



## COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

### MASSTRAILS GRANTS PROGRAM

#### Accessible Trail Guide

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#### Shared Use Pathways

All trail projects involving shared use path and amenity construction must comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) and the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board (MAAB) design standards. Under The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), a law passed in 1990, all newly designed and constructed or altered State and local government facilities, public accommodation, and commercial facilities must be readily accessible and usable by persons with disabilities. The design standards issued under the Americans with Disabilities Act by the Department of Justice and the Department of Transportation ensure access to the built environment for people with disabilities. The ADA Standards apply nationwide, in addition to any applicable state or local codes, where facilities are newly built or altered. ADA Standards for Accessible Design can be found here: <https://www.access-board.gov/ada/>.

The Architectural Access Board in Massachusetts (MAAB) develops and enforces regulations to make public buildings and facilities accessible to, functional for, and safe for use by persons with disabilities. The MAAB has published its own design standards since 1968, updating them regularly. Known as 521 CMR, you can find information here: <https://www.mass.gov/aab-rules-and-regulations>. If there is a conflict between ADA standards and MAAB standards, the stricter standard applies.

The Architectural Barriers Act (ABA) Standards for Outdoor Developed Areas (<https://www.access-board.gov/aba/guides/chapter-10-outdoor/>) apply to projects on Federal lands or constructed by a Federal agency. The guidelines provide detailed specifications for accessible recreational trails and outdoor developed areas. Although the guidelines do not necessarily apply to Federal aid projects (unless on Federal land), they provide best practices to ensure compliance under the ADA.

**Shared Use Path Accessibility Resources:** Accessibility requirements are complex and can be challenging to interpret. Contact the MassTrails Grants Administrator with any questions and refer to the links below for helpful resources:

- FHWA Designing Sidewalks and Trails for Access, Chapter 14: [https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bicycle\\_pedestrian/publications/sidewalk2/pdf/15chapter14.pdf](https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bicycle_pedestrian/publications/sidewalk2/pdf/15chapter14.pdf)
- MassDOT Design Guide: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/massdot-design-guide-chapter-11-shared-use-paths-and-greenways/download>

## Woodland/Motorized Trails

A woodland or motorized trail or trail facility must be constructed as accessible according to the applicable standards defined above, but more specifically as outlined in U.S. Forest Service Trail Accessibility Guidelines (FSTAG). The guidelines specify accessibility requirements for single-use recreational hiking trails and multi-use trails designed primarily for hiking. Trails are classified by their **designed use** and **managed use**. A trail has only one designed use that determines the design, construction, and maintenance parameters for the trail. A trail can have more than one managed use based on a management decision to allow other uses on the trail. Trails that have a designed use for hikers or pedestrians are required to comply with the accessibility requirements for trails. Trails that have a designed use for other than hikers or pedestrians, such as mountain bike or equestrian trails, are not required to comply with the technical accessibility requirements for trails.

A trail system may include a series of connecting trails. Only trails that directly connect to a trailhead or another trail that substantially meets the accessibility requirements for trails are required to comply with the accessibility requirements for trails. A trail that complies with most of the accessibility requirements for trails is considered to substantially meet the accessibility requirements.

New Trail Projects: All new trail systems funded through MassTrails which are designed for hiking must comply with the accessibility requirements. If a new segment of an existing trail system that is designed for hiking directly connects to a trailhead or other trail that substantially meets the accessibility requirements for trails, the new trail must comply with the accessibility requirements.

Trail Restoration Projects: When a trail designed for hiking is reconstructed or restored, and the altered portion of the trail connects directly to a trailhead of other trail that substantially meets the accessibility requirements for trails, the altered portion of the trail must comply with the accessibility requirements.

The FSTAG accessibility guidelines include exceptions for when a trail designed for hiking/pedestrian use cannot reasonably comply with accessibility requirements. When a condition for exception does not permit full compliance with a specific provision in the accessibility requirements on a portion of a trail, that portion of the trail must comply with the specific provision to the extent possible. When extreme or numerous conditions for exceptions make it impracticable to construct a trail that complies with the accessibility requirements, the entire trail can be exempted from the accessibility requirements. If the designed use of the trail is not hiking/pedestrian then the accessibility requirements do not apply.

Departures from specific accessibility guidelines are permitted for any portion of the trail where compliance would:

- Cause substantial harm to cultural, historic, religious, or significant natural features or characteristics;
- Substantially alter the nature of the setting or the purpose;
- Require construction methods or materials that are prohibited by Federal, State, or local regulations or statutes; or
- Not be feasible due to terrain or the prevailing construction practices.

**Trailhead Facilities, Structures and Staging Areas:** All trailhead facilities should comply with the accessibility requirements, to the extent practicable. Any trail structure (e.g., bridges, viewing platforms, shelters) must comply with accessibility standards in all instances. For example, if a project involves new bridge construction on an existing trail that is not accessible, the bridge must still be built to accessibility standards as outlined in FSTAG. If the project will construct or restore trailhead or staging area facilities, those facilities should be brought up to accessibility standards.

**Woodland/Motorized Trail Accessibility Resources:** Accessibility requirements are complex and can be challenging to interpret. Contact the MassTrails Grants Administrator with any questions and refer to the links below for helpful resources:

- **US Forest Service Accessibility Guidelines (FSTAG):**  
<https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/FSTAG-2013-Update.pdf>
- **FHWA, Recreational Trails Program Accessibility Guidance:**  
[https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/recreational\\_trails/guidance/accessibility\\_guidance/](https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/recreational_trails/guidance/accessibility_guidance/)
- **Tips and Techniques for using Crusher fines surfacing for trails:**  
<https://www.americantrails.org/resources/faq-tips-and-techniques-for-using-crusher-fines-surfacing-for-trails>
- **The Art of Building Crushed Stone Trails:** <https://www.americantrails.org/resources/the-art-of-building-crushed-stone-trails>

## Universal Design

Beyond MassTrails requirements for accessibility, grant applicants and land managers should consider other universal design techniques and apply an accessibility lens to all projects. Universal design attempts to meet the needs of all people, and includes those of all ages, physical abilities, sensory abilities, and cognitive skills. It includes the use of integrated and mainstream products, environmental features and services, with the need for adaptation of specialized design. Examples of universal design elements in a trail project include mounting ramps and block for riders to mount their horses, installing safety barriers that don't obstruct views for wheelchair users, and taking the width of recumbent bikes into account when placing bollards or other barriers on a bike trail.