



ACCESS CURRENTS

Board Holds Town Meeting in St. Louis

On May 12th, the Board held a town meeting in St. Louis at the America's Center in conjunction with the Great Plains ADA Center's National ADA Symposium. The event provided a forum for members of the public to advise the Board on issues of concern to them and to ask questions about accessibility or the work of the Board. The meeting and Symposium drew attendance not only from the St. Louis area, but also from other cities across the country, including Ann Arbor, Atlanta, Boston, and San Diego, among others.

A number of participants raised concerns about air travel and access at airports and aboard planes. Comments addressed the need for the visual display or captioning of announcements in airports for travelers who are deaf or hard of hearing and adequate accommodations for those who travel with service animals. Attention was also called to airline baggage policies that may impact passengers who travel with assistive devices or medical equipment, frequent reports of damaged wheelchairs and powered mobility devices that cannot be stowed in cabins, and various industry trends, such as the growing use of commuter planes and smaller aircraft that are boarded by stairs instead of jetways. The Board noted that many aspects of

access to air travel are governed by the Air Carrier Access Act and that the U.S. Department of Transportation, the enforcing agency, was about to issue updated regulations issued under the law (see page 4). The Board is also examining access issues related to the design of airports through a focus initiative.



Board members listen to comments from the public at the St. Louis town meeting.

Various questions were posed and recommendations provided concerning specifications for the design of facilities. Several focused on bathroom and hotel room access, including the provision of seats in roll-in showers, questions about how the minimum dimensions of such showers are to be measured, and the need to limit the height of hotel beds to facilitate transfer. Participants also urged the Board to take action or provide guidance on addressing the opening force of

exterior doors, accessible traffic signals, the provision of closed captioning in movie theaters, and procuring software that is compliant under section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act.

Attendees also sought updates on various rulemaking initiatives and raised enforcement issues. The Board noted the status and next steps of efforts to develop new guidelines for public rights-of-way and outdoor developed areas. Many wanted to know when the U.S. Department of Justice would adopt updated standards under the ADA (see page 3). In addition, several commenters called attention to common barriers and stressed the need for more rigorous enforcement of the ADA and its design requirements to improve compliance.

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In addition to the town meeting, the Board also conducted a series of break-out sessions at the Symposium. These well-attended sessions covered public rights-of-way, recreation facilities, bathroom access, the ADA guidelines and the International Building Code, and information technology and e-government. They provided an opportunity for the Board to address in greater depth many of the technical questions raised in the town meeting.

While in St. Louis, the Board toured Busch Stadium and received a briefing by designers from HOK Sport on how accessibility was integrated into its design. Board members also visited the Central Institute for the Deaf to examine firsthand its pioneering work on quiet classrooms, which are designed to promote good acoustics for quality learning environments. During the visit, audiologists and acoustical designers briefed the Board on efforts to promote implementation of acoustical standards developed for classrooms.

Board to Hold Information Meeting on Beach Access

On July 23rd the Board will hold a public meeting on beach access to further its work developing new guidelines for outdoor sites. The meeting will focus on design and maintenance considerations for accessible routes at beaches. In particular, the Board seeks input on the location of beach access routes, their distance, width, endpoints, coverage area, and frequency, as well as information on factors or conditions that may impact compliance.



Mat systems are a common means of providing accessible routes at beaches.

Last June, the Board proposed accessibility guidelines for Federal parks and recreation areas that included specifications for beach access routes, trails, picnic areas, and camp sites. The proposal sought feedback on specific topics through questions posed to the public. During a four-month comment period, the Board held several hearings and received over 120 comments. In May, Board representatives toured several beaches in Florida to examine beach access route solutions, including a variety of mat and surfacing products, and met with beach and community officials and product manufacturers on the provision and maintenance of routes.

The Board will use the upcoming meeting to solicit additional feedback on the provisions for beach access routes for its use in finalizing the guidelines. The meeting will be held from 9:00 – 12:00 at the Westin Arlington Gateway, 801 North Glebe Road, in Arlington, Virginia. For

further information, contact Bill Botten at botten@access-board.gov, (202) 272-0014 (v), or (202) 272-0082 (TTY).

Vessel Alarms Advisory Committee to Reconvene in August

The Board's Passenger Vessel Emergency Alarms Advisory Committee is scheduled to hold its final meeting August 12th and 13th at the Board's offices. The committee, which examined issues concerning access to vessel alarm systems and notification procedures for passengers who are deaf or hard of hearing, largely completed its deliberations earlier this year. The meeting will provide an opportunity for members to review draft consensus recommendations and conclusions before the committee finalizes its report for submission to the Board. The report will address design and engineering constraints in specifying visual emergency notification systems aboard vessels and will be used by the Board in proposing accessibility guidelines for passenger vessels. For further information, visit the Board's website at www.access-board.gov/pvaac/alarms/ or contact Paul Beatty at pvag@access-board.gov, (202) 272-0012 (v), or (202) 272-0082 (TTY).



DOJ Issues Notices to Adopt New ADA Standards

On June 17th, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) issued proposals to adopt new design standards for facilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) based on revised guidelines previously issued by the Board. Under the ADA, DOJ is responsible for maintaining standards for new construction and alterations that are consistent with the Board's guidelines. DOJ's standards apply to the construction and alteration of all facilities covered by the ADA except transportation facilities, which are subject to standards maintained by the Department of Transportation (DOT). The new standards would apply to state and local government facilities subject to title II of the ADA and to places of public accommodation and commercial facilities covered by title III of the law. DOJ issued separate notices under each title.

The notices also address issues relating to the application of the new standards, including effective dates. Through these proposals, DOJ is also revisiting or supplementing other sections of its regulations, which have changed little since their original publication in 1991. New or revised provisions are proposed concerning removal of barriers in existing facilities, accommodation of service animals, maintenance of accessible features, policies and practices governing various services, including hotel reservations, ticket sales and accessible seating, and provision of auxiliary aids, services, and effective communication, including captioning, narrative description, and video interpreting services. The notices, which highlight specific issues in these and other areas where input from the public is sought, are available through the online edition of the *Federal Register* at www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/index.html. Comments are due by August 18th and can be submitted through the www.regulations.gov website. DOJ plans to hold a public hearing on the notices in Washington, D.C. during the comment period. For further information, contact DOJ at (202) 307-0663 (v/TTY) or visit its website at www.ada.gov.

Current ADA and ABA Standards

DOJ will need to follow-up with a finalized notice after the comment period. In the interim, its existing ADA standards are to be followed until the new standards take effect as established in the final notice. Updated ADA standards issued by DOT are in effect for transportation facilities. In addition, most Federal facilities, including postal facilities, are subject to similar standards adopted by the General Services Administration and the U.S. Postal Service under the Architectural Barriers Act (ABA). Military facilities and federally funded housing remain subject to the Uniform Federal Accessibility Standards (UFAS) pending the adoption of new standards by the Department of Defense and the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Once these agencies and DOJ implement updated standards, a consistent level of access will be specified for all facilities covered by the ADA or the ABA. Additional information, including links to all relevant regulations and standards, is available on the Board's website at www.access-board.gov/ada-aba/standards-update.htm.

STANDARDS FOR ADA FACILITIES	
Transportation	Updated DOT standards
State and Local Government (except transportation)	Original ADA standards or UFAS
Places of Public Accommodation and Commercial Facilities	Original ADA standards
STANDARDS FOR ABA (FEDERAL) FACILITIES	
Military and Housing	UFAS
Postal	Updated USPS standards
All Other Federal	Updated GSA standards

DOT Issues Updated Air Carrier Access Act Regulations

On May 13th the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) issued new regulations under the Air Carrier Access Act which prohibits discrimination by air carriers on the basis of disability. The new rule updates and reorganizes existing regulations which were first issued in 1990 and supplemented and clarified over the years. The regulations cover boarding and aircraft access, including seating, lavatories, mobility aid storage and transport, and provision on onboard wheelchairs, as well as air carrier policies and practices, terminal accessibility, and other topics. Most provisions remain substantively unchanged, but they have been reorganized into a new subject-based framework and format for greater clarity.



The rule broadens coverage by applying the regulations to foreign carriers. It also includes new provisions that address access for passengers who travel with medical oxygen. Policy guidance previously issued by DOT, including information covering accommodation of service animals, has been incorporated into the regulations. The updated regulations, which will take effect on May 13, 2009, are available in the online edition of the *Federal Register* at www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/fedreg/a080513c.html (listed under the "Transportation Department"). For additional information, contact DOT at (202) 366-9310 (v) or (202) 366-7687 (TTY).

DOT maintains a toll-free hotline under the Air Carrier Access Act to provide immediate assistance to air travelers in resolving access issues or disputes with airlines. The hotline, which can also be used to order information on the rights of travelers under the act, is available weekdays from 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (eastern) by calling (800) 778-4838 (v) or (800) 455-9880 (TTY). Written complaints should be sent to DOT's Aviation Consumer Protection Division, Attn: C-75-D, 1200 New Jersey Ave, S.E., Washington, D.C. 20590 or submitted through its website at <http://airconsumer.ost.dot.gov/ACAComplaint.htm>.

Access Currents is a free newsletter issued by the Access Board every other month by mail and e-mail. Send questions or comments to news@access-board.gov or call (800) 872-2253 ext. 0026 (voice) or (800) 993-2822 (TTY). Mailing address: 1331 F Street, N.W., Suite 1000; Washington, D.C. 20004-1111.

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