

What is ADA complementary paratransit?

ADA Paratransit

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires public transit agencies that provide fixed-route service to provide “complementary paratransit” service to people with disabilities who cannot use the fixed-route bus or rail service because of a disability. The ADA regulations specifically define a population of customers who are entitled to this service as a civil right. The regulations also define minimum service characteristics that must be met for this service to be considered equivalent to the fixed-route service it is intended to complement.

Service characteristics

In general, ADA complementary paratransit service must be provided within 3/4 of a mile of a bus route or rail station, at the same hours and days, for no more than twice the regular fixed-route fare.

While the transit agency is required to provide paratransit for trips with origins and destinations within 3/4 of a mile of a route/station, paratransit eligible customers who are outside the service area could still use the service if they are able to use get themselves into the service area. The ADA further requires that paratransit rides be provided to all eligible riders if requested any time the previous day. The ADA allows providers to negotiate trip times with the customer, but no more than an hour before or an hour after the requested time.

Eligibility

The ADA regulations provide three categories of paratransit eligibility. All three categories include people who may be able to ride fixed-route transit for some trips and not for other trips, and eligibility may be conditional based on the person’s ability to ride fixed-route for certain trips. The three categories are defined in response to the frequently-asked question, “What are the three categories of eligibility for ADA complementary paratransit?”

The eligibility determination process for ADA complementary paratransit is developed by the transit system in consultation with the local community. To qualify for this service, it is usually necessary to submit an application, and may also require supporting documentation, an in-person interview and/or an in-person assessment of the applicant's ability to use fixed-route service. Some transit systems have more rigorous processes and strictly limit eligibility to those people who are functionally unable to ride fixed-route service. Other transit systems have less restrictive eligibility or may use the ADA paratransit application process to determine eligibility for other kinds of demand-responsive services, described below.

Relationship to other kinds of demand-responsive services

It is important to note that a community may offer other kinds of transportation services or in addition to, or instead of, the fixed-route and ADA complementary paratransit services. Such services may be offered on a general public basis (for example, open to all people with disabilities, senior adults, and/or the general public), or may be limited to people who participate in specific social service programs. The service characteristics vary widely from community to community. Sometimes these services are provided in coordination with the ADA complementary paratransit. A customer may be eligible to use the ADA complementary paratransit for some trips, but find it necessary to use other demand-responsive services for other trips. For example, while the ADA complementary paratransit may only operate within 3/4 mile of the fixed-route service, another service may be available throughout the county.

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