

# DISABILITY & AGING RIGHTS



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## TRANSPORTATION

# Light, Rapid and Commuter Rail Service and People with Disabilities

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a civil rights law. The ADA does not require that public transportation be provided in every community where people live. However, if public rail service is provided, it must follow Title II of the ADA. The ADA covers rail cars, rail facilities and rail services. Providers of light and rapid rail service must also provide ADA paratransit service for people with disabilities who cannot use the rail system all or some of the time.

### Types of rail service

**Light rail:** Light rail means a streetcar-type vehicle operated on city streets. Service may be provided by step-entry vehicles or by level boarding.

**Rapid rail:** Also referred to as metro, subway or heavy rail, rapid rail means a subway-type transit vehicle railway operated on exclusive private rights of way with high-level platform stations. Rapid rail also may operate on elevated or grade-level track separated from other traffic.

**Commuter rail:** Short-haul rail passenger service operating in metropolitan and suburban areas, sometimes across the boundaries of a state, usually characterized by reduced-fare, multiple-ride and commuter tickets, and by morning and evening peak period operations.

**Intercity rail:** Transportation provided by Amtrak.

### Accessible rail station requirements – light, rapid and commuter rail

- All rail stations built since 1992 are required to be fully accessible to people with disabilities, with ramps and/or elevators.
- When the ADA became law in 1990, rail systems were required to identify “key stations” that would be made accessible by 1993.
- The deadline for specific key stations could be extended if unusually expensive modifications were needed. Light and rapid rail station deadlines could be extended to 2020. Commuter rail station deadlines could be extended to 2010.
- When alterations are performed at existing non-key rail stations, accessibility must be added to the altered part of the station “to the maximum extent feasible” and only if the cost of adding accessibility doesn’t exceed 20 percent of the cost of the project.



## Accessible rail car requirements

Accessible light and rapid rail cars must have:

- 32-inch-wide doorways
- Priority seating marked for people with disabilities
- At least two areas marked for people who use mobility devices (wheelchairs), with a minimum clear floor space of 30 inches by 48 inches
- A 32-inch-wide clear route to the mobility device areas

Accessible commuter rail cars must have:

- 32-inch-wide doorways
- Priority seating marked for people with disabilities
- At least one area marked for people who use mobility devices (wheelchairs), with a minimum clear floor space of 30 inches by 48 inches
- A 32-inch-wide clear route to the mobility device areas

If an accessible commuter rail car has a restroom, it must be accessible to people who use mobility devices.

## Boarding

### **I use a cane, not a wheelchair. Can I ask to use the lift or ramp to get on and off the train?**

Anyone who asks may use a rail car's lift or ramp, whether they have an obvious disability or not.

Rail personnel are not required to help with transfers, lifting, or carrying packages or bags. However, they must help with getting on and off the train when needed.

### Stop announcements

On all types of rail service, stops must be announced:

- At transfer points with other fixed routes
- At major intersections and destination points
- Regularly enough along a route so people with disabilities can be oriented to their location
- Clearly and loudly enough to be heard throughout the rail car

### Training

Each transit agency must ensure that its workers are trained appropriately. This means that they must be trained in:

- How to use and maintain accessibility features and equipment
- Boarding assistance
- Securement of mobility devices, if applicable
- Sensitive and appropriate interaction with passengers with disabilities
- Handling and storage of mobility devices (if necessary)
- Understanding the requirements of the ADA

### Other requirements

A transit agency may not require that people with disabilities use designated priority seats.

### **I have low vision. When I'm waiting for rail service at a stop that has more than one rail line, how will I know which is the train that I need?**

Where vehicles for more than one route serve the same stop, the transit agency must provide a way for a person who is blind or has low vision to identify the right vehicle to enter (or be identified to rail personnel as a person seeking a ride on a particular route).

Service animals are permitted to accompany people with disabilities in rail cars and rail facilities.



## Is it a violation of the ADA if an elevator in a rail station isn't working?

Transit agencies must keep accessibility equipment working and fix it quickly if it breaks. If something does break, they must try to accommodate people with disabilities who need accessibility. It's not a violation of the ADA if something isn't working every once in a while, but if it happens regularly then it might be.

Information about transportation service must be provided in accessible formats, upon request (large print, Braille, accessible technology, etc.).

## What can you do if you have a disability-related problem with rail service?

First, and most important, let the transit or rail agency know about any problems. If you can, make your complaint in writing (email or letter). Give them as much information as possible (rail car, badge number, route, date, time, etc.). Keep a copy for your records.

For light and rapid rail complaints, you can file a complaint with the Federal Transit Administration Office of Civil Rights. You can fill out the FTA's Complaint Form or send a letter to: **Director, FTA Office of Civil Rights, East Building – 5th Floor, TCR, 1200 New Jersey Ave. SE, Washington, DC 20590.** Include as many details as possible.

The FTA's ADA website is [www.fta.dot.gov/civilrights/12325.html](http://www.fta.dot.gov/civilrights/12325.html) and the FTA ADA complaint form is at [www.fta.dot.gov/civilrights/12875\\_14816.html](http://www.fta.dot.gov/civilrights/12875_14816.html). You may also leave a message at FTA's ADA Assistance Line, **1-888-446-4511**, through the Federal Information Relay Service, **1-800-877-8339**, or by email at: [FTA.ADAAssistance@dot.gov](mailto:FTA.ADAAssistance@dot.gov).

Complaints must be filed within 180 days of the incident of discrimination, although the deadline may be extended for good cause.

For commuter rail and Amtrak complaints, contact the Federal Railroad Administration Office of Civil Rights. To file a complaint in writing, send an ADA Complaint Form to: **Office of Civil Rights, Federal Railroad Administration, 1200 New Jersey Ave. SE, ROA-10, Mail Stop 5, Washington, DC 20590.** Include as many details as possible.

**[www.fra.dot.gov/Page/P0175](http://www.fra.dot.gov/Page/P0175)  
[civil.rights@dot.gov](mailto:civil.rights@dot.gov)  
1-202-493-6012**

Complaints must be filed within 180 days of the incident of discrimination, although the deadline may be extended for good cause.

Another option is to file a complaint with the Illinois Attorney General's Disability Rights Bureau. Send a letter to: **Office of the Attorney General, Chicago Disability Rights Bureau, James R. Thompson Center, 11th floor, 100 W. Randolph St., Chicago, IL 60601.** Include as many details as possible.

**[www.illinoisattorneygeneral.gov/rights/disabilityrights.html](http://www.illinoisattorneygeneral.gov/rights/disabilityrights.html)  
1-312-814-5684 or 1-800-964-3013 (TTY)**

For more information about this and other topics, contact Equip for Equality at **1-800-537-2632** or visit **[www.EquipForEquality.org](http://www.EquipForEquality.org).**



## Additional helpful resources and links

Amtrak is the intercity rail service operated by the National Railroad Passenger Corp.

[www.amtrak.com/accessible-travel-services](http://www.amtrak.com/accessible-travel-services)

Easter Seals Project ACTION is funded by the U.S. Department of Transportation to promote access to transportation for people with disabilities by providing training, technical assistance, research, outreach and communication.

**1-800-659-6428**

[www.projectaction.org/Resources  
Publications/RailServices.aspx](http://www.projectaction.org/Resources/Publications/RailServices.aspx)

Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund provides advocacy for and training about accessible transportation.

**1-510-644-2555**

**1-510-841-8645** (Fax/TTY)

[info@dredf.org](mailto:info@dredf.org)

[www.dredf.org/public-policy/transportation](http://www.dredf.org/public-policy/transportation)

U.S. Access Board issues ADA standards for transportation facilities and vehicles.

[www.access-board.gov/  
guidelines-and-standards/transportation](http://www.access-board.gov/guidelines-and-standards/transportation)

Community Transportation Association of America is a national association of organizations and people that provides programs and services to remove barriers and improve mobility for all people, particularly senior citizens and people with disabilities.

**1341 G St. NW, 10th Floor,**

**Washington, DC 20005**

**1-800-891-0590**

[www.ctaa.org](http://www.ctaa.org)

The National Center on Senior Transportation strives to increase transportation options for older adults to support their ability to live independently in their homes and communities throughout the United States.

**1-866-528-6278**

[ncst@easterseals.com](mailto:ncst@easterseals.com)

[www.seniortransportation.net](http://www.seniortransportation.net) ■



**Equip for Equality**

20 North Michigan Avenue  
Suite 300  
Chicago, IL 60602

[www.equipforequality.org](http://www.equipforequality.org)  
1-800-537-2632  
1-800-610-2779 (TTY)

**Illinois Department on Aging**

One Natural Resources Way  
Suite 100  
Springfield, IL 62702-1271

Senior HelpLine:

1-800-252-8966  
1-888-206-1327 (TTY)  
[www.illinois.gov/aging](http://www.illinois.gov/aging)

The Illinois Department on Aging does not discriminate in admission to programs or treatment of employment in programs or activities in compliance with appropriate State and Federal statutes. If you feel like you have been discriminated against, call the Senior HelpLine at 1-800-252-8966, 1-888-206-1327 (TTY).