



Risk Control

Paratransit – Loading and Unloading

Every driver needs to know if their responsibilities include curb-to-curb, door-to-door and door-through-door service, and how each impacts loading and unloading.

Loading and Unloading Passenger Safety Elements

By definition, paratransit passengers are at additional risk of injury due to the myriad of disabilities that make it difficult to navigate the transit system without assistance. Every paratransit provider should be cognizant of the significant, inherent risks present during the loading and unloading of passengers.

Consider these basic steps to reduce risks to your customers/passengers during loading and unloading.

- Require all drivers, attendants and supervisors to attend regularly scheduled, documented, comprehensive training focused on loading and unloading risks, safety techniques, vehicle-specific requirements, company-specific procedures, manufacturers' instructions on safe operation of wheelchair lifts, inspection criteria, etc.
- Maintain and perform regular, documented inspections of all vehicles, adaptive equipment such as lifts and ramps, and wheelchair securement equipment (docking devices, straps, etc.), in accordance with manufacturer's specifications.
- Prior to every passenger pickup, ensure that the floors inside vehicles are clean and free of debris to ease rolling mobility and limit trip/fall hazards.
- Securement straps should be in good condition and all buckles should be operational. All tracks and floor anchors should be checked to ensure that they are in good working condition. The preventative maintenance program should include securement equipment.
- Park the vehicle on level ground in a safe area that is protected from traffic. Make sure the vehicle is in park with the emergency brake engaged. Check the loading/unloading area for hazards and possible obstructions around the vehicle prior to deploying the lift.
- Clearly communicate loading and unloading procedures to passengers. Consider posting written instructions with pictograms on the inside of the vehicle. Complete a basic inspection of the passenger's wheelchair to confirm that it is in safe operating condition prior to loading and unloading.
- Check to make sure that the passenger's wheelchair will safely fit onto the platform of the lift. Ensure that the passenger and wheelchair are oriented correctly, in accordance with the instructions for your specific lift (outward vs. inward). Prior to operation of the lift, verify that the roll stops function correctly and ensure that the brakes are locked on a conventional wheelchair or powered off and in gear for powered wheelchairs. Note that some lift models have additional passenger restraint/securement features that may be necessary.
- Before allowing a wheelchair passenger to board the bus, ensure that the wheelchair is in safe operating condition. If there is any problem with the chair, it must be remedied before boarding the passenger. If nothing can be done to make the wheelchair safe for transportation, the passenger should not be boarded.



Raising a manual chair

After the lift is lowered, back the passenger onto the platform and set the brakes on the chair. Secure the wheelchair with the passenger facing outward (back to the vehicle), so they do not risk pinning their feet between the lift and the vehicle. Ensure that the roll stop is up before running the lift. As the lift rises, the person on the ground should keep one hand firmly on the chair. When the passenger reaches the top, remove the safety restraints, release the brakes and wheel the passenger onboard and into place.



Raising a motorized chair

Motorized wheelchairs should be turned off while on the lift. If the gears on a motorized chair are accessible, they should be disengaged to prevent the chair from rolling. On some motorized chairs, disengaging the gears may prevent the brakes from working. For this reason, it is imperative that drivers understand the correct way to operate each of the chairs used by their passengers. If the passenger can safely motorize himself/herself onto or off the lift when it's at ground level, it may be permissible. When the lift is at vehicle level, the passenger should not be allowed to motorize onto or off of it.

Once passengers are inside the vehicle, ensure that the chair and passenger are appropriately secured using conventional seatbelts, straps, docking devices or purpose-built WTORS (Wheelchair Tie-down and Occupant Restraint Systems) equipment. Trays and other accessories should be removed, if possible, and stowed and secured. Clear space around the wheelchair should be maximized as much as possible. Seatbelts must be worn at all times when the vehicle is in motion. Oxygen bottles and other medical devices must be secured appropriately.

To learn more about how CNA's Risk Control services can help you manage your risks and increase efficiencies, contact CNA Risk Control at RiskControl@cna.com or visit cna.com/riskcontrol.