

Mayor's Committee on Disability Concerns
Policy Recommendation Concerning Sidewalks and Community Accessibility

The Mayor's Committee on Disability Concerns (MCDC) focuses primarily on generating awareness of disabilities issues. We have discussed the need for more and better sidewalks as well as curb cuts and accessible ramps along public streets in public rights-of-way (street easements). The Oklahoma City Committee believes there is a need to make the community more accessible with both public and private improvements for all pedestrians. This is a quality of life and health issue for all citizens but especially for people with physical disabilities. For example, sidewalks and/or Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant curb cut ramps need to be installed in small districts or neighborhoods that are home to several residents with disabilities, especially when shopping, services and other livability amenities are adjacent to their residences. This is particularly important near apartments and condominiums. Public sidewalks and curb cuts/ramps along and leading up to bus routes are a critical need in all nine communities with bus service, but especially within the City of Oklahoma City (City).

To address this need, the Mayor's Committee on Disability Concerns recommends that the City, the Central Oklahoma Transportation and Parking Authority (COTPA) and the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments (ACOG) work jointly and with other organizations and jurisdictions to:

- encourage private investment in ADA compliant sidewalks and curb cuts/ramps on private property to improve the path of travel;
- inventory the presence/absence of ADA compliant sidewalks and curb cuts/ramps adjacent to and within a block of bus routes;
- identify areas with higher concentrations of people with disabilities and the sidewalk/curb cut network near or along public streets in those areas;
- identify districts with the best potential to be convenient for people unable to drive or choosing not to drive--areas with a good combination of nearby housing, shopping, and services along a bus route;
- emphasize the need to make existing sidewalks more accessible, especially in high priority areas such as along transit routes where there are government offices and facilities, places of employment, medical facilities, or other frequent use by people with disabilities;
- encourage adequate budgeting by state, county, municipal, school, and other public jurisdictions to address higher priority public sidewalk and curb cut needs, and especially along both the perimeters of public land and along the streets abutting transit routes;
- identify areas near public parks that would benefit from sidewalks and curb cuts/ramps for improved access from neighborhoods to parks;
- recognize publicly the progress made in the region annually.

Citizens have voiced pedestrian and ADA concerns in various forums over the years. This input was brought into sharper focus when this matter was one of four (4) transportation recommendations contained in a periodic Federal review of the Oklahoma City Area Regional Transportation Study (OCARTS) planning process. The review was conducted by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and included a comparison of the City to communities across the country. That recommendation from the 2004 Joint Certification Review of ACOG stated that there should be increased focus on strategies to provide "...amenities such as sidewalks to bus stops and curb cuts for wheelchair bound transit patrons in order to improve overall accessibility and safety and increase transit ridership in the OCARTS service area." COTPA provides the bus service known as METRO Transit and can provide some assistance, but furnishing sidewalks and ramps compliant with the ADA is essentially a municipal responsibility far beyond the capacity of ACOG and COTPA. COTPA's funding and authority to implement sidewalks are very limited.

The MCDC recognizes that more public and private sidewalks and curb cuts/ramps are needed. Some public ones could be specifically included in upcoming bond issues, potentially as a separate proposition or as part of other capital improvement plans. Such quality of life improvements make our community more attractive to everyone, including potential businesses and residents.

Pam Henry March 2006
Pam Henry, Chair March, 2006