

# UCAT

Ulster County Area Transit

# Paratransit Users Guide



A shared-ride ADA Paratransit transportation service available seven days a week for all trip purposes including shopping, trips to and from school or college, medical appointments, and work.

# UCAT Paratransit Users Guide

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# UCAT Paratransit Users Guide

## **Introduction**

Welcome to Ulster County's ADA complementary paratransit service. Whether you are a frequent user or a new rider, we continually strive to give you safe and reliable transportation. We have developed these procedures and guidelines over many years based on the changing needs of the passengers and our operation. This document also incorporates the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) as well as many additional Federal and State guidelines.

Please let us know of any suggestions you may have while using any of our services. Our goal is to provide you with exceptional service. We use highly trained drivers and accessible lift-equipped vehicles to provide the safest and quickest shared-ride possible for our paratransit service.

The ADA paratransit service complements our fixed route bus service by providing a comparable service to those individuals who cannot use it for some or all trips, due to one or more disabilities. This program is a service in which the cooperation of each passenger is essential. It is necessary that both passengers and staff make the service the best and most effective for everyone by observing the following guidelines. It is important to understand that under the ADA, paratransit functions as a "safety net" for people whose disabilities prevent them from using the regular fixed route transit system. It is not intended to be a comprehensive system of transportation that meets all the needs of persons with disabilities. By statute, complementary paratransit must be provided a level of service that is comparable to that provided by the fixed-route system. (Public Law 101-336, Section 22.).

Look for the UCAT homepage on the County of Ulster's web site. Our address is: [www.ulstercountyny.gov/ucat](http://www.ulstercountyny.gov/ucat).

Note: All material made available to applicants and passengers of Ulster County Area Transit's complementary paratransit service will be provided in accessible formats upon request.

## **What is ADA Paratransit**

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed into federal law in 1990. It prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities in the areas of employment, public services such as transit, public accommodations, private services, and telecommunications.

The ADA requires all public transit operators to provide a service to eligible persons living with a disability whose disabilities prevent them from using lift-equipped public transit. This service, called "paratransit service," is required by the ADA to complement fixed-route public transit service. For this reason, it is required to operate at similar times and in similar areas as public transportation (defined by the ADA as a minimum of three-quarters of a mile on either side of existing public non-commute fixed route transit).

The ADA also requires transit operators to establish specific eligibility criteria for users of paratransit service and that there be no trip priorities given to specific kinds of trips. For example, trips to medical appointments cannot be prioritized over trips to the movie theater.

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## Eligibility for UCAT Paratransit

**Category 1** - Any person with a disability who is unable to board, ride, or disembark from an accessible vehicle without the assistance of another person (except for the operator of a lift or other boarding device).

**Category 2** - Any person with a disability who needs the assistance of a lift ramp to board, ride or disembark from an accessible vehicle and an accommodating vehicle is not available or key stations have not been made accessible.

**Category 3** - Any person with a disability who has a specific impairment related condition that prevents the person from traveling to or from a bus or light rail boarding and disembarking location.

**Eligibility is not based on age, economic status, or inability to drive an automobile. Applicants should note that having a medical condition, use of a mobility device (i.e. wheelchair, scooter, etc.), or disability will not automatically qualify them for service.**

The ADA mandates a service area of  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile on either side of an active non-commute bus route. This generally means paratransit is available along existing bus routes during the hours in which the bus is operating. This is because the ADA was designed to provide “equal” access to public transportation for those who have disabilities that prevent them from using the public system. Due to the rural nature of Ulster County, UCAT has extended that service area to 1  $\frac{1}{2}$  miles.

## How to apply for UCAT paratransit service

Applications are available at Ulster County Area Transit’s offices located at 1 Danny Circle, Kingston, NY 12401 or a request for a copy to be mailed can be made by calling the Ulster County Area Transit office at (845)334-8135. Applications are also available for download from Ulster County Area Transit’s website located at [www.ulstercountyny.gov/ucat](http://www.ulstercountyny.gov/ucat) by clicking on the ADA tab. This site also includes hours of operation, holiday schedule, ticket information, bus route map, weekly fixed-route schedule, and Saturday fixed-route schedule.

**All information about the process, materials necessary to apply for eligibility, notices, and determinations concerning eligibility are available in accessible formats upon request. Formats include, but are not limited to: audio, large print, Braille, electronic files emailed and sign language.**

## Eligibility Determinations

The ADA paratransit eligibility application process may take up to 21 days to complete. Applicants will receive written notification of their eligibility determination, including specific information supporting the decision. If decisions take longer than 21 days to process, applicants who have submitted a complete eligibility application will be granted presumptive eligibility to receive services on the 22nd day until a determination is made.

Approved applicants enrolled as new paratransit customers will receive a non-photo ID card in their welcome packet to use as proof of eligibility including your expiration date.

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## **Full vs. Conditional Eligibility**

Passengers may be considered “fully” or “conditionally” eligible. Fully eligible riders are those riders whose inability to ride the bus is not based upon conditions which change. Conversely, conditionally eligible passengers include passengers who are eligible for paratransit only when certain conditions exist (e.g., wet weather, cold temperatures, darkness, geographical / architectural barriers, and distance). Conditionally eligible passengers are required to use fixed-route service whenever conditions permit. Permanent vs. Temporary Eligibility Riders are also determined to have “permanent” or “temporary” eligibility based upon the physical condition that prevents them from riding fixed route service. “Permanent” certification is for a period of three years (unless it is determined your condition is unlikely to change over time) while “Temporary” certification can be for any period up to three years and is usually set based upon the projected length of recovery. Both “Permanent” and “Temporary” riders are able to re-apply for certification once their certification expires.

## **Recertification**

Recertification of eligibility is usually required every four years (less with a temporary disability). However, at UCAT we understand that some conditions do not change over time. Thus, we offer an abbreviated recertification process for those individuals whose condition is unlikely to change over time. To qualify you must have a doctor sign a UCAT medical verification form that states that you have a condition that prevents you from riding public transportation and that this condition is unlikely to change over time. With this statement in our files, we will simply send out a short form for you to fill out and return to us every four years that asks if you wish to remain in the program. There will be no recertification application to fill out.

## **Visitors**

You do not need to be a resident of Ulster County to use UCAT paratransit. If you have been certified to use paratransit in any other state or county, UCAT will be able to provide your ride once your eligibility has been verified. ADA-eligible visitors may also use UCAT paratransit service for any combination of 21 days of service during any 365-day period beginning with the visitor’s first use of the service. Conversely, once you are ADA-certified to use paratransit in Ulster County you are also eligible to receive paratransit services in other cities and states. We suggest you contact the transit agency in the city to which you plan to travel prior to your trip. They will give you information about arrangements, fares, operating times, and schedules.

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## Appeals Process and Ineligible determination

Ulster County Area Transit has established an administrative appeals process through which an individual who has been denied ADA complementary paratransit eligibility can obtain review of the denial.

1. Appeal of the decision of the denial of ADA paratransit eligibility must be filed within 60 days of written notification of the denial. Appeals are to be sent to the Director of Transportation for Ulster County Area Transit
2. Upon receipt of the denial, Ulster County Area Transit will provide the individual with the opportunity to be heard and to present information and arguments to an individual not involved with the initial decision to deny eligibility. Ulster County Area Transit will again provide a written determination as to the decision made upon completion of the appeals process and the reasons for it.
3. Ulster County Area Transit will provide complementary paratransit service to the applicant pending the final determination of the appeal.
4. If a customer appeal is denied and the applicant thinks the ADA paratransit eligibility process was unfair, the applicant can file a complaint with the Federal Transit Administration Office of Civil Rights 1200 New Jersey Ave., SE, Washington D.C. 20590 888-446-4511 (Voice) 1-800-877-8339 (TTY).

## To File a Complaint

Ulster County Area Transit has established an administrative complaint procedure through which an individual may file a complaint concerning ADA complementary paratransit.

**Complaints may be made to the Director of Public Transit in writing, email or telephone to:**

The Director of Public Transit  
Ulster County Area Transit  
1 Danny Circle Kingston, NY 12401

Email: [ucac@co.ulster.ny.us](mailto:ucac@co.ulster.ny.us)  
Telephone 845-340-3335

The Director of Public Transit will promptly respond to the complaint allegations, including its reasons for the response, to the complainant within five (5) working days in writing, unless a verbal response is requested.

If for any reason the Director is unavailable to respond the complaint will be forwarded to the Deputy Director of Public Transit. All complaints will be documented and filed along with its response in the locked ADA cabinet.

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## Scheduling a Trip


You may call to schedule your UCAT Paratransit trip during normal business hours from 8:00am to 4:00pm, Monday through Friday. If you are calling before or after normal business hours, or on a major holiday, you may leave a message to schedule a trip and the scheduler will return your call. Trip requests can be made from one (1) to seven (7) days in advance of the trip. If a requested trip time is not available, the UCAT Paratransit scheduler may offer a trip time up to one (1) hour before or one (1) hour after the requested trip time to accommodate all ride requests. Same day requests can only be accommodated if space is available. UCAT Paratransit operating hours are the same as the local fixed route operating hours.

### Trips with a Flexible Purpose

The scheduler will negotiate a pick up time within a 2-hour window for trips with a **flexible purpose**  
For example, if the pick up time requested is 9:00 AM

Earliest negotiable pick up time is 8:00 AM  
Rider requested 9:00 AM pick up time  
Latest negotiable pick up time is 10:00 AM

8:00 AM 9:00 AM 10:00 AM 11:00 AM




### Trip with a Constrained Purpose

For constrained purpose trip where you need to arrive at a set time such as medical appointment, school or work  
You may arrive up to 1-hour before the appointment

you may arrive at your destination up to 1-hour early  
your medical appointment time

9:00 AM 10:00 AM 11:00 AM



### Be prepared to tell the dispatcher:

- Your name and phone number
- The address where you would like to be picked up
- The address where you are going
- The time you need to arrive at your destination
- When you would like to return
- The number of people riding (yourself, with a PCA or companion)
- Any special needs (traveling with service animal, oxygen, etc.)

Once your trip is scheduled, the UCAT bus will arrive to pick you up within a 30-minute window of your scheduled pick up time. The 30-minute window is between 15 minutes before your pickup time and 15 minutes after your pickup time. (For example: If your pick-up time is 2:00pm, the UCAT bus will be there anytime between 1:45pm and 2:15pm.) You should be ready to board the vehicle at the beginning of your pickup window. Please go to the vehicle as soon as it arrives, as the driver may only wait for five (5) minutes after your scheduled pick-up time before departing. Once the driver has departed, the trip is considered a “No Show”

**REMEMBER! The UCAT drivers do not go to your door. When you have a reservation on UCAT, be watching for the bus and go out to meet it when it arrives.**

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## Fares

When you make a reservation for a UCAT paratransit trip you will be told of the cost of your trip. Passengers are expected to pay the full \$3.00 (\$4.00 for trips outside the ¼ mile radius up to 1.5 miles) fare for every trip. The fare for a one-way trip within UCAT Paratransit is typically double the current adult fixed-route fare. Individual trips and roundtrips can be paid directly to the driver with exact cash fare only (keep in mind drivers do not carry change).

## Subscription Service

Subscription service is a method of efficient reservations and scheduling for trips with a repeated pattern—same origin and destination, same pickup or drop-off time, and same day(s). Riders subscribe to the service once and then UCAT Paratransit provides the repeated service. Typical uses for subscription service include:

- Traveling to work or school
- Traveling to medical appointments

After riders and transit agencies set up the subscription service, there is no need to make further arrangements until a rider's travel needs change.

Repeated "no-shows" on a subscription service may result in the loss of subscription service.

## Escorts, Aides and Guests

Paratransit and fixed route drivers are not attendants/caregivers. Drivers are there to safely transport passengers from origin to destination. UCAT Paratransit eligible riders who need a Personal Care Attendant (PCA) can be joined by one PCA, on both paratransit and fixed route bus, for no charge for the PCA. Paratransit clients are permitted to bring along one PCA (which could be a family or friend) to assist them during their trip and provide any necessary assistance beyond the driver assistance.

Additional friends or family members may ride on a space available basis, but they must pay a full fare. Children four years and younger ride free, limit to two children with each paratransit eligible rider. UCAT Paratransit schedulers must be informed of the total number of people taking the trip when the trip is scheduled. Everyone traveling with the Paratransit client is required to travel with the registrant from the same trip origin to the same trip destination. An ADA eligible individual may not schedule a trip then send an escort or aide on a trip alone. UCAT Paratransit vehicles are required to transport ADA eligible individuals.

## Wait Time

UCAT Paratransit will wait no more than five minutes for a passenger upon arriving at a scheduled pickup. If a paratransit vehicle arrives before the agreed upon time/pick-up window, the five-minute wait time does not begin until the agreed upon time.



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## Pick-up Window

All passengers are expected to be ready at their scheduled pickup time to prevent other passengers from facing avoidable delays. To account for traffic irregularities, UCAT Paratransit is considered “on time” when the Paratransit vehicle arrives up to thirty minutes after the agreed upon scheduled pick-up time. Please plan your trip with this 30-minute flexibility in mind. If the Paratransit vehicle arrives more than 31 minutes late and is clearly outside the pick-up window, it is considered a missed trip and there will be no charge for that trip if you choose to take the trip. Riders can reach the dispatcher at (845) 334-8458 to check on an existing ride during all operating hours.

## 30-Minute Pick Up Window



## Driver Assistance

Drivers are required to assist registrants on and off the bus and to safely secure mobility aids. If the registrant requests, drivers will escort registrants to and from the front door of the primary building upon arrival at both origin and destination with the following limitations:

- Paratransit drivers cannot enter any interior area of a home or apartment.
- Paratransit drivers can never lose sight of a Paratransit vehicle or leave a vehicle unsupervised with passengers aboard.
- Drivers cannot assist passengers in wheelchairs or other mobility devices up more than one step.

The ADA does not recognize a difference between door-to-door service and curb-to-curb service. The ADA recognizes origination to destination service only. Drivers are prohibited from doing any lifting, pushing or pulling to accommodate barriers. Any barriers that might risk the health or safety of the passenger, or UCAT Paratransit staff must be removed. If safe access is not available, UCAT Paratransit will provide curb service ONLY.

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## **Travel Time**

Complementary paratransit is a shared public transportation service for persons living with a disability. A maximum onboard travel time parameter is defined in accordance with ADA regulations. Ulster County Area Transit paratransit actively works to ensure there is not a pattern or proactive of excessively long trips, due to the fact that it would discourage and impact paratransit riders. It is important to understand that “excessive” is in comparison to the time required to make a similar trip using the fixed route system (including walking time to bus stop, waiting time, fixed route travel time, transfer time and walking time to final destination); while a 1-hour travel time for a 4-mile complementary paratransit trip may seem excessive in the abstract, if the same trip takes an hour using the fixed route system, it is comparable, not excessive. Complementary paratransit service is by nature a shared-ride service. The standard of service is not intended to reflect that of a taxi service.

## **Service Animals**

A service animal is defined by the ADA as any guide dog, signal dog, or other animal individually trained to aid an individual with a disability. If they meet this definition, animals are considered service animals under the ADA regardless of whether they have been licensed or certified by a state or local government.

When scheduling a trip, please advise the scheduler that a service animal will be riding. The service animal must stay on the floor of the vehicle and be under control and well behaved at all times. Any service animal will be removed if it shows signs of aggression or any other inappropriate behavior such as urinating or defecating on the Paratransit vehicle.

## **Mobility Aids**

All UCAT Paratransit buses as well as fixed route buses are equipped with wheelchair lifts/ramps. You may travel with your mobility device as long as the lift/ramp and vehicle can physically accommodate the size and weight of your mobility device when occupied, unless doing so is inconsistent with legitimate safety requirements.

Legitimate Safety Requirements (ADA Regulations 49 CFR 37):

- The weight of your mobility device, when occupied, must not exceed the weight indicated in the lift/ramp specifications.
- Your mobility device must not be of a size that would block an aisle or be too large to fully enter the vehicle.
- Your mobility device must not interfere with the safe evaluation of passengers in an emergency. Mobility devices must be functioning properly (i.e., wheels, brakes, footrests, and batteries must be in good working order). Mobility devices in poor working order or with a leaking or dead battery unit will not be allowed to board.

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## **Return Trips after Medical Appointment**

Passengers who are unsure how long their medical appointments will take will be placed in a “will-call” status. This means that once a passenger is ready to be picked up, they will contact dispatch at (845) 334-8458 for a return. A bus will be dispatched to the passenger and will arrive within one (1) hour of dispatch receiving the call.

## **Riding the fixed route bus**

Some paratransit passengers are able to ride the UCAT fixed route buses for some trips. The buses offer more flexibility and more independence to those who are able to use it. All of our buses allow persons using wheelchairs and persons with other mobility impairments greater access to them. ADA passengers riding the fixed route bus are entitled to pay half fare between the hours of 9am and 3pm.

Many of our buses can “kneel.” This means the bus can be lowered a few inches in order to reduce the height of the step into the bus. This may also help those passengers who use other types of mobility devices by reducing the step up into the bus. The buses also have a ramp that unfolds for people using wheelchairs or anyone else requesting it.

All bus drivers will, unfold the ramp, kneel the bus, assist a person on and off the vehicle, secure wheelchairs, make stop announcements, and help passengers with transfers and route information. However, the bus driver cannot provide assistance after you exit the bus onto the sidewalk. Please call (845)334-8120 at least one day in advance if you would like to schedule a transfer from a paratransit vehicle to a bus.

## **Safety**

No tobacco products, alcohol or illegal substances will be consumed on UCAT vehicles. No open alcoholic beverages are allowed on board the vans.

Passengers carrying hazardous materials (i.e., kerosene, gasoline, firearms, and explosives) will not be allowed on UCAT vehicles.

If a passenger engages in violent, seriously disruptive or illegal conduct, the passenger will be suspended from the service.

## **Other Assistance**

Those persons who would like to learn how to use the lift-equipment on an accessible fixed-route bus can practice on a vehicle that is not in regular service. Whenever possible, Ulster County Area Transit will try to make available a demonstration, which can be attended by all interested persons, and will arrange transportation to such sites for those who need it. Ulster County Area Transit staff may be able to accompany you on all or part of your first trip if advance arrangements are made. Ulster County Area Transit will make mobility training available upon request. Contact Ulster County Area Transit at 1 Danny Circle, Kingston, NY 12401 or by phone at (845)334-8135.

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## Late Cancellations/No-Shows

Call UCAT Paratransit as soon as possible if you need to cancel your reservation. By cancelling well in advance, you help UCAT Paratransit improve service to all customers. Cancellations made less than one hour in advance of a scheduled pickup time are considered a no-show. A no-show happens when riders do not cancel a scheduled trip at least one hour in advance or are not available to board within five minutes of the vehicle's arrival within the pickup window. Riders can avoid no-show situations when they:

- Review times and dates with the schedulers to be sure the information is correct.
- Call UCAT Paratransit and cancel rides as soon as the ride is no longer needed.
- Cancel at least 1 hour in advance of the scheduled pickup time.
- Are prepared to board at the starting time of the pickup window and within 5 minutes after the bus arrives.

## No-Show Policy

UCAT Paratransit's late cancellations/no-show policy is modeled in accordance with the industry standard. Its purpose is to ensure quality paratransit service. Abuse of the paratransit system affects the ability to provide paratransit services to other eligible clients. Every time a late cancellation/no-show occurs it is recorded in the rider's trip record. If you have more than two late cancellations/no-shows within any 30-day period, the rider's trip record will be reviewed. If a pattern or practice of missed trips (at least two 30 day periods with more than two late cancellation/no-shows), repeated or intentional, is determined, the client will be warned (verbally and written/email). Continued violations may result in suspension of UCAT Paratransit service (at least three 30 day periods with more than two late cancellation/no-shows). For a rider using the subscription service, the above process may be followed, resulting in removal from subscription service, but the rider may retain the ability to schedule individual trips.

When there are circumstances outside the rider's control, it is not considered a no-show. If, for some reason, UCAT Paratransit arrives after your 31-minute pickup window and you have made other arrangements or cancelled your ride, it is not considered a no-show.

## Suspension Process

Before suspending service, UCAT will:

- Notify the rider at least twice verbally regarding the rider's trip record.
- Mail the rider the Paratransit Rider Guide
- Notify the individual in writing detailing (start date, length of time, end date) the proposed suspended service and citing the basis of the proposed suspension.
- Provide the individual an opportunity to be heard and to present information and arguments.
- Provide the individual with written notification of the decision and the reasons for it, along with detailing the individual's opportunity to appeal the decision. The appeals must be filed within 60 days.

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## **Appeal Process for Suspension of Service**

Ulster County Area Transit has established an administrative appeals process through which an individual who has had service suspended due to excessive No Shows can obtain review of the suspension.

1. All suspensions of service due to No Shows are subject to a formal appeal, in person or in writing to the Ulster County Area Transit Director of Transportation by mailing to: 1 Danny Circle, Kingston, NY 12401.
2. Appeal of the decision to suspend service to an individual must be filed within 30 days of the written notification of the decision to suspend service.
3. The Ulster County Area Transit Director of Transportation will review the written request and make a determination within fourteen (14) business days.

The customer will be notified in writing regarding the decision made by the Ulster County Area Transit Director of Transportation as to the decision made upon completion of the appeals process and the reasons for it.

## **Reasonable Modifications**

Public entities providing designated public transportation (e.g., fixed route, demand-responsive, and ADA complementary Paratransit) service will need to make reasonable modifications/accommodations to policies and practices to ensure program accessibility subject to several exceptions. These exceptions included when the medication/accommodation would cause a direct threat to the health or safety of others, would result in a fundamental alteration of the service, would not actually be necessary in order for the individual with a disability to access the entity's service, or (for recipients of Federal financial assistance) would result in an undue financial and administrative burden. Requests for Reasonable Modification can be made over the phone. If your request was denied and you feel it should not have been, please contact the director at 845-340-3335.

## **SUMMARY OF TELEPHONE NUMBERS**

TTY users may call the New York relay center at: 1-800-662-1220

ADA information and general inquiries: 845-334-8135

ADA appointments and cancellations: 845-334-8120

ADA complaints/compliments/Reasonable Modifications: 845-340-3335

Federal Transit Administration Office of Civil Rights:

Voice: 1-888-446-4511

TTY: 1-800-877-8339

VCO: 1-877-877-6280