



Overview of the Proposed Guidelines for Public Rights-of-Way

This overview highlights provisions in the Access Board's proposed guidelines for accessible public rights-of-way and also includes answers to common questions. The Board's published proposal discusses in greater detail provisions of the rule.



Scope of the Guidelines

The Access Board's proposed guidelines address access to newly constructed and altered public streets and sidewalks covered by the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) and, in the case of those federally funded, the Architectural Barriers Act (ABA) or the Rehabilitation Act. In alterations, these requirements would apply within, not beyond, the planned scope of a project. The guidelines do not apply to existing public rights-of-ways except those portions that are altered. Program access mandates of the ADA and the Rehabilitation Act may require access improvements to existing pedestrian networks, but these obligations are regulated by other agencies, such as the Department of Transportation and the Department of Justice, not the Access Board.

Accessibility Addressed

Many provisions are designed to ensure that public rights-of-ways contain a continuous accessible route that accommodates all pedestrians, including those who use mobility aids. These requirements also benefit many other users, including those traveling with strollers. The guidelines also address access for people who are blind or who have low vision and include requirements to mediate potential hazards along public streets and sidewalks. These include provisions that cover tactile warnings at transitions to streets, accessible pedestrian signals, signalization at traffic roundabouts, and objects that protrude into circulation paths.

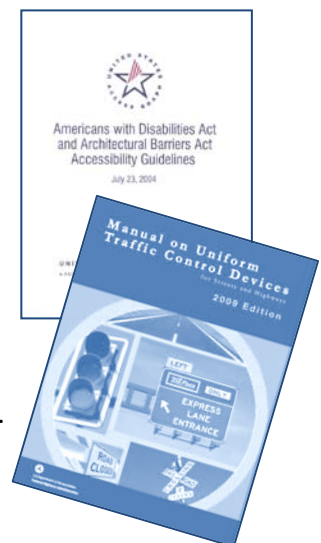
Recognized Constraints and Exceptions

The guidelines take into account conditions typical of roadway geometry and common constraints unique to public rights-of-way in order to facilitate compliance and minimize impacts. For example, the grade of accessible pedestrian routes is permitted to follow those of adjacent streets. In alteration projects, departures are allowed where existing constraints, such as terrain, space limitations, drainage requirements, and historic features, make compliance impracticable. The guidelines also exempt from coverage utility vaults and tunnels and other spaces used only by service personnel.

Relationship to Other Guidelines and Requirements

The Board's ADA and ABA Accessibility Guidelines address access to buildings and facilities located on sites. Standards based on these guidelines apply within the boundary of covered sites as defined by property lines and public rights-of-ways. In covering public rights-of-ways, the new guidelines essentially pick up where these guidelines leave off. The proposed rights-of-way guidelines reference requirements in the ADA and ABA guidelines for certain elements, such as toilet facilities and escalators.

The guidelines also refer to requirements in the most recent edition (2009) of the Federal Highway Administration's Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) for Streets and Highways to ensure consistency and to avoid redundancy. Specifically, the guidelines invoke MUTCD definitions and technical criteria for temporary alternate pedestrian routes and pedestrian signals and push buttons.



What the Guidelines Cover

The guidelines cover pedestrian features in new or altered public right-of-ways, including sidewalks and other pedestrian ways, street crossings, medians and traffic islands, overpasses, underpasses and bridges. On-street parking, transit stops, toilet facilities, signs, and street furniture are also addressed. The guidelines apply to permanent as well as temporary facilities, such as temporary routes around work zones and portable toilets. Provisions in the guidelines address:

- Pedestrian Access Routes (including sidewalks, street crossings, curb ramps/ blended transitions)
- Detectable Warning Surfaces
- Roundabouts
- Transit Stops and Shelters
- Pedestrian Signals
- On-Street Parking and Passenger Loading Zones
- Street Furniture and Other Elements

Pedestrian Access Routes

A continuous accessible pedestrian route at least 4 feet wide is specified along pedestrian networks. Most provisions apply only within this portion of public rights-of-way, although some requirements, such as those limiting hazards posed by protruding objects, apply to all areas of circulation. Specifications for the grade and cross slope of pedestrian access routes take into account factors such as terrain and drainage requirements. Specifications are provided or referenced for route components, including curb ramps, blended transitions such as depressed corners and raised street crossings, ramps, elevators, stairways, and handrails.

Pedestrian Signals

The guidelines do not require intersections to be signalized for pedestrians, except at certain roundabouts and channelized turn lanes. Instead, they generally apply MUTCD requirements only where pedestrian signals are provided. Pedestrian signals and push buttons meeting MUTCD criteria integrate discreet locator tones and vibro-tactile indicators of walk/ don't walk cycles. Unlike earlier technologies, current products create very little noise because the low-volume tone, often a ticking sound, is used to indicate the location of vibro-tactile signals and push buttons, not to broadcast walk cycles. The guidelines also specify signal phase timing based on a maximum traveling speed of 3.5 feet per second.



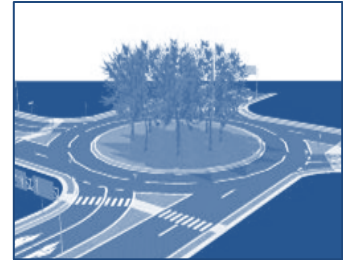
Detectable Warning Surfaces

Detectable warnings, a distinct tactile surface of truncated domes, are specified to alert pedestrians with vision impairments of transitions to vehicle ways and of open drop-offs at transit platforms. The guidelines propose requiring these warnings at curb ramps and blended transitions which remove tactile cues otherwise provided by curb faces. The Board also proposes requiring them at certain pedestrian refuge islands above a specified width, at-grade pedestrian-only rail crossings, and transit stop boarding platforms or areas. Requirements for detectable warnings on curb ramps were previously included in the Board's guidelines for buildings and facilities but were removed in the last update in deference to this rulemaking. Detectable warnings on curb ramps and blended transitions are especially important along public sidewalks where hazards posed by vehicle traffic are greater.



Roundabouts

Circular intersections or “roundabouts,” by their continuous traffic flow and non-linear pedestrian routes, are often difficult for people with vision impairments to safely navigate. The guidelines include requirements for pedestrian activated signals at roundabouts with multi-lane crossings and multi-lane channelized turn lanes. The guidelines also call for tactile barriers or warnings along portions of sidewalks flush against the curb where pedestrian crossing is not intended.



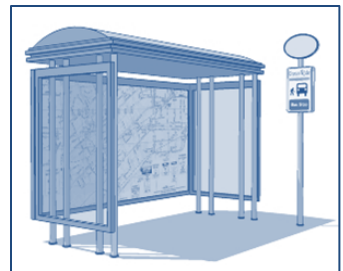
On-Street Parking and Passenger Loading Zones

Where marked or metered on-street parking is provided, the guidelines specify the minimum number that must be accessible based on the total number provided on a block perimeter. In general, at least 4% of spaces must be accessible (scoping lowers to 2% for amounts between 101 and 200 spaces). Adjoining access aisles must serve spaces, but in the case of parallel parking, only where the sidewalks are wide enough (14 feet minimum) to accommodate them. Perpendicular and angled spaces, parking meters and pay stations, and passenger loading zones (other than transit stops) are covered as well. Accessible passenger loading zones are required for every 100 feet of continuous loading zone space provided.



Transit Stops and Shelters

Provisions for transit stops address boarding and alighting areas, including their size and grade, boarding platforms, and provided shelters. These requirements require sufficient space so that people with disabilities, including those who used wheeled mobility aids, can board or disembark from transit vehicles and have equal access to shelters.



Street Furniture and Other Elements

The guidelines cover street furniture and other elements that serve public rights-of-way, including drinking fountains, toilet facilities, and benches. Some elements are addressed through references to the relevant sections in the ADA and ABA Accessibility Guidelines. Components such as ramps, stairways, and escalators are also addressed, as are signs, protruding objects, and operable parts.

Answers to Common Questions

Will existing streets and sidewalks have to be modified to meet the new guidelines?

No. The guidelines apply only to those portions of public rights-of-way that are newly constructed or altered. They do not apply to existing public rights-of-way outside of planned alterations. Jurisdictions can voluntarily consult the guidelines in undertaking access improvements at existing streets and sidewalks.

Will these guidelines significantly impact the design of streets and sidewalks?

Accessibility in general often has minimal impacts when properly integrated into planning and design. However, constraints and conditions unique to public rights-of-ways can pose significant challenges, which is why the Board is developing these guidelines separately from its guidelines for buildings and facilities. As proposed, the guidelines accommodate typical roadway geometry, such as specifying grades and cross slopes for pedestrian access routes based on the established street grade. Projects involving existing streets and sidewalks may be further constrained by limited space and right-of-way availability, underlying terrain, underground structures, drainage, and other factors. The guidelines allow departures in alterations where existing physical constraints make compliance impracticable. These and other allowances will greatly mediate the impacts of the guidelines.

Won't requirements for accessible pedestrian signals cause noise pollution?

No. Current pedestrian signal devices, which have become the norm, feature discreet tones or ticks that indicate the location of nearby push buttons and tactile signals that silently vibrate to indicate walk cycles. The locator tone is not used to broadcast walk cycles. To be effective, the locator signal is designed to be audible only within the vicinity of the signal or push button. Earlier technologies that used louder chirps and tones to indicate walk cycles are no longer in use and are not required by the guidelines.

Why are requirements for detectable warnings, which were removed from the Board's facility guidelines, included in this rule?

The Board considers detectable warnings on curb ramps and blended transitions important in the public rights-of-way realm where hazards to people with vision impairments posed by vehicle traffic are greater. At facilities located on sites, such hazards are often reduced by lower traffic speeds, traffic calming measures, and pedestrian right-of-way. Detectable warnings re-establish a tactile boundary between pedestrian and vehicular ways that is taken away by the removal of curb faces at ramps and blended transitions. The proposed guidelines, like the Board's facility guidelines, also require detectable warnings along unprotected drop-offs at boarding platforms in transit stations.

What are the next steps in finalizing these requirements?

The Access Board will proceed to finalize the guidelines based on the public comments received on this proposal. Once finalized, the guidelines, though usable, will not actually be mandatory until implemented as enforceable standards by other agencies such as the Department of Transportation and the Department of Justice.

What should be applied to public rights-of-way under design at this time or in the near future?

Design guides and manuals on accessible public rights-of-ways and information gathered in the course of this rulemaking are available on the Board's [website](#) as interim resources until these guidelines are completed. In addition, the Board regularly provides technical assistance and training on this subject upon request. For further information, contact the Access Board at ta@access-board.gov (technical assistance), training@access-board.gov (training), (800) 872-2253 (v), or (800) 993-2822 (TTY).

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