



# **BT ACCESS RIDER'S GUIDE**

**October 2020**

This document is available in alternative formats upon request by contacting Blacksburg Transit.

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## Welcome

On behalf of Blacksburg Transit (BT), we welcome you to BT ACCESS.

BT ACCESS is a paratransit door-to-door service that complements fixed route bus service in Blacksburg. The service is available for eligible persons who are unable to independently access or use the fixed route system either all of the time, temporarily or under certain circumstances. BT ACCESS meets or exceeds the requirements for paratransit service as defined by the US Department of Transportation under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

This guide includes policies and procedures, rules and regulations, and guidelines for use of BT ACCESS, along with answers to frequently asked questions about the service. For additional information, please call BT ACCESS at (540) 443-1533, or email us at [BTACCESS@blacksburg.gov](mailto:BTACCESS@blacksburg.gov).

Thank you for riding BT ACCESS.

## BT Contacts

BT staff can be reached as follows:

### BT ACCESS

Phone (Reservations/Cancellations) (540) 443-1533  
Email [BTAccess@blacksburg.gov](mailto:BTAccess@blacksburg.gov)

### Telecommunications Relay Service (TRS):

Virginia Relay 711  
TTY (text telephone) (800) 828-1120  
STS (speech to speech) (866) 221-6784

### Blacksburg Transit

Phone (Fixed Route Bus Questions / Feedback) (540) 443-1500  
Email [btransit@blacksburg.gov](mailto:btransit@blacksburg.gov)  
Fax (540) 951-3142

Additional information is also available on BT's website at [ridebt.org](http://ridebt.org).

## Hours of Operation

BT's hours of operation vary according to the time of year. As a general rule, BT operates on full service during Virginia Tech's academic semester (approximately mid-August to mid-December and mid-January to mid-May). BT operates on reduced service during all other times. To confirm which service level BT is operating please call (540) 443-1500 or TRS, or visit BT's service calendar at [www.ridebt.org/service-calendar](http://www.ridebt.org/service-calendar).

Day of the Week	Full Service	Reduced Service
Monday - Thursday	7 am – 12:45 am	7 am – 9:45 pm
Friday	7 am – 2:45 am	7 am – 9:45 pm
Saturday	9:30 am – 2:45 am	9:30 am – 9:15 pm
Sunday	9:30 am – 12:45 am	9:30 am – 9:15 pm

By official action, BT may operate different hours on specified days or over specified time periods.

There is no service on the following holidays: New Year's Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Thanksgiving Day, and Christmas Day.

## Service Area

BT ACCESS serves persons within the Blacksburg Town limits. If you do not live within the town limits, you may still be eligible for BT ACCESS service as long as you are certified and you meet all other requirements.

## Fare

The fare for BT ACCESS is \$0.50 for a one-way trip. A one month pass is available for \$8.00 and a six month pass is available for \$37.50. Bus passes may be purchased by visiting the Blacksburg Municipal Building located at 300 S. Main Street.

Fares are pre-paid for Virginia Tech students, faculty, staff and affiliated entities, as well as Town of Blacksburg employees. Please show a valid ID when boarding.

Personal Care Attendants ride free; Companions pay a fare. See Personal Care Attendants and Companions section for more information.

Exact change or valid pass is required to ride. Bus operators cannot make change.

BT offers discounted fares on the fixed route buses for persons over age 65, persons with disabilities, and Medicare cardholders. Discounted fares are not valid on BT ACCESS.

By official action, BT may operate fare free on specified days or over specified time periods.

## Certification

You must be certified in order to utilize BT ACCESS. To apply for certification, the applicant must fill out an application and return it to BT for review.

Per federal guidelines the following individuals are considered eligible for paratransit service: Any individual with a disability who is unable, as result of a physical or mental impairment, (including vision impairment), and without the assistance of another individual (except the operator of a wheelchair lift or other boarding assistance device), to board, ride, or disembark from any vehicle on the system which is readily accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities.

Eligibility for BT ACCESS is directly related to the functional ability of individuals with disabilities to use fixed route transit services. Each

applicant will be evaluated individually to determine (1) their ability to navigate the system independently, (2) accessibility of vehicles or bus stops, and (3) their ability to reach the boarding point or final destination.

Applications are available by calling BT ACCESS at (540) 443-1533 or TRS, or online at [ridebt.org/access](http://ridebt.org/access). BT ACCESS will send a second form to the applicant's medical professional to fill out and return. A determination of eligibility will be made within 21 days of receipt of the completed two-part application and all forms. If a decision is not made within 21 days, service will be provided until a final decision is made. If after initial review of your application, your eligibility is determined to be temporary, we will provide you with service until a final decision is made. You will receive a letter notifying you of your level of eligibility or if you are ineligible for BT ACCESS service.

If certified, BT will designate a type of eligibility based on the person's functional ability to use public transportation, as follows:

- **Unconditional Eligibility** - An applicant whose disability prevents them from using the accessible fixed route bus system in all situations.
- **Conditional Eligibility** - An applicant whose disability prevents them from using the accessible fixed route bus system when specific circumstances are present.
- **Temporary Eligibility** - An applicant who is temporarily disabled and needs service for a short period of time.
- **Ineligible** - An applicant with a disability that does not prohibit him/her from using the accessible fixed route bus service under the definitions of the ADA. If an applicant is denied, BT will provide a letter stating the reasons for the determination and explaining the process for filing an appeal.

An applicant who is deemed ineligible has the right to an appeal. Please refer to the [Appeals](#) section for specific details.

BT ACCESS reserves the right to require a new eligibility assessment at reasonable intervals. A new eligibility assessment may be required for, but not limited to:

- Possibility of improvements in a passenger's ability to use the fixed route system

- Any improvements in public physical barriers previously preventing a passenger's use of the fixed route system.

## Reservations

Trip reservations can be made by calling (540) 443-1533 or TRS, between 7 am and 5 pm, Sunday through Saturday. If a staff member is not available to take the call you will need to leave a message and your call will be returned as soon as possible, in the order it was received. On weekends, calls will be returned after 9 am.

For reservations, you may call up to 14 days in advance, but no later than the day before you would like a trip. If you call to schedule a trip the same day, we will try to accommodate your request but cannot guarantee you will be able to have that trip.

When making a reservation, please be prepared to provide:

- Your name
- Your pick up address
- The preferred date and time your trip needs to be scheduled
- The address of your drop off destination
- The preferred date and time you would like to return
- Whether a Personal Care Attendant or companion will be accompanying you on your trip. There is no charge for PCA's, however a companion will need to pay the regular fare.
- Any special needs for the trip or information on the location

BT ACCESS schedulers may negotiate pick up times for a requested trip to begin up to one hour before or after the passenger's desired departure time. Consideration is given for time constraints such as an individual's work hours or appointments.

## Will Calls

Will calls for return trips to your home address are available on a limited basis for medical appointments due to their unpredictability. This courtesy, when available, allows you to call the scheduler when the appointment is complete and you are ready to be picked up for your return trip home. The standard wait time for a will call is one hour after the call for the pick up is received. Will call information may be left on voicemail. The scheduler will note the time the call/voicemail was received, and adjust the trip accordingly. Our schedulers are unable to return will call messages.

## Subscription Trips

Passengers may request a “subscription” designation for trips taken with a repeated pattern – same origin and destination, same pick up and drop off time and same day of the week. If approved as subscription trips, there is no need to call to schedule the trip since the trip repeats on the schedule automatically. This also means passengers do not have to call to confirm subscription trips. Available capacity and other factors are considered when evaluating subscription trip requests. Subscription trip approvals are re-evaluated on a periodic basis. More information is available by calling (540) 443-1533 or TRS.

## How to Cancel a Trip

Sometimes plans change and a trip needs to be canceled. Simply call (540) 443-1533 or TRS at least one hour before your scheduled trip and request a cancellation. The more notice you can give us, the more likely we can help someone else.

## No Strand Policy

BT ACCESS will not leave you stranded if you miss your return trip home. Please call BT ACCESS at (540) 443-1533 or TRS; a vehicle will be sent to pick you up however, it may take two hours or longer.

## Voicemail

All messages received via voicemail will be returned in the order received. Please leave one message and include your full name and phone number. Leaving multiple messages could further delay our ability to return calls in a timely manner.

## Inclement Weather

We reserve the right to cancel a scheduled trip if weather is a danger to passenger or operator safety. If a passenger’s location is too dangerous to access (e.g. icy sidewalks and driveways), we will cancel the trip to avoid injury. The passenger will not be penalized for the cancellation. BT ACCESS will make sure a passenger is provided a return trip home if inclement weather persists while a passenger is away from their home.

## Riding BT ACCESS

Riding BT ACCESS is the equivalent to riding BT’s fixed route system. There is a scheduled arrival time and you must be ready when the vehicle arrives.



You will be given time to board, and there may be additional stops before reaching your destination.

Please remember:

- You may ride from any location in the Blacksburg town limits as long as a reservation has been made.
- The operator will arrive within the 20-minute window. For example, if you call BT ACCESS for an 8 am pick up the operator could arrive at your location 10 minutes before at 7:50am, or up to 10 minutes after at 8:10 am. We will be prepared to assist you in boarding if you are ready early but you are not required to board early.
- If a BT ACCESS vehicle is more than 10 minutes late for your scheduled pick up, please call BT ACCESS at (540) 443-1533 or TRS, and we will check the status of its arrival time. Please do not hesitate to call.
- The operator will wait no longer than five minutes after the scheduled pick up time or arrival time, whichever is later. If you are not ready or available for the trip at that time, the operator will report the trip as a No Show to the scheduler and leave the location. **Note:** BT ACCESS will not cancel any remaining trips for that day. If you do not plan to take the remaining trips, please call the BT ACCESS scheduler at (540) 443-1533 or TRS to cancel or reschedule your trip(s). If you do not cancel subsequent trips they will be reported as a No Show.
- The operator is required to collect the fare prior to departure. Please have exact change or valid pass ready. The operator will not give change or credit a fare for a subsequent trip.
- For comfort, safety, and cleanliness of the vehicle, eating, drinking, chewing tobacco, smoking and vaping are not permitted.
- Operators will assist a passenger to the exterior door of a building but will not go beyond the doorway into a building.

## Getting There On Time

It is the goal of BT ACCESS to provide friendly, efficient service to all of our passengers. The following are ways you may help us serve you:

- Make reservations as early as possible, up to 14 days in advance, but no later than the day before you wish to ride.
- Please do not request unscheduled stops.

Because you may share a vehicle with other passengers, we suggest you:

- Allow at least thirty minutes to reach your destination
- Allow for time spent picking up and dropping off other passengers before reaching your destination
- Be prepared for delays due to traffic or bad weather
- Plan your trip, and make sure you give yourself time to get to your destination

## **Personal Care Attendants and Companions**

### **Personal Care Attendants (PCA)**

A Personal Care Attendant (PCA) is someone designated or employed specifically to help the passenger meet his or her personal needs. The passenger must indicate on the application if they will travel with a PCA. The designated PCA must also be authorized by the passenger's medical provider. No fare is charged for a PCA, and they must be picked up and dropped off at the same point as the eligible passenger.

BT ACCESS may require a PCA as a condition of providing service to an individual it otherwise had the right to refuse based on past violent, seriously disruptive, or illegal conduct.

### **Companions**

If someone whose presence is desired but not necessary is accompanying you, that person will be your companion. You may take one companion, who must also be pre-scheduled to ensure space is available for them on the vehicle, and doing so will not result in a denial of service to other passengers. The companion will pay full fare.

### **Visitors with Disabilities**

Visitors certified with another paratransit service are provided temporary eligibility with BT ACCESS for up to 21 days in a 365-day period. Visitors must provide verification of ADA eligibility. If the visitor's disability is evident, this documentation is not required. Additional information is available on the BT website at [ridebt.org](http://ridebt.org) or call (540) 443-1533.

If service is requested beyond this period, individuals will be required to apply for certification.

## **Service Animals**

BT welcomes the use of a service animal by a person with a disability following ADA guidelines on all BT vehicles. A service animal is any guide dog, signal dog, or other animal individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability. Service animals must be on a leash with a collar, use a service harness, or ride in a suitable pet carrier.

BT may refuse to transport service animals that are deemed to pose a direct threat to the health or safety of drivers or other passengers, create a seriously disruptive atmosphere, or are otherwise not under the passenger's control.

Under the ADA, emotional support, therapy and companion animals are not considered to be service animals and are not allowed, in accordance with BT's No Pets policy.

When scheduling a trip, passengers should state their intent to ride with a service animal in order to help ensure adequate space is available for the animal.

## **Wheelchairs and Other Mobility Devices**

BT ACCESS vehicles are fully accessible, as well as our fixed route buses. Lifts and ramps provide ease of boarding with or without a mobility device.

BT's accessible vehicles will carry a passenger with a wheelchair or other mobility device if the lift or ramp can physically accommodate them. BT may decline to carry a passenger and mobility device if deemed a legitimate safety concern, including if the combined weight exceeds the lift specifications or any other safety requirements. All mobility devices must be secured by our operators before travel can resume. All passengers, including a PCA or companion, must wear a seat belt at all times.

## **Oxygen Supplies**

Portable oxygen supplies and respirators are permitted with proper notification. Oxygen tanks must be secured so they do not move during transport. Information about the use of this equipment must be provided to the scheduler when scheduling trips.

BT shall not prohibit a passenger from traveling with a respirator or portable oxygen supply, consistent with Department of Transportation rules on the transportation of hazardous materials.

### **Carry-on Items**

You may bring grocery bags, luggage, or other packages or (legal) personal items with you on BT ACCESS. If requested, an operator will assist with light weight packages, total weight not to exceed 25 pounds, during one trip loading or unloading carry-on items. Please do not plan to bring more items than you can manage without delaying the vehicle. Companions and personal care attendants are expected to assist the passenger. Also, keep in mind that this is a shared-ride service and space is limited. If you are bringing a collapsible cart with you, let the scheduler know to ensure the vehicle will be able to accommodate it. All items must be secured out of the aisle, either under your seat or on your lap. All items will be left just inside the exterior door of a passenger's home. Operators are not permitted to go past lobby doors nor enter private homes.

### **No Shows and Late Cancellations**

BT ACCESS reserves the right to deny service for a reasonable length of time to passengers who show a pattern or practice of No Shows or Late Cancellations of scheduled trips.

A No Show occurs when the passenger fails to appear to board the vehicle for a scheduled trip. This presumes the vehicle arrives at the scheduled pick up location within the pick up window and the operator waits at least five (5) minutes after the scheduled pick up time or arrival time, whichever is later.

A Late Cancellation occurs when:

- A cancellation is made by phone less than one hour before the scheduled pick up time, or
- A passenger refuses to board a vehicle that has arrived within the pick up window.

No Shows and Late Cancellations are counted equally for tracking purposes.

BT ACCESS does not count as No Shows or Late Cancellations any missed trips beyond a passenger's control that prevents the passenger from notifying BT, or due to BT's error. Passengers should contact the scheduler after experiencing a No Show or Late Cancellation due to circumstances

beyond their control. When requested by BT ACCESS it is the passenger's responsibility to provide adequate justification for missed trips beyond their control that result in possible No Shows or Late Cancellations.

When a passenger is a No Show on a pick up, any subsequent trips on that day will remain on the schedule unless the passenger specifically cancels the subsequent trip(s). If no communication is made, the trips will be honored and the passenger will receive a No Show for each trip not taken. To avoid multiple No Shows on the same day, passengers are strongly encouraged to cancel any subsequent trips they no longer need that day.

BT ACCESS will suspend passengers for a pattern or practice of No Shows and/or Late Cancellations. A pattern or practice involves intentional, repeated, or regular actions by passengers that result in No Shows and/or Late Cancellations, not isolated, accidental or singular incidents.

A pattern or practice exists when a passenger accumulates three (3) or more No Shows and/or Late Cancellations that meet or exceed 10% of their scheduled trips in three (3) consecutive months. When these criteria are met a violation has occurred and a suspension is warranted.

See [Suspensions](#) section for additional information.

## Code of Conduct

BT has established certain rules to ensure that passengers do not engage in violent, seriously disruptive, or illegal conduct or represent a direct threat to the health, or safety of others. More information can be found at <http://ridebt.org/travel-tips>. BT's code of conduct also includes violations of the Town of Blacksburg ordinances (Section 14-102 and 23-110), such as disorderly conduct in public places, and creating a nuisance.

These rules are designed to ensure that while on any BT vehicle, passengers act in an orderly manner so as to permit the safe operation of the vehicle by the operator, and obey the directions of the operator, or other person in charge.

Disciplinary action will be taken in accordance with:

- The severity of the violation
- A pattern of repeat unacceptable conduct

Disciplinary action may include removal from the vehicle and suspension of service.

See [Suspensions](#) section for additional information.

## Suspensions

BT ACCESS has established an administrative process to suspend, for a reasonable period, the provision of service to passengers who (1) establish a pattern or practice of missing scheduled trips both by No Shows or Late Cancellations, and (2) for unacceptable conduct.

Passengers are subject to suspension should they accumulate occurrences consistent with the criteria listed in the No Shows and Late Cancellations section and Code of Conduct sections. Violations result in the following suspensions:

- **First violation:** 3-calendar day suspension
- **Second violation:** 5-calendar day suspension
- **Third violation:** 10-calendar day suspension
- **Fourth violation:** 15-calendar day suspension
- **Subsequent violations:** 15-calendar day suspension

Suspensions will be cumulative throughout the passenger's certification period. No mandatory financial penalties will be assessed for No Shows or Late Cancellations.

As a courtesy, BT staff will notify a customer via phone or voicemail after the first and second occurrences. The courtesy call will restate BT ACCESS policy and inform the passenger that they may contact BT ACCESS if they think the No Show or Late Cancellation or unacceptable conduct was charged in error.

When cumulative No Shows and/or Late Cancellations or unacceptable conduct result in a violation with suspension of service, BT ACCESS will send a Certified Letter notifying the passenger of the proposed suspension. The letter will contain the following as well as other pertinent information:

- Reason(s) and length for the proposed suspension
- No Show dates, times, pick up locations and destinations
- Unacceptable conduct occurrences with supporting documentation
- Instructions on the appeals process including how to request an appeal

Before implementing a suspension, BT ACCESS will provide you with written notification of its decision and the reasons for it. You may appeal the decision by following the appeal procedure in your suspension notification letter and recapped under the [Appeals](#) section.

## Appeals

BT ACCESS has established an administrative process for appeals of eligibility determination, and any suspensions of service for No Shows and late cancellations, or conduct violations.

BT ACCESS will provide an individual with written notification of its decision and the reasons for it. Individuals can appeal the decision or obtain a review of the determination by following the process outlined below.

An individual must file a written appeal within 60 days of the decision. The appeal process is the opportunity to be heard and to present information and arguments. The individual has the choice to include the basis or reasons for the appeal in the written request, or he or she may request a hearing. A hearing may be conducted in person, by phone or online.

The individual may submit a request for an appeal hearing in writing to the attention of the BT Operations Manager by email to [btransit@blacksburg.gov](mailto:btransit@blacksburg.gov) or by mail to 2800 Commerce Street, Blacksburg, VA 24060. The appeal will be handled by a person who was not involved in the original decision.

BT will conduct an administrative review and follow up by email or mailed correspondence within 10 days with a final resolution. The correspondence will include the specific reasons for the decision similar to the level of detail provided in the original correspondence.

### Eligibility Related Considerations

If the appeal is regarding eligibility, BT ACCESS is not required to provide paratransit service while the appeal is under consideration; however, if a decision has not been made within 30 days of the completion of the appeal process, BT ACCESS must provide paratransit service from that time until and unless a decision to deny the appeal is issued. If the individual misses the appeal deadline or chooses not to appeal, he or she may reapply for service at any time.

### No Show or Cancellation Related Considerations

If the appeal is regarding a suspension for No Shows and late cancellations, service will continue to be provided pending the outcome of the appeal.

## Conduct Related Considerations

If the appeal is regarding a suspension for conduct, service will continue to be provided pending the outcome of the appeal unless the conduct rises to the level of being a direct threat to the health and safety of others in which case the suspension will be in place during the appeal process.

## Reasonable Modifications

A reasonable modification is a change or exception to a policy, practice, or procedure that allows individuals with disabilities to have equal access to programs, services, and activities. BT will make reasonable modifications to policies, practices, and procedures when necessary to ensure access to transit services. More information about reasonable modifications can be found at: [ridebt.org/reasonable-mod](http://ridebt.org/reasonable-mod)

## Travel Training

Travel training is designed to teach seniors and people with disabilities how to travel safely and independently on a fully accessible low floor fixed-route bus. BT travel trainers determine how an individual's disability affects travel and then travel skills are tailored to each person's needs. Remember, riding the bus does not jeopardize the ability to use BT ACCESS services, but allows the passenger more flexibility and freedom to travel whenever they choose.

Benefits include:

- Learning to travel independently
- Greater self-esteem
- Flexibility of scheduling allowing freedom of movement within the town limits of Blacksburg

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's)

- **No one answered my call, what do I do now?**  
We're not able to answer every call (although we try our best), please leave only one message and we'll address your message in the order received.
- **Can I use BT ACCESS for other purposes besides doctor's appointments?**  
YES. You can use BT ACCESS for any type of trip.



- **Can I bring a friend/family member with me?**  
Of course, just make sure you request the companion accompany you when reserving your trip, and they have cash fare or a valid pass with them.
- **Can I make changes to my trips after I've scheduled them?**  
Yes, but please make these changes at least one day in advance.
- **I have a trip scheduled over the weekend and I have a question about it, what do I do?**  
Simply call our BT ACCESS line, (540) 443-1533 or TRS, and leave a voicemail. We have staff that check the messages even after our schedulers leave.