

“THE RIDE” AND OTHER PARATRANSIT SERVICES FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN MASSACHUSETTS

**Prepared by the Mental Health Legal Advisors Committee
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PARATRANSIT SERVICES (SUCH AS THE RIDE)¹

About paratransit services

Paratransit is a low-cost curb-to-curb transportation service that will take you to and from your destination. Paratransit services serve individuals with disabilities who are unable to access fixed-route bus, train, and trolley services. Paratransit services are a more flexible version of public transportation for persons with disabilities. In many instances, the Americans with Disabilities Act requires a city or town to make paratransit services available if that city or town operates a fixed-route bus or rail system.² Drivers receive sensitivity and safety training.³

Benefits

If you qualify for paratransit services, you:

- may use the services as often as you like during the same days and hours that the fixed-route service is running;⁴
- may use the services for any purpose;⁵
- must pay for your trips (you will pay no more than twice the fare that you would pay for a fixed route bus trip);⁶
- may bring a personal care assistant with you for free;⁷
- may bring additional companions with you if space permits, but they must pay for their ride.⁸

Eligibility

Generally, in order to qualify for paratransit services an individual must:

- be unable to board, ride, or disembark from public transportation as a result of a physical or mental disability; or
- require a wheelchair lift or other boarding assistance device that public transportation is not equipped to accommodate.⁹

¹ The information for this section was largely drawn from <http://www.massresources.org/ada-paratransit.html> and http://www.mbta.com/riding_the_t/accessible_services/?id=7108.

² 49 CFR 37.121.

³ 49 CFR 37.173.

⁴ 49 CFR 37.131 (e).

⁵ 49 CFR 37.131(d).

⁶ 49 CFR 37.131(c).

⁷ 49 CFR 37.131(c)(3).

⁸ 49 CFR 37.131(c)(2).

⁹ 49 CFR 37.123(e).

If you have a temporary disability, you may be eligible for temporary paratransit services as long as that disability persists.¹⁰

How to apply

You will have to submit an application to your local transit authority. Once you apply, the transit authority will have 21 days to make a written determination of eligibility.¹¹ If you are found ineligible, the transit authority must include reasons for its finding.¹² You may appeal this denial.¹³ If you are approved, you should receive written information that includes the name and contact number of the local paratransit provider so that you can begin to use the services.¹⁴

Communities served by the MBTA: THE RIDE

Benefits

The MBTA's paratransit service is known as THE RIDE. THE RIDE serves over 60 cities and towns in the greater Boston area. This service provides door-to-door transportation.

Customers of THE RIDE must schedule their trips in advance, and they may have to share a vehicle with other customers traveling to or from similar locations. Individuals are not restricted to any particular destinations. Vehicles may be equipped with wheelchair lifts.

Eligibility

To be eligible for THE RIDE, you must satisfy the requirements mentioned above. According to the MBTA, this means that you must be unable to use public transportation all or some of the time due to mental, physical, or cognitive disability.¹⁵

How to apply

An application must be submitted to the MBTA for approval. Individuals who live in communities served by the MBTA can request an application for THE RIDE at 1-800-533-6282 (TTY: 617-222-5415). The application and additional information about THE RIDE are also available online at http://www.mbta.com/customer_support/feedback/.

The application will ask you many questions about your mobility. The questions will cover the nature of your disability, whether you require a mobility device (such as a wheelchair, cane, or service animal), whether you require a ramp or lift, your ability to walk certain distances, and your ability to wait outside, among other questions. Your doctor or health care professional will be asked to complete a portion of the application as well.

If you have a complaint, comment, or concern about THE RIDE you can contact the Administrative Office of the Office for Transportation Access at (617) 222-5123, (800) 533-

¹⁰ 49 CFR 37.123(c).

¹¹ 49 CFR 37.125(c).

¹² 49 CFR 37.125(d).

¹³ 49 CFR 37.125(g).

¹⁴ 49 CFR 37.125(e).

¹⁵ http://www.mbta.com/riding_the_t/accessible_services/default.asp?id=7108.

6282, and TTY at (617) 222-5415. Complaints will be responded to within 10 calendar days.¹⁶ There is also a comment and complaint form available online at [http://www.mbta.com/uploadedFiles/documents/RIDEGUIDE120107R1.7\(1\).pdf](http://www.mbta.com/uploadedFiles/documents/RIDEGUIDE120107R1.7(1).pdf).

Communities outside MBTA service area

Individuals who live in areas that are not served by the MBTA must contact their local regional transit authority to find out about paratransit services. Regional transit authorities can be found online at <http://www.massdot.state.ma.us/transit/RegionalTransitAuthorities.aspx> and also in the phone book.

Individuals who live in communities not served by the MBTA should contact their local transit authority to request a paratransit application.

¹⁶ [http://www.mbta.com/uploadedFiles/documents/RIDEGUIDE120107R1.7\(1\).pdf](http://www.mbta.com/uploadedFiles/documents/RIDEGUIDE120107R1.7(1).pdf).