



Make today a breakthrough.

February 8, 2024

Subash S. Iyer  
Acting General Counsel  
U.S. Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Ave SE  
Washington, DC 20590

Re: Transportation Services for Individuals with Disabilities: Americans with Disabilities Act Standards for Transportation Facilities. Docket No: DOT-OST-2023-0166

Dear Acting General Counsel Iyer,

As the leading national organization representing individuals with spinal muscular atrophy (SMA), **Cure SMA is pleased to comment on the needed improvements for transportation facilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.** In summary, the current ADA standards do not go far enough to ensure equitable, safe, and dignified access to public transportation facilities. Cure SMA asks that DOT address these barriers to help individuals with SMA and other disabilities who rely on public transportation in their daily lives.

SMA is a rare degenerative neuromuscular disease that robs individuals of their physical strength, greatly impacting their ability to walk, sit without support, transfer independently, and perform other essential functions of everyday life. Most individuals with SMA utilize power wheelchairs to maintain their independence. While some individuals have access to personal vehicles, the cost of needed adaptations of these vehicles often leave individuals with SMA to depend on public transportation to participate in their communities.

### **VERTICAL ACCESS**

Public transportation, especially subway and rail systems, can be unreliable due to elevator outages. Individuals with disabilities often need to utilize 2 to 6 elevators just to reach their final destination. If elevators along this route are out of order, they must cancel their journey, find a workable transit stop that is much further away, or switch to a more costly alternative option such as a taxi. Having two or more elevators in each location can greatly increase reliability for passengers with disabilities. Additionally, utilizing these elevators has become unsanitary and undignified, as they are unfortunately being misused for personal relief. They need to be cleaned as well as kept up to service.

Ramps can be a reliable replacement for elevators at some stations, and this reliability is a top priority for many individuals with disabilities. Individuals who are ambulatory, but have difficulties walking far distances, may face obstacles navigating long switch-back ramps. We recommend prioritizing a ramp with the addition of an elevator, when possible, to include individuals of all abilities.



At many subway and rail stations across the country, the platform does not align with the train, leaving a step or gap that is unsafe for wheelchairs. Stations often utilize ramps to bridge this gap, however this requires additional personnel to assist and can be difficult to locate. When the train is in line with the platform, wheelchair users can roll onto the train independently without the assistance of station personnel.

### **GENERAL FEEDBACK**

Finding parking can also pose significant challenges, particularly for wheelchair-accessible side-entry vans that require additional space to the right side of the vehicle. Individuals with SMA often operate accessible vans from their wheelchairs, leaving no extra seating for a different driver. In cases where a person with a disability cannot access an accessible parking spot and gets blocked by another vehicle, they're left without the means to enter their own vehicle, forcing them to wait for the obstructing driver's return. In a parking lot with 100 parking spaces, only 4 accessible parking spaces are required<sup>1</sup>. **A mom of a daughter with SMA shared** *"It is a daily struggle to locate an accessible parking space for our side-entry wheelchair accessible van as there are never enough accessible van spots."* Present regulations fail to allocate a sufficient number of parking spaces to accommodate the increasing issuance of disabled placards. Cure SMA and the SMA community respectfully ask that you use your authority to propose or implement measures that will increase the percentage of accessible parking spots.

### **CURE SMA FINAL COMMENTS**

The current standards set by the Access Board were adopted by the DOT in 2006<sup>2</sup>. These standards made great strides toward accessibility in public transportation. However, further improvements are needed to ensure individuals with SMA and other disabilities can maintain their independence and participate in daily life through the use of public transportation and its facilities.

Thank you for the opportunity to share the transportation challenges of people with SMA and their recommendations for updating ADA standards for transportation facilities. For more information, please contact Sarah Bellish, Cure SMA Policy and Advocacy Manager, at [sarah.bellish@curesma.org](mailto:sarah.bellish@curesma.org) or 202-871-8005.

Sincerely,

Sarah Bellish  
Manager, Policy & Advocacy  
Cure SMA

Maynard Friesz  
Vice President of Policy & Advocacy  
Cure SMA

<sup>1</sup> Accessible Parking Spaces, ADA  
<https://www.ada.gov/topics/parking/>

<sup>2</sup> Transportation for Individuals with Disabilities, National Archives  
<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2006/10/30/E6-16680/transportation-for-individuals-with-disabilities-adoption-of-new-accessibility-standards>

