



Frequently Asked Questions for ADA Curb Ramp Upgrades and Sidewalk Treatments

When ODOT upgrades an intersection on the state highway system, we also upgrade ADA curb ramps around the intersection. ODOT is actively improving access for all users of the transportation system and have numerous ADA specific projects going on or planned for all around the state. As part of these upgrades, we design them in a way to ensure the pedestrian way is useable by people with various abilities. In some cases, features on the sidewalks are included to help people with low vision or mobility issues. Some of these features may be new to your community and you may have questions as to why we included them as part of the curb ramp upgrades.

What purpose do the ADA features such as raised, stamped concrete serve?

The stamped concrete is a landscape feature used in buffer zones between the street and the sidewalk to alert people with mobility or vision impairments where the intended path of travel is to access a crosswalk. The stamped concrete area is not intended to be part of the pedestrian route, just as other landscape features like grass are not intended to be used as part of the pedestrian route.

Some landscape designs are not able to meet the ADA requirements for curb ramps without this technique. For example, many public agencies do not have the staff or resources to maintain landscaped areas, and this is a maintenance free option. These areas are buffer zones that separate pedestrian pathways from roads and driveways, and often include other things like utility poles and street signs.

Why not use plain concrete?

Plain concrete can be used under certain conditions, but not in buffer zones or planter strips. Walkways should not direct pedestrians over an unexpected vertical drop as a result of a curb along the walkway. Low vision users need contrasting and tactile elements to inform them about the walkway environment. It can be confusing if a person with low vision cannot distinguish between the pathway underfoot and the buffer zone that separates the path from the street.

Has ODOT tried using other types of treatments such as loose rock and stamped concrete in buffer zones?

Yes. We have used loose rock, but this treatment led to concerns about rock displacement in the roadway or the walkway. We revised designs to use more durable, longer-lasting products like stamped and colorized concrete. The tradeoff is that the stamped concrete is required to be detectable underfoot for the desired outcome. Detection might occur with a white cane, walking on the roughed surface, or with a service animal raising up a step change. While no treatment is perfect for all users, we continue to work with each community to find an ADA compliant treatment that works for the broadest group of users.

Why not build or install planters in these areas?

While planters would be aesthetically pleasing buffers, they do require maintenance. More often than not, any treatment that requires continued maintenance is not an option. The ADA curb ramp projects are focused on the immediate need of upgrading the ramps and connecting them to existing sidewalks.

Why does ODOT put in curb ramp extensions at corners that bump out halfway out into the street?

Curb extensions, also known as “bulb-outs,” are good tools to help reduce the pedestrian crossing distance and exposure in the street. They are often built in areas with on-street parking or wide shoulders. In cases like these, curb extensions increase pedestrian visibility, help control vehicular speeds, and give a “downtown look” to an urban area. They are designed to ensure vehicles can make the turning moves at intersections, see pedestrians, and allow bicycles to stay in the shoulder. In addition, they ensure parked cars don’t block the curb ramp or obstruct the intersection as required by law. Curb extensions increase the area for pedestrian use and makes achieving the ADA slope requirements for curb ramps easier when the space is constrained by existing infrastructure.