

29.1 General Discussion

This chapter summarizes the regulations and implementing requirements local agencies shall follow regarding services, programs, and activities in or that affect the public right of way.

Section 504 of the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504)* states that no person with a disability shall be excluded from participation in, denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity that receives Federal funding. This includes both transportation and non-transportation funding. Transportation funding includes funding from the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) or the operating administrations under it (Federal Highway Administration, Federal Transit Administration, Federal Railroad Administration, Federal Aviation Administration, Research and Special Programs Administration, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, or the U.S. Coast Guard).

Section 504 extends to the entire operations of a recipient or subrecipient, regardless of the specific funding source of a particular operation. Section 504 Regulations ([49 CFR Part 27.5](#)) define a recipient as any public entity that receives Federal financial assistance from the USDOT or its operating administrations either directly or through another recipient. An example of a recipient is WSDOT an example of a subrecipient is a local agency receiving USDOT funds through WSDOT, for projects/programs/activities administered by the local agency.

All public entities shall follow *the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA)*, regardless of funding sources. The ADA is mirrored after Section 504 but extends the reach of Federal accessibility laws to include those agencies that are not recipients or subrecipients of Federal funding. Title II ([28 CFR Part 35](#)) of the ADA specifically pertains to state and local governments.

The respective Federal funding agency (FHWA) and WSDOT will ensure that local agencies comply with Section 504 and the ADA. For more information about Section 504 and the ADA, please see WSDOT Equal Opportunity ADA website: www.wsdot.wa.gov/EqualOpportunity/ADA.htm

Local agency public works staff should also refer to [Chapter 42](#) of the Local Agency Guidelines (LAG) for technical information specific to public right-of-way facilities.

29.2 Assurances

Each local agency that receives Federal funding from the USDOT or its operating administrations (such as FHWA) shall submit a written assurance that all of its services, programs, and activities will be conducted in compliance with Section 504 and the ADA. The assurance shall be signed by the Agency Executive, and submitted to each agency (such as WSDOT) administering funds for the USDOT or an operating administration.

Federal aid projects administered through WSDOT require a Local Agency Agreement between the local agency and WSDOT. That agreement may serve as the local agency's assurance of compliance with Section 504 and the ADA if it is signed by the Agency Executive and states the following:

In accordance with Section 504 and the ADA, the Agency shall not discriminate on the basis of disability in any of its programs, services, or activities.

29.3 Administrative Requirements

The following list and [Appendix 29.11](#) summarize some of the key requirements of Section 504 and the ADA. Note that when a requirement cites a number of employees, that number is the number of paid permanent, temporary, and contract employees regardless of whether the employees are full or part time.

- Each agency, regardless of the number of employees and funding sources, shall ensure that its services, programs, and activities are accessible to persons with disabilities. Some things this includes are:
 - Transportation and community evacuation elements of emergency management programs/plans
 - Communications. Communications with persons with disabilities shall be as effective as communications with other persons. This applies to all forms of communications, including information posted on an agency's website (ref. Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act and the ADA), emergency services communications, pedestrian signal systems, etc.
 - Maintenance of programs and facilities. This includes maintaining accessibility of pedestrian facilities that may be impacted by overgrown vegetation, snow/ice, severe heaving/cracking of surfaces, construction work zones, etc. Pedestrian signals/pushbuttons must also be accessible and maintained in working order.
 - New construction and altered facilities.
- Each agency regardless of the number of employees shall designate at least one person as its ADA/504 Coordinator. The individual designated as the ADA/504 Coordinator is responsible for coordinating ADA/Section 504 compliance throughout the agency. The agency shall provide the name, office address, and telephone number of the ADA/504 Coordinator both internally and externally. This information is required to be posted in areas likely to be viewed by employees and the public (such as the agency's Web page, etc.).
- Each agency regardless of the number of employees shall adopt and publish grievance/complaint procedures. These procedures shall be posted internally and externally and be made available in alternative formats that address the needs of persons with mobility, visual, and hearing disabilities. This information is required to be posted in areas likely to be viewed by employees and the general public (such as the agency's Web page).

- Each agency, regardless of the number of employees, shall provide public notice of its ADA provisions. This notice shall contain a brief description about how the agency will address ADA accessibility in its employment, communications, policies, and resolution of complaints. This notice shall be placed in locations and/or facilities that are accessible internally and externally and be available in alternative formats that address the needs of persons with mobility, visual, and hearing disabilities. Information placed on the agency's Web page counts as posting externally.
- Each agency, regardless of the number of employees, shall conduct a self-evaluation of its policies, programs, services, and activities to determine whether Section 504/ADA accessibility requirements are being met. This includes all public right-of-way facilities. See [Appendix 29.11](#). Each agency shall provide an opportunity for interested parties (i.e., persons with disabilities/advocacy groups) to participate in the process.
- Each agency with 50 or more employees shall develop a transition plan (See Section 29.4) when structural modifications, identified through a self-evaluation process, are necessary to achieve program accessibility under the ADA. While Section 504 regulations contain similar requirements, there is no employee threshold and the regulation is not as descriptive as the ADA regulations. Therefore, each agency with fewer than 50 employees that is a recipient or subrecipient of Federal financial assistance shall develop a program access plan. See [Section 29.4](#) for the requirements of these plans.

An agency's self-evaluation and transition plan must cover all of the agency's programs (including facilities), services, and activities. The information contained in this chapter is intended to provide local agency transportation departments (i.e., public works) with guidance/expectations for addressing ADA accessibility requirements associated with public right-of-way facilities.

29.4 Transition Plan, Program Access Plan, and Accessible Pedestrian Signal and Pushbutton Policy

Each agency shall provide an opportunity for interested parties (i.e., persons with disabilities/advocacy groups) to participate in the process to develop a transition plan or program access plan.

FHWA considers transition plans and program access plans to be living documents. The applicable plan should be used in conjunction with the planning and prioritizing of projects, and for monitoring progress on completing modifications. If the time period of the plan is longer than one year, the plan shall identify steps that will be taken during each year of the transition period.

Transition Plan

As stated in [Section 29.3](#) of this chapter, agencies with 50 or more employees (ADA), regardless of funding source, shall develop a transition plan when structural modifications are necessary to achieve ADA compliance.

Plans are to be updated a minimum of every 5 years until structural modifications are no longer necessary to achieve ADA compliance. Plans should include a tabulation of maximum extent feasible documentation prepared for the local agency ADA facilities.

Based on the agency's self-evaluation, at a minimum the plan shall:

- Identify the physical obstacles in the public entity's facilities that limit the accessibility of its programs or activities to individuals with disabilities, including those within the public right of way.
- Describe in detail the methods that will be used to make the facilities accessible.
- Specify the schedule for each facility and/or obstacle to be retrofitted. FHWA recommends that an agency include the estimated cost of each modification as part of the schedule, to assist in the budget and/or Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) preparation.
- Identify the official responsible for implementation of the plan. This is typically the agency's Executive, or the agency's designated ADA/504 Coordinator who has the authority to act on behalf of the agency's Executive.

The local agency's transition plan is a living document and should be updated periodically (every 3-5 years) to ensure the ongoing needs of the community continue to be met. New or updated transition plan are submitted to the WSDOT Office of Equity and Civil Rights (OECR) for review. OECR will review the new or updated plan and provide feedback based on WSDOT's transition plan rubric located in appendix X. The Rubric will assess transition plans across seven categories using a scoring standard of exceeds minimum criteria, acceptable, and unacceptable. The Rubric's seven categories are as follows:

- **Category One** - Official Responsible for Implementation of ADA Transition Plan. Every transition plan should include the name, title, and role of the Official responsible for implementing the plan.
- **Category Two** - Inventory of Barriers. At a minimum all plans should include results of inventory and assessments for at least two ADA-related features (best practice minimum - sidewalks and curb ramps or curb ramps and pedestrian signals.)
- **Category Three** - Modification Schedule. At a minimum all plans shall show a commitment toward upgrading ADA elements identified in the inventory of barriers in the short term (planned capital improvement projects) and a recognition of priority of curb ramps at walkways serving entities covered by the ADA. 28 CFR 35.150(d)(2)
- **Category Four** - Accessibility Methods. Plans must describe the methods that will be used to make the facilities accessible.
- **Category Five** - Public Involvement. All plans must include a description of the process for allowing the public to readily access and submit comments regarding the transition plan.
- **Category Six** - ADA Policy Statement. Although not required of local agencies, nevertheless it is a best practice for agencies to mention and provide a link to their ADA policy statement.
- **Category Seven** - Complaint/Request/Grievance Process. Every plan must have basic information to inform individuals on how to submit a request for accommodation or file a formal complaint.

Upon finishing its review, WSDOT OECR will provide local agencies a written response of any deficiencies and a copy of the completed rubric pertaining to their transition plans with 30 days of submittal. Agencies are encouraged to correct all categories scored in the rubric as applicable. WSDOT will not take any action other than providing agencies a copy of the rubric results. If transition plans remain incomplete, this may be a factor in determining whether a local agency remains eligible for state or federal funds. In this case, OECR will work with local agencies on taking the appropriate actions necessary to achieve compliance.

Program Access Plan

As stated in [Section 29.3](#), agencies with fewer than 50 employees and a recipient of Federal financial assistance are required to develop a program access plan. Similar to a transition plan, agencies shall:

- Identify the physical obstacles in the public entity's facilities that limit the accessibility of its programs or activities to individuals with disabilities, including those within the public right of way.
- Describe in detail the methods/actions needed to make the facilities accessible.
- Specify a schedule (milestones) of when the agency plans to make the necessary modifications.

Accessible Pedestrian Signal and Pushbutton (APS) Policy

Based on input from the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), it is FHWA's policy to require recipients and subrecipients (of FHWA funding) to establish a "reasonable and consistent" policy for installing accessible pedestrian signals and pushbuttons (APS) on all alteration and new construction projects, consistent with the requirements of Title II of the ADA ([28 CFR Part 35.151](#)) and Section 504 regulations ([49 CFR Part 27.7\(c\)](#)). This policy should be part of a transition plan, program access plan, or a stand-alone document if a transition plan or program access plan has not yet been completed. FHWA and WSDOT will work with local agencies to ensure that all new and altered pedestrian signal and pushbutton installations are usable by persons with visual disabilities.

29.5 Requirements for New Construction and Alterations in the Public Right of Way

Title II of the ADA requires that new and altered facilities be designed and constructed to be readily accessible to and usable by persons with disabilities.

New Construction

New construction projects address the construction of a new roadway, interchange, or other transportation facility where none existed before. New construction is expected to meet the highest level of ADA accessibility unless it is structurally impracticable to achieve full compliance. Full compliance will be considered structurally impracticable only when, in rare circumstances, the unique characteristics of terrain prevent full compliance.

Alterations

Most of construction projects undertaken by local agency public works/transportation departments are classified as alterations. An alteration is a change that affects or could affect the usability of a facility or part of a facility. Alterations include reconstruction, major rehabilitation, widening, resurfacing (e.g., asphalt overlays and mill and fill), signal installation and upgrades, and projects of similar scale and effect. Alterations to existing facilities shall meet new construction standards unless it is technically infeasible to do so. If full ADA compliance cannot be achieved in an alteration, the agency shall alter the facility to provide the maximum degree of accessibility possible. The feasibility meant by this standard is physical possibility only. Neither cost nor schedule are factors in determining whether the ADA standards can be met, nor are they factors in determining the feasibility of complying with the standard.

An alteration project shall be planned, designed, and constructed so that the required accessibility improvements occur at the same time as the alteration. If a project involves resurfacing the street, connections between the sidewalk and street crossings (i.e., curb ramps) are within the scope of the alteration project. Any accessibility issues shall be addressed in conjunction with the resurfacing project, either prior to or at the same time as the resurfacing project. For the requirements for curb ramps during resurfacing projects, see USDOJ-USDOT's Joint Technical Assistance document, dated July 8, 2013, and the Supplement to this document, dated December 1, 2015; and a FHWA recorded webinar from FHWA, dated March 1, 2016.

Safe Harbor for Alterations

Both the Section 504 and ADA requirements contain a "safe harbor" provision. However, there is a difference in the timeline associated with the Section 504 safe harbor provision and the ADA safe harbor provision.

If an agency receives Federal financial assistance from USDOT – either directly or through another USDOT recipient (such as WSDOT), the agency is subject to the 2004 ADA Accessibility Guidelines (2004 ADAAG).

This became effective in 2006 when the USDOT adopted the 2004 ADA Accessibility Guideline (2004 ADAAG) into its Section 504 regulations. This document is known as the 2004 ADA Standards. The 2004 Standards have a "safe harbor" provision for curb ramps. The provision is that if a curb ramp was constructed or altered prior to November 29, 2006, and complies with either the 1991 ADA Standards for Accessible Design (1991 ADA Accessibility Guidelines) or the Uniform Federal Accessibility Standards (UFAS), it does not need to be modified as part of a roadway resurfacing project. If this is not the case, or if the curb ramp is in disrepair, then the curb ramp and its detectable warnings (truncated domes) must be brought into compliance with the 2004 Standards at the time of an alternation. If an agency receives Federal financial assistance from USDOT – either directly or through another DOT recipient (such as WSDOT), then the agency is subject to the 2004 ADAAG as part of the USDOT Section 504 regulations.

For those agencies who are not a recipient or subrecipient of Federal financial assistance from USDOT, the safe harbor provision in the 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design (2010 Standards) applies. Under the 2010 Standards' safe harbor provision, if curb ramps were built or altered (in existing facilities) prior to March 15, 2012 and if they comply with the 1991 Standards or the UFAS, they do not need to be modified as part of a resurfacing project.

However, if an existing curb ramp does not comply with either the 1991 Standards or the UFAS (including if the curb ramp is in a state of disrepair), then the Safe Harbor provision does not apply and the curb ramp would need to be brought into compliance with the 2010 Standards at the time of roadway alteration.

When curb ramps or abutting sidewalks abutting ramps are altered, they shall be reconstructed to meet the 2010 Standards. For additional curb ramp design guidance, see LAG Manual [Chapter 42](#).

Documentation for Structural Impracticability and Maximum Extent Feasible

While ADA/Section 504 regulations do not require documentation of the application of structural impracticability nor maximum extent feasible, both FHWA and the U.S. Access Board recommend that these instances be documented so the agency can support its decisions if challenged at a later date. The documentation of these instances should reveal the standard of care that guided engineering judgments. While careful documentation will not protect an agency against complaint, evidence of the considerations that led to the specific project solution may be persuasive in discussions with stakeholders or in court.

As described in the *Design Manual*, WSDOT has a documentation procedure for applications of maximum extent feasible in alteration projects on state routes. If a local agency applies maximum extent feasible to a pedestrian facility located on a state route, it is WSDOT's expectation that the agency follows the WSDOT documentation procedure described in the *Design Manual*. The completed documentation should be contained in local agency project files to document the agencies design efforts in complying with the ADA/Section 504 requirements.

If a local agency finds the need to apply maximum extent feasible to a pedestrian facility that is not located on a state route, the WSDOT documentation procedure does not need to be followed. However, it is highly recommended that the agency develops its own documentation protocol for such situations that is consistent with the FHWA and U.S. Access Board recommendations.

29.6 Monitoring and Enforcement

Responsibility for monitoring and enforcement of Section 504 rests with the Federal funding agency (such as FHWA). While USDOJ has the ultimate enforcement authority for ADA compliance, USDOJ has delegated monitoring and enforcement responsibility to several Federal executive agencies including the USDOT and its operating administrations (such as FHWA).

FHWA requires WSDOT to monitor and enforce the compliance with both Section 504 and the ADA of any entity receiving disbursement of either state or Federal funding through WSDOT. FHWA monitors WSDOT and local agency compliance through various means such as process and program reviews, construction inspections, PS&E reviews, and complaint investigations. If noncompliance is found, and the noncompliance is not corrected to FHWA's satisfaction, FHWA may terminate existing Federal funding or refuse to grant future funding.

29.7 Laws

- 29 USC 794 - Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (as amended by the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987)
- 42 USC 12111 - Americans with Disabilities Act (Title II)

29.8 Regulations

- 28 CFR Part 35 (Title II) “Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Disability in State and Local Government Services”
- 49 CFR Part 27 (Section 504) “Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Disability in Programs or Activities Receiving Federal Financial Assistance”
- 49 CFR Part 37 “Transportation Services for Individuals with Disabilities (ADA)”
- 49 CFR Part 38 “Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Accessibility Specifications for Transportation Vehicles”

29.9 Resources

- Chapters [1510](#) and [1515](#) of the *Design Manual*

29.10 Appendices

- [29.11](#) ADA Title II and Section 504 Regulatory References

Appendix 29.11 ADA Title II and Section 504 Regulatory References

ADA Title II and Rehabilitation Act Section 504 Regulatory References	Requirements for agencies with less than 50 employees	Requirements for agencies with 50 or more employees
Programs, Services, and Activities: Ensure that programs, services, and activities are accessible to persons with disabilities. (28 CFR Part 35.150(a) and (c))	✓	✓
ADA/504 Coordinator: Designate at least one responsible employee (ADA/504 Coordinator) and make the name and contact information available internally and externally. (28 CFR Part 35.107(a) and 49 CFR Part 27.13(a))	✓	✓
Complaint/Grievance Procedures: Adopt and publish complaint/grievance procedures. (28 CFR Part 35.107(b) and 49 CFR Part 27.13(b))	✓	✓
Notice of ADA Provisions: Provide a public notice of how the agency will address ADA accessibility in its employment, communications, policies, and resolution of complaints. (28 CFR 35.106)	✓	✓
Self-evaluation²: Evaluate all services, policies, and practices for barriers that restrict/limit persons with disabilities from access to services, programs, and activities. (28 CFR Part 35.105(a) and 49 CFR Part 27.11(c)(2)(i) and (v))	✓	✓
Self-evaluation²: Maintain the completed self-evaluation on file and make it available for public inspection for at least three years following its completion. (28 CFR Part 35.105(c) and 49 CFR Part 27.11(c)(3)(ii):	✓	✓
Transition Plan²/Program Access Plan: Develop a transition plan or program access plan that outlines the structural modifications that must be made to those services, programs, and activities that are not accessible. (28 CFR Part 35.150(d) and 49 CFR Part 27.11(c)(2)(ii))	✓ program access plan	✓ transition plan (post it on the agency's website)
Accessible Pedestrian Signal and Pushbutton (APS) Policy²: Develop a "reasonable and consistent" policy for installing accessible pedestrian signals and pushbuttons when a transition plan has not yet been completed. (28 CFR Part 35.130 and 35.160a(1) and 49 CFR Part 27.7(c))	✓	✓

Notes:

¹Employees include paid permanent, temporary, and contract employees regardless of whether the employees are full or part time.

²Complete self-evaluations, and develop transition plans, program access plan and APS policies by engaging persons with disabilities and/or their advocates (28 CFR Parts 35.105 and 35.150 and 49 CFR Part 27.11(c)(2)).

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