

# Tech Topic

## Physical Sidewalk Requirements Under ADA

There are many qualitative and quantitative requirements for sidewalks that stem from the Americans with Disabilities Act, but the significant drivers tend to be physical dimensions and a review of those is helpful. This very brief treatment is intended to outline the sometimes challenging criteria for sidewalks, but is no substitute for a thorough understanding of relevant requirements and guidance at the federal, state, and local level.

### Sidewalk Widths

In the language of ADA, a sidewalk should be thought of as an “accessible route.” The U.S. Access Board’s ADA Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG), in Section 4.2 and Figure 1, requires a minimum width for accessible routes of 36” on a continuous basis, which should generally be thought of as the legal minimum width of a sidewalk. ADAAG does provide for an occasional obstruction that limits the width to no less than 32” for a length no greater than 24”; for example, a utility pole or street sign that leaves only a 32” sidewalk would be permissible, but a utility pole that left a 30” width would not be, nor would an extended planter that limited the width to 32” for more than two feet. Using ADAAG Section 4.13.7, such obstructions (that limit a sidewalk to less than 36”) can occur at a maximum frequency such that there is at least a 48” clear distance between the obstructions where a minimum 36” sidewalk is available. Regardless of the presence or absence of obstructions, any sidewalk with less than 60” clear width must be provided passing spaces at least 60” by 60” at least every 200 feet of length. The foregoing details from ADAAG should be considered the minimum requirements under the law. The Access Board and many state DOTs, including DelDOT, target a 48” continuous width where they can achieve it in an upgrade and 60” for new construction. Sidewalk widths are measured from the back of the curb to the back of the sidewalk; the curb is not included in any width measurement.

### Ramp Widths

Similarly, ADAAG requires the minimum ramp width to be 36”, exclusive of any flared sides (Section 4.7.3). DelDOT requires a minimum 48” wide ramp, with 60” preferred. Curb ramps must have detectable warnings (truncated domes) extending the full width and depth of the ramp (ADAAG, Section 4.7.7).

### Sidewalk Slopes

Sidewalk cross slopes must not exceed 2% (ADAAG, Section 4.3.7), and DelDOT’s guidance agrees; however, some cross slope approaching 2% is desirable for proper drainage and safety considerations. Longitudinal or running slopes of sidewalks should generally be kept less than 5%, because any length of sidewalk that exceeds 5% must then comply with ADAAG Section 4.8 as a ramp.

## Ramp Slopes

Any sidewalk running slope in excess of 5% is considered a ramp (ADAAG, Section 4.3.7), which can then not exceed 8.33% and may not rise more than 30" without requirements for periodic landings (ADAAG, Section 4.8). Ramp cross slopes may not exceed 2%.

## Construction Tolerances

Small deviations from these requirements are considered by the disabled community to be critically important and tolerances in construction should not be taken lightly. A 59" wide sidewalk should not be accepted where the required width on construction documents is 60". Cross slopes should be specified, for example, as no less than 1.5% and no greater than 2%, and constructed cross slopes outside of that range should be removed and replaced at the contractor's expense to ensure that the project owner is not held liable in a civil lawsuit. Adequate construction inspection is essential to minimize owner liability.

Again, these are only some of the physical requirements for sidewalks and ramps and even the details for these elements can be more complex under some situations. All upgrade of sidewalks and ramps and all new construction design should be carefully reviewed against the requirements of the Access Board, and relevant state and local codes. Moreover, detailed construction inspection is essential to ensure rigid compliance.

### Suggested Further Reading and References:

- Equal Opportunity for Individuals with Disabilities, ADA, 42 U.S.C. §12101 et seq., [http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/42/usc\\_sup\\_01\\_42\\_10\\_126.html](http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/42/usc_sup_01_42_10_126.html)
- U.S. Access Board: <http://www.access-board.gov/index.htm>
- Access Board ADAAG: <http://www.access-board.gov/adaag/html/adaag.htm>
- Access Board public right of way background: <http://www.access-board.gov/prowac/index.htm>
- Access Board PROWAC: <http://www.access-board.gov/prowac/alterations/guide.pdf>
- DelDOT Standards and Regulations for Subdivision Streets and State Highway Access: [http://www.deldot.gov/information/pubs\\_forms/manuals/subdivisions/pdf/standards\\_and\\_regulations\\_031108.pdf](http://www.deldot.gov/information/pubs_forms/manuals/subdivisions/pdf/standards_and_regulations_031108.pdf)
- DelDOT curb ramp design guidance: [http://www.deldot.gov/information/pubs\\_forms/manuals/dgm/pdf/1-16\\_curb\\_ramps.pdf](http://www.deldot.gov/information/pubs_forms/manuals/dgm/pdf/1-16_curb_ramps.pdf)
- ADA small town guide: <http://www.ada.gov/smtown.pdf>



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