

## Wheelchairs or Scooters: Transporting passengers in vehicles

When using a vehicle to transport passengers with a wheelchair or scooter, it is vital to ensure that both the user and their mobility device are safely and correctly secured into the vehicle. In many cases, the user may need to remain seated on their mobility device due to their need for more supportive seating and/or a reduced ability to transfer into the passenger seat of a vehicle.



### Wheelchairs for use in vehicles

In Nova Scotia the Board Public Passenger Motor Carrier Act Regulations made under subsection 27(1) of the *Motor Carrier Act* R.S.N.S. 1989, c. 292 O.I.C. 92-1257 (December 22, 1992), N.S. Reg. 283/92 as amended up to O.I.C. 2013-402 (December 20, 2013), N.S. Reg. 342/2013

The regulations outline a number of legal requirements surrounding which types of wheelchairs can or cannot be used in a vehicle. In the case of a commercial vehicle that is a special transit facility,

- (i) *if fitted with wheelchair securement devices, each device anchorage shall be secure, each component part shall operate as intended and no component part shall have damage apparent on visual inspection that would reduce its effectiveness,*
- (ii) *if fitted with occupant restraint assemblies, each component part shall operate as intended and no component part shall have damage apparent on visual inspection that would reduce its effectiveness,*
- (iii) *if fitted with occupant restraint assemblies anchored to the vehicle, each restraint assembly anchorage shall be secured,*
- (iv) *all devices used to secure passenger access or emergency exit doors in the open position shall operate as intended and shall have no damage apparent on visual inspection that would reduce their effectiveness,*
- (v) *if fitted with an emergency exit door, the door shall have no fixed obstructions blocking the passage of persons or, in the case of a vehicle used for the transportation of persons in wheelchairs, blocking the passage of wheelchairs, and the door release mechanism shall function from inside and outside the vehicle,*
- (vi) *if fitted with a ramp or power lift, the means of attachment of the ramp or power lift to the vehicle shall be secure with no fastening parts missing and when the ramp or power lift is in the stored position it shall be secured by means other than a support or lug in the door in such a manner as to pose no potential hazard to occupants of the vehicle,*
- (vii) *no plate, cover or energy-absorbing material required to protect persons from sharp edges or corners shall be missing, worn or damaged so as to reduce its effectiveness,*
- (viii) *as a minimum, the vehicle shall meet the requirements of CSA D409-92, Motor Vehicles for the Transportation of Persons with Physical Disabilities, as amended.*

### Tie-down point

A wheelchair has to have brackets or tie-down points already designed and incorporated by the manufacturer as suitable for securing a wheelchair to a vehicle. Tie-down points that are incorporated after manufacture or design may not be as strong or may weaken the wheelchair frame. Wheelchairs without brackets suitable for tie-down points will not be transported with the passenger sitting in them.

The following mobility devices are unsuitable for use in vehicles due to potentially hazardous design construction features. These include (but are not limited to):

- Lightweight 'stroller' type wheelchairs
- Wheelchairs or mobility scooters where the seat is attached to the base via a single post (often featured with a swivel-style seat)
- Any wheelchair or mobility scooter that features projections at the front, as these may be hazardous in the event of an accident.
- Any user of a mobility scooter, or one of the wheelchair types mentioned above, must transfer into one of the passengers seats of the vehicle during transit and cannot travel seated on their mobility device.

The user may transfer to a passenger seat either before or after their wheelchair or scooter has been loaded into the vehicle depending on their capabilities and the design of the vehicle.

### **Loading a wheelchair/scooter and user into a vehicle**

Ramps are used to transfer the user and their wheelchair or scooter into a vehicle. These are positioned at the rear of the vehicle when the vehicle is parked.

### **Securing a wheelchair/scooter inside a vehicle**

Any wheelchair or scooter being transported inside a vehicle must be secured directly to the body of the vehicle using wheelchair restraint systems that meet the relevant Canadian Standards. A variety of restraint systems is available depending on the vehicle and device.

The preferred direction for the wheelchair user is facing forwards.

Where the wheelchair manufacturer has not specified tie-down points, the wheelchair is not suitable to be transported.

Avoid any twisting of restraints. Do not cross restraints from one side to the other or from the front to rear

Restraints should be around 45 degrees to the floor when correctly attached.

### **Securing the user in the vehicle**

Even if the wheelchair user has a belt or other harness as part of their wheelchair seating, it is essential that a transport occupant restraint, which is secured to the vehicle, also be used.

A lap belt that goes across the pelvis and secures to the vehicle is the minimum requirement, however, it is preferred to have a lap sash belt that goes over the shoulder as well as the pelvis. Guidelines regarding their use:

The lap belt should make full contact across the front of the body and pass down between the user and any side panels on the wheelchair, **not** over the arm rests. Belts must fit firmly

The lap belt needs to sit across the pelvis, not across the abdomen. Avoid transporting the passenger in a reclined position as the user is more prone to slide down under the lap belt causing additional pressure on the abdomen and a potential choking risk if a sash belt is being used

Position a sash belt so that it remains in contact with the shoulders of the wheelchair user.

### **Other considerations**

Secure any loose objects on the wheelchair or elsewhere in the vehicle and remove wheelchair trays—these can become a hazard to the wheelchair user in the event of an accident

Drive the vehicle with increased consideration for the wheelchair user— accelerate smoothly, brake early and gently, take corners smoothly and slowly