

City of Albany Paratransit Policy Book



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Paratransit Policies

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Call-A-Ride Eligibility

Determining Eligibility. Individuals are not qualified or disqualified for ADA paratransit service based on a specific medical diagnosis or disability. To ascertain if the individual fits the criteria, it is necessary to determine whether or not an individual's disability prevents him/her from utilizing any of the fixed route services provided by ATS. This determination will be made using the following four tests:

1. Does the disability prevent the individual from getting to and from a station/stop at point of origin or destination? If yes, then the trip is eligible. A distinction is made in the regulations between those who have difficulty (or simply find it unpleasant) to travel to or from a bus stop and those whose disability *prevents* them from doing so.
2. Can the individual board and utilize the vehicle at the station/stop? If the vehicle is inaccessible, the person is eligible.
3. Can the individual independently recognize the destination and disembark? If no, the trip is eligible. This test will form the basis of eligibility for many individuals with visual impairments and developmental cognitive disabilities.
4. If a trip involves transfers and connections, are the paths of travel between lines or modes accessible and navigable by the individual? If no, the trip is eligible.

Eligibility Process. Albany Transit staff mails application forms to those who request them. Alternate versions of the application form are available if necessary. Completed applications are reviewed and processed by staff to determine eligibility. A determination will be made within 21 days of the receipt of a completed application. The applicant will be notified in writing, or another appropriate format if requested. All new clients will be given a copy of the Paratransit Policy Book. Applicants may either accept or appeal their eligibility determination.

Denial of Eligibility. The applicant shall be notified in writing (and such other format as requested in the application for service) of the initial ADA eligibility determination. If eligibility has been denied or is subject to conditions, information describing the appeals process shall be included in the notification to the applicant.

ADA Paratransit service shall not be provided to the appellant pending the determination appeal, except as otherwise approved by the initial eligibility determination or as noted in the appeals process.

Suspension of Eligibility. At times, the ATS Paratransit Service may suspend eligibility for an ADA rider. Persons who demonstrate a consistent pattern of missing scheduled paratransit trips may lose their eligibility for a period of time. Individuals whose behavior is extremely disruptive or threatening may also have their service suspended for a period of time.

Before suspending service, ATS shall notify the individual in writing (and such other format as requested in the application for service) that ATS proposes to suspend service. The notification shall cite the basis of the proposed suspension, set for the proposed sanction, and provide information describing the appeals process. In these instances, the individual shall remain eligible for paratransit service during the appeal pendency.

Termination of Eligibility. A person whose behavior threatens or has threatened the safety of paratransit personnel or other riders, may be denied the service. The denial of service shall be documented by the person or persons denying the service. If the denial of service extends beyond the time of the originating incident, the ATS shall notify the individual in writing (and such other format as requested in the application for service) that ATS has terminated their eligibility, citing the basis of the termination. Information describing the appeals process shall be included in the notification. Because of the circumstances initiating the denial of service, no service shall be provided during the appeals process.

Appeals. An individual may appeal a negative eligibility or suspension or termination decision to an Albany Paratransit Appeals Board appointed by the City of Albany. The APS Appeals Board shall not have been involved in the decision being appealed.

An appeal of an eligibility determination must be filed within 60 days of the date of the eligibility notice. An appeal of a termination or proposed suspension must be filed within ten (10) days of the dated of termination or proposed suspension notice. An appeal shall not be considered if it is not received by the Albany Transit System within the specified time limit.

The appeal must be in written or audio form and may be completed by a third party if the individual desires. The appeal must include the following information: the appellant's name, address, and telephone number; and the reason for the appeal.

If an appeal is filed within the appropriate time period, and contains the required information, the APS Appeals Board shall set the date, time, and place of the hearing. The appellant shall then be notified. The appellant shall have an opportunity to be heard and to present information and arguments at the hearing. The appellant shall be provided with any necessary support (e.g. sign language interpreter, etc.) if requested in the appeal. The appellant and an ATS representative may present evidence, including the testimony of witnesses, in support of or in opposition to the appellant's case.

The APS Appeals Board's decision and the reasons for it shall be provided to the appellant in writing and such other format as requested in the application. The decision of the APS Appeals Board is final.

If an appeal has not be decided within 30 days of the completion of the hearing ATS shall provide paratransit service from that time until a decision to deny the appeal has been issued.

Service Area

The Albany Call-A-Ride service area includes the entire city of Albany and extends out to $\frac{3}{4}$ mile beyond Albany city limits. Service is also available between the cities of Albany and Millersburg.

Service Hours

Call-A-Ride operates during the same hours as Albany Transit, Monday through Friday 6:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Additionally, Call-A-Ride service is available Saturday from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Service Delivery

Call-A-Ride service operates from origin to destination. Generally, drivers will pick up and drop off clients at the curb although drivers will provide door-to-door service when requested in advance. In that case, drivers may escort passengers to and from the main door of their pick-up and drop-off locations and help passengers get on and off the vehicle. Drivers may stow small personal belongings. Passengers who

need other types of help, such as filling prescriptions, managing several bags or packages, etc., are advised to bring along a personal care attendant (PCA). Reasonable accommodations will be made to facilitate travel between the vehicle and the origin/destination doorway, provided these accommodations do not place an undue burden on the driver or other passengers.

Attendants

As required by ADA, customers may be accompanied by a personal care attendant (PCA). Riders must be able to get to and from the vehicle with only minimal assistance from the driver or must provide a PCA. Drivers will not perform the duties of a PCA. A personal care attendant assists the passenger with daily life functions and may provide assistance during the ride or at the destination. Customers who need assistance to travel are strongly encouraged to ride with a personal attendant. Riders needing such help must make their own arrangements for this assistance. PCA's may be a friend or family member or may be a paid employee of the eligible person. The PCA serves as a mobility aid to the eligible person. The need for a PCA must be noted on the application form at the time of eligibility certification.

Personal attendants are not required to pay fares and must be picked up and dropped off at the same locations as the passenger. A passenger's need for a personal attendant must be registered with the Albany Paratransit program.

Companions

An eligible individual may travel with at least one guest. Additional guests may accompany the ADA client on a space-available basis. Confirmed reservations for additional guests are restricted to the day of the trip. The fare for each guest will be the same as for the ADA eligible customer.

Mobility Aids

ADA eligible riders may travel using mobility aids. Mobility aids may include, but are not limited to the following: canes, walkers, wheelchairs, Personal Care Attendants, service animals such as guide dogs, respirators, portable oxygen, and other life support systems. Aids may not accompany the rider if they would violate rules concerning the transportation of hazardous materials.

All "common wheelchairs" will be transported providing their user is ADA eligible. A "common wheelchair" is a wheelchair that does not exceed 30 inches in width and 48 inches in length measured two inches above the ground, and does not weigh more than 600 pounds when occupied. Both three-wheeled and four wheeled mobility aids will be transported if they are within the size requirements listed above. All wheelchairs must be secured during transportation. Functional brakes are required on all wheelchairs.

Reservations

Paratransit trips must be reserved in advance. Reservations may be requested between 14 days and 24 hours in advance of the time of the trip. The reservation line is open from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Monday through Friday, and is closed on all City holidays. Clients may call outside regular hours and leave a reservation request as a voicemail message. Those messages are checked prior to the start of business the next business day and are date and time-stamped. Same-day service is not normally provided.

Clients may request a time for their trip and that time may be negotiated by searching for available space up to one hour before and after the requested time. If no time is available, ADA clients may bump non-ADA clients. Non-ADA clients who are bumped from their reservation will be contacted to reschedule their trip.

Return trips must be scheduled. Clients are encouraged to use their best estimate of a return time. Requests for an early return are considered in the same way as same-day ride requests and will not normally be accommodated.

Standing rides, or subscription service, is offered where available based on time, geography and route. Standing rides are scheduled by the supervisor.

Cancellations and No-Shows

Passengers are given a 20-minute pickup window in which the vehicle will arrive. For example, if the negotiated ready time is 8:00 a.m., the 20-minute pickup window is 8:00 a.m. to 8:20 a.m. The passenger is required to be ready to board at 8:00 a.m., and the vehicle is considered late beginning at 8:21 a.m. When the vehicle arrives within the pickup window, the driver will wait no more than five minutes. If the vehicle arrives before the pickup window starts, the passenger may board if they are ready. If the passenger is not ready, the driver will wait until the pickup window starts and then an additional five minutes. If the passenger is not available to board by the end of the five-minute waiting period, and did not cancel the reservation at least one hour in advance, then the trip is considered a no-show.

A rider's eligibility will be suspended for a documented pattern, within any 30-day period, of misuse of system capacity within the rider's control. A system of graduated suspensions is available as follows: first suspension, seven days; second suspension, 14 days; third suspension, 30 days. As required by ADA regulations, the policy states that suspensions will not be imposed for circumstances that are beyond the rider's control, such as:

- A sudden personal emergency
- Sudden or worsening illness
- Technical difficulty with Albany Paratransit phone lines
- Late arrival of the vehicle
- Disruptive behavior caused by a disability

The suspension policy does not specify how many no-shows would amount to a pattern of misuse of system capacity. Letters are sent to riders who have multiple no-shows explaining how no-shows affect other riders. Riders who cancel their trips less than one hour before the scheduled pick-up time are asked about their reasons, and each case is classified as justified or not.

Cargo

Albany Call-A-Ride drivers may assist clients by stowing small personal belongings and up to four grocery store bags. Passengers who need other types of help, such as filling prescriptions, managing several bags or packages, or carrying excessively heavy items, are advised to bring along a personal care attendant (PCA).