, the most important thing you can do when driving in slippery conditions is to increase your safety zone. Normal following distances should be increased to at least 8 to 10 seconds. Remember, bridges and overpasses freeze first!

Taking some time now to prepare for the winter driving ahead will keep your passengers and operators safe and comfortable. Be safe out there!

Resource: exchange.aaa.com/safety/driving-advice/winter-driving-tips/



Safe Boarding of Ambulatory and Non-Ambulatory Passengers

As a driver, it is your primary responsibility to pick up and deliver your passengers safely to their destination. This begins with the passenger boarding your vehicle.

When boarding ambulatory passengers, those capable of walking and using the steps to enter the vehicle, follow these steps:

1. Engage the four-way flasher prior to stopping.
2. When possible, all boarding should be done at approved passenger stops.
3. Pull your vehicle parallel six to eight inches from the curb. This will allow the passenger to step from the curb onto the step without stepping down to the street level.
4. In the event that you cannot stop within six to eight inches from the curb, remain at least three feet from the curb.
5. Always evaluate the physical capabilities of your boarding passengers. If there is any doubt, drivers should get out of their seat and assist the passenger from behind going up the steps when boarding and from in front coming down the steps when deboarding.
6. If boarding or discharging passengers on streets that do not have a bus stop, always choose an area free of any hazards such as water, potholes, tripping hazards, ice, etc. From the street, the first boarding step will be rather high for many passengers. In this case, you should assist with boarding and deboarding as described in step five.

7. When boarding in a parking lot, take extreme care to avoid moving traffic and cars backing out of parking spaces.
8. Once onboard, you should remain stopped until passengers are safely in their seats; accelerate and brake smoothly at all times.
9. Drivers should report any unsafe bus stops and hazardous conditions along their route that may interfere with safe boarding and debarking of passengers as well as the condition of step treads and hand rails on their vehicles.
10. Always remember that many injury claims are the result of boarding and debarking vehicles; take extreme caution in the safe board and debarking of passengers.

Follow these steps when arriving to board a passenger using a mobility device (wheelchairs, scooters, etc.):

1. Stop on level ground with room for the platform to deploy.
2. Put the vehicle in park, set the parking brake and turn on the four-way flashers.
3. Deploy the lift while standing on the ground next to the vehicle (or from the driver's seat, depending on the vehicle).
4. If the passenger uses a power wheelchair, disengage the clutches that transfer power to the wheels. This eliminates the possibility of the passenger steering their power wheelchair off the lift or into any obstacle on the vehicle.
5. Depending on the type of vehicle used: (a) Side loading van—back the passenger onto the platform;

(b) Rear loading van or ramps—push the passenger forward onto the platform.

6. Make sure the mobility device brakes are set.
7. Ask the passenger to place their hands on their lap and make sure their feet are clear of the toe-guard flap to avoid any injury while loading.
8. If the lift has securement handles, ask the passenger to take hold of them.



Photo by Charles on Unsplash

9. Always inform the passenger before the lift is engaged.

10. Hold onto the mobility device when raising and lowering the lift.

11. Once the lift platform is level with the vehicle, the bus operator has two options for assisting the rider with the mobility device on how to enter the bus. If the driver is capable of holding onto the mobility device and guiding the device into the vehicle—never pushing—the driver may do so by disengaging the brakes, and guiding the mobility device and passenger completely inside the vehicle without losing contact with the device. In the event that the

operator is not able to guide the mobility device completely into the vehicle from an outside position, the driver would leave the passenger on the lift with the device's brakes engaged, go inside the bus, have the passenger disengage the brakes, and guide the mobility device and passenger into the vehicle.

Source:

National RTAP's Safety Training and Rural Transit (START) Training, available at nationalrtap.org/Resource-Library/Advanced-Search/fd=778

calendar

January 7-8	Executive Level Leadership Training Program in Golden Valley
January 9-10	Manager Level Leadership Training Program in Golden Valley
January 13-14	Supervisor Level Leadership Training Program in Golden Valley
January 27	Passenger Assistance Safety and Sensitivity (PASS) in Lowry
January 28	Maltreatment Awareness and Defensive Driving in Lowry
January 29	Driver Refresher 1 and 2 in Lowry
January 30	Driver Refresher 3 and 4 in Lowry
March 3-4	<u>Minnesota's Transportation Conference</u> in Saint Paul
March 10	ADA Etiquette Training in Baxter
March 10-11	Executive Level Leadership Training Program in Golden Valley
March 12-13	Manager Level Leadership Training Program in Golden Valley
March 16-17	Supervisor Level Leadership Training Program in Golden Valley

Visit the [Minnesota Rural Transit Assistance Program](#) website for a catalog and a listing of upcoming 2020 events:
mnrtap.us/calendar-of-events/

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If you are not receiving this newsletter directly, or know of someone who is not currently receiving it and would like to, please contact Julie Schafer (jschafer@rlsandassoc.com). This publication is free.

In the next issue:

A Frequently Asked Questions section! Send any questions to Deb Brisk at deb.brisk@mnrtap.net

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