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Draft Guidelines for Accessible Public Rights-of-Way (June 17, 2002)

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) recognizes and protects the civil rights of people with disabilities and is modeled after earlier landmark laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race and gender. To ensure that buildings and facilities are accessible to and usable by people with disabilities, the ADA establishes accessibility requirements for State and local government facilities, places of public accommodation, and commercial facilities. Under the ADA, the Access Board has developed and continues to maintain design guidelines for accessible buildings and facilities known as the ADA Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG). ADAAG covers a wide variety of facilities and establishes minimum requirements for new construction and alterations.

The Board maintains a similar responsibility for accessibility guidelines under the Architectural Barriers Act (ABA). The ABA requires access to certain facilities designed, built, altered, or leased with Federal funds. Like ADAAG, the Board's ABA accessibility guidelines apply to new construction and alterations.

The Board plans to undertake rulemaking to supplement its ADA and ABA accessibility guidelines, which primarily cover facilities on sites, by adding new provisions specific to public rights-of-way. The Board's aim is to ensure that access for persons with disabilities is provided wherever a pedestrian way is newly built or altered, and that the same degree of convenience, connection, and safety afforded the public generally is available to pedestrians with disabilities. The guidelines would not require alterations to existing public rights-of-way, but would apply where a pedestrian route or facility is altered as part of a planned project to improve existing public rights-of-way.

BACKGROUND

The Need for Guidelines on Public Rights-of-Way

Local jurisdictions, and other entities covered by the ADA or ABA, must ensure that the facilities they build or alter are accessible to people with disabilities. The Board's ADA and ABA accessibility guidelines specify the minimum level of accessibility in new construction and alteration projects and serve as the basis for enforceable standards maintained by other agencies. Currently, the Board's guidelines, like the industry standards from which they derive, focus mainly on facilities on sites. While they address certain features common to public sidewalks, such as curb ramps, accessible routes, ground and floor surfaces, and bus stops and shelters, further guidance is necessary to address conditions unique to public rights-of-way. Various constraints posed by space limitations at sidewalks, roadway design practices, slope, and terrain raise valid

questions on how and to what extent access can be achieved. Access for blind pedestrians at street crossings and wheelchair access to on-street parking are typical of the issues for which additional guidance is needed. In addition, new trends in roadway design, such as the growing use of traffic roundabouts, pose additional challenges to access, while various technological innovations, particularly those pertaining to pedestrian signaling devices, offer new solutions.

The Board previously proposed guidelines for public rights-of-way under the ADA which were published for public comment in 1992 and 1994. Based on the comments received, the Board determined that it should further coordinate with the transportation industry and State and local governments before continuing its rulemaking.

Consequently, the Board undertook an outreach and training program on accessible public rights-of-way. Under this program, the Board developed a series of videos, an accessibility checklist, and a design guide on accessible public rights-of-way. In addition, the Board sponsored research on tactile warnings at street crossings, accessible pedestrian signals, and traffic roundabouts. The Board has made this information widely available to the public. The interest in these materials has underscored the need for criteria for public rights-of-way that are definitive and enforceable so that local jurisdictions and others are clear on their obligations when constructing or altering streets and sidewalks.

Detectable Warnings (1104.3.2)

Detectable warnings provide a distinctive surface of truncated domes detectable by cane or underfoot to alert people with vision impairments of the transition to vehicular ways. These warnings compensate for the sloped surfaces of curb ramps which remove a tactile cue provided by curb faces. ADAAG, as originally published in 1991, contained a requirement for detectable warnings on the surface of curb ramps and other locations where pedestrian ways blend with vehicular ways without tactile cues. This requirement was temporarily suspended due to concerns raised about the specifications, the availability of complying products, maintenance, usefulness, safety, and the need for further study. The suspension expired in July 2001.

The advisory committee considered the issue at length and recommended that the draft guidelines require detectable warnings according to revised specifications. The Board agrees with the committee's recommendation and has included a requirement for a detectable warning surface 2 feet deep where the ramp, landing, or blended transition connects to a crosswalk. Since detectable warnings are intended to replace the cue otherwise provided by a curb drop-off, they would be required to span the entire area where the curb drop-off is absent. This is especially important for blended transitions, where there is no slope to help detect the presence of a ramp.

The advisory committee deliberated on whether to require detectable warnings at all curb ramps and blended transitions or only those which were the least distinguishable. One organization represented on the committee suggested that detectable warnings be required only where the ramp slope was 1:15 or less. The Board seeks comment on this

issue as well as any research that supports slopes of 1:15 or steeper being sufficiently detectable by persons with vision impairments.

The technical specifications for detectable warnings are discussed below in [section 1108](#).

1108 Detectable Warning Surfaces

1108.1 General. Detectable warnings shall consist of a surface of truncated domes aligned in a square grid pattern and shall comply with 1108.

1108.1.1 Dome Size. Truncated domes in a detectable warning surface shall have a base diameter of 0.9 inches (23 mm) minimum to 1.4 inches (36 mm) maximum, a top diameter of 50% of the base diameter minimum to 65% of the base diameter maximum, and a height of 0.2 inches (5 mm).

1108.1.2 Dome Spacing. Truncated domes in a detectable warning surface shall have a center-to-center spacing of 1.6 inches (41 mm) minimum and 2.4 inches (61 mm) maximum, and a base-to-base spacing of 0.65 inches (16 mm) minimum, measured between the most adjacent domes on square grid.

1108.1.3 Contrast. Detectable warning surfaces shall contrast visually with adjacent walking surfaces either light-on-dark, or dark-on-light.

1108.1.4 Size. Detectable warning surfaces shall extend 24 inches (610 mm) minimum in the direction of travel and the full width of the curb ramp, landing, or blended transition.

1108.2 Location.

1108.2.1 Curb Ramps and Blended Transitions. The detectable warning surface shall be located so that the edge nearest the curb line is 6 inches (150 mm) minimum and 8 inches (205 mm) maximum from the curb line.

1108.2.2 Rail Crossings. The detectable warning surface shall be located so that the edge nearest the rail crossing is 6 inches (150 mm) minimum and 8 inches (205 mm) maximum from the vehicle dynamic envelope.

1108.2.3 Platform Edges. Detectable warning surfaces at platform boarding edges shall be 24 inches (610 mm) wide and shall extend the full length of the platform.
