



Applying the Americans with Disabilities Act to Ridesharing Companies

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Emerging technology [often](#) creates new [issues](#) in antidiscrimination law. Technologies like rideshare apps have opened up convenient transportation opportunities for many people with and without disabilities; however, some people with disabilities have alleged that these new services are leaving them behind. In September 2025, the Department of Justice (DOJ) [sued](#) Uber Technologies, Inc. (Uber), alleging that the company discriminated against passengers with disabilities. The DOJ is bringing claims under [Title III](#) of the [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#), which prohibits disability discrimination by certain transportation operators and requires them to make reasonable accommodations for passengers with disabilities. On March 5, 2026, the district court [denied](#) Uber’s motion to dismiss.

The DOJ’s suit is the latest foray in ADA litigation against the ridesharing companies Uber and Lyft, Inc. (Lyft). Passengers with disabilities have also attempted to enforce the ADA against these companies with mixed success. Blind passengers have achieved victories in the early stages of litigation and at one point entered into a nationwide settlement with Uber to secure their right to travel with service animals. Passengers who use wheelchairs, on the other hand, have settled some cases but struggled to convince courts that ridesharing companies must make changes to better serve their needs. This Legal Sidebar reviews the portions of the ADA that may govern ridesharing companies and the application of that law in recent litigation. The Sidebar then turns to DOJ enforcement actions—including the pending lawsuit against Uber.

Does the ADA Cover Ridesharing Companies?

Congress [enacted](#) the ADA to “provide a clear and comprehensive national mandate for the elimination of discrimination against individuals with disabilities.” To that end, the primary titles of the ADA address disability discrimination in three broad contexts: employment ([Title I](#)), state and local government ([Title II](#)), and public accommodations and commercial facilities ([Title III](#)). Title III contains two provisions that may apply to ridesharing companies. First, the law [prohibits](#) disability discrimination in “specified public transportation services provided by a private entity that is primarily engaged in the business of transporting people and whose operations affect commerce.” In turn, the law [defines](#) “specified public transportation” as transportation by any vehicle other than aircraft “that provides the general public with general or special service (including charter service) on a regular and continuing basis.” Regulations from

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the Department of Transportation, which [shares authority](#) with the DOJ for implementing Title III, [make clear](#) that this provision applies to taxi services. Second, Title III [applies](#) to “any person who owns, leases (or leases to), or operates a place of public accommodation.” The law [defines](#) “public accommodation” to include a “travel service ... or other service establishment.”

In litigation, the ridesharing companies Uber and Lyft have [argued](#) that these provisions [do not cover](#) them. Addressing ADA’s provisions governing specified public transportation, the ridesharing companies [contend](#) that they are not “primarily engaged in the business of transporting people,” because the companies do not own, lease, or dispatch cars. Rather, they argue, they develop and license software platforms to allow independent drivers and riders to connect. [In their view](#), this distinction makes them technology companies, not taxi services.

Courts have largely disagreed and held that Uber and Lyft are covered by Title III’s rules for specified public transportation. In one representative [order](#), the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California pointed out that Uber has held itself out as a transportation company in the past and that it has significant control over the rides offered through its platform, including where services are offered, the types of services available, the price of rides, and driver standards. The court, and [others like it](#), held that such facts subject ridesharing companies to Title III.

The ridesharing companies have also asserted that they do not “operate a place of public accommodation” because they do not own or operate any property open to the public. At least [one court](#) has agreed, holding that “places of public accommodation” must be “actual, physical places” such as a storefront or office, and that neither the vehicles that drive for ridesharing companies nor the customers’ pick up and drop off locations qualify. Other [courts](#) have [entertained](#) the claim that Uber and Lyft could be public accommodations without issuing a definitive ruling.

Whether ridesharing companies are covered as specified public transportation services or as public accommodations makes little difference to their legal obligations. So long as one of these provisions applies, the substantive requirements under the ADA are the [same](#). The next section discusses how those requirements have been applied in cases against Uber and Lyft.

What Does the ADA Require of Ridesharing Companies?

Under the ADA, specified public transportation services and public accommodations must follow a number of antidiscrimination requirements. As relevant to suits against ridesharing companies, both in substance and frequency, discrimination under the ADA and its implementing regulations includes

- [denying](#) service to people with disabilities or providing them with unequal services;
- [failing](#) to “make reasonable modifications in policies, practices, or procedures” when necessary to allow people with disabilities to use their services, unless the defendant can show that a requested modification would “fundamentally alter” its services;
- [imposing](#) unnecessary “[eligibility criteria that screen out or tend to screen out](#)” people with disabilities from using the defendant’s services;
- [refusing](#) to remove physical and communication barriers when doing so is “[readily achievable](#)”;
- [refusing](#) to transport riders with service animals or [stow](#) mobility aids; and
- [charging](#) additional [fees](#) to people with disabilities, including fees for reasonable modifications.

The ADA does **not** require any company to purchase accessible automobiles.

Per CRS review of the case law, most private ADA litigation against ridesharing companies has been brought by or on behalf of **wheelchair** users seeking access to wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAVs) through Uber and Lyft, and blind passengers seeking to enforce their **right** to travel with service animals. The DOJ has litigated against Uber and Lyft over drivers' alleged refusal to transport **stowable mobility aids**, allegedly discriminatory **wait-time fees**, and **other issues**.

Litigation to Increase WAV Availability

Prospective Uber and Lyft passengers who use wheelchairs have filed lawsuits arguing that the companies are violating the ADA by failing to make WAVs available to them. Both Uber and Lyft allow riders to hail WAVs in a limited number of jurisdictions, through **UberWAV** and **Lyft Wheelchair rides** (formally called Lyft Access), respectively. **According to records** developed in litigation, the companies have largely offered WAV services only in jurisdictions with local regulations either requiring these services or incentivizing them, or where the companies have developed partnerships to subsidize such services.

Plaintiffs in cities where Uber and Lyft either do not offer WAVs or where riders allegedly experience lesser service have **argued** that Uber and Lyft could change their practices to make WAV service broadly available. Wheelchair users have also **argued** that Uber's vehicle rules barring aftermarket modifications effectively keep WAVs off their app. At least one set of plaintiffs has **claimed** that Lyft's failure to display its accessible mode in their region violates the ADA's requirement that companies remove barriers to access when doing so is "readily achievable."

Courts have **held** that such allegations present plausible ADA claims. That is, **courts** thus far have accepted, at the outset of litigation, that Uber and Lyft could be required to modify their services to make WAVs more broadly available. Some of these cases have settled on confidential terms after plaintiffs survived Uber's and Lyft's initial attempts to have the suits dismissed.

Plaintiffs have been much less successful once the evidence has been fully developed at trial. In the **three** cases CRS has **identified** that went to **trial**, the courts found for the ridesharing companies, ruling that the plaintiffs had not demonstrated that there was a reasonable way to require ridesharing companies to expand WAV services. The ADA **requires** covered entities to modify their policies to provide access to people with disabilities, but only when such modifications are "reasonable" and do not fundamentally alter the entities' services. Fundamentally, the courts **held** that the plaintiffs' proposals were unreasonable because **none** was likely to result in meaningful WAV service on the apps. Whatever improvements could result from plaintiffs' suggestions, courts have **held**, would not be justified by the **cost**. One court **rejected** suggestions from plaintiffs that Lyft take a trial-and-error approach, holding that the ADA requires plaintiffs to put forward "concrete" modification proposals, not an "iterative process." Moreover, one **court** held, it is the low supply of WAV drivers interested in driving for ridesharing companies, not those companies' policies, that "screen out" wheelchair users. Additionally, one **court** has rejected the claim that making an accessible mode available in a rideshare app is a form of barrier removal within the meaning of the ADA.

Litigation Over Service-Animal Access

Both **Lyft** and **Uber** have **policies** requiring drivers to accept passengers with service animals. Nevertheless, in 2014, the **National Federation of the Blind** (NFB) sued Uber, **alleging** that Uber violated the ADA when NFB members were routinely denied rides, charged cancellation fees after drivers denied service, and left stranded in extreme weather. Even if drivers accepted blind riders with service animals, the NFB alleged, they sometimes **harassed** them.

In [denying](#) Uber's motion to dismiss plaintiffs' claims, the court observed that Uber did not contest that it provided "specified public transportation service," and the court found plaintiffs' allegations that Uber was a public accommodation plausible. The case settled in 2016. The settlement agreement [required](#) Uber to use a pop-up notification to inform drivers of their obligation to transport service animals and [limited](#) cleaning fees that could be charged for service animals. Uber also [agreed](#) to terminate drivers for knowingly refusing to transport a rider because of their service animal, to change its app and its website to make service animal complaints easier to report, and to [reimburse](#) trip cancellation charges riders wrongfully incurred.

The agreement included a period of monitoring, which expired in 2020. NFB sought an extension of monitoring, alleging that blind riders were still commonly turned away. The court [denied](#) the extension, stating that Uber was in "substantial compliance" with the terms of the agreement and had reduced discriminatory incidents, "albeit only slightly."

Litigation Over Stowable Mobility Aids

In 2020, the DOJ [settled](#) with Lyft over its treatment of riders with stowable wheelchairs and walkers. Unlike passengers in the cases involving WAVs discussed above, these passengers could ride in unmodified cars but needed assistance stowing their devices. The DOJ [alleged](#) that Lyft drivers regularly refused to provide that assistance.

As part of the settlement, Lyft agreed to make [changes](#) to its wheelchair policy, and it now [requires](#) drivers to transport riders with "foldable mobility devices" and to assist them to stow those devices "unless physically unable to do so." Lyft also agreed to [new procedures](#) to ensure drivers had reviewed its policy and to train its drivers and [discipline](#) those who refused to take wheelchair users or harassed them. Lyft paid \$42,000 to [four named complainants](#) and \$40,000 in [civil penalties](#) to the United States. Lyft [agreed](#) to refund trip-cancellation fees, provide a \$10 credit to people with disabilities who were refused service, and [monitor compliance and report to the DOJ](#) during the three-year agreement.

Litigation Over Wait-Time Fees

Rideshare apps sometime charge wait-time fees for riders who take more than a few minutes to reach the vehicle. In 2021, the DOJ [settled](#) with Uber over wait-time fees charged to riders whose disabilities made it hard to reach Uber rides within the allotted time.

The DOJ [alleged](#) that Uber charged the fees even when it knew disability was the reason a rider could not board within the allotted time. According to the DOJ, Uber sometimes, but not always, [refunded](#) these fees to riders with disabilities upon request. The DOJ [alleged](#) that Uber violated the ADA in not making a reasonable modification to its fees policy for riders with disabilities. The [district](#) court denied Uber's motion to dismiss, and the case settled.

Under the settlement, Uber agreed to policy [changes](#). Riders can now [certify, via an online form](#), that they or a frequent companion have a disability and need more time to board. These riders will not be charged wait-time fees. Riders can also seek a refund if they are charged wait-time fees for disability-related delays. In the end, the settlement provided several million dollars in [compensation](#) to more than 65,000 Uber users.

Lyft similarly charges [wait-time fees](#). As of this writing, Lyft users with disabilities [can request](#) a wait-time-fee refund if they needed more time to board due to disability. Riders can also request a waiver of future wait-time fees for disability reasons upon completing an online certification.

Latest DOJ Action: *United States v. Uber Technologies, Inc.*

In September 2025, the DOJ [sued](#) Uber alleging a number of ADA violations, some not previously litigated and some echoing issues arising in prior matters. The DOJ alleged that Uber drivers [mistreat](#) riders who look disabled (such as walking with a [limp](#)) and do not accommodate riders [who need to ride](#) in the front seat because of a disability. According to the DOJ, some drivers [refuse](#) to help with stowable wheelchairs and other mobility aids, even when they help nondisabled passengers with luggage. Some drivers also allegedly [refuse](#) to serve riders with service animals. At times, according to the complaint, drivers tell riders that the animals should be muzzled or ride in the [trunk](#); improperly ask riders for animals' "[papers](#)" or [charge](#) improper cleaning [fees](#); and sometimes [direct](#) riders with service animals to "Uber Pet," a higher-priced service.

Besides detailing individual drivers' discrimination, the DOJ alleged Uber's own actions violate the ADA. According to the complaint, Uber sometimes charges [cancellation fees](#) when drivers refuse to transport people with disabilities. While the company will sometimes redress such fees with credits, it has allegedly capped credits for some riders who seek them too often—even though disabled riders report frequent denials of service. Uber also allegedly fails to [train](#) drivers on its policies and does not discipline drivers who discriminate, in violation of ADA [regulations](#).

Uber filed a motion to dismiss, which the district court [denied](#). In response to Uber's assertion that it is a technology company that is not subject to Title III of the ADA, the court [indicated](#) that other courts have "soundly rejected" this argument. The court also concluded that, at the motion-to-dismiss stage, Uber could not avoid the suit by blaming its drivers. The DOJ, it [said](#), alleged "sufficient instances of Uber's practices and participation in the discrimination" and offered adequate allegations "that Uber maintains sufficient control over its drivers to support holding Uber vicariously liable for the drivers' conduct." The litigation is [ongoing](#).

Considerations for Congress

As with other emerging technologies, how the ADA applies to ridesharing companies is within Congress's control. Congress could amend the ADA to specify whether these companies are covered and what their obligations should be. Congress can also determine whether general principles in the ADA should be amended, or not, in light of the ridesharing cases. Courts have [held](#), for example, that ADA defendants need not engage in trial-and-error processes—implementing plaintiffs' suggested changes and then seeing if they work—to determine whether they can reasonably accommodate a person's, or class of people's, disability. In cases involving novel technologies or other areas that lack developed solutions for disability access, that may make it difficult for certain plaintiffs to demonstrate the availability of workable accommodations. On the other hand, trial-and-error processes may be more burdensome for ADA defendants.

If it chooses to, Congress could also address access to ridesharing platforms outside of the ADA. Several [localities](#) have passed [laws](#) requiring ridesharing companies to make WAVs available on their platforms. Other [jurisdictions](#) have financially incentivized ridesharing companies to do so, or penalized them for not providing WAV access. Congress could consider such approaches.

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