

# District Three Governmental Cooperative



## Mountain Lynx Transit CUSTOMER SERVICE GUIDE

*Effective March 18, 2025*

# Mountain Lynx Transit Customer Service Guide

Our goal is to provide high quality, safe, and friendly public transit services. If you have any questions after reading this guide, please contact the District Three Central Office.

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## **PART 1. GENERAL GUIDELINES**

### **1.1 Office Hours and Contact Information**

**District Three Governmental Cooperative/Mountain Lynx Transit Central Office** operates from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm weekdays (except holidays) and is located at 4453 Lee Highway, Marion, VA 24354.

- Local 276-783-8157
- Toll Free 800-541-0933
- TTY users should call Virginia Relay at 711

**Dispatch** services operate from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm weekdays (except holidays)

- Abingdon 276-676-0700 (Serving Abingdon and Washington County)
- Galax 276-236-3055 (Serving Galax, Carroll and Grayson Counties)
- Marion 276-782-9300 (Serving Marion and Smyth County)
- Wytheville 276-228-7433 (Serving Wytheville, Wythe and Bland Counties)

Please check our website <http://www.district-three.org/transit/index.php> or call for a schedule of services as days and times vary by location and may extend beyond office and dispatch hours.

### **1.2 Holidays – Scheduled Closings**

Mountain Lynx Transit will not operate on the following holidays:

- New Year's Day
- Martin Luther King Day
- President's Day
- Memorial Day
- Juneteenth
- 4<sup>th</sup> of July
- Labor Day
- Columbus / Indigenous Peoples Day
- Veteran's Day
- Thanksgiving Day and the Friday that follows it
- Christmas Eve
- Christmas Day
- Other days as may be announced. Refer to the DTPT website for a complete list

### **1.3 Unscheduled Closings**

Due to emergencies, inclement weather or mechanical failure, service may be suspended. If such circumstances arise during the day, Mountain Lynx Transit will make an effort to help passengers return to their homes before ceasing operation for the day. The decision to close routes is made by the local dispatcher. During inclement weather passengers should contact their local dispatcher to determine if a route is operating.

Nutrition sites are closed and nutrition routes canceled if the locality's schools are closed or on a delay.

## **1.4 Eligibility**

Mountain Lynx Transit is a service brought to you by your local government in cooperation with federal, state, and regional organizations. It is provided for the benefit of all citizens, without regard to age, income, functional ability, or any other such factor.

## **1.5 Customer Rights**

Mountain Lynx Transit customers have a right to:

- Be treated with courtesy, dignity and respect
- Be served without discrimination or partiality
- Be transported in a safe manner
- Travel in a clean, well-maintained vehicle
- Be picked up on time within a reasonable pick-up window
- Be heard and expect MLT to address and attempt to resolve concerns or complaints
- Have calls answered promptly and courteously
- Travel with a Personal Care Attendant (PCA) or service animal, if needed
- Be notified if MLT is unable to make a scheduled pick-up

## **1.6 Mountain Lynx Transit Rights**

MLT service staff has a right to expect customers to:

- Abide by the guidelines established in this service guide
- Maintain good personal hygiene
- Adhere to safety requirements such as wearing safety belts
- Assure that driveways and walkways will be safe and clear
- Cancel trips they do not plan to make so others may have their seat
- Be ready for pickup throughout the pick-up window of the scheduled trip
- Treat staff and other customers respectfully and not engage in disruptive or abusive behavior

## **1.7 Fares**

Mountain Lynx Transit is currently fare-free.

## **1.8 Safety Belts**

For safety and security, all customers on Mountain Lynx Transit vehicles are required to remain seated with their safety belt secured during transport. This includes the use of MLT provided safety belts for customers seated in personal wheelchairs. MLT will accept a physician's note authorizing an exemption to wearing a safety belt (lap &/or shoulder belt). For comfort, safety belt extensions are available by request to the driver.

## **1.9 Traveling with Children and Babies**

Public transportation is exempted from Virginia's child restraint device law (Code of Virginia Chapter 10 Article 13); however, Mountain Lynx Transit policy mirrors the portion of the law that requires children to ride in a rear-facing safety seat until the age of two or the child reaches the minimum weight limit for a

forward-facing safety seat as prescribed by the manufacturer of the safety seat. Caregivers may also be permitted to ride with a baby secured in a front-worn carrier.

Booster seats are not designed to be used without a shoulder belt and thus are not to be used on transit bus seats equipped with only a lap belt.

The caregiver is responsible for child securement.

### **1.10 Prohibited Items**

- Eating is not permitted on board MLT vehicles
- Drinking is not permitted on board MLT vehicles
- The use of tobacco products is prohibited on MLT vehicles
- Vaping is not permitted on MLT vehicles
- The use of alcohol is prohibited on MLT vehicles
- Illegal substances are prohibited on MLT vehicles
- Hazardous materials including, but not limited to, car batteries, explosives, and flammable liquids are not permitted on board MLT vehicles
- Drinks in containers that are not designed for travel use, such as cups without lids, are not permitted on MLT vehicles. Drinks in sealed, spillproof containers and drinks in containers designed for travel use, such as a thermos or takeaway cup with a secured lid, are permitted.

### **1.11 Carry-on Limits**

Passengers are permitted to transport bags of groceries, laundry or other purchases, etc., but are limited to the amount they can safely carry onto and off the vehicle in a single trip. Packages must be stowed neatly either beneath the seat or in the passenger's lap.

An exception to the limit is made for passengers with disabilities and all passengers on county and regional routes who may transport more but not more than can be safely stored on the vehicle ensuring that the aisle and access to emergency exits remain clear at all times.

### **1.12 Lost & Found**

If something is believed to be lost on a Mountain Lynx Transit vehicle, please contact the appropriate dispatch office. District Three Governmental Cooperative/Mountain Lynx Transit is not responsible for lost or stolen items.

### **1.13 Complaints, Commendations and Suggestions**

Mountain Lynx Transit employees are trained to provide safe, reliable and courteous on-time service. We always want to hear from our riders, whether it's a compliment, suggestion, or complaint. We encourage customers to work with their local dispatcher to resolve issues. If this method does not work, customers may contact the District Three Governmental Cooperative Central Office:

- **By telephone:** 276-783-8157 or 800-541-0933 weekdays 8:00 am to 5:00 pm (except holidays)
- **TTY users:** call The Virginia relay at 711
- **By mail:** District Three Governmental Cooperative, 4453 Lee Highway, Marion, VA 24354

### **1.14 Title VI**

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin in programs and activities receiving federal financial assistance. Specifically, Title VI provides that "no person in the United States shall, on the grounds of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance" (42 U.S.C. Section 2000d).

District Three Governmental Cooperative - Mountain Lynx Transit is committed to ensuring that no person is excluded from participation in, or denied the benefits of its services on the basis of race, color, or national origin, as protected by Title VI in Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Circular 4702.1B. If you feel you are being denied participation in or being denied services provided by District Three Governmental Cooperative or otherwise being discriminated against because of your race, color, national origin our contact information is: Title VI Manager, District Three Governmental Cooperative, 4453 Lee Highway, Marion, VA 24354. 276.783.8157.

### **1.15 ADA**

Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 prohibits discrimination against qualified individuals with disabilities on the basis of disability in its services, programs or activities. District Three Governmental Cooperative - Mountain Lynx Transit does not discriminate on the basis of disability in its hiring or employment practices and complies with all regulations promulgated by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission under Title I of the ADA.

District Three Governmental Cooperative - Mountain Lynx Transit will make all reasonable modifications to policies and programs to ensure that people with disabilities have an equal opportunity to enjoy all of its programs, services, and activities. Anyone who requires an auxiliary aid or service for effective communication, or a modification of policies or procedures to participate in a District Three Governmental Cooperative - Mountain Lynx Transit program, service, or activity, should contact the Mountain Lynx Transit's ADA Coordinator, Transit Division Director at 276-783-8157 or [mfleenor@district-three.org](mailto:mfleenor@district-three.org) as soon as possible but no later than 48 hours before the scheduled event.

## **PART 2. SERVICES PROVIDED**

Mountain Lynx Transit (MLT) is public transportation. Mountain Lynx Transit provides a shared-ride service that carries multiple customers to different destinations on a first-come first-serve basis. Every trip is important and customers may schedule a trip for any purpose. The dispatcher will work with each customer to select the type of service, route, and nearest pick-up time available for their requested trip. The cooperation of each passenger is essential in enabling MLT to provide the best service to all of its passengers.

### **2.1 Types of Services Defined – Demand Response, Request-Based, Contracted**

Mountain Lynx Transit operates the following types of services and reserves the right to assess each customer's individual situation in order to determine if service can be safely and efficiently provided under agency guidelines:

- **Deviated Route Loops:** While traveling in a demand response area, the driver can be “deviated” and change the course a pre-specified distance in any direction to service passengers.
- **Demand-Response:** Customers call dispatch to request service to a given destination. Dispatchers schedule the closest pick-up time available at that time for the customer.
- **Contracted:** MLT provides transportation to certified human service agencies on a contractual basis. For example, District Three Senior Services contracts with MLT to provide its clients transportation to medical appointments. Also, a Center for Independent Living contracts for persons with disabilities to attend advocacy meetings. In these cases, the agency provides a list of its approved riders and MLT serves them in the manner agreed upon in the contract. These services may take place outside of the core hours of operation. Please contact the District Three Governmental Cooperative Central Office to ask about eligibility for contracted service.

## **2.2 Types of Routes – Town or County**

Mountain Lynx Transit’s routes are largely a demand-response/request-based service and a combination of the following:

- **Town Transit:** Town transit operates as a combination of deviated-route loops and demand-response-based services. During operation, buses assigned to deviated-route loops operate hourly along a designated route. Riders may request deviations of up to two blocks off the route. Additional service is provided on a demand response basis, operating in a pre-defined area, limited to customers needing transportation within town limits. Please call the appropriate local dispatch office or visit the MLT website for a schedule of services
- **County Transit:** County transit operates as request-based service due to the wide coverage area. Customers must call to schedule trips no later than 3:00 pm on the last business day before the scheduled trip to be sure of being on the schedule on a given day. County transit routes serve areas within each member county at least once per week.

## **2.3 Curb-to-Curb Service**

Mountain Lynx Transit provides curb-to-curb service for those customers that do not require special assistance from the operator to board or exit the vehicle. MLT defines curb-to-curb service as pick-up or drop-off for customers at the end of their driveway, the nearest curb, or next to a public road, depending upon the type of service used. Customers must be waiting for pick-up in a location visible to the operator.

Persons with disabilities who are not able to use curb-to-curb service will be served with door-to-door service (see Part 3).

## **2.4 Operator’s Responsibilities**

The operator’s first responsibility is for the safety and security of all the customers and the vehicle. Operators are encouraged to stay within sight of the vehicle whenever possible. Passengers may be left alone on the Mountain Lynx Transit vehicle anytime that the driver assists other customers to and from the door. The vehicle will not always be visible to the operator at those times.

- Operators should not engage in conversations that are not related to the transit trip. In order to help operators focus on their driving, please limit conversation to questions or concerns about the trip.

- Operators are not authorized to pick up packages (such as prescriptions) or to handle medications or money, other than fare (if applicable). Please do not request that they dispense or hold on to such items.
- Operators cannot accept tips, but they do appreciate letters of praise for good service.

## **2.5 Scheduling a Pick-up**

You may meet Mountain Lynx Transit vehicle at any time within the prescribed service area, or you may call the local dispatch office to schedule a pick-up for town or county service or call the District Three Governmental Cooperative Central Office for contracted service.

- Be prepared to give the dispatcher your name, desired time and the exact addresses of pick-up and drop-off locations. We recommend leaving a phone number in case of delay or cancellation of routes.
- The dispatcher should be advised of a customer's special needs and whether they will be riding with a mobility aid, service animal, personal care assistant (PCA) or companion (see Part 3).
- If a pick-up location is at a building with more than one entrance, it is important to specify which entrance will be used.
- If possible, arrange return trips at the same time outgoing reservations are made. If you cannot make the time of your return trip, please call the appropriate office to reschedule.

## **2.6 Deadlines for Scheduling a Pick-up**

### **Town route deadlines:**

- For best availability, customers should schedule pick-up no later than 3:00 pm on the last business day before the desired travel time if needing transportation for known times such as work or appointments.
- For same day calls, passengers should expect pick-up no sooner than one hour after calling the dispatch office as determined by the deviated (flexible) fixed route schedules and existing reservations for request-based service.
- Depending upon demand, MLT may not be able to accommodate same day calls.

### **County route deadlines:**

- County route trips must be scheduled no later than 3:00 pm on the last business day before the scheduled day of the route to ensure service.
- Please note that if there are no reservations by the close of business the day prior to the route running, the route will be cancelled.

## **2.7 Multiple Trips**

- **Town routes:** If requesting multiple pick-ups and drop-offs, a rider must schedule a separate trip from each pick-up location to each drop-off destination. Mountain Lynx Transit recommends that no less than one hour be allowed between each scheduled pick-up time.
- **County routes:** Customers who board a county shopping route outside of a town's service area may embark and disembark multiple times. In-town customers may board any Mountain Lynx Transit vehicle, but stops on county routes are based on the needs of the county customers.

## **2.8 Pick-up Time Frame and Vehicle Wait Time**

**Deviated Loop Route Service:** Deviated loop routes run on estimated schedules. Due to the flexibility of these routes, customers should allow a reasonable wait time. Customers who call to schedule a pick-up along a deviated loop's route must be waiting in a location visible to the operator. Bus drivers operating on deviated loop routes are not able to wait on customers that are not prepared to board immediately.

### **Demand-Response (Request-based) and contracted service:**

- Mountain Lynx Transit schedules pick-ups within a 30-minute time frame to allow for traffic and other delays. Customers should be ready to leave as early as 15 minutes prior to or as late as 15 minutes after the scheduled pick-up time. The standard vehicle wait time is one minute. Dispatchers are not able to call to notify a customer that a driver has arrived

## **2.9 Cancelling a Trip**

- **Town routes:** Riders are expected to cancel trips at least one hour before the beginning of their pick-up window by calling the local dispatcher
- **County routes:** Riders should cancel trips no later than 3:00 pm on the last business day before the scheduled trip by calling the local dispatcher

## **2.10 Late Cancellation and No-Show Policy**

Mountain Lynx Transit has no Late Cancellation Policy at this time.

Mountain Lynx Transit has no No-Show Policy at this time.

## **2.11 Suspension of Services to a Customer**

Refusal of service due to a rider's conduct may occur in situations where a rider engages in violent, seriously disruptive, or illegal conduct; or represents a direct threat to the health or safety of others.

Refusal of service to an individual with disabilities shall not occur solely because the individual's disability results in involuntary behavior that may offend, annoy, or inconvenience others.

Riders who flagrantly disregard a rule (for example, consuming alcohol or vaping on the bus, or refusing to buckle their safety belt) will be asked to either to adhere to the rule or exit the bus.

## **2.12 Travel Training**

Travel training helps customers gain more independence by assisting them in becoming transit customers. Trainers familiarize individuals with how the system works, assisting them with understanding routes, fares, schedules, etc. If someone is hesitant to ride public transportation, travel training will give them the confidence needed to be comfortable and in control of their schedule. If interested in travel training, contact the District Three Governmental Cooperative Central Office.

## **PART 3. GUIDELINES FOR CUSTOMERS WITH DISABILITIES & OTHER SPECIAL NEEDS**

### **3.1 Eligibility**

In order to be eligible for door-to-door service, a customer **must meet one** of the following criteria

- Have a disability as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
- Need to use a ramp or wheelchair lift to board or exit a public transit vehicle
- Be unable to travel to or from a designated stop due to a disability

### **3.2 Weight and Dimension Limits for Lifts**

Customers must inform dispatchers when scheduling a trip if use of a lift is required.

- In accordance with federal requirements, Mountain Lynx Transit vehicles will carry a wheelchair or scooter and occupant if the lift and vehicle can accommodate the wheelchair and occupant. MLT may decline to carry a wheelchair/scooter and occupant if the combined weight exceeds that of the lift specifications or if carriage of the wheelchair/scooter and occupant is demonstrated to be inconsistent with legitimate safety requirements
- If a customer's wheelchair exceeds the measurements of a wheelchair as defined in the ADA, please contact our office..
- Customers who do not use wheelchairs may request use of the lift to board the vehicle. For example, a person with arthritis who is not able to climb steps may use the lift.
- For the shopping convenience of our customers with special needs, customers may request use of the lift to transport wheeled personal shopping carts.

### **3.3 Door-to-Door Service Defined**

Operators will escort passengers from the outermost exterior door of the customer's pick-up address into the vehicle and from the vehicle to the outermost exterior door of the customer's destination address. Passengers may receive additional assistance as determined by transit staff. (See 3.05). Customers receiving door-to-door service are subject to the same vehicle wait time as standard curb-to-curb service (see 2.07)

### **3.4 Conditions for Door-to-Door Service**

Customers are responsible for ensuring both their pick-up and destination locations meet the below requirements. Mountain Lynx Transit will provide an assessment in advance of the scheduled trip, if requested. To receive door-to-door service, the following conditions must be met:

- There must be a safe and accessible place to park where the lift can be safely and fully deployed – in the customer's driveway, on a public roadway or public parking lot
- The parked vehicle must not block or impede traffic
- There must be a safe and accessible path of travel within 100 feet from the vehicle to the door and be clear of ice, snow and debris
- Private driveways and lanes leading to houses must be clear of overhanging limbs or other debris that may damage a vehicle
- Wheelchair ramps must be cleared of any obstructions and safely constructed
- Animals must be restrained and under control at all times

Upon arrival, if an operator determines either the location or a ramp does not meet the above conditions of safety and accessibility for door-to-door service, the driver must contact the dispatcher to report the reason and seek guidance for alternatives. If an acceptable alternative cannot be found for that particular trip, service will not be able to be provided. Mountain Lynx Transit will arrange for a safety officer to evaluate the location to try to reach a solution for future service. MLT reserves the right to refuse any destination deemed inaccessible or unsafe for passengers, the driver, or property of MLT.

### **3.5 Assistance Provided by The Operator**

The assistance provided by our Operators will vary depending on the routes and time schedule. If operating in a demand response area the Operator must maintain a reasonable schedule. Therefore, passengers must be able to load and unload only what they can carry on themselves. MLT Operators will provide the following assistance to customers:

- Asking the customer, "How may I assist you?"
- Accompany and assist the customer along the path of travel between the vehicle and the outermost exterior door of the residence
- Guide customers who have a vision impairment (per customer's approval/request)
- Maneuver the customer's wheelchair (per customer's approval/request) between the outermost exterior door of the residence to the vehicle and from the vehicle to the outermost door of the destination
- Assist customers on and off the wheelchair lift, and will fasten and unfasten the required wheelchair securement inside the van
- Assist with the placement of passenger restraints (combination lap and shoulder safety strap)
- Allow customers to hold the driver's arm for balance
- Assist customers with their packages (see 1.11) to their door (at no more than 25 lbs per bag)
- Use the lift to load and secure a wheeled personal shopping cart of up to 100 lbs
- Provide limited simple services, e.g. help locking an exterior door
- Call emergency medical personnel and wait with a customer until it is safe for them to leave
- Please note that MLT operators are not trained to provide medical assistance

### **3.6 Operator-Prohibited Activities**

Additionally, operators are prohibited from:

- Entering a customer's private residence at any time, even to assist with wheelchairs
- Assisting a customer using a wheelchair up or down more than a single step or curb
- Maneuvering a vacant wheelchair up or down more than a single step or curb
- Searching a customer's person or personal belongings
- Providing duties of a Personal Care Attendant (see 3.07 below)
- Waiting with customers at their destination
- Handling a service animal
- Assisting with activities of daily living
- Assisting with the operation of a power wheelchair or scooter
- Assisting customers who use mobility devices over rough terrain or steep slopes
- Repairing or "rigging" a mobility device to make it functional
- Pushing a power wheelchair that is not operating
- Providing assistance beyond what is outlined in this guide

### **3.7 Traveling with a Service Animal or Personal Care Attendant**

Some customers have a level of disability that necessitates their use of a service animal or Personal Care Attendant (PCA). All customers have the right to travel with a service animal or PCA free of charge and should indicate their intent to do so when making a reservation.

A service animal:

- Must remain well-behaved and under the control of the handler at all times
- Is not permitted to ride in a seat
- Will not be tolerated if poorly disciplined and causing disruption to the driver or other customers

A PCA is someone who assists customers requiring attendant-to-attendant care. Mountain Lynx Transit Operators cannot fulfill PCA duties.

Duties which may be performed by a PCA and **not** by a MLT Operator include, but are not limited to:

- Assisting a customer in removing their jacket and/or repositioning in their wheelchair
- Providing physical support for a customer so they may walk between the vehicle and the first exterior door of their pick-up or destination
- Assisting a customer with changing oxygen canisters
- Traveling with or meeting a customer who cannot be left unattended for a brief time on an MLT vehicle or at their destination without risk to themselves or others
- Assisting a customer who travels with a service animal but cannot board or disembark that animal from the vehicle without assistance
- Assisting a customer inside their destination
- Searching for a passenger inside any building
- Assisting a customer into their private residence
- Assisting a customer using a wheelchair in navigating up or down more than one step or curb

### **3.8 Traveling with a Wheelchair or Other Service Aids**

Wheelchairs and other mobility aids must be kept clean and in good condition. It can be a hazard to the passenger using it or to the driver and other customers if, for example, the wheels or other parts are loose or the brakes do not hold the wheels securely. If a mobility aid becomes disabled while out in the community and a ride is already scheduled, please call the appropriate dispatch office (see 1.01).

Mountain Lynx Transit requires that customers who use wheelchairs also use the vehicle's integrated lap belt and shoulder strap restraint system. Lap belts and postural support belts attached to wheelchairs do not provide effective occupant restraint in the event of a collision.

Walkers, plus any attachments such as baskets, bags, or water bottles, should weigh no more than 25 pounds total. The driver will secure walkers inside the vehicle.

Life-support equipment, e.g. respirator or portable oxygen, must not violate hazardous material transportation laws and must fit into the vehicle and be secured. Oxygen cylinders must be transported in a cylinder holder, be attached firmly to a mobility aid, or be in a wheeled cylinder cart. Customers must ensure that there is an adequate oxygen supply to last the entire length of the trip before boarding.

### **3.9 Traveling with Companions**

Companions such as family or friends who are not PCAs (see 3.07) may travel with a customer being transported through contracted services when space is available and at all times on town, county and regional transit routes. Be sure to notify your dispatcher if a companion will ride with you and if your companion uses a mobility device.

### **3.10 A Note to Caregivers and Social Service Agencies**

Caregivers and others may assume the responsibility for reading and understanding this information as well as making reservations and other arrangements for the customer. Please ensure the person you care for is able to follow basic customer responsibilities if he or she is riding independently.