

FTA 5317 – New Freedom Program

The purpose of the New Freedom program is to reduce barriers to transportation services and expand the transportation mobility options available to persons with disabilities beyond the requirements of the ADA, that assist individuals with disabilities with transportation, including transportation to and from jobs and employment support services. The New Freedom formula grant program aims to provide additional tools to overcome existing barriers facing persons with disabilities who seek integration into the work force and full participation in society, noting that lack of transportation is a primary barrier to work for individuals with disabilities.

The New Freedom Program seeks Examples of public transportation services that go beyond the ADA requirements include expansion, spatially or temporally, beyond what is minimally required; the provision of same-day service; door-through-door service; vehicles and equipment that accommodate larger mobility aids; feeder services; accessibility improvements at non-key stations; and travel training. New initiatives may include the purchase of accessible vehicles for accessible taxi, ridesharing and/or vanpooling programs; administration of new voucher programs; the support of new volunteer driver/aide programs and; development of new mobility management and coordination programs among public transportation providers and other human service agencies providing transportation.

Eligible Section 5317 New Freedom (NF) Projects

Eligible projects under New Freedom may include, but are not limited to:

1. New Public Transportation Services Beyond the ADA

- Enhancing paratransit beyond minimum requirements of the ADA. ADA complementary paratransit services can be eligible under New Freedom in several ways as long as the services provided meet the definition of “new.” Eligible projects may include:
 - expansion of paratransit service parameters beyond the ¾-mile required by the ADA;
 - expansion of current hours of operation for ADA paratransit services that are beyond those provided on the fixed-route services;
 - the incremental cost of providing same day service;
 - the incremental cost of making door-to-door service available to all eligible ADA paratransit riders, but not as a reasonable modification for individual riders in an otherwise curb-to-curb system;
 - enhancement of the level of service by providing escorts or assisting riders through the door of their destination;
 - acquisition of vehicles and equipment designed to accommodate mobility aids that exceed the dimensions and weight ratings established for common wheelchairs under the ADA and labor costs of aides to help drivers assist passengers with over-sized wheelchairs;¹ and
 - installation of additional securement locations in public buses beyond what is required by the ADA.
- Feeder services. New “feeder” service to commuter rail, commuter bus, intercity rail, and intercity bus stations, for which complementary paratransit service is not required under the ADA.
- Making accessibility improvements to transit and intermodal stations not designated as key stations. Improvements for accessibility at existing transportation facilities that are not designated as key stations established under 49 CFR 37.47, 37.51, or 37.53, and that are not required under 49 CFR 37.43 as part of an alteration or renovation to an existing station, so long as the projects are clearly intended to remove barriers that would otherwise have remained. New Freedom funds are eligible to be used for new accessibility enhancements that remove barriers to individuals with disabilities so they may access greater portions of public transportation systems, such as fixed-route bus service, commuter rail, light rail and rapid rail. This may include:
 - building an accessible path to a bus stop that is currently inaccessible, including curb cuts, sidewalks, accessible pedestrian signals or other accessible features;

¹ This concept would permit the acquisition of lifts with a larger capacity, as well as modifications to lifts with a 600 lb design load, and the acquisition of heavier-duty vehicles for paratransit and/or demand-response service.

- adding an elevator or ramps, detectable warnings, or other accessibility improvements to a non-key station that are not otherwise required under the ADA;
 - improving signage, or wayfinding technology; or
 - implementation of other technology improvements that enhance accessibility for people with disabilities including Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS).
- Travel training. New training programs for individual users on awareness, knowledge, and skills of public and alternative transportation options available in their communities. This includes travel instruction and travel training services.

2. New Public Transportation Alternatives Beyond the ADA

- Purchasing vehicles to support new accessible taxi, ride sharing, and/or vanpooling programs. New Freedom funds can be used to purchase and operate accessible vehicles for use in taxi, ridesharing and/or van pool programs. The vehicles must be able to accommodate a passenger who uses a “common wheelchair” as defined under 49 CFR 37.3, at a minimum, while remaining in his/her personal mobility device inside the vehicle, and meeting the same requirements for lifts, ramps and securement systems specified in 49 CFR part 38, subpart B.
- Supporting the administration and expenses related to new voucher programs for transportation services offered by human service providers. This activity is intended to support and supplement existing transportation services by expanding the number of providers available or the number of passengers receiving transportation services. Only *new* voucher programs or expansion of existing programs are eligible under the New Freedom Program. The New Freedom Program can provide vouchers to individuals with disabilities to purchase rides, including: (a) mileage reimbursement as part of a volunteer driver program; (b) a taxi trip; or (c) trips provided by a human service agency. Transit passes for use on existing fixed-route or ADA complementary paratransit service are not eligible. Vouchers are an operational expense which requires a 50/50 (federal/local) match.
- Supporting new volunteer driver and aide programs. New volunteer driver programs are eligible and include support for costs associated with the administration, management of driver recruitment, safety, background checks, scheduling, coordination with passengers, and other related support functions, mileage reimbursement, and insurance associated with volunteer driver programs. The costs of new enhancements to increase capacity of existing volunteer driver programs are also eligible. FTA notes that any volunteer program supported by New Freedom must meet the requirements of both “new” and “beyond the ADA.”
- Supporting new mobility management and coordination programs among public transportation providers and other human service agencies providing transportation. Mobility management is an eligible capital cost. Mobility management techniques may enhance transportation access for populations

beyond those served by one agency or organization within a community. Mobility management activities may include:

- the promotion, enhancement, and facilitation of access to transportation services, including the integration and coordination of services for individuals with disabilities, older adults, and low-income individuals;
- support for short term management activities to plan and implement coordinated services;
- the support of state and local coordination policy bodies and councils;
- the operation of transportation brokerages to coordinate providers, funding agencies and customers;
- the provision of coordination services, including employer-oriented Transportation Management Organizations' and Human Service Organizations' customer-oriented travel navigator systems and neighborhood travel coordination activities such as coordinating individualized travel training and trip planning activities for customers;
- the development and operation of one-stop transportation traveler call centers to coordinate transportation information on all travel modes and to manage eligibility requirements and arrangements for customers among supporting programs; and
- operational planning for the acquisition of intelligent transportation technologies to help plan and operate coordinated systems inclusive of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) mapping, Global Positioning System Technology, coordinated vehicle scheduling, dispatching and monitoring technologies as well as technologies to track costs and billing in a coordinated system and single smart customer payment systems (acquisition of technology is also eligible as a stand alone capital expense).

The labor protection provisions of Section 5333(b) do not apply to New Freedom Programs funds.