



Rider's Guide to Using
ADA Paratransit
and
Demand Response
Services

2423 E Robinson Avenue
Springdale, AR 72764

www.ozark.org

(479)756-5901

(800)865-5901

Revised May 8, 2024

What is ADA Paratransit?

It is individual rides provided as a 'safety-net' for those who have a disability and are functionally unable to get to or use the fixed route bus services. With the implementation of fixed route service, ORT is required to comply with the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) by providing Complementary Paratransit. Complementary Paratransit Service is available in an area three quarters (3/4) of a mile in any direction from any of ORT's fixed routes and timed stops of all commuter routes; and within fixed and commute route service times.

Who can use ORT's Paratransit?

Under the ADA, a disability alone does not automatically qualify a person to use ORT's Complementary ADA Paratransit Service. A person must be functionally unable to get to or use the fixed-route bus service to qualify to use ORT's ADA Paratransit Service.

Complementary Paratransit service is provided to the following three general groups of persons with disabilities:

- Persons who have specific impairment-related conditions which make it impossible (not just difficult) to travel to or from the bus stop.

- Persons who need a wheelchair lift or ramp and a wheelchair lift-equipped vehicle/bus are unable to deploy its lift/ramp in a particular location due to physical constraints of that particular bus stop.
- People who are unable to board, ride, exit or otherwise navigate the fixed route bus system, even if they are able to get to a bus stop.

ORT does go beyond what is required by ADA law and does allow passengers living outside the fixed route areas to schedule rides if there is space available, as well as those who are considered ADA eligible. These rides are known as Demand Response rides. These rides are pending until the night before the ride is to take place. They may be "moved to a different time" or "cancelled" from the service for that day if the space is needed by an ADA qualified ride.

What kind of service is ORT's Paratransit/Demand Response?

Paratransit/Demand Response is a curb-to-curb service. Door to Door assistance provided if needed.

Does NOT include any of the following:

- Assisting passengers on unsafe or steeply inclined mobility ramps or stairs.
- Entering beyond the door threshold. For safety and liability reasons, our Operators cannot enter homes/residences.
- Locking/unlocking doors or activating/deactivating house alarms.
- Retrieving mail, personal documents, etc.
- Utilizing any type of drive-through services i.e. banks, prescriptions, restaurants, etc.

Does include the following:

- Any individual needing door-to-door assistance from their house to the vehicle or to the front door of their destination will need to request this assistance in advance. The driver is not required to leave sight of their vehicle to provide this assistance.
- Operators will wait for a passenger as close as possible to the requested pickup location.
- If a passenger cannot be left unattended (as a result of his/her disability or impairment), a companion or personal care attendant is required to receive the passenger upon the vehicle's arrival.

- ORT Operators can assist passengers with small items upon request. You are only allowed to bring with you what you can control in your lap. The driver is encouraged not to lose sight of their vehicle to provide this assistance.
- ORT does not provide personal care attendants (PCA) services.

Can my attendant or a guest ride with me?

- A Personal Care Attendant may travel with you free of charge. They must be traveling with you from your pickup origin and going to your destinations. Notify the scheduler of their presence when you schedule a ride.
- You may also have one guest accompany you in addition to your attendant. Any additional guests will be on a space available basis. Notify the scheduler of their presence when you schedule a ride.

Can my service animal go with me?

Your service animal may travel with you at any ORT facilities or on any ORT vehicles. Training documentation is not required, but control of the animal is. You may be required to remove the service animal if the animal's behavior poses a direct threat to the health or safety of others, or if the animal is out of your control and you do not take effective action to control it. ORT defines a service animal as an animal that is trained (or is training) to perform specific tasks for people with disabilities, such as guiding

people who are blind, alerting people who are deaf, pulling wheelchairs, alerting and protection of a person in a seizure, or performing other specific tasks. Service animals are working animals, and not pets, companions, mental health, or comfort animals.

Do I need to apply for ADA eligibility?

If you have a disability and travel within 3/4 of a mile of a fixed route you can submit a completed application. It will apply only to any rides that begin and end within 3/4 of a mile of a fixed or commuter route and within fixed and commuter route service times. If you do not have a disability, you do not need to apply.

How do I apply for ADA eligibility?

To be eligible for ORT ADA Paratransit Service, you must:

- Complete an ADA Paratransit Eligibility Application and
- Provide the completed Professional Verification that pertains to your disability and
- If more information is needed from you or the person doing your Professional Verification, it will be required before a determination can be given. If you are unwilling or unable to provide the needed information, a letter of denial of eligibility will be sent. You may apply again when you are prepared to provide the needed information.

- If an evaluation of your ability to perform the skills needed to use the fixed routes and/or Paratransit services are requested, you will need to participate in it. If you refuse to participate, your eligibility will be denied because the application process has not been completed. If this evaluation is required, it will be at no cost to you and transportation will be provided.
- The final step will be an in-person interview. This will be scheduled to go over the application and the ORT policies and procedures.
- An eligibility committee will review the eligibility application, the professional verification, and any evaluation information provided to determine your level of eligibility.
- Eligible riders are certified for services for a period of up to two (2) years. The eligibility period will depend on the Paratransit passengers specific disability and, if temporary in its duration.
- You will be informed of this decision in writing within twenty-one days. If a decision has not been made within 21 days, full eligibility will be assumed until the application has been processed and a decision mailed to you.
- If you disagree with ORT's denial of eligibility or the level of eligibility granted to use the ADA Paratransit Service, you may appeal that decision. See 'How to Appeal if Denied Eligibility' below.

- Applications and all information for ORT's ADA Paratransit Service may be obtained by calling Ozark Regional Transit at (479)756-5901 ext. 2 to have information to be mailed or faxed; it can be downloaded off ORT's web site at www.ozark.org; or it may be picked up at Ozark Regional Transit's office located at 2423 East Robinson in Springdale, Arkansas.

Applications for Download:

- ADA Paratransit Eligibility Application with Professional Verification
- ADA Paratransit Eligibility Application for a Visual Disability with Professional Verification
- ADA Paratransit Eligibility Application for Epilepsy & Seizure Disorder Supplemental Form

How to appeal if denied eligibility

- If you do not meet the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) eligibility criteria for ADA Paratransit, you will be informed of this decision in writing within twenty-one (21) days. If a decision has not been made within 21 days, full eligibility will be assumed until the application has been processed and a decision mailed to you. The letter will explain the reasons for the denial as related to the eligibility criteria.
- You have the right to appeal the denial of eligibility, or the level of eligibility granted to you.

- You must appeal the decision by contacting the Operations Scheduling Manager in writing and schedule an Appeal Hearing within sixty (60) days of the date of the denial or eligibility letter. You (or your representative) and the original eligibility decision maker will each have ten minutes to present information and arguments.
- Transportation will not be provided during this period unless a decision has not been made within 30 days of the appeal date. Transportation will then be provided until a decision is reached by the Operations Scheduling Manager.
- If you do not schedule the appeal hearing or do not show up for it, the original eligibility decision will stand.
- If you disagree with the Operation Scheduling Manager's decision of a denial of eligibility or the level of eligibility given, you may appeal to the Executive Director. This second appeal must be made in writing and a hearing set up within 15 days of the date of the Operations Scheduling Manager's eligibility determination letter.
- Transportation will not be provided during this period unless a decision has not been made within 30 days of the appeal date. Transportation will then be provided until a decision is reached by the Executive Director.
- *This is consistent with the administrative appeals process as detailed in Section 37.125 of the Federal Regulation 49CFR Part 37 entitled, Transportation for Individuals with Disabilities, dated September 30, 2013.*

How do I schedule a ride?

If you need to schedule a Complementary ADA Paratransit ride, call ORT's Call Center: (479) 756-5901 or (800) 865-5901 and select opt. 1 between 8:00 am and 5:00 pm Monday through Friday. Messages left on the ADA phone line between 8:00 am and 5:00 pm, on Saturday, Sunday, and holidays that ORT is closed, will be honored.

If you do not live within a Fixed Route area and need to schedule a ride on ORT's Demand Response Service call ORT's Call Center: (479) 756-5901 or (800) 865-5901 and select opt. 1 between 8:00 am and 3:00 pm Monday through Friday. Rides are available on a first come first serve, space available basis for non-ADA qualified rides.

All trip requests must be made no less than one (1) day and no more than seven (7) days in advance. Holiday service schedules are posted in all buses and on ORT's web site: www.ozark.org.

What information do I need to provide?

When calling the Call Center be prepared to tell the Customer Service Representative (CSR) the following information:

- Your name and phone number
- The trip date.
- Your desired pickup, work, or appointment time.

- The physical addresses of pick-up and all destinations, and business names.
- Approximate length of time you want to be at each destination.
- If a personal care attendant (PCA), guest or children will travel with you.
- If you will be using a mobility device.

ORT Paratransit Service can offer travel times from one (1) hour before to one (1) hour after the requested travel times under the ADA service criteria.

Travel time on Paratransit is comparable to the amount of time it would take to make the same trip using the ORT fixed-route bus service with transfer connections. The average trip length is about ninety (90) minutes and may exceed or fall below that average depending on the circumstances.

Can I schedule rides on the same day or make same day changes?

Schedule changes or alterations are allowed only when feasible. A passenger must call into the dispatch office to request approval to change a scheduled destination and do so within the same guidelines given for canceling a trip. (More than 2 hours in advance)

- Trip changes must be made at least two hours prior to the original scheduled pickup time, or the trip is classified as a No Show.
- Drivers are not permitted to change a passenger's destination without prior approval from Dispatch.

To cancel a ride or make changes on the same day, please contact our Dispatch office as soon as possible at (479)756-5901 opt. 1. Our dispatch office hours are Monday – Friday, 5:00 am–9:00 pm.

What can I expect when I take my ride?

- Operators can be there any time within the 30-minute window the scheduler gave as your ride time, so be where you can see or hear them pull up.
- Operators will wait as close as possible to the requested pickup location.
- If you do not come out within 5 minutes they will leave, and your ride will be marked as a No Show.
- The return ride is not automatically cancelled.
- Operators do not normally knock on doors or call when they arrive.
 - If assistance is needed because of your specific disability limitations, make prior arrangements with the Call Center for it to appear with each ride as an assistance note.

How do I cancel my trips?

When customers no longer need trips they have scheduled, whether demand or subscription service, they must call (479)756-5901 ext. 1 to cancel. Customers should make every effort to cancel trips no later than 4:30 pm the day before the scheduled trip.

What is a no-show?

A no-show occurs when a passenger fails to board the ORT vehicle within five (5) minutes after it arrives within the pick-up window. When customers no-show, they are responsible for canceling any other trips scheduled for the day if they no longer wish to travel. For every three (3) same day cancellations, a rider will be charged one (1) no show.

What is a same day cancellation?

A same day cancellation is a trip that is not canceled at least the day before the scheduled pick-up time. This includes trips canceled at the door.

What are the penalties for no-shows and same day cancellations?

Customers who establish a pattern or practice of no-shows and/or same day cancellations in a twelve (12) month look-back period will receive:

- First violation: Written warning
- Second violation: 14-day (2-week) suspension
- Subsequent violations: 28-day (4-week) suspension

Customers scheduling ten (10) trips or more and who no-show/same day cancel 15 percent (15%) of their scheduled trips within a 30-day look-back period may be subject to service discipline.

For instance:

- A customer who schedules 20 trips in a month and no-shows/same day cancels three, or 15 percent, of those trips can be subject to service discipline.
- Someone who schedules 40 trips in a month and no-shows/same day cancels six or, 15 percent, of those trips can be subject to service discipline.

Customers who believe one or more of their violations were charged in error may appeal in writing in a timely manner either by completing the form and returning it via mail to:

Appeal Process
2423 E Robinson Ave
Springdale, AR 72764

The appeal must include details regarding why the customer believes the violation was charged in error.

Ozark Regional Transit will consider the information provided with the appeal, make a determination, and mail a determination within seven (7) calendar days after the request for appeal has been received.

If all or part of the appeal is denied, the customer will have a right to request an in-person hearing to appeal the determination made by ORT. Customers making appeals in person will each have up to 15 minutes to present oral and/or written arguments concerning the no-show(s) and/or same day cancellations(s) they believe were charged in error and not removed by ORT during the initial appeal. The appeal will be heard by someone who was not involved in the initial decision, and the decision of the hearing officer will be handed down in writing. The decision will be final, and no further appeals will be accepted by ORT.

Should a customer be temporarily suspended from the ORT Program, it will be necessary for the customer to request subscription trips be reinstated at the end of the suspension period. Subscriptions are suspended when service is suspended.

Can I avoid being suspended?

Customers can avoid a pending suspension by exercising a “buy-back” option. For all proposed suspensions, the customer will receive a detailed list of violations. Customers may remove violations by paying the cost of the no-show/same day cancellation trips. Customers can buy back only six individual no-shows and/or same day cancellations in a twelve (12) month look-back period.

Customers choosing to exercise the buy-back option should send a cashier's check or money order (personal checks will not be accepted) to:

Buy Back Program
2423 E Robinson Ave
Springdale, AR 72764

Or hand deliver to the Ozark Regional Transit offices, Monday through Friday from 8 am – 5 pm

What if there is a problem with my ride or with ORT personnel?

Please call the Call Center at (479)756-5901, opt. 1 if you experience *any* problems during your ride. We appreciate your compliments, we will follow up on your complaints, and consider your suggestions.

Are there any other policies I should know about?

Behavior

- Full Behavior Policy on separate document.
- You may request a copy at any time at (479) 756-5901 or download it on our web site at www.ozark.org.

Medically Related Restrictions

- Ozark Regional Transit complies with existing laws governing the exposure of persons to human biological hazards and other health-related hazards. This is a serious issue for ORT since many of our passengers are in a high-risk category due to age and/or lowered immune system.
- In order to protect ORT Operators as well as our passengers, ORT will deny transportation to any person who has visible evidence of any open or festering wound or sore. ORT will also deny transportation to any person who appears so ill that their presence would be harmful to ORT Operators, themselves, or other passengers on the vehicle.

Wheelchairs and Wheelchair Securement

ORT is very concerned for the safety of all our passengers. ORT will make every attempt to accommodate all wheelchairs, scooter, and/or other mobility devices, as long as the wheelchair fits on the lift or ramp, can safely be loaded, will fit facing forward, and does not exceed the safe weight limits of lift or ramp given by the manufacturer.

- The Operator may suggest the passenger load separately from their wheelchair, if the weight load seems to be more than the lift can safely lift. If the passenger refuses or is unable to load separately from their wheelchair they may not be able to travel on that route.

- ORT requires that all wheelchairs be secured on our transit vehicles. ORT Operators will use their best efforts to secure any mobility device.
- A wheelchair passenger who refuses to allow their wheelchair to be secured may be denied service.
- You may load onto a lift facing toward or away from the bus. For safety reasons, ORT requests that wheelchairs be backed onto the wheelchair lift.
- If the Operator is unable safely and properly secure a wheelchair, the Operator may ask the passenger to transfer to a seat, as the mobility device may move in transit. It is the passenger's choice to transfer or remain in his/her mobility device.
- For safety reasons, ORT cannot transport passengers with broken mobility devices or devices without working brakes. Please be sure that wheelchairs or other mobility devices are clean, safe, and in good working condition before traveling aboard ORT vehicles.
- ORT recommends that passengers using a wheelchair, or a similar mobility device use all built in mobility device restraints.

Use of Tobacco Products and Alcohol

- The use of any tobacco products on ORT vehicles is prohibited. This includes dipping and chewing tobaccos and well as smoking products (cigarettes, cigars, and pipes).
- Passengers under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol are prohibited from riding.

Transporting Children

- Federal law does not require public transit operators to provide car seats for children in the State of Arkansas. Therefore, it is the responsibility of passengers to provide the proper car seat/booster seat if traveling with children. ORT does not require but strongly recommends that all children less than six (6) years or sixty (60) pounds be restrained in an approved child passenger safety seat.
- Children 12 years old and older may travel alone if they are able to communicate with the Operator if they are having a problem.
- ORT does not take responsibility for children traveling alone.

Permitted on ORT Vehicles

The following articles may be carried on vehicles providing such articles are not permitted to remain in a location where they will interfere with the entrance, exit, or free use of the aisles by

passengers, or with the safe operation of the vehicle or take up passenger seats when other passengers need the seat:

- Baggage - ordinary hand baggage and packages or articles that can be carried without inconvenience to other passengers and can be done in one trip on or off the bus.
- Carriages and strollers - baby carriages or strollers may be carried on board but must be folded and must not block the aisles.
- Carts - Personal shopping carts may be carried on board so long as they fold and do not block the aisle.
- Walk aids and stand-up walkers - it is preferred that walkers be folded so as not to interfere with the free use of the aisle.

Not Permitted on ORT Vehicles

The ORT Operator will exercise judgment concerning the overall safety of all passengers. The following items represent but are not limited to as potential hazards that may be prohibited for safety reasons: fishing poles that are assembled and/or hooks are attached; sharp objects or instruments; gasoline or other hazardous materials; explosives; furniture; non-folding baby carriages; large bundles that will obstruct the aisle; bundles or bags that are leaking; weapons including firearm, handgun, club, explosive weapon, knife, knuckles, bomb, chemical dispensing device, or any dangerous weapon

Carry-On Package Policy

Carry-on packages are welcomed, provided they do not remain in a location where they will interfere with:

- The entrance, exit, or free use of the aisles by passengers
- Safe operation of the vehicle
- Take up passenger seats when other passengers need the seat.
- For safety reasons, and to ensure that there is room for other passengers, take only as many packages as can be carried on and off the vehicle in one trip. Typically, four (4) bags.
- Packages may not exceed a weight of twenty-five (25) pounds each and a combined weight of fifty (40) pounds for all packages.
- Shopping bags must be of the plastic type with the top tied together.
- ORT will not assume any liability for breakage/spoilage while aboard our vehicle.

Note - ORT's ADA Paratransit/Demand Response offers ordinary curb-to-curb service. Operators may assist with the loading and unloading of packages meeting the above requirements if the passenger requests it when they schedule the trip. Limit what you bring to what can be carried by you and the driver in one trip.