

Highlights of [GAO-13-17](#), a report to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs, U.S. Senate

## Why GAO Did This Study

The ADA, a civil rights law enacted in 1990, provided that it shall be considered discrimination for a public entity that operates a fixed-route transit system to fail to offer paratransit service to disabled individuals that is comparable to services provided to those without disabilities. FTA is responsible for overseeing compliance with ADA requirements for paratransit services. As requested, GAO examined: (1) the extent of compliance with ADA paratransit requirements, (2) changes in ADA paratransit demand and costs since 2007, and (3) actions transit agencies are taking to help address changes in the demand for and costs of ADA paratransit service. GAO analyzed FTA's ADA compliance reports; conducted a generalizable web-based survey of 145 transit agencies; interviewed federal officials; and interviewed officials from 20 transit agencies, chosen based on a variety of characteristics, including geographic diversity.

## What GAO Recommends

The Secretary of Transportation should direct the FTA Administrator to (1) document and make publicly available a formal approach for selecting transit agencies for ADA paratransit compliance reviews, (2) post the backlog of ADA's compliance-review final reports and establish a process for the timely posting of future reports, and (3) provide guidance to transit agencies on how to accurately complete existing ADA paratransit data fields in the NTD. The Department of Transportation neither agreed nor disagreed with the recommendations and provided clarifying comments, which GAO incorporated.

View [GAO-13-17](#). For more information, contact David J. Wise at (202) 512-2834 or [wised@gao.gov](mailto:wised@gao.gov).

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# ADA PARATRANSIT SERVICES

## Demand Has Increased, but Little is Known about Compliance

### What GAO Found

Little is known about the extent of transit agencies' compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) paratransit service requirements. FTA does receive some assurance that agencies are complying with federal statutes and regulations, including ADA paratransit requirements, because transit agencies that receive FTA funding are required to self-certify and assure that they are complying with the Department of Transportation's ADA regulations. Additionally, FTA conducts specialized ADA paratransit compliance reviews that examine multiple aspects of an agency's paratransit services; however, few transit agencies are selected for review each year. FTA generally relies on complaints, media reports, experience with an agency, and other information to select agencies for review, but does not have documented criteria for selecting agencies. This informal selection process does not align with federal guidance on internal controls related to communication, documentation, and monitoring. Lastly, according to FTA officials, all finalized ADA paratransit compliance review reports are to be available on FTA's website, but GAO identified nine final review reports—conducted from 2004 to 2010—that have not been posted to FTA's website.

Based on GAO's survey, the demand for ADA paratransit trips increased, since 2007 for some transit agencies, and costs for providing the trips remain high. The average number of annual ADA paratransit trips provided by a transit agency increased 7 percent from 2007 to 2010; from 172,481 trips in 2007 to 184,856 trips in 2010. Increases in demand for ADA paratransit services were driven by the 10 largest transit agencies, measured according to the population size of their service areas. Also, ADA paratransit trips are much more costly to provide than fixed-route trips. Similarly, the average cost of providing an ADA paratransit trip in 2010 was \$29.30, an estimated three and a half times more expensive than the average cost of \$8.15 to provide a fixed-route trip. The average cost of providing an ADA paratransit trip increased 10 percent from 2007 to 2010. GAO's analysis of ADA paratransit data available in FTA's National Transit Database (NTD) found that, according to GAO standards for data reliability, the data are not sufficiently reliable for the purpose of assessing changes in ADA paratransit demand and costs. For example, GAO found discrepancies, such as incomplete data, that may understate or overstate the number of ADA trips and amount of ADA expenses. According to FTA officials, some transit agencies fail to report these data, while others misunderstand the data fields and make reporting errors as a result.

Transit agencies are taking actions such as coordinating with other transportation providers, offering travel training, and improving accessibility to address changes in ADA paratransit demand and costs. According to GAO's survey, about 59 percent of transit agencies are coordinating with health and human services providers to improve ADA paratransit services or address the costs of providing such services. About 44 percent of transit agencies are coordinating with other local transportation providers. Additionally, about 55 percent are using travel training to help paratransit riders' transition to fixed-route services. Furthermore, GAO's survey results showed that over 62 percent of transit agencies have made accessibility improvements to their fixed-route systems since 2007.