

Users Guide

Motorised wheelchairs



A guide for users



These Guidelines are not legal advice.

The Crown in right of the State of Western Australia (including its departments and agencies and their employees and agents) makes no representation, guarantee or warranty, expressed or implied as to the accuracy or completeness of these guidelines.

Suppliers and users should make enquiries and take advice about their own circumstances.

Footnote: Motorised wheelchairs include electric mobility devices for people with physical disabilities such as electric wheelchairs and devices formerly referred to as Gophers or Scooters.

Introduction

This guide has been prepared for current and potential users of motorised wheelchairs. It does not apply to manual wheelchairs. The Government is committed to accessible transport throughout the community. This Guide which is the second edition provides advice on the safe use of your motorised wheelchair and other electric mobility device for people with disabilities. It also provides helpful tips about public transport, training and insurance.

Legal Definition

Motorised wheelchairs and other mobility devices used by people with a physical disability fall within the single definition of motorised wheelchair under the *Western Australian Road Traffic Code 2000*. To be considered a motorised wheelchair the device must be designed so as to be not capable of a speed exceeding 10km/h. People with a physical disability who operate motorised wheelchairs at or below the limit of 10km/h are classified as pedestrians.

Training

If you are using a motorised wheelchair for the first time, or if it has been a while since you have driven outdoors, it is a good idea to get some training.

It is important that you choose a motorised wheelchair that meets your needs and you may wish to contact the Independent Living Centre on 9381 or 1300 885 886 for advice on a suitable motorised wheelchair.

Training will ensure you have the skills to manage your motorised wheelchair safely.

For information on training, you should contact your local health professional, occupational therapist or physiotherapist.

You should also look at a current edition of the “Drive Safe” booklet that outlines the major road rules in force in WA. A copy of this booklet can be obtained from your local licensing services centre. This will help you to become familiar with the various traffic signs and signals that you may come across when you are using your motorised wheelchair.

Walk or ride?

Using your motorised wheelchair may allow you to move around more easily. However, it is important to remain as physically active as possible. If you are able to walk, even short distances, discuss with your doctor how much exercise you should be doing each day. Walking, even very slowly, will help the condition of your joints and muscles, and improve your breathing and circulation.

Where can I use my motorised wheelchair?

If your motorised wheelchair is not capable of doing more than 10 km/h, and you have physical disability, you can ride on:

- footpaths;
- shared paths;
- the pedestrian section of a separated footpath;
- in shopping centres;
- in public places; and
- to cross roads.

As a pedestrian you can travel on the road provided:

- There is no footpath or nature strip adjacent to the road that is in a condition that is fit to use;
- You keep as far as practical to the right hand side of the road (facing the oncoming traffic);

- You do not travel abreast of more than one other pedestrian, unless you are overtaking another pedestrian or in an authorised procession or parade; and
- You immediately move off the road when a vehicle approaches and remain off the road until the vehicle passes.

If your motorised wheelchair is capable of exceeding 10 km/h, it must be registered as a vehicle with the Department for Planning and Infrastructure before it can be used on a public road. You can ride motorised wheelchairs on paths, provided you do not exceed 10km/h when doing so.

You cannot ride/drive on freeways.

What rules should I be aware of?

On footpaths, shared paths and the pedestrian section of a separated footpath:

Remember that when you are using a motorised wheelchair not operating above 10 km/h, you are classed as a pedestrian. You should:

- keep to the left of the footpath, unless overtaking a pedestrian;
- beware of vehicles reversing out of driveways;
- show consideration of other pedestrians, particularly older persons or people with a vision or hearing impairment; and
- travel no faster than surrounding pedestrians because they may not be able to move out of the way easily, for example in shopping areas.

On the road:

If there is no path or the path is not suitable for use and you have to travel along a road, you should:

- remember that your motorised wheelchair is not as powerful,

or as visible as other vehicles on the road;

- always travel facing toward oncoming traffic (i.e. contra-flow);
- show consideration for other pedestrians who are also using the roadway;
- be aware of vehicle traffic movements, signals and signs;
- watch out for obstructions in the road ahead such as drains, potholes and parked cars;
- when passing parked cars, watch out for doors being opened in your path, or a vehicle moving off without indicating;
- fit a flag (of reflective material if possible) to you motorised wheelchair which will make you more visible and therefore safer; and
- take additional care as motor vehicle drivers may not be aware of you or the rules you have to follow.

What should I do to prepare myself for travelling outdoors?

As a general rule, you should plan your journey carefully. This way you may be able to reach your destination without having to negotiate major roundabouts, peak-hour traffic or busy roads.

You should try to make yourself as visible as possible. It is advisable to wear brightly coloured clothing during the day and something reflective at night.

Remember that other people may have difficulty seeing you. As you are lower to the ground than a vehicle or pedestrian, consider fitting a flag to your motorised wheelchair to make you more visible.

Always use your seat belt if you have one fitted - even for short journeys.

You should not use your motorised wheelchair if you are under the influence of alcohol, drugs or medication that may affect your driving ability.

Crossing the road:

Before crossing always check to see that you will be able to gain access to the footpath on the other side.

Never cross the road where you can't see the oncoming traffic because of a hill, or a curve in the road, or because parked cars are obstructing your view.

Use the shortest possible path to cross the road. Try to cross the road at traffic signals, designated pedestrian crossings or an intersection with Stop or Give Way signs. Where this is not possible, you should take special care to enable yourself to cross safely.

Crossing intersections and roundabouts:

You must take special care at intersections and roundabouts. Cross as a pedestrian would, from footpath to footpath.

If the intersection or roundabout is too hazardous, it may be worth considering an alternative route.

If there are no pedestrian facilities or if you feel that the facilities are inadequate, you should inform your local council.

Other helpful information

Parking:

Your motorised wheelchair should not be left unattended on a footpath as it may cause an obstruction to other pedestrians, people using wheelchairs and people with prams or shopping trolleys.

Remember to take your keys with you and to park in a sheltered area, where possible.

Night time use:

If you intend to travel at night you should consider some of the following safety features:

- front and rear lights to assist you in driving safely, and to enable other vehicles, bicycles and pedestrians to see you;
- reflectors to assist other vehicles to see you; and
- reflective flags and reflective (light or white) clothing to help make you more visible.

What should I do to make travelling by public transport as easy as possible?

Buses:

Some Public Transport Authority (PTA) buses, all circle route buses, all CAT buses in Central Perth and Fremantle, and buses in Albany, Geraldton and Bunbury are equipped to carry you and your motorised wheelchair.

PTA is gradually replacing the existing bus fleet with low-floor ramped buses. You should call the PTA on 13 62 13 at least 24 hours prior to travelling to find out if your bus route has a bus that you can access. Where possible an accessible bus will be provided to meet your travel needs.

Trains:

Some station platforms are designed so that it is easy for you to gain access to a train on your own. To ascertain whether your nominated station is equipped please call PTA on FREECALL 1800 800 022 for advice. If assistance is required, the PTA will arrange for a customer service assistant to meet you and assist you on or off the train. You can also arrange return journeys at this time. You should give the PTA at least one hour's notice of your travel plans.

Taxis:

Multi Purpose Taxis are available to transport you and your motorised wheelchair. If you live in the country contact your local taxis service to see if they have a suitable taxi.

It is important that you choose a motorised wheelchair that can be safely restrained in a Multi Purpose Taxi, as both you and your motorised wheelchair will need to be restrained in accordance with safety requirements. Contact the Independent Living Centre on 9381 0600 or 1300 885 886 for advice on suitable motorised wheelchairs.

Ferry:

The PTA ferry service is able to transport you between Perth and South Perth, from Barrack Street to the Mend Street jetty.

Travelling by car

When travelling by car, it is important to ensure that both you and your motorised wheelchair are safely secured. You can contact the Independent Living Centre for detailed information on how to best secure yourself and your motorised wheelchair.

Annual Checklist

Your health:

It is strongly recommended that you visit your local GP or health professional on a regular basis for a check up to ensure that you are able to operate your motorised wheelchair.

In addition, you can also carry out the following self-assessment every month:

1. Check your eyesight. You should be able to read a car's licence plate from a distance of 10 metres.
2. Check your hearing.

3. Turn your head. You should be able to see back over your shoulder to check for oncoming vehicles or pedestrians.
4. Think about your ability to judge speed and distance, your reaction times, your balance and your physical ability to drive and manage your motorised wheelchair.

At any time, if you have any doubts about your ability to operate your motorised wheelchair safely, please call your doctor to arrange a full assessment.

Your electric mobility device:

You should get your motorised wheelchair checked at least once a year so that it stays reliable and in good working order. Things you can regularly check include:

- your horn - does it still work?
- your tyres - do they need more air?
- your battery - is it charged up fully?

You should refer to your owner's manual for information on servicing requirements. You can contact the proprietor that you purchased your motorised wheelchair from, or alternately the Independent Living Centre document *Wheelchair Maintenance*, can assist with details on where to get your vehicle serviced.

Safety

It is the supplier's responsibility to inform the customer of all safety requirements associated with the use and operations of motorised wheelchairs. This includes:

Safety features of the equipment. For example, emergency shutdown or free-wheeling;

- use of mobile phones (which may interfere with the electronics and battery operation);
- use of warning flags; and

- requirements for lights at night.

What are my legal obligations?

Registration and Licensing:

If you use a motorised wheelchair that is capable of travelling no faster than 10 km/h you are legally defined as a pedestrian. Therefore, you do not need to have a driver's licence or to take a test. Most motorised wheelchairs will fall into this category.

Under these circumstances your motorised wheelchair does not have to be registered with the Department for Planning and Infrastructure, nor are you subject to any mandatory insurance requirements.

However, if your motorised wheelchair is capable of exceeding 10 km/h it will be classified as a vehicle and you will need to contact the Department of Planning and Infrastructure's Licensing Division on 13 11 56 for further information.

What about insurance?

If your vehicle is not capable of exceeding 10 km/h, insurance coverage for injury to third parties, is not a legal requirement.

Insurance companies have different policies on insurance cover for motorised wheelchairs. When buying a motorised wheelchair you are strongly advised to notify your insurance company and clarify their insurance cover for loss, theft or damage both at home and when travelling in public.

Remember: If your vehicle is capable of exceeding 10 km/h and you intend to travel at a greater speed:

You must register and license your motorised wheelchair with the Department for Planning and Infrastructure's Licensing Division by calling 13 11 56, before you operate it on a public highway, road or street. You can only use the vehicle on paths provided you do not exceed 10 km/h.

