

U.S. Department of Transportation

Accessibility: Strategic Plan Framework

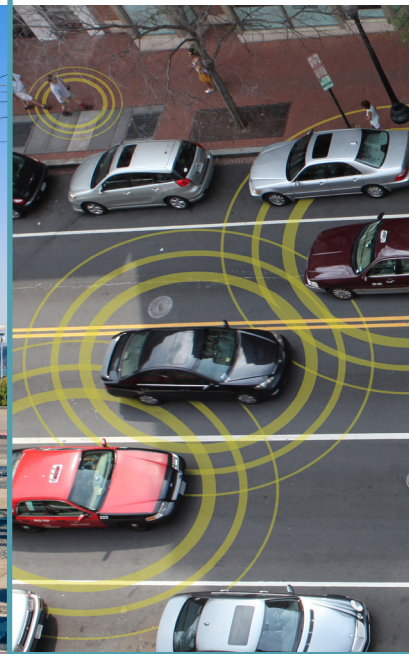
Complete Trip



Partnerships



Innovation



Geographic Equity



U.S. Department of Transportation

July 2020

Seeking Your Feedback

For the first time, the U.S. Department of Transportation will have an accessibility strategic plan focusing on making transportation more accessible to people with disabilities. This strategic plan framework serves as a starting document that will guide the development of the full strategic plan. As we work to expand this framework, we are interested in getting your feedback on what you would like to see in the final document.

To provide feedback, please visit
TransportationInnovation.IdeaScale.com.

The dialogue will be open for comments during the “Breaking Down Barriers: Celebrating the 30th Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act” virtual event on July 30, and will run through August 16.

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Introduction

As the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT or the Department) celebrates the 30th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the Department recognizes a prime opportunity to build on its accomplishments in expanding accessible transportation for people with disabilities by continuing to remove barriers and enhance transportation services across all modes.

The landmark ADA civil rights law addressed the rights of people with disabilities, including prohibiting discrimination based on disability. The ADA has led to major improvements in transportation across the United States. However, significant barriers still exist—particularly in rural and disadvantaged communities. There is an opportunity to leverage numerous new technologies, emerging data sets, and public and private partnerships to identify and address remaining needs.

In 2018, the Bureau of Transportation Statistics reported that an estimated 25.5 million Americans experience a travel-limiting disability that makes it difficult to participate in activities of daily living. Further, the COVID-19 public health emergency has highlighted the critical need for people with disabilities to have access to on-demand transportation services, connecting them to healthcare, pharmacies, grocery stores, and other essential services.



Photo: © 123RF/ Chris Boswell

DOT is taking steps to ensure that America's transportation system is accessible to all travelers. As part of this effort, the Department is drafting an accessibility strategic plan to ensure that the Department has a unified vision and a clear path forward to continue to remove barriers in transportation access for people with disabilities. This document presents an introduction to the forthcoming strategic plan, as well as themes and specific goals that will guide the department's accessibility work for the next five years. Through this document, DOT hopes to gain stakeholder input on its accessibility goals, which will then be considered when drafting the full strategic plan, anticipated to be released by the end of 2020. DOT has engaged in extensive outreach to gather information on the needs and concerns of people with disabilities, and will continue to do so.

DOT's accessibility transportation policy efforts draw upon extensive collaboration with other Federal agencies, disability advocates, researchers, and the transportation industry. Through the strategic plan, DOT will set the goals and objectives of how accessibility will be broadly realized in a way that improves the travel experience for all Americans, especially those with disabilities.

Purpose

The mission of DOT is to “ensure our Nation has the safest, most efficient and modern transportation system in the world, which improves the quality of life for all American people and communities, from rural to urban, and increases the productivity and competitiveness of American workers and businesses.”¹

The purpose of this strategic plan framework is to present DOT’s accessibility goals. It seeks to inform our stakeholder community and solicit feedback to ensure that DOT has a unified vision and roadmap to continue to make progress on moving America’s transportation system toward being accessible for all. Accessibility initiatives are currently spread across DOT’s nine operating administrations and the Office of the Secretary. The strategic plan will create a unified vision for accessibility to guide DOT as it addresses any gaps in its accessibility work, enhance coordination of DOT’s accessibility initiatives across the Department as well as across the Federal government, and facilitate the efficient use of DOT resources to further accessibility.

A summary of laws related to transportation accessibility is included in the Appendix.



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charmoment

¹ See DOT’s strategic plan at <https://www.transportation.gov/sites/dot.gov/files/docs/mission/administrations/office-policy/304866/dot-strategic-planfy2018-2022508.pdf>.

Themes

In carrying out its accessibility priorities, the Department will be guided by four overarching themes that cut across transportation types and operating administrations:

Complete Trip:

DOT's accessibility work will be guided by the "complete trip" concept. All travelers, especially those with disabilities, should be able to get from their starting point to their destination spontaneously and independently, being able to navigate sidewalks, intersections, transit facilities, rail stations, vehicles, and all other parts of the transportation network with ease and confidence: not just curb-to-curb and door-to-door, but point-to-point.



Partnerships:

DOT will work collaboratively with other Federal agencies, State governments, metropolitan planning organizations, local transportation agencies, the private sector, and other stakeholders toward making existing transportation infrastructure accessible. Further, DOT will encourage new transportation projects to be designed with all users in mind. Given that infrastructure maintenance can have accessibility implications, DOT will also work to address accessibility through current grant programs and prioritize keeping infrastructure in good repair.



Innovation:

DOT will encourage research into technologies that have the potential to remove barriers to accessibility in the transportation system. DOT will seek to complement research done by leading academic institutions, the private sector and other entities to fill gaps that industry is not already covering. DOT will work to remove any unnecessary regulatory barriers affecting innovative products that will improve accessibility in transportation while prioritizing safety.



Geographic Equity:

Rural residents with disabilities face unique challenges accessing transportation, including lack of public transit, longer distances to desired destinations, and increased reliance on personal car ownership as a means of transportation. Therefore, simply applying urban solutions to rural communities is not enough. Consistent with DOT's Rural Opportunities to Use Transportation for Economic Success (ROUTES) Initiative, DOT's accessibility and technological initiatives will take into account the unique needs of rural residents and consider the initiatives' impact on rural communities.



Term and Scope

The strategic plan will set out Departmental objectives for fiscal years (FY) 2021-2025. It will specifically address DOT activities that seek to remove barriers to accessibility in transportation. For the purposes of this plan, a person with a disability will be defined in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act:² “a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such an impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment.”³ For example, three types of disabilities and some of their transportation needs are described below.



Photo: National Rural Transit Assistance Program

People with physical disabilities may use mobility aids such as wheelchairs, walkers, crutches, or canes. Some of these individuals may be able to drive a car, but may need after-market modifications, such as hand controls, wheelchair ramps, and lifts. Generally, in part because of the ADA, people with physical disabilities are able to use public transportation, such as buses and trains. However, other factors, such as elevators that are out of order, may affect their ability to use certain stops and stations, which may prevent their

ability to make the complete trip. For navigation, these individuals need information about the physical accessibility of sidewalks (e.g., if curb cuts are present), including any construction that may prevent them from safely travelling to the stop or station. Additionally, transportation network companies and taxis are not always available for individuals who use mobility aids such as wheelchairs, due to the limited availability of drivers who use wheelchair accessible vehicles.

² Exact definitions may vary in related legislation, such as the Air Carrier Access Act.

³ See “A guide to Disability-Rights Laws” at <https://www.ada.gov/cguide.htm#:~:text=An%20individual%20with%20a%20disability%20is%20defined%20by%20the%20ADA.as%20having%20such%20an%20impairment>

People with sensory disabilities include those who are blind or are visually impaired, and those who are deaf or hard of hearing. For those with vision disabilities, driving a car is generally not possible. Audible walking directions and audible street crossing buttons can help those with visual impairments navigate to transit hubs. Stations and stops should be identified and georeferenced in GPS applications, so they can be found more easily by individuals with vision disabilities. Any information presented visually would also need to be announced audibly to be accessible to people with visual impairment. This information could include indicators that the bus has arrived, a stop has been reached, a train is going in a specific direction, and other information that helps the traveler identify and locate their stop, board the correct vehicle, and exit at the intended destinations. Individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing may be able to drive a car, but may require safety features such as a vibration notifying them if the vehicle has been left running. Generally, information presented visually is accessible to individuals with hearing disabilities.

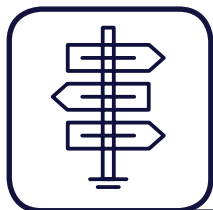
People with cognitive disabilities include individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities, people with traumatic brain injury, and autistic people. Often, this group benefits from travel information that is presented in plain language, visualized information, and supportive technologies, such as wayfinding, that assist with navigation. Travel training may assist an individual with a cognitive disability in successfully reaching their desired destinations. Trip planning features that allow an individual with a cognitive disability to practice making the trip virtually may reduce anxiety and uncertainty, preparing the individual to make the complete trip successfully.



Photo: NADTC.org/ © MetroWest Regional Transit Authority

Strategic Plan Goals

Goals are the guiding statements of any strategic plan. They divide future efforts into spheres of influence and help focus future action. This document includes five strategic goals:



- Goal 1 – Remove unnecessary barriers to multimodal accessibility of public rights of way.



- Goal 2 – Enhance opportunities for people with disabilities to walk, roll, cycle, and use micromobility services to the greatest extent possible.



- Goal 3 – Remove unnecessary barriers for people with disabilities to seek licensure for, operate, and/or ride in passenger and commercial vehicles.



- Goal 4 – Support the development and diversification of the Nation's public transit systems and mobility providers to provide accessibility for people with disabilities.



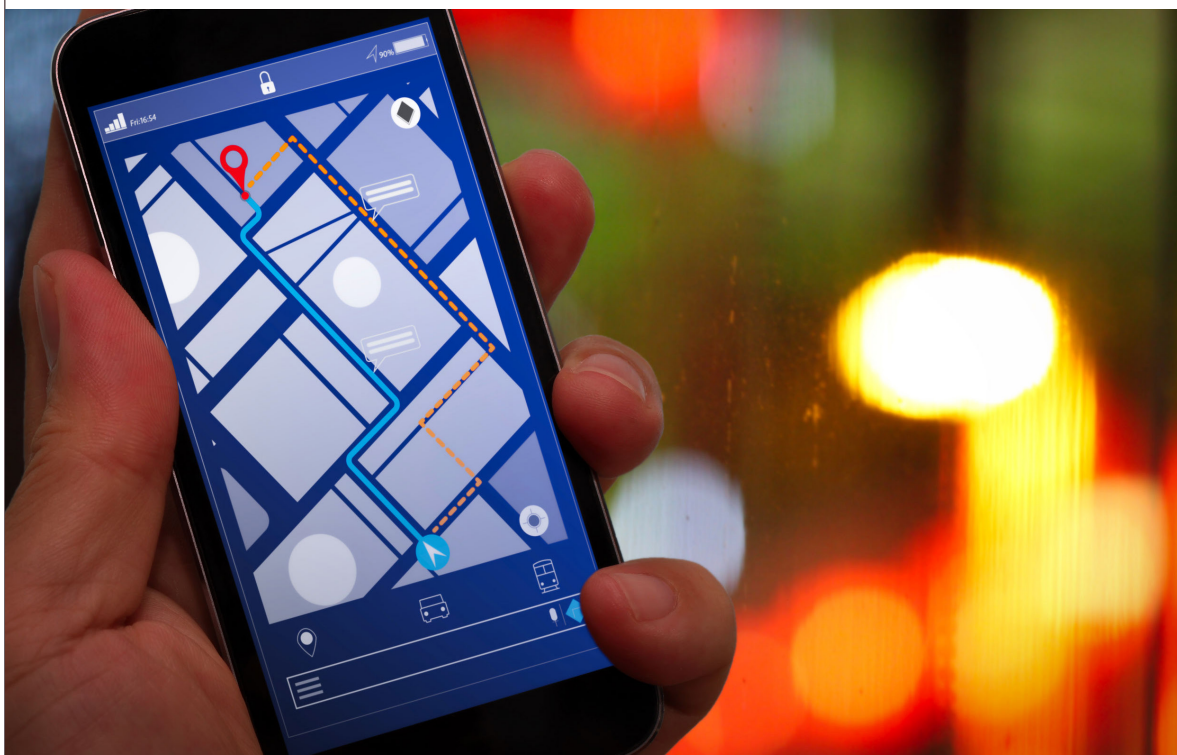
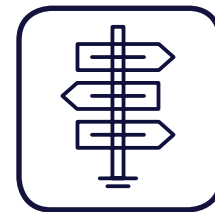
- Goal 5 – Advance accessible intercity transportation systems for people with disabilities.

The final strategic plan will add considerable content and detail. Each goal will be accompanied by multiple objectives that describe specific actions, policies, or programs. Objectives may include measures of effectiveness or targets, which offer a means to track the progress toward meeting a goal/objective.

Goal 1—Remove unnecessary barriers to multimodal accessibility of public rights of way.

DOT believes public roadway and transit rights of way should be accessible to all. Barriers to accessibility include design, signage, service standards, and planning processes. As more rights of way become accessible, more people with disabilities will be able to use the roadway and transit networks in the regions where they live to successfully complete trips from starting point to destination. Areas of emphasis include:

- **Standards:** Work to advance national standards on rights of way accessibility, including with partner organizations.
- **Civil Rights:** DOT civil rights offices have important roles in investigations, oversight, ADA transition plans, guidance, and resource production.
- **Data:** Use common data specifications across multiple modes to make it easier for public and private entities to map information, plan infrastructure, and make trip decisions.





Goal 2—Enhance opportunities for people with disabilities to walk, roll, cycle, and use micromobility services to the greatest extent possible.

Promoting equal access to non-vehicular transportation modes is key to achieving a fully accessible transportation system that promotes complete trips for all. Barriers can be removed through research and innovations that create an environment that permits and supports access to non-vehicular modes. Areas of emphasis include:

- **Deployment:** Advance implementation of multimodal innovation, network connectivity, and mobility technologies to accommodate people with disabilities safely.
- **Pedestrians:** Consider pedestrian access throughout the transportation planning, engineering, and construction process. This includes roadside infrastructure, grade separated paths, and accessible pedestrian signals at intersections.
- **Bicycles:** Enhance adaptive bicycle and scooter accessibility for private ownership, rental, and shared mobility uses.
- **Micromobility:** Remove unnecessary barriers for powered and adaptive micromobility devices to increase mobility and accessibility.



Goal 3—Remove barriers for people with disabilities to seek licensure for, operate, and/or ride in passenger and commercial vehicles.



DOT believes that people with disabilities who can safely operate passenger and commercial vehicles should be able to obtain the requisite licenses. Further, DOT will advance the development and deployment of accessible automated vehicles, which may offer mobility in the future for people who cannot or choose not to drive or for whom public transit is not available. Necessary steps toward accomplishing this goal include:

- **Passenger Vehicles:** Eligible individuals who apply for a driver's license should not be denied a license or the services of a department of motor vehicles based on their protected status.
- **Commercial Motor Vehicles:** People with hearing disabilities should be able to operate commercial motor vehicles using reasonable accommodations provided to State drivers licensing agencies.
- **Automated Vehicles:** Assess findings from ongoing DOT research on automated wheelchair securement and human-machine interfaces to inform the development of goals and considerations related to the accessibility of automated vehicles. Create a library of standards to provide a common source of best practices on accessibility of automated vehicles.
- **Websites:** Ensure that DOT websites, systems, and applications used for licensure or other regulatory functions are accessible, consistent with the requirements of Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.



Photo: © 123RF/ Wang Tom



Goal 4—Support the development and diversification of the Nation’s public transit systems and mobility providers to provide accessibility for people with disabilities.

Public transit (including paratransit) is critical to mobility for people with disabilities. The rider experience varies considerably based on disability, geographic location, and customer service. DOT will advance initiatives to improve service, while also exploring how new service models may further enhance mobility. This goal includes three aspects of public transit:

- **Facilities:** Increase the number of existing transit facilities that are accessible, while ensuring that all new facilities meet accessibility standards.
- **Service:** Improve service for people with disabilities, particularly those who use assistive devices.
- **Vehicles:** Use research and demonstration to explore new frontiers in vehicle technology and showcase new transit vehicles.



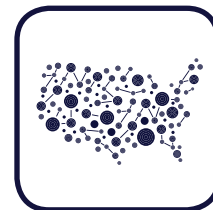


Photo: © 123RF/
iakovenko

Goal 5—Advance accessible intercity transportation systems for people with disabilities.

Linking our Nation's cities and regions with accessible transportation systems will provide the widest range of options to ensure every member of our community can participate in economic, recreational, and social opportunities. Goals related to intercity transportation include:

- **Aviation:** Advance the safety and accessibility of the Nation's air transportation system through oversight, technical assistance, enforcement, and policy-making.
- **Over-the-Road Buses:** The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration will continue to ensure ADA compliance in the motorcoach industry.
- **Intercity Passenger Rail:** Promote the accessibility of the Nation's intercity passenger transportation systems. This includes Amtrak, commuter rail, and privately-operated passenger rail carriers.



Conclusion and Next Steps

This document is a strategic plan framework. The purpose is to inform stakeholders of the direction of the Department and commit to the development and implementation of an accessibility strategic plan.

As part of the process of drafting the strategic plan, DOT seeks stakeholder input through sharing this strategic plan framework with attendees of the “Breaking Down Barriers: Celebrating the 30th Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act” event that will take place virtually on July 30, 2020. DOT will also post a completed draft of the accessibility strategic plan on the DOT website and will publish a *Federal Register* Notice with a request for comment. DOT staff will review comments and revise the document where appropriate.

The Department intends to issue the accessibility strategic plan late this calendar year.



Photo: National Rural Transportation Assistance Program

Appendix

There are several legislative authorities that define legal protections for people with disabilities that are relevant to transportation access. The strategic plan will pull together principles from these Acts and ensure their mandates remain central to the current DOT program. These include:

- The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA): prohibits discrimination based on disability in employment, State and local government, public accommodations, commercial facilities, transportation, and telecommunications.⁴
- Rehabilitation Act: prohibits discrimination based on disability in programs conducted by Federal agencies, in programs receiving Federal financial assistance, in Federal employment, and in the employment practices of Federal contractors.⁵
- Architectural Barriers Act: requires that buildings and facilities that are designed, constructed, or altered with Federal funds, or leased by a Federal agency, comply with Federal standards for physical accessibility. ABA requirements are limited to architectural standards in new and altered buildings and in newly leased facilities. They do not address the activities conducted in those buildings and facilities.⁶
- Over-the-Road Bus Transportation Accessibility Act: requires over-the-road bus transportation operators to comply with DOT's ADA regulations concerning accessible transportation as a condition to obtaining and retaining active operating authority registration issued by FMCSA. DOT and the Department of Justice (DOJ) have concurrent ADA enforcement jurisdiction over these operations.⁷
- Air Carrier Access Act: prohibits discrimination in air transportation by domestic and foreign air carriers against qualified individuals with physical or mental impairments. For U.S. Carriers, it applies to all operations and aircraft, regardless of where those operations take place. For foreign carriers, it applies to flights that begin or end at a U.S. airport and to aircraft used for those flights.⁸

4 Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (Pub. L. 101-336), as amended (P.L. 110-325)

5 Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Pub. L. 93-112)

6 Architectural Barriers Act (ABA) of 1968 (Pub. L. 90-480)

7 Over-the-Road Bus Transportation Accessibility Act of 2007 (Pub. L. 110-291)

8 Air Carrier Access Act of 1986 (Pub. L. 99-435)

Submit Your Feedback:

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