



Wheelchair securement: Where art meets science

by Courtney Hansen

Wheelchair access on transit buses and paratransit is getting more complicated every year. Service providers are faced with accommodating more passengers with an ever-increasing diversity of mobility aids. Some of the problems facing transit systems and customers are:

- Larger and less maneuverable wheelchairs;
- Securement is often time consuming, physically challenging, and intrusive to passengers;
- It is increasingly common for wheelchairs to be difficult to tie down because of new design features.

If there is no good place for attachment of belts or hooks, a fabric webbing tether strap can be installed on the mobility aid. This approach, while not as good as having proper mechanical tie-down points built in or attached to wheelchairs, serves to make “best efforts” to keep wheelchairs in the securement area, as encouraged by the ADA regulations.

A common problem for transit personnel is not being able to identify where to attach tie-down straps on many wheelchairs and scooters. Some transit systems and disability organizations offer wheelchair mark-



ing and/or tether strap programs for wheelchair users. The first component of these programs is markings for appropriate attachment points on customers’ chairs with color-coded tape, stickers, wire ties, or some other identifier. If there is no good place for attachment of belts or

hooks, a fabric webbing tether strap can be installed on the mobility aid. This approach, while not as good as having proper mechanical tie-down points built in or attached to wheelchairs, serves to make “best efforts”

to keep wheelchairs in the securement area, as encouraged by the ADA regulations.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires that people using wheelchairs be transported, whether they can be adequately secured or not. If a wheelchair cannot be successfully secured, or the vehicle’s securement equipment isn’t functioning, the passenger must still be allowed to ride. However, it is important to note that the regulations also state that wheelchair users may be denied transportation if they do not allow their chairs to be secured.

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) bulletin on wheelchair securement indicates that transit providers must establish and post a written policy governing these situations. Conversely, the FTA bulletin allows transit providers to also have a policy that securement is at the option of the passenger. The transit agency must, however, provide securement assistance to any passenger who needs or requests it. In addition, wheelchair users may only be required to use occupant restraints if all other passengers are required to do so. The FTA bulletin (ADA Information Bulletin, Volume 1: *Questions and Answers Concerning Common Wheelchairs and Public Transit*) is available online at www.fta.dot.gov/14863_ENG_HTML.htm.

Reprinted from an article by Doug Cross in *Project ACTION Update*, August/September 2004.▲