

ADA PARATRANSIT PASSENGERS HANDBOOK

East Alabama Regional Planning & Development Commission
Areawide Community Transportation System
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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the East Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission's (EARPDC) Areawide Community Transportation System's (ACTS) ADA Complementary paratransit service. Whether you are a frequent user or a new rider, we continually strive to give you safe and reliable transportation. We have developed these procedures and guidelines over many years based on the changing needs of the passengers and our operation. This document also incorporates the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) as well as many additional Federal and State guidelines.

Please let us know of any suggestions you may have while using any of our services. Our goal is to provide you with exceptional service. We use highly trained drivers and accessible lift-equipped vehicles to provide the safest and quickest shared-ride possible for our paratransit service.

The ADA paratransit service complements our fixed route bus service by providing a comparable service to those individuals who can not use it for some or all trips, due to one or more disabilities. This program is a service in which the cooperation of each passenger is essential. It is necessary that both passengers and staff make the service the best and most effective for everyone by observing the following guidelines. It is important to understand that under the ADA, paratransit functions as a "safety net" for people whose disabilities prevent them from using the regular fixed route transit system. It is not intended to be a comprehensive system of transportation that meets all the needs of persons with disabilities. By statute, complementary paratransit must be provided a level of service that is comparable to that provided by the fixed-route system. (Public Law 10 1-336, Section 22.).

We're on the Internet! Look for the transportation page on the homepage of the EARPDC's web site. Our address is: www.earpdc.org

Note: All material made available to applicants and passengers of the ACTS complementary paratransit service will be provided in accessible formats upon request.

Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in employment, state and local government services, transportation, and communications. It ensures that persons with disabilities have the same rights and responsibilities as everyone else. The ACTS is required to comply with all requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

ADA Eligibility for Complementary Paratransit Services

ADA complementary paratransit service must be provided to all passengers described as being ADA eligible under 49 CFR §37.123. The Americans With Disabilities Act requires that all public bus systems provide Complementary Paratransit service for disabled persons who cannot independently use the bus service because of a disability. ADA eligibility includes the following:

1. Any individual with a disability who is unable, as a result of a physical or mental impairment (including a visual impairment), and without the assistance of another individual (not including driver assistance and the use of a lift or ramp to board the vehicle) to board, ride or disembark from an accessible vehicle in the system. Included in this category are individuals with psychiatric, cognitive, physical or vision impairments who cannot navigate the system.
2. Persons who need accessible vehicles are eligible for ADA complementary paratransit if accessible fixed-route vehicles are not available on the bus routes on which they need to travel, when they need to travel during operational hours of the ACTS.
3. Persons with specific impairment related conditions that cannot travel to a boarding location or from a disembarking location to their final destination. Conditions that make getting to the fixed-route bus stop “more difficult” do not grant eligibility. Second, the existence of architectural barriers (such as no curb cuts) not under the control of the ACTS, and environmental barriers (such as distance, terrain, and weather) do not, by themselves, confer eligibility.

Your trip origin and destination must be within the city limits of Anniston, Oxford, Weaver, Jacksonville, or Hobson City and the time of your trip must fall within the hours of the closest bus route. If you do not reside within the city limits of Anniston, Oxford, Weaver, Jacksonville, or Hobson City, then you must have the means of getting within our service area before transportation is provided.

How to Become Certified as ADA eligible for Complementary Paratransit Service

Eligibility applications for the ACTS's ADA complementary paratransit service are available at the ACTS's offices located at 1130 Quintard Avenue Suite 300, Anniston, AL 36201 or a request for a copy to be mailed can be made by calling the EARPDC office at 256-237-6741. Applications are also available for download from the ACTS's website located at <http://earpdc.org/pages/?pageID=28> by clicking on the ADA Application hyperlink. This site also includes hours of operation, holiday schedule, bus route map, weekly fixed-route schedule, and Saturday fixed-route schedule.

Once the application is received, the ACTS will notify the applicant within twenty-one (21) days of his/her eligibility status. If a determination has not been made within 21 days of receiving the completed application, the applicant will be treated as eligible and will be provided service on the 22nd until or unless The Transit Advisory Board denies the application. The applicant will receive a letter verifying whether eligible for service or not. If eligibility is denied, or temporary eligibility is granted, the Project Administrator, in a letter, will state specifically the reason for the denial and provide information on the appeal process.

Certification applications are available to anyone who requests them and are made available electronically at www.earpdc.org. Those determined to be eligible for service will receive an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Paratransit Eligibility card. For riders with permanent disabilities, Rider ID cards will be valid permanently, for persons with temporary disabilities, Rider ID cards will be valid for a length of time determined by the paratransit supervisor.

Temporary Disability Eligibility For Complementary Paratransit Service

Any individual with a temporary disability, for the purpose of determining ADA eligibility will be subject to the same standards as those with permanent disabilities.

Certification of eligibility in such cases will be subject to a specific expiration date. Those determined to be eligible for service will receive a ADA paratransit eligibility card. For riders with permanent disabilities, these rider ID cards will be valid permanently; for persons with temporary disabilities, riders ID cards will be valid for a length of time determined by the paratransit supervisor. An individual may apply for recertification before their eligibility expires if more time is needed.

Visitors

Visitors to the ACTS Service area who are unable to use the local fixed service, because of their disabilities are eligible to use paratransit for up to 21 days in a 365 day period. Visitors must either present documentation that they are eligible for ADA paratransit service in their home area, or document their place of residents and their disabilities (if not apparent) to ACTS. To use paratransit beyond the 21 day period, you will be required to apply for or obtain paratransit eligibility. Please call 256-237-6741 to arrange visitor service.

Appeals Process for Denial of ADA Eligibility

The ACTS has established an administrative appeals process through which an individual who has been denied ADA complementary paratransit eligibility can obtain review of the denial.

1. Appeal of the decision of the denial of ADA paratransit eligibility must be filed within 60 days of written notification of the denial. Appeals are to be sent to the Project Administrator for the ACTS.
2. Upon receipt of the denial, the ACTS will provide the individual with the opportunity to be heard and to present information and arguments to an individual not involved with the initial decision to deny eligibility. The ACTS will again provide a written determination as to the decision made upon completion of the appeals process and the reasons for it.
3. The ACTS will provide complementary paratransit service to the applicant pending the final determination of the appeal.
4. If a customer appeal is denied and the applicant thinks the ADA paratransit eligibility process was unfair, the applicant can file a complaint with the Federal Transit Administration Office of Civil Rights, Attention: Title VI Program Coordinator, East Building 5th Floor – TCR, 1200 New Jersey Ave., SE, Washington, DC 20590

Service Criteria

Under the ACTS's Complementary Paratransit Service Plan, the level of service provided to persons determined to be ADA eligible is similar to the ACTS's fixed-route bus service. Six service criteria are included in the ADA regulations. The following is a description of how The ACTS's complementary paratransit service meets or exceeds the six service criteria:

SERVICE AREA:

ADA complementary paratransit service is provided to all origins and destinations within the service area defined as the cities of Anniston, Oxford, Weaver, Jacksonville, and Hobson City.

RESPONSE TIME:

Pick up times may be negotiated with ADA eligible passengers to make scheduling more efficient. Appointments must be made the day prior to needed service. As a ride-sharing service, the ACTS will discuss and negotiate the pick up time at the time of reservation. The ACTS will not require passengers to schedule a trip more than one hour before or after their desired departure time.

FARE STRUCTURE:

Fares charged for an ADA eligible complementary service trip to ADA eligible users will be the same amount as the general public's fare paid to use the fixed-route system: \$1.00 per trip. Personal Care Attendants (PCA) traveling with the ADA eligible passengers will not be charged, as defined in the regulations. Passengers must be listed as having a PCA when filing the necessary application for ADA eligibility. A guest is required to pay the applicable paratransit fare.

TRIP PURPOSES:

Requests for all types of ADA eligible trips will be accepted and provided within the service area.

HOURS AND DAYS OF SERVICE:

Service Hours

Monday – Friday 6:00 am–6:00 pm Saturday 10:00 am–5:00 pm

Service will be limited on or not be provided on the following holidays:

New Year's Eve, New Year's Day, Martin Luther King Day, President's Day, Memorial Day, July 4th, Labor Day, Columbus Day, Thanksgiving, Christmas Day. For annual updated limited holiday service information, contact dispatch office at 256-231-0010.

CAPACITY CONSTRAINTS:

The ACTS does not maintain waiting lists which would constrain demand on paratransit capacity. The ACTS does not limit the number of ADA eligible complementary paratransit trips to ADA eligible passengers. Since ADA complementary paratransit is a shared ride service, paratransit rides between Point A and Point B will usually take longer, and involve more intermediate stops, than a taxi ride between the same two points with one passenger in the vehicle. The length of your trip will be about the same as if you had taken it on the fixed route bus system.

How Do I Schedule Trips?

Eligible riders may schedule all their trips by calling the ACTS dispatch office at 256-231-0010 between the hours of 8:00 AM and 5:00 PM, Monday through Friday. On Saturday, Sunday and holidays, passengers will be able to make reservations using the automated voice mail system between the hours of 8:00 AM and 4:00 PM. We encourage you to call during business hours Monday thru Friday when possible.

Trips may be scheduled one day in advance. Same-day requests will be considered only for medical reason and are not guaranteed. Trips scheduled on the previous day or up to two weeks before, are scheduled within one hour before or after the requested time. We cannot prioritize ADA complementary paratransit trips for any reason; Return trips must be scheduled when the “going” trip is scheduled. Only medical trips may have unscheduled returns and will be scheduled within an hour of ACTS paratransit being notified of the passenger being ready.

At the time of the reservation, the ACTS will negotiate pick up times with ADA eligible passengers to make scheduling more efficient. However, the ACTS will not require passengers to schedule a trip more than one hour before or after their desired departure time.

Pick up Window

The ACTS schedules pickups within a 30-minute pickup window to allow for traffic and other delays. That means, we give you a 30-minute period during which your driver should arrive. For example, if you ask to be picked up at 8:00 AM, your ride may arrive between 7:45 and 8:15 AM.

Be ready to leave as early as the start time of the pick up window. For example, if your pick up window is from 7:45 to 8:15 AM, you must be ready at 7:45 AM. If your

driver arrives early, he or she is only required to wait 5 minutes into the pick up window. For example, if your pick up window is from 7:45 to 8:15 AM and the driver arrives at 7:45 or earlier, you must be in the vehicle by 7:50 AM.

You are not required to board the vehicle until the pick up window begins, but you may board the vehicle early if you wish.

Pre-Trip Planning

The pathway between our vehicle and your pick-up point, i.e., entryways, sidewalks, ramps and driveways, must be clear of ice and snow for paratransit drivers to safely assist you. Some of our vehicles are very wide and tall. Any obstructions that we cannot avoid must be cleared before we pick up or drop off any passenger. Service may be denied if branches or obstructions damage our vehicles and are not removed or if we determine it is unsafe to complete a trip due to weather related concerns.

Attendant Policy

Personal Care Attendants (PCA) will be permitted to accompany ADA eligible riders on ADA eligible trips at no charge. The ACTS will require that passengers state the need for a PCA when they request ADA eligibility certification. At the time each appointment is scheduled, the passenger will inform the ACTS that a PCA will be accompanying them. One guest will be allowed to accompany an ADA eligible complementary paratransit passenger on their ADA eligible paratransit trip. More than one guest will be allowed on a space available basis. The PCA is not considered to be a “guest”. A guest is required to pay the applicable paratransit fare. A parent, guardian, or another responsible adult must accompany children under the age of 12.

The ACTS’s Driver Origin to Destination Assistance Policy

It is the policy of the ACTS to provide origin to destination complementary paratransit services within the city limits of Anniston, Oxford, Weaver, Jacksonville, and Hobson City. A door to door option is available if needed by an individual rider. Drivers are trained to provide minimal assistance only. Drivers are not trained to provide medical assistance. Drivers:

- Shall assist passengers in a manual wheelchair up/down 1 step or curb
- Shall assist with packages that can be safety controlled on the vehicle and can be carried (drivers can not pick up items that may cause injury)

- Shall open the door at the home and the destination for a passenger needing that assistance
- Shall assist pushing a manual wheelchair up or down a ramp unless exceedingly steep and would therefore cause direct threat to the driver's well being
- Shall keep the vehicle in sight to ensure the safety of any passengers on board as well as security of the vehicle itself
- Shall not enter homes or businesses to assist passengers
- Shall not retrieve items on a passenger's behalf such as going into a store to get their prescription medication from the pharmacy
- Shall ring exterior door bells when necessary
- Shall clear a path of small items so that a wheelchair can pass but will not move heavy objects or shovel snow

The ACTS shall not take any actions that would fundamentally alter the nature of the service or create undue burdens. The ACTS shall not provide additional personnel in addition to the driver to assist passengers.

Shopping Trips

To ensure timely service, passengers are encouraged only to bring what they can carry and control on their own or with assistance of a personal care attendant (PCA). Passengers are welcome to bring a collapsible shopping cart on board the vehicle to assist them with their purchases.

Recurring Subscription Trips (Weekly Trips)

A Subscription service is provided for the convenience of riders desiring service on a regular basis for medical and similar recurring weekly trips. This service eliminates the need for you to call daily or weekly to schedule a trip. We can also schedule trips that occur periodically every month i.e., 2nd Tuesday of the month.

Subscription scheduling may be requested by calling the office at 256-231-0010 during business hours. These trip requests will be accepted on a continual basis. After requests are received, passengers will be contacted and a pick-up time confirmed. Passengers wishing to change a subscription must give two weeks notice to the paratransit office. Any changes in a passengers' schedule, e.g vacation or break, must be called into the paratransit office at least two weeks in advance. This will allow other passengers to schedule trips in those time slots. No trip(s) will be cancelled automatically due to

weather or school closings, unless the ACTS fixed route is not running. Passengers are responsible for calling the office to ensure each cancellation.

Canceling Subscription Trips

Because we have such a high demand for subscription trips, passengers canceling one-third (33%) of their Subscription trips in one month may lose the time slot. Consideration will be given for vacations, illnesses, and work/school related meetings, unplanned and unusual circumstances. The ACTS will not *automatically cancel* any passenger trips, i.e. due to school closings, bad weather, etc., unless the ACTS fixed route is *not* running. Passengers must call in to report their individual cancellation(s).

Trip Cancellation Policy for a Scheduled Trip

Passengers may cancel up to 1 hour before scheduled pick-ups. The transit agency shall also cancel the trip 1 hour before scheduled pick-up. Any cancellation by the transit agency shall prompt the notification of affected passengers with explanation. Realizing there may be natural disasters, unavoidable maintenance issues, accidents, civil disturbances, and/or unforeseen events beyond the control of this agency may be cause for trip cancellation or denial. All affected passengers shall be notified as soon as possible.

There is no penalty for a cancellation as long as notice is given at least 1 hour or more hours before the start of the pickup window. Passengers are encouraged to give as much notice as possible if unable to make the appointment. We ask that passengers be cooperative in reducing cancellations. Cancellations are disruptive to the overall operation and the time could have been scheduled by another passenger. If a passenger cancels a trip less than an hour before the scheduled pick up time, it will be treated the same as a No Show.

Passengers should call the ACTS at 256-231-0010 as soon as known to cancel any trips. Cancellations can be made by leaving a message on the answering system 24 hours a day 7 days a week, but every effort should be made to call during business hours that are between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday.

No Show Definition and Policy

The ACTS defines a No Show as occurring when any of the following circumstances have occurred:

1. The customer (or the customer's representative) has scheduled ADA paratransit service. There has been no call by the customer or his/her representative to cancel the scheduled trip one (1) hour in advance of the scheduled pick up time.
 - The paratransit vehicle has arrived at the scheduled pickup point by the scheduled pick up time.
2. The driver has waited 5 minutes beyond the scheduled pick up time, but the customer has failed to board the vehicle or refuses a trip.

The following is the No Show policy for complementary paratransit:

1. If a passenger is not ready within the pick up window time or refuses a trip, the driver will be instructed by dispatch to continue with his/her regular schedule and the trip will be considered a No Show.
2. The drivers have been instructed to radio dispatch in the case of a No Show. When the driver notifies the office of the pending No Show, it must be verified by dispatch or a supervisor. Dispatch or the supervisor will then enter the information on the dispatch screen in the transit dispatching system.
3. The driver must mark the Driver Manifest as a No Show with the correct time of pick up and mileage. The driver will mark his/her manifest as "No Show". Information will also be displayed in verification for office staff to view.

Policy Relating to No Show

Any rider who fails to notify the paratransit office of a cancellation (No-Show) will first be warned. We understand that unforeseen circumstances occur to all of us. If you do not show for a trip, all remaining trips for that day must be confirmed. If confirmation is not made remaining trips will be canceled, unless you call and request that your remaining trips be provided.

Passengers are allowed 3 no-show appointments. After 3 consecutive no-shows—making an appointment and not being up at pick-up point without explanation—the

passenger may have his/her ridership privileges suspended for 1 week. Persistent and recurring no-shows by a passenger may lead to the loss of ridership privileges for longer periods of time. Each incident shall be evaluated on its own merits.

* No Shows that are out of the passengers control will not count*

Frequency of use or proportion of trips missed will be considered when determining a pattern or practice of no shows.

It is also considered a no-show if the passenger is not ready to board the vehicle within five (5) minutes of the scheduled pick-up time (ten minutes before and after the scheduled time) and the driver must leave in order to continue on schedule.

Suspensions will be delayed during the appeal process. All written notifications will be made two weeks prior to suspension of service.

Appeal Process for Suspension of Service Due To No Shows or Inappropriate Conduct

The ACTS has established an administrative appeals process through which an individual who has had service suspended due to excessive No Shows can obtain review of the suspension.

1. All suspensions of service due to No Shows are subject to a formal appeal, in person or in writing to the ACTS Project Administrator by mailing to: P. O. Box 2186, Anniston, AL 36202
2. Appeal of the decision to suspend service to an individual must be filed within 30 days of the written notification of the decision to suspend service.
3. The ACTS Project Administrator will review the written request and make a determination within fourteen (14) business days.

The customer will be notified in writing regarding the decision made by the ACTS Project Administrator as to the decision made upon completion of the appeals process and the reasons for it.

Types of Paratransit Service that Areawide Community Transportation System Offers

The ACTS's complementary paratransit service for ADA eligible users will be origin-to-destination service. This includes: paratransit service within the cities of Anniston, Oxford, Weaver, Jacksonville, and Hobson City.

Return Trips after Medical Appointment

When arranging for medical transportation, passengers are encouraged to schedule a return time at a pre-arranged location. This will help eliminate waiting for a driver to become available to transport the passenger home. If an approximate return time is not known, passengers can call 256-231-0010 when ready to return. A driver will be dispatched to pick up the passenger.

Lift and Securement Use Policy

In accordance with the regulations, The ACTS will provide service to all mobility devices and their users. A wheelchair is broadly defined as a three or four wheeled device that can be used indoors and is designed for and used by persons with mobility disabilities.

The ACTS shall carry a wheelchair and occupant if the lift and vehicle can physically accommodate them, unless doing so is inconsistent with legitimate safety requirements.

Legitimate safety requirements include such circumstances as a wheelchair of such size that it would block an aisle, or would be too large to fully enter a railcar, would block the vestibule, or would interfere with the safe evacuation of passengers in an emergency. Use of the Securement system on the ACTS's vehicles will be a required condition of service. Passengers must allow the driver to secure the chair per the wheel chair manufacturer's securement recommendation.

The ACTS may recommend that the passenger transfer from his or her mobility device into a bus seat. The passenger, in this case, has the final decision as to whether a transfer is appropriate given the passengers' particular disability.

As the regulations require, a passenger who cannot enter the vehicle using the stairs or ramp, but who does not use a wheelchair, will be allowed to enter the vehicle using the lift.

Accommodating Other Mobility Devices, Life Support Equipment or Service Animals

The ACTS will permit the use of a lift for other personal transportation devices when used as a mobility device by eligible customers as long as it does not exceed what the lift is designed to accommodate or would put the driver, passenger, other passengers, or vehicle in danger. Securement provisions do not apply.

In accordance with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), all paratransit passengers will be permitted to travel with a service animal trained to assist them. The DOT ADA regulations defines a service animal as any guide dog, signal dog or other animal individually trained to work or perform tasks for an individual with a disability. Animals that meet this definition are considered service animals under the ADA, regardless of whether they have been licensed or certified by a state or local government.

People with disabilities who use service animals will not be charged extra fees, isolated from other patrons, or treated less favorably than other patrons.

A person with a disability cannot be asked to remove his/her service animal from the premises unless: (1) the animal is out of control and the animal's owner does not take effective action to control it or (2) the animal poses a direct threat to the health or safety of others. The ACTS will not provide care or food for a service animal or provide a special location for it to relieve itself.

Allergies and fear of animals are generally not valid reasons for denying access or refusing service to people with service animals.

Passengers will also be permitted to travel with respirators, portable oxygen and other life support equipment. Travel with this equipment will only be denied if it violates rules concerning the transportation of hazardous materials.

RIDING THE FIXED ROUTE BUSES

Some paratransit passengers are able to ride the ACTS fixed route buses for some trips. The buses offer more flexibility and more independence to those who are able to use it. All of our buses allow persons using wheelchairs and persons with other mobility impairments greater access to them. All bus drivers will, deploy the ramp, kneel the bus, assist a person on and off the vehicle, secure wheelchairs, make stop announcements, and help passengers with transfers and route information. However, the bus driver *cannot* provide assistance after you exit the bus onto the sidewalk. Please call 256-231-0010 at least one day in

advance if you would like to schedule a transfer from a paratransit vehicle to a bus.

SAFETY

All passengers are required to use seatbelts and/or wheelchair securement devices. No tobacco products, alcohol or illegal substances will be consumed on ACTS vehicles. No open alcoholic beverages are allowed on board the vans.

Passengers carrying hazardous materials (i.e., kerosene, gasoline, firearms, and explosives) will not be allowed on ACTS vehicles.

If a passenger engages in violent, seriously disruptive or illegal conduct, the passenger will be suspended from the service.

SUMMARY OF TELEPHONE NUMBERS

ADA information and general inquiries:

256-237-6741

TTY users may call the Alabama Relay Center at: 711

ADA appointments and cancellations: 256-231-0010

ADA complaints or compliments: Shane Christian: 256-237-6741

Federal Transit Administration Office of Civil Rights:

Voice: 1-404-865-5600

FAX: 404-865-5605

Federal Transit Administration Office of Civil Rights

Attention: Title VI Program Coordinator

East Building 5th Floor – TCR

1200 New Jersey Ave., SE

Washington, DC 20590