

# Transition Truths: Transportation

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The transportation system helps Americans safely and efficiently move from place to place.

## How this System Works

The Transportation system consists of the people, places, policies, and programs that work to make sure everyone has access to transit services that allow them to get safely where they need to go, whether to the grocery store or to work. Not everyone can drive independently in privately owned vehicles like cars, so it is important that public transportation be available and accessible to meet the needs of Americans in both urban and rural settings.

## People and Places

The people in this system include passengers, drivers, pilots, train conductors, engineers who build and maintain roads, federal and local police, and policymakers. The places in this system are public transportation hubs like bus stations, train stations, and airports, as well as taxi stations and companies that operate school buses or paratransit services. The nation's infrastructure like roads, bridges, and rails are also an important part of making this system work. At the federal level, the [U.S. Department of Transportation](#) is tasked with overseeing this system and making sure it works.

## Policies and Programs

In 1966, the [National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act](#) required that automobile manufacturers meet certain safety standards to prevent accidents that occur from the design and operation of cars and other vehicles. A similar law passed in the same year, the [Highway Safety Act](#), focused on safety standards for highway design and also created the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to monitor these standards.

A number of laws exist to promote equal access to transportation for all people, including people with disabilities. The [Air Carrier Access Act](#), the [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#), and the [Over-the-Road Bus Transportation Accessibility Act](#) all prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability when using various forms of transportation, including but not limited to buses, airlines, taxis, and subways. For the purposes of the ADA, it is important to distinguish a fixed route bus or rail service, which provides transportation to people along a specific path that does not change. City bus or subway services are examples of fixed route public transportation.

For people who cannot access fixed route bus or rail services, the ADA requires transit agencies to offer paratransit services, and to create a specific process for how to become eligible for these services based on the categories listed below. In general, paratransit service must be provided within 0.75 miles of a bus route or rail station, at the same hours and days, for no more than twice the regular fixed route fare. The ADA further requires that paratransit rides be provided to all eligible riders (if requested any time the previous day) within an hour of the requested time.

## Eligibility

The ADA guarantees that individuals with disabilities have equal opportunity to access and make use of public transportation. For example, public transit buses along a fixed route must be accessible, and so must paratransit services needed by individuals who cannot use public transit systems because they fall into one of the eligibility categories listed below.

The ADA outlines different categories of eligibility for paratransit services.

- **Category 1 (Can't Navigate the System):** People who cannot travel on a bus/train (even if it is physically accessible) due to a disability such as a cognitive disability (meaning they may not know how to use the bus or get to their destination from the bus stop) or visual impairment (meaning that they may not have the travel skills to travel alone or may see well enough to travel independently during the day but not at night).
- **Category 2 (Needs an Accessible Bus):** People who need an accessible bus or train such as wheelchair users (who want to travel, but their route or station is still physically inaccessible).
- **Category 3 (Specific Impairment-Related Conditions):** People who have a specific disability-related condition that prevents them from traveling to or from a boarding or disembarking location. Environmental barriers (distance, terrain, weather) or architectural barriers not under the control of the transit agency (such as lack of curb ramps) that prevent an individual from traveling to or from the boarding or disembarking locations may form the basis for eligibility. This category also takes into account people with disabilities that affect them very differently over time. For example, people with multiple sclerosis might sometimes be unable to go to the bus stop or train station, while at other times they may be able to make the trip on their own.