

Service Animal Policy

The Eastern Sierra Transit Authority (ESTA) is committed to taking reasonable measures to ensure that all passengers and the public enjoy the public transportation services provided by ESTA and are able to utilize ESTA facilities with ease and comfort. ESTA has designed this policy to assist those qualified individuals with disabilities who use service animals to better utilize the fixed route bus services, paratransit services and ESTA facilities. In addition, this policy will enable ESTA employees to facilitate utilization by such individuals of ESTA's services and facilities.

Service animals play an important role in ensuring the independence of individuals with disabilities, and it is ESTA's policy to welcome any service animal that is trained to assist an individual with a disability on fixed route buses, paratransit vehicles, and in ESTA's public facilities. This policy is designed to assist ESTA employees and qualified individuals with disabilities in complying with State and Federal laws including the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and its amendments.

This policy is applicable to ESTA employees, qualified individuals with disabilities using the fixed route and paratransit services, and/or ESTA facilities.

In order to effectively and consistently implement the Service Animal Policy, the following standards apply:

1. ESTA personnel may ask if an animal is a service animal or ask what tasks the animal has been trained to perform. Such personnel may not ask for identification or certification for the animal, or inquire about the individual's disability.
2. The user/owner boarding an ESTA vehicle with a service animal may not be charged an extra fee for the service animal.
3. The user/owner is not limited in the number of service animals he/she may have as each may provide different types of service.
4. The user/owner must be in control of the service animal(s) at all times.
5. The service animal(s) must be appropriately trained and be able to perform its tasks for the benefit of the user/owner.
6. There is no specific requirement about how to board a service animal onto the bus or paratransit vehicle. The bus operator, or paratransit operator should ask the user/owner how he/she would like to board with his/her service animal(s), and follow the requested procedures, if appropriate, and reasonable. A driver may call Dispatch for assistance.
7. Users/owners with service animals may not be required to sit in a specified area.
8. As long as they are not blocking aisles or exits or interfering with other passengers entering, exiting or riding ESTA vehicles, service animals may sit or lie:
 - a. At their user/owner's feet, under the seat;
 - b. Directly beside their user/owner's mobility aid (e.g., wheelchair, walker, scooter);

- c. Between their user/owner's knees;
 - d. On their user/owner's lap; or
 - e. In some type of pouch or carrier.
9. Service Animals are not permitted to ride in or on ESTA bus seats or paratransit vehicle seats, unless the vehicle provides insufficient floor space for the animal and the user/owner has a plastic sheet to cover the full area that the animal uses to sit. If there is insufficient floor space for seating of the service animal, the driver will call Dispatch for instructions.
 10. If other passengers are afraid of animals, or have severe allergies, that does not supersede the rights of the user/owner to utilize ESTA's transportation services with a service animal. Those other riders may be permitted to pay their fare, and then board via whichever door of the bus allows him/her access away from the service animal or they can wait for the next bus. If separation in the vehicle is not possible to avoid these issues, the driver will contact Dispatch for instructions.
 11. A service animal may be prohibited from ESTA facilities and from riding on ESTA fixed route and/or paratransit vehicles if the animal poses a direct threat to the health or safety of the user/owner, other passengers, or ESTA employees; or demonstrates aggressive behavior towards other passengers or other service animals; or disrupts the ESTA driver from safely performing his/her duties.
 12. ESTA will not exclude a particular service animal based solely on experience with other similar type service animals, or on an unreasonable fear that is not related to the service animal's actual behavior. Each situation will be considered on the actual facts and circumstances at issue on an individual basis.
 13. Users/owners with service animals are responsible for any damage or soiling caused by the animal.
 14. Other passengers or members of the public are not permitted to touch, or interfere in any way with a service animal without the consent of the user/owner.
 15. Any person including a person with a disability or a user/owner who does not comply with this policy and its procedures will be asked to disembark the fixed route bus, paratransit vehicle, or will be asked to leave the transit facility. ESTA drivers are required to contact Dispatch for instructions before requiring any individual to alight from the vehicle or vacate a facility.
 16. Pets that are under the control of their owner/user are welcome on all ESTA fixed-route buses, paratransit vehicles (Dial-a-Ride) and at transportation facilities when either muzzled and leashed, or in a carrier designed to transport animals. Comfort and/or therapy animals are considered pets unless they have been individually trained to perform tasks or work for a disabled person and have been properly trained to behave properly in public.