

Unlocking Mobility: The Case for Accessible Rental Vehicles

WRITTEN BY: Bill Noelting

In an era where convenience and customization define transportation, one segment remains chronically underserved: individuals with mobility challenges seeking short-term access to wheelchair-accessible or adapted vehicles. Accessible rental vehicles — those modified to accommodate wheelchairs, scooters or other assistive devices — are not just a niche offering. They are a civil rights imperative, a business opportunity and a litmus test for how inclusive our mobility infrastructure truly is.

The Promise of Accessible Rentals

For many people with disabilities, owning a modified vehicle is cost-prohibitive. Rental options offer a flexible alternative for travel, medical appointments, family visits or vacations. These vehicles often include features like lowered floors, ramps or lifts, hand controls, and securement systems. When available, they restore autonomy and reduce reliance on paratransit or caregiver transport.

The market is growing. According to recent forecasts, the global accessible vehicle rental service market is projected to expand from \$1.2

billion in 2024 to \$2.5 billion by 2033,¹ driven by rising demand for inclusive travel solutions and supportive legislation. Yet this growth is uneven, with availability concentrated in urban centers and major airports, leaving rural and suburban users stranded.

Barriers to Access

Despite the promise, several barriers persist:

- **Limited inventory:** Most mainstream rental companies offer few accessible vehicles, often requiring days of advance notice.
- **High costs:** Daily rates for accessible vans can be double or triple those of standard vehicles, with insurance and mileage caps adding to the burden.
- **Opaque booking systems:** Online platforms rarely allow users to filter for accessibility features, forcing them to call or email for confirmation.
- **Lack of awareness:** Many travelers with disabilities don't know accessible rentals exist or assume they're unavailable.

These gaps reflect a broader failure to integrate accessibility into the core business model of transportation services.

Accessibility should not be a special request — it should be a standard offering.

Innovation and Inclusion

Some companies are leading the way. Startups and niche providers like MobilityWorks, Wheelchair Getaways and BraunAbility Rentals offer fleets of accessible vans with nationwide delivery options. Ride-hailing platforms like Uber and Lyft have experimented with WAV (wheelchair-accessible vehicle) programs, though coverage remains spotty.

Technology can help. Mobile apps with real-time inventory, adaptive vehicle specs and transparent pricing could revolutionize the booking experience. Partnerships with health care providers, tourism boards and disability advocacy groups could expand reach and trust.

Policy also plays a role. Tax incentives for fleet operators, grants for vehicle conversion and ADA enforcement in the rental sector could accelerate adoption. The Americans with Disabilities Act mandates equal access, but enforcement in the rental space is inconsistent.

A Call to Action

Accessible rental vehicles are not just about transportation — they're about participation. They enable people to attend weddings, job interviews, graduations and funerals. They allow spontaneous travel, not just scheduled paratransit. They affirm that mobility is a right, not a privilege.

To realize this vision, we need:

- **Fleet diversification:** Rental companies must invest in accessible inventory across regions.
- **Transparent platforms:** Booking systems should clearly display accessibility features and availability.
- **Affordability measures:** Subsidies, insurance reform and competitive pricing can reduce cost barriers.
- **Public-private partnerships:** Collaboration between government, industry and advocacy groups can drive systemic change.

Navigating the System: Tips for Securing Accessible Rental Vehicles

For disabled travelers, securing an accessible rental vehicle can feel like solving a puzzle

CLINICAL EDITORIAL

with missing pieces. But with preparation and persistence, it's possible to unlock mobility on your terms. Here are some practical tips to help take control of your journey.

Plan Ahead — But Stay Flexible

- **Book early:** Accessible vehicles are often in limited supply. Reserve at least seven to 10 days in advance, especially around holidays or peak travel seasons.
- **Call directly:** Don't rely solely on online booking platforms. Speak with a rental agent to confirm vehicle specs, availability and pickup logistics.
- **Ask about delivery:** Some providers will deliver the vehicle to your home, hotel or airport — especially helpful if local branches lack inventory.

Know What You Need

- **Specify features:** Clarify whether you need a side-entry ramp, rear-entry lift, hand controls, transfer seats or scooter compatibility.
- **Bring measurements:** Know the dimensions of your wheelchair or mobility device to ensure proper fit and securement.

- **Request a demo:** If possible, ask for a walkthrough of the vehicle's features before driving off.

Understand the Costs

- **Compare providers:** Rates vary widely. Check both national chains and local mobility specialists.
- **Ask about insurance:** Verify coverage for adapted equipment and accessible modifications.
- **Look for discounts:** Some companies offer reduced rates for veterans, seniors or ADA-qualified renters.

Use Tech to Your Advantage

- **Download apps:** Some rental companies offer mobile apps with real-time inventory and booking options.
- **Enable alerts:** Sign up for notifications when accessible vehicles become available in your area.
- **Use GPS and accessibility tools:** Apps like Wheelmap or AccessNow can help you plan routes and destinations compatible with your mobility needs.

Leverage Community Support

- **Tap advocacy networks:** Organizations like United Spinal, Easterseals and local disability councils often maintain lists of trusted rental providers.
- **Share feedback:** If you encounter barriers or exceptional service, let others know by leaving reviews or posting on social media.
- **Know your rights:** Under the ADA, rental companies must provide reasonable accommodations. If you face discrimination, document the incident and report it.

Overview

Accessible rental vehicles are a critical yet underdeveloped link in the mobility chain — offering independence, dignity and inclusion to millions, but still facing systemic gaps in availability, affordability and awareness. Careful planning can help you take control of your journey.

References

1. Stratenth Dynamics. October 2025; Verified Market Reports, February 2025: Accessible Vehicle Rental Service Market Size, Demand, Trends and Competitive Forecast 2033



CONTACT THE AUTHOR

Bill may be reached at
BNOELTING@NRRTS.ORG

Bill Noelting has 40 years' experience serving the pharmaceutical and health care industries. For the past 30 years, he has focused on the seating and mobility/Complex Rehab Technology/ Assistive Technology industry, including serving 20+ years as chief information officer and senior vice president of marketing and strategy at National Seating & Mobility, a national seating and mobility provider. Since 2017, Noelting has provided consulting, advisory and production services as principal of Noelting Creative Productions. His podcast, "Talk Rehab," is dedicated to chronicling the world of seating and mobility and the amazing people that make it happen. He is currently acting director of marketing for the iNRRTS. For more information, visit Noelting.com