

SUMMER 2014

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WISCONSIN TRANSPORTATION INFORMATION CENTER

CROSSROADS

LTAP at the University of Wisconsin-Madison

State and local governments are responsible for making sure transportation facilities in the public right-of-way are physically accessible to all.

Make street crossings accessible

FEDERAL LAW requires accessible pedestrian street crossings at intersections and midblock so people with disabilities can cross roadways safely. On the books since 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) specifies that state and local governments are responsible for making sure transportation facilities in the public right-of-way are physically accessible to all. One improvement local governments should make at every opportunity is the curb ramp.

Meet standard

A year ago, the Department of Justice (DOJ) and [Federal Highway Administration \(FHWA\)](#) clarified which types of road project trigger the ADA rules.

Resurfacing of a street or roadway that spans multiple intersections is one example. The full

list of projects defined as *alterations* include an asphalt pavement overlay, reconstruction or rehabilitation, open-graded surface course, micro surfacing and thin lift overlays, cape seals and in-place asphalt recycling. These require putting in curb ramps that meet the current standard.

Routine maintenance activities like crack filling, chip seals and spot high-friction treatments fall outside that definition and do not require road agencies to add ramps or other accessibility features.

The goal is to remove barriers and make sure pedestrians with disabilities can use the transportation system in an accessible and safe manner, says Patrick Fleming, Standards Development Engineer with the Wisconsin Department of Transportation. "Where there are sidewalks or curbs, local governments need to bring all pedestrian crossings up to the federal accessibility standard," he explains. "And despite exceptions to the rule, public agencies should do everything they can to comply."

In the case of an improvement that is technically infeasible, agencies must comply with the law to the maximum extent possible and when they cannot do more, document why. He emphasizes that the law applies to all public agencies regardless of the funding source. Agencies must install or upgrade curb ramps if the road project qualifies as an alteration. The project must include detectable warning surfaces (truncated domes), for all new curb ramps to warn people with visual disabilities of the boundary between sidewalk and street.

Accessibility guidelines

For its projects, WisDOT follows the [Public Right-of-Way Accessibility Guidelines](#) published by the U.S. Access Board, an independent federal agency responsible for developing guidelines for design, construction and alteration of facilities

Public agencies must replace barriers to accessibility, like steps **RIGHT** with a curb ramp installation **LOWER RIGHT** as part of certain alteration projects. Ramps require truncated domes **BELOW** as detectable warning.





Two examples of crossings that need updating to improve pedestrian safety and accessibility. Agencies can make the improvements as part of a planned alteration or on a Transition Plan schedule.

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RESOURCES

[FAQ](#) on the role of local public agencies in ADA compliance.

[FHWA resource](#) on bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

[Planning and design resource](#) from the Access Board includes case studies and solutions for accessible transportation facilities.

[Downloadable version](#) of WisDOT Facilities Development Manual.

Association of Bicycle and Pedestrian Professionals offers [technical help and courses](#) on design of accessible facilities.

Accessible street crossings *continued*

to make them accessible to and usable by people with disabilities.

The guidelines include specifications on curb ramps that meet the ADA standard. It has diagrams and details about required running slope and turning space, and information about which locations need a detectable warning surface. Fleming reminds agencies the state's Facilities Development Manual (FDM) also is a reliable source for local governments on design of curb ramps that fit the requirement. Local road officials can reference *FDM 11-46-10* and Standard Detail Drawing 8D5.

Transition plans

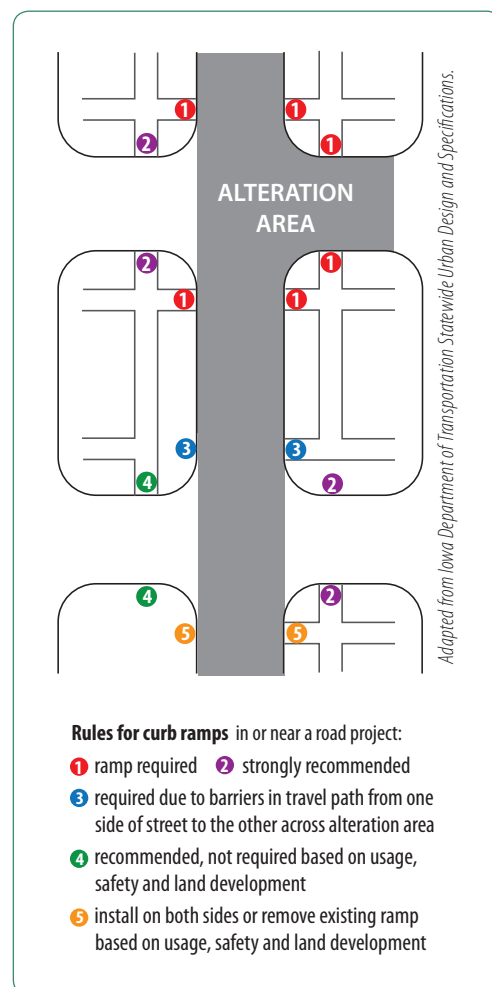
Another way local governments comply with the requirements is doing upgrades as part of their ADA transition plan for implementing accessibility improvements. That way they can cost-effectively prioritize plans for adding access features, says Jill Mrotek Glenzinski, Statewide Bicycle and Pedestrian Coordinator for WisDOT. Mrotek Glenzinski works with public agencies in Wisconsin on bicycle and pedestrian issues.

One component of an ADA transition plan is an inventory of physical barriers to accessibility, she explains. "A plan's inventory of facilities requiring improvement, with details on measures needed, makes it easier to schedule curb ramp installations or replacements one neighborhood at a time on an annual basis."

Mrotek Glenzinski also quotes data that says about a third of the population in the state does not drive—by choice or due to age, economic status or some other restriction. That makes accessible sidewalks and crossings important for all communities. "When road agencies build upgrades like this into their



Curb ramps with detectable warnings improve pedestrian safety and accessibility at all crossings.



improvement programs, it provides safe travel options for everyone," she adds.

Accessible communities

Failing to comply may lead to complaints from the public about lack of access that end up in court. An unfavorable judgment there might mean making wholesale rather than incremental upgrades. Local governments also risk the loss of funds by not including required curb ramps in a project that relies on federal funding.

"If local public agencies do the improvements over time, there are economic and other benefits to becoming very accessible for all residents and visitors with mobility issues," Fleming says.

Resources included here provide background on accessibility requirements, answer questions about the responsibility of local governments to comply with ADA rules and information on designing curb ramps that meet the current standard. ●