



ACCESSIBLE TRAVEL WITH VIA RAIL CANADA

VIA Rail Canada prides and promotes itself as “The More Human Way to Travel.” Nowhere is this commitment more critical than in the provision of service to passengers with reduced mobility or other special needs.

VIA has been recognised for the leadership role it has played over the past 25 years in advancing the cause of accessible public transportation for all Canadians. Over that period, VIA has established a constructive working relationship with a number of organisations representing disabled travellers. Within this framework, ongoing consultations and a co-operative approach have permitted VIA to make substantial and continuing improvements to its trains, stations and front-line services – ensuring Canadian passenger rail remains at the forefront of accessible transportation for travellers with mobility or other restrictions.

Getting the special services you need

VIA knows that some passengers' travel needs may differ from those of our clients in general. The range of our special services (and adapted services) may vary from one region to another, depending particularly on station facilities and train cars. If we know about special needs in advance our staff will have time to do everything necessary to make the trip as comfortable and pleasant as possible. In order to do this, we ask that passengers with special needs purchase their tickets by telephone or at one of our ticket offices 48 hours or more in advance of your departure, taking care to specify the special services required. These may include arrangements for wheelchair access, guide dogs, priority boarding, special meals, or an escort.

Information and reservations:

- From anywhere in Canada, call toll-free: 1 888 VIA RAIL (1 888 842-7245)
- People with speech or hearing problems may communicate through telecommunication devices for the hearing-impaired (TTY) by calling toll-free: 1 800 268 9503.
- The full range of our special services is outlined on our website:
www.viarail.ca/planner/en_plan_beso.html

Enabling people to travel with dignity

A well-trained staff is the reason VIA is at the forefront in providing superior customer service for the elderly, disabled and special needs passengers. Each year, almost one third of VIA's employees receive introductory or refresher training on how to assist passengers with disabilities. Training has taught our staff to treat individuals with respect, to empathize as much as possible, and to ask the right questions. The best is often, “Tell me how we can best help you.” It is often as simple as that.

An escort policy that is unique in the industry

VIA has for some time recognized the benefit of allowing travellers with specific disabilities to bring an escort of their choice, at no cost to them or their escort. This policy is designed for travellers who cannot tend to their own personal needs such as requiring assistance with eating, personal hygiene or medical care. To the best of our knowledge, this Free Escort Policy is unique in the industry.

Similarly, a person may also be accompanied on our trains by a service animal that is certified trained to increase the autonomy of the person with the disability. The service animal would have free access to an additional seat and not be restricted to the limited space under a seat. This is a policy that encourages people with special needs to travel. From 2004 to 2006, use of this service grew by 21 per cent.

An accessibility mindset

When the Winnipeg Train Station, built in 1911, was renovated in 1997, the architects included full barrier-free access. When a new train station was built in Edmonton in 1998, it also incorporated all aspects of barrier-free design. Most recently VIA built a new train station in London, Ontario, where the main entrance ramp is a wheelchair accessible slope that continues as the main thoroughfare through the centre of the station. The thoroughfare also has seats so that people with disabilities can rest at key locations. For this reason in 2005, the Ontario March of Dimes, which annually designates a building for its accommodation of special needs, presented its award to the new London, Ontario VIA Rail Station.

VIA is signatory to three Canadian Transportation Agency voluntary codes of practice:

- Passenger Rail Car Accessibility (1998)
- Removing Communication Barriers (2004)
- Passenger Terminal Accessibility (2007)

In 2007, VIA began a thorough review of station signage with the aim of making it clearer and easier to navigate for all passengers, but particularly those who are visually impaired. A pilot project has already been carried out in one station, and plans are underway to apply what was learned to stations across the network.

Dear VIA -- Testimonials from our passengers

We had the pleasure of taking the train from London, Ontario to Toronto last November and we met exceptional employees. One of them was a redcap at Toronto Union Station, whom I met when I was going down the ramp with my disabled daughter. He assisted us with our luggage and helped us board the train. He was friendly, polite and courteous.

We love travelling by train because of the service your employees provide. We used to travel by bus until someone said to us: 'There is only one way to travel when someone is disabled, and that is the train'. I don't know who your trainees for your staff are, but kudos to them. Your employees treat a

disabled person with great care and dignity. Furthermore, the disabled person and their attendant never feel like they are a burden or an inconvenience to your staff. Congratulations on a job well done and thank you!

M. & C. S.

I am writing to inform you of the excellent service I received at the Windsor VIA Rail Station on Sunday when meeting my 87-year-old sister upon her arrival from Toronto. The agent at the ticket counter let me know that the train would be a little late, and asked if my sister required a wheelchair. Since there was only one wheelchair at the station, he helped a customer with a wheelchair reservation and then practically ran down the platform so that he could take my sister to the train car. He helped her into the car and made sure that she was comfortable. I was grateful for his assistance and kindness, so I offered him a tip. He refused the money, said it was his pleasure and wished us a pleasant visit.

When we returned, the same agent was back at the ticket counter! He informed us that he had the wheelchair ready for my sister and said I could board the train with her to get her settled. What great service! It sure made my day.

D. D.

Being on renal dialysis and my husband being disabled, this was our first holiday in five years. You helped us in a very positive way and we shall never forget. There are times when a family bottoms out and then the climb back up is so unexpected, and we have to thank you for making that happen.

C. G.

Last September we had the pleasure of travelling with VIA Rail from Winnipeg to Edmonton. The service we received was excellent! My husband was in a wheelchair and the staff of VIA were excellent in helping him both on and off the train. Everyone without exception went out of their way to make our trip as comfortable as possible.

E.M.