

**Executive Summary**  
**Accessibility Audit for the Downtown Development Authority**  
**City of Grand Rapids Michigan**

Disability Advocates of Kent County surveyed the downtown area during the spring and nearly summer of 2006 for compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG), Michigan Barrier Free Code, City Sidewalk Guidelines, and best practices.

Several major conferences with a disability focus are being held in Grand Rapids during 2007. The Rapid provided excellent accessible public transportation. If downtown pedestrian access is improved, the City would have the potential to market its accessibility to attract more conferences with a disability focus. Many of these conferences are held during the off or shoulder seasons.

To the casual observer, the downtown looks accessible. When the area is surveyed for actual compliance with the ADA, it does not comply with the ADAAG. Very few best practices are employed. Funds are being spent to comply with the ADAAG, but the execution falls short of compliance.

**Passengers Become Pedestrians**

Then DASH Parking lots near the Van Andel Arena are short of handicapped parking spaces that comply with the ADAAG. The main problem is the spaces in Parking Area 1 lack access aisles. Parking serving the BOB should be increased and relocated near pedestrian exits.

The pedestrian egress from most DASH Parking lots does not comply with the ADAAG. There are rolled curbs between the ramp and the gutter. These are in fact curbs in violation of the ADAAG. The slope of the ramp should continue through the gutter.

The ramps from passenger loading zones are missing or poorly placed and most are too steep to comply with then ADAAG.

Bus stops near the hospitals and those on Scribner and Mt. Vernon do not have cement pads, allowing those with mobility to use the bus.

## **Sidewalks**

Most alleys and some driveways cannot be crossed by a person in a wheelchair or a person with blindness: they have sunk and/or the ramps are too deteriorated or missing.

Except for Campau Avenue, the width of the sidewalks meets all applicable standards. Slopes and cross slopes are within the ADAAG standards, except for in the HillSide Area.

Abrupt changes in levels can be resolved through a maintenance program.

The railroad crossings do not have protective devices to bridge the gaps in excess of 1/2". They are readily available and work.

## **Curb Ramps**

Brick in the curb ramps causes significant violations of the ADAAG. Often it sinks at a different rate than the curb, causing a barrier. Missing or broken brick cause barriers.

The slopes of many ramps exceed the ADAAG standards.

Many crosswalks are not perpendicular to the street and curb. This can cause people with vision problems to walk into unsafe areas. Audible traffic signals would resolve this issue.

Many curb ramps do not have detectable warnings. Many that are there are stamped into the concrete and have worn down, so there are no longer functional.

Diagonal curb ramps are not within the guidelines for best practice for busy areas. MDOT is no longer building any diagonal curb ramps. They pose safety problem for those with vision problems and mobility impairments.

## **The Future**

The first step is to stop building element that do not comply with the ADAAG. Had all accessible elements been built to ADAAG standards and best practices, Grand Rapids actually be very accessible to many people with disabilities- we would be discussing fine points, rather than basics

