

UNITED STATES ACCESS BOARD



2007 Annual Report

January 2008

A FEDERAL AGENCY COMMITTED TO ACCESSIBLE DESIGN

UNITED STATES ACCESS BOARD

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FY 2007 ANNUAL REPORT

The U.S. Access Board is a leading resource on design that is accessible to people with disabilities. Through the development of guidelines and standards, the Board establishes what constitutes accessibility in the realms of architecture, transportation, and communication and information technologies. Its design specifications play a critical role in fulfilling the promises of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and other Federal laws guaranteeing the rights of people with disabilities. The Board promotes accessible design through public outreach, technical assistance, training, published guidance, and research. In addition, it ensures access to facilities funded by the Federal government.

GUIDELINES AND STANDARDS

Establishing design criteria and keeping them up to date constitute key Board activities. The Board maintains guidelines and standards for the built environment, vehicles, information technology, and telecommunications equipment under several different laws. In any given year, the Board advances work on a varied agenda of rulemaking initiatives. Some involve updates of existing criteria to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of people with disabilities. Others break new ground by detailing access in areas not specifically addressed by a guideline or standard. Having previously completed a comprehensive update of its facility guidelines, the Board proceeded to review its specifications for electronic and information technology, telecommunication products, and transportation vehicles in 2007. The Board also continued work on new guidelines for outdoor environments, public rights-of-way, and passenger vessels, and examined issues concerning emergency housing.

Outdoor Developed Areas

Achieving accessibility in outdoor environments has long been a source of confusion due to challenges and constraints posed by terrain, the degree of development, construction practices and materials, and other factors. In 2007, the Board unveiled new guidelines for Federal parks and recreation areas and made them available for public comment. The guidelines provide detailed guidance on trails, beaches, and picnic and camping areas on sites managed by the Federal government.



Board members hear testimony at one of three public hearings on the proposed guidelines.

To promote public input, the Board held hearings on the proposal in Denver, Washington, D.C., and Indianapolis. The Board received over 120 comments during a four-month comment period, including testimony provided at the hearings. Detailed feedback was submitted by professional and trade associations, individuals with disabilities, advocacy groups, organizations devoted to outdoor recreation, trail and park operators, Federal agencies, parks and recreation departments, and others. The Board will finalize the guidelines based on this feedback and plans to follow up this effort with similar guidelines for non-Federal sites.

Information Technology and Telecommunications

The Board conducted a review of its accessibility criteria for electronic and information technology and telecommunications products through an advisory committee it chartered. Comprised of a cross-section of stakeholders, the Telecommunications and Electronic and Information Technology Advisory Committee includes representatives from industry, disability groups, standard-setting bodies in the U.S. and abroad, government agencies, and others. The Committee met regularly throughout the year to craft recommendations on how the Board's standards for electronic and information technologies should be updated. Issued under section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act, these standards apply to technologies procured by the Federal government. The Committee's report also will address updates to Board guidelines for telecommunications products covered by section 255 of the Telecommunications Act.



Committee members met regularly throughout the year and continued deliberations by teleconference.

The Committee's recommendations will address coverage of products and technologies, including new or convergent types, solutions to identified access barriers, the content of new or revised specifications and criteria, and their harmonization with comparable international efforts in this area. The Committee is slated to submit its report to the Board in April 2008. The Board will follow-up with proposed revisions to the standards and guidelines based on the committee's recommendations.

Transportation Vehicles

The Board also initiated a review of its ADA guidelines for transportation vehicles which cover access to buses, vans, rail cars, and other modes of public transportation. In laying the groundwork for this update, the Board held an industry roundtable to identify key issues to address. Discussion focused on trends and innovations in the design of buses and boarding devices and the growing diversity of mobility aids now on the market. Based on this input, the Board prepared updates to specifications for buses and vans and released a draft for public comment. The Board also posed questions to the public on existing specifications, such as minimum space requirements for wheelchairs. Vehicle manufacturers, transit operators, trade associations, consumers, and disability groups, among others provided feedback to the Board. By the close of the comment period, the Board received approximately 80 comments. The Board will also update specifications for rail cars and other vehicles covered by the guidelines.

Passenger Vessels

Work also continued on new guidelines for passenger vessels last year. These guidelines will provide access criteria for different types of vessels, including cruise and gaming ships, ferries, and excursion boats. Previously, the Board made two drafts of the guidelines available for public comment. Based on the input it received, the Board identified and examined key issues. In 2007, the Board organized an advisory committee to explore issues related to accessible alarm systems aboard vessels. The Passenger Vessel Emergency Alarms Advisory Committee, which includes representatives from disability organizations, the vessel and cruise ship industry, and codes and trade groups, will prepare recommendations on specifications for emergency warning systems that take into account design considerations unique to various types of vessels. The Committee is due to complete its work in 2008. The Board will officially propose a revised version of the guidelines that incorporates the Committee's recommendations.

Public Rights-of-Way

Sidewalks, street crossings, and other elements of public rights-of-ways present unique challenges to accessibility. The Board is developing new guidelines for public rights-of-way that will address various issues, including access for blind pedestrians at street crossings, accessible on-street parking, and constraints posed by space limitations and terrain, among others. Over the course of the year, the Board made progress on these guidelines, which will be released for public comment. In addition, the Board partnered with other entities to conduct needed research and collect data, develop supplementary guidance, including a publication of a new guide on alterations, and continue outreach. For example, the Board, along with the American Traffic Safety Services Association and other agencies, organized an event that enabled people with vision impairments to test and evaluate products used for directing pedestrians around work zones, including barricades, channelizing devices, "talking" lights, and detectable warnings.

Emergency Transportable Housing

The Board also organized a new advisory committee that is examining access to housing trailers procured by the government for use in natural disasters. Access to such housing proved problematic in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and, after verifying and examining the issues involved, the Board determined that an advisory committee should be organized to develop guidance on the topic. The Board organized the Committee based on applications received in response to a published notice. The Committee's 13 members include representatives from disability groups, industry and codes groups, and government agencies. A report from the Committee is expected in 2008.

OUTREACH

In developing guidelines and standards, the Board routinely interacts with the public and its stakeholders through hearings, information meetings, and other venues. In addition, each year the Board holds a town meeting in a different city to hear from individuals on issues of concern and to update the public on the work of the Board. These events offer an open dialogue on accessible design and typically include presentations and briefings on specific topics.

The Board held its 2007 town meeting in the Denver area in July. The event provided a forum where members of the public could advise the Board on issues of concern. It also included panel presentations by invited guests on voting equipment and classroom acoustics. Several members of the public, including parents of children with hearing loss, strongly endorsed the efforts to improve classroom acoustics. Participants also called attention to other access concerns, including ADA standards for residential facilities, voting systems and the legibility of paper ballots, and access to parking meters. While in the Denver area, Board members toured area parks to examine trail and campground access and other subjects of the guidelines proposed for outdoor developed areas.



The Board's visit to Denver included tours of Rocky Mountain National Park and the Breckenridge Outdoor Education Center.

SERVICES AND RESOURCES

In addition to its development of guidelines and standards, the Board promotes accessible design through education, published resources, and one-on-one guidance to the public. These services play a critical role in assisting various professionals understand and apply accessibility design requirements. The Board also ensures access to federally funded buildings through the investigation of complaints.

Training

On a regular basis, the Board travels across the country to provide training on accessible design and its guidelines and standards at different events and conferences. Most training pertains to design criteria for facilities, transportation vehicles, and information technology. Training sessions, which are targeted to the needs and interests of each audience, attract designers and architects, code officials, advocacy groups, transportation operators, the information technology industry, and other professionals in assorted fields. In 2007, the Board conducted 78 sessions and provided training to over 5,700 people.

Technical Assistance


In following accessibility guidelines and standards, users run into questions about how a specification can best be met in a certain situation or seek clarification on what a particular provision means. Every day the Board provides technical assistance on its accessibility criteria and accessible design through its toll-free line as well as by email and fax. Whether it's a question about a construction or alteration project, vehicle design, or information and communication technology, people can turn to the Board for answers. This individualized guidance improves compliance and helps ensure that access is achieved properly. The Board responded to over 14,400 technical inquiries in 2007.


The Board's input is routinely sought on specific projects, including high-profile sites and landmarks. Last year, Board staff provided feedback on the Pentagon Memorial Project commemorating victims of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, met with representatives of the American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial to be built in Washington, D.C. near Capitol Hill to discuss the project's accessible features, and offered input on schematic designs for a new justice center in Denver.


Resources


A variety of publications and guidance materials on accessibility is produced and distributed by the Board. In addition to copies of Board guidelines and standards, this information includes user-friendly companion guides, technical bulletins, manuals, and online courses. New materials are developed each year, many of which focus on clarifying recent guidelines or providing guidance in areas where guidelines are pending. In 2007, the Board unveiled an interactive online course on accessible play areas. It also distributed a new illustrated guide on public rights-of-ways that shows how access can be maximized in alteration projects through planning, best practices, case studies, and recommended strategies for negotiating constraints.

FY 2007 by the Numbers

Over **14,400** technical inquiries handled 

78 training sessions held and **5,740** people trained 

Over **7,600** copies of Board materials mailed out 

More than **3.4 million** user sessions and **63 million** hits on Board website 

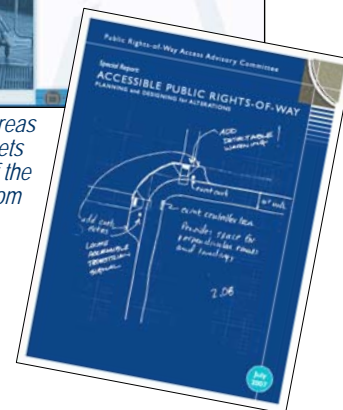
All Board resources are available on its website at www.access-board.gov. Website traffic continued to grow significantly, and by year's end the site logged over 62.3 million hits and more than over 3.4 million user sessions. Some Board customers prefer ordering copies of materials in print or alternate formats. The Board sent out over 7,600 copies of its publications last year, in addition to materials distributed at its training sessions.

Enforcement

Facilities built or altered with Federal dollars must be accessible under the Architectural Barriers Act (ABA) of 1968, the first national law on the books guaranteeing access to the built environment. The ABA covers a wide range of government buildings, including post offices, social security offices, and Federal office buildings. It also applies to non-Federal buildings that are federally funded, such as schools, transit stations, local courthouses and jails, and public housing. The Board enforces the law through the investigation of complaints. The first step in an investigation is to determine whether the facility is covered by the ABA and, if so, whether it meets the applicable design standards. If a covered facility is not in compliance, the Board will pursue a corrective action plan and monitor the case until all necessary work is completed. In 2007, the Board advanced 177 investigations and closed 43 cases. Barriers were successfully remedied in all cases where the law applied, and in some cases voluntarily where it did not.



An online course on play areas and a design guide on streets and sidewalks are some of the new resources available from the Board.



RESEARCH

The Board sponsors and coordinates research to develop guidance materials, support its development of new guidelines and promote accessible design. Each year, the Board initiates a variety of projects, often in partnership with other organizations. Most projects focus on the study of accessibility in relation to architecture and design, human factors, communication, and transportation. During the year, on-going projects advanced research on human measures and wheeled mobility aids, surfaces, public rights-of-way, communication access in transportation systems, point-of-sales machines, and indoor environmental air quality. New projects initiated in 2007 are examining trail and play area surfaces, exhibit design, and best practices for state code implementation and enforcement.

A sampling of several projects shows the breadth of certain data collection efforts and the range of enlisted expertise that informs the design of projects and the guidance developed. It also demonstrates how research findings improve accessibility and lead to real-world results.

Human Measures and Wheeled Mobility

The Board has provided significant financial and advisory support to a major multi-year study on people who use wheeled mobility aids. Conducted by the Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center on Universal Design, this project is collecting human measures on people using various types of manual wheelchairs and motorized devices. Space requirements, maneuvering parameters, reach ranges, and other measures are being entered into a database that will be

instrumental in evaluating existing accessibility criteria and design specifications. The Board has contributed to this project over the past four years, and provided additional funds last year to expand data collection, which is due to be completed in 2008. Data from 500 test subjects will be compiled. Extensive planning went into the design of this project and the development and vetting of a standardized measurement protocol, including input received through two international conferences. It is hoped that subsequent researchers will utilize this project's methodologies and build upon the data collected.



A researcher measures the reach of a test participant.

Tolerances for Surface Smoothness and Slope

The Board's facility guidelines generally recognize conventional industry tolerances for field conditions. Many in the design, construction, and codes industry have sought guidance from the Board on what tolerances are acceptable for a given specification. A project underway by the Board will develop guidance on construction tolerances for surface slope, flatness, and smoothness. As part of this project, a workshop was held last spring to identify strategies and considerations for developing this guidance. Participants included representatives from various trade associations, professional societies, government agencies, and research organizations. Discussion focused on available measurement protocols, and presented papers addressed design issues, construction considerations, and research findings. Participants identified ways to establish and promote appropriate tolerances, measurement protocols, and best practices through trade and professional associations. This project, while currently focused on exterior routes, will also explore tolerances for other types of construction.

Outdoor Surfacing

Another Board project is establishing ways to improve the performance of engineered wood fiber as a surfacing material for trails and playgrounds. This multi-year study involves long-term testing of treatments for making this wood chip material, a popular choice for outdoor surfaces, firmer and more stable for wheelchair traffic. Although final test phases are currently underway, the methods and materials deemed most effective by this study are being used to improve access at various outdoor sites, including a complex of open-air performance centers in the Washington, D.C. area. Last year, volunteers installed stabilized engineered wood fiber to improve the surface of routes and wheelchair seating spaces at Wolf Trap National Park for the Performing Arts. Final phases of the Board's study, currently underway, involve full-scale field assessments at an assortment of playgrounds and trails in different sites across the country.



Treated engineered wood fiber improves routes and wheelchair spaces at an outdoor arena at Wolf Trap.