



Passenger Management

9

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this chapter, you will be able to:

- Explain how to safely load passengers onto your vehicle
- Explain how to safely unload passengers from your vehicle
- Discuss safe management of standing passengers
- Explain how to deal with disruptive passengers

Introduction

As the driver of a large passenger-carrying vehicle, your primary responsibility will be getting your passengers to their destinations safely and efficiently. Safe driving is certainly a large part of that, but your responsibilities won't end there. You will need to interact with and actively manage the safety of your passengers from the first hello to the last goodbye—including the entire loading and unloading process—no matter their age, race, gender, ability, or demeanor. You may even need to deal with disruptive or combative individuals who pose a safety risk to you or others.

If driving a regular route with designated stopping areas, your loading/unloading areas will already be selected for you.

Selecting a Loading Area

Your responsibility for safe boarding begins well before any passengers approach the vehicle. The first step is selecting a safe loading area.

Position the vehicle so that passengers have the shortest, clearest path possible to the entrance of the vehicle, without the need to:

- Cross rough terrain
- Step off a curb and then up into the vehicle
- Cross a street or other area with traffic

Your loading point should also keep passengers away from hazards such as:

- Dark areas
- Signs
- Poles
- Sewer grates
- Benches
- Other obstacles that could create a hazard during boarding



Your employer may have a specific policy on the use of four-way flashers when boarding or alighting passengers.

If you are going to be stopped on the roadway or in another high-traffic area, use your four-way flashers to alert other traffic. Leave the flashers on until boarding is complete and you are ready to pull away.

Be alert for pedestrians as you approach the loading area. Approach slowly if passengers or other pedestrians are standing and waiting close to where you are going to park.

If you will need to use a wheelchair lift, park the vehicle where the lift can be used and accessed. You need both a clear area for the wheelchair lift to deploy and a clear approach area to load the passenger onto the lift.

After stopping in the loading area, keep the door closed and secured until you are ready to begin the actual boarding process. An open door is usually seen as an invitation to board.

- If there is a task you must perform before allowing passengers to board, such as stowing an object or cleaning a spill, complete the task before opening the door.
- If you must exit the vehicle before beginning the boarding process—such as to open the luggage compartment—only open the door enough for you to exit and then immediately close it (at least partially) to prevent passengers from boarding.

The Boarding Process

Remain by the entrance door during loading whenever possible, so you can:

- Control the entrance and see who goes in and out
- Assist any passengers who might need assistance
- Be in the best position to spot and prevent any safety problems, since the entranceway is typically the most hazardous area during boarding

Advise passengers on how to safely board the bus as they approach the door. Advise them to:

- Watch their step—this is especially important if the first step is a portable step
- Use the handrails and all steps (that is, don't skip steps)
- Watch out for any known hazards, such as slippery steps caused by snow or rain

Be willing to assist passengers with boarding as needed, especially elderly passengers and small children.

Watch for unaccompanied children and supervise them if necessary to ensure their safety.

The boarding and unloading process will differ from that described below if you drive for a fixed-route bus service and/or if you collect fares during loading. For example, you may be required to remain seated, and your vehicle may not have luggage bays. Check with your employer for details on the procedures to be followed.



After the Boarding Process

Prepare the passengers for safe departure by checking the following:

- All passengers are seated and are wearing their seatbelts, if the vehicle has them.
- Baggage is secured and out of the aisle, so passengers have a clear path to the exits. If necessary, overly large baggage may need to be moved to a storage compartment.
- No one is close to the outside of the vehicle as you prepare to pull away. Listen carefully for anyone yelling out a warning or a request.

Unloading Passengers

When passengers are exiting (also known as “alighting”) from the vehicle, many of the procedures above should be repeated.

- Select a safe location, preferably on the same side of the street as the passengers’ destination. Avoid the need for passengers to cross in front of, or behind, the vehicle and into traffic. If that is unavoidable, warn passengers to:
 - Move slowly around the vehicle
 - Use the nearest designated crosswalk
 - Check for traffic before entering the street
- If parked on the street, turn on your four-way flashers and keep them on the entire time you are stopped.
- Do not open the exit door until you have checked the exit area and verified that it will be safe for passengers to exit. If necessary, ask passengers to please remain in their seats until you complete this step.
- Before passengers exit the vehicle, check the area around the exit for—and warn passengers about—any rough terrain or other hazards.

Remember, the steps create the greatest hazard to exiting passengers.

- Stay near the door, if possible, to make sure your passengers exit safely. Remind passengers to step carefully and to use all handholds when exiting. Be willing to assist passengers who are having difficulty with the steps.

- Supervise and assist with the removal of luggage from the luggage compartment. Do not unlock and open the luggage compartment until you are able to supervise the removal of luggage. If your employer uses claim checks, you may need to positively match luggage to its owner.

Standing Passengers

Some passenger-carrying vehicles allow “standees”—passengers who ride while standing in the aisle or other designated standing area.

Do not drive the vehicle while any passengers are forward of the “standee line,” and make sure standees remain behind that line at all times while the vehicle is moving. This is required under 49 CFR Sec. 392.62.



The line is located just behind the driver’s seat, running perpendicular from one side of the vehicle to the other. The line may be marked on the floor or through some other means. If the vehicle was designed to accommodate standees, it should be equipped with a sign stating that it’s a federal violation for the vehicle to move while persons are forward of the standee line.

If any passengers will be riding in permanent seats located forward of the standee line, do not drive the vehicle if those persons interfere with your safe operation of the vehicle.

Dealing With Disruptive Passengers

Anyone who interacts with a variety of people—such as the driver of a bus or motorcoach—must be prepared to deal with confrontational, disruptive, or combative passengers.

One of the first steps to avoiding confrontation with a passenger is to not allow them to become a passenger in the first place. Follow your employer’s policies and procedures for refusing to allow combative or intoxicated individuals to board the vehicle.

You will need to assess the situation and act, based on your best judgment, “people skills,” and your employer’s policies. Your first step is likely to be parking the vehicle in a safe location. Never attempt to deal with a confrontational or combative passenger while the vehicle is moving.

Every confrontational situation you encounter is going to be unique, so preparing for every possible scenario is impossible. Depending on the situation, your plan of action may first involve trying to calm the passenger using conversation. If that is unsuccessful, the situation may require physical movement.

Verbal

Determine why the passenger is upset and, if possible, try to resolve the situation verbally by:

Simply reporting the customer's issue to your employer—and making sure the passenger knows that you made the report—might help resolve the problem.

- Listening to the passenger
- Acknowledging their issue
- Expressing your understanding
- Stating that you will try to help resolve the issue
- Acting on any promises that you made to address the issue

If the problem is a “domestic dispute” or an argument between passengers who know each other, do not get involved unless the situation escalates to the point where it poses a threat to others. Trying to insert yourself into the argument may cause it to escalate out of control.

Always be aware of your attitude, your language, and your physical presence, and how those are perceived by your passengers. When possible, you must avoid the following when dealing with a combative passenger:

- Ignoring them, making them feel invisible or powerless
- Cornering the individual, which can make them feel threatened—and feel that a fight is the only way to escape
- Humiliating them, which can escalate hostility

As tension escalates, do not respond in a way that creates more tension. You need to *de-escalate* the situation. If a passenger begins to yell at you, for example, do not yell back. Instead, respond with a calm and assertive voice and non-threatening body language that signals that you are in control of the situation.

When speaking to a combative or frustrated individual, use clear statements that:

- Inform the passenger of the rules or the directions you expect them (and everyone else) to follow
- Reflect their frustrations, so they know that you heard them



For example:

- “I understand your frustration about the high fares, but it’s my job to collect them.”
- “I realize we’re running out of storage space, but the aisle must remain clear for everyone’s safety.”

Asking questions that engage the passenger in a conversation can also help, and show that you are concerned about them.

If the passenger continues to be confrontational or combative, or you cannot determine the passenger’s specific issue, the next step is to exercise your authority. Use your appearance, presence, and perceived authority as the “captain” of the vehicle to request that the individual stop the behavior.

Physical

If the situation becomes physical, or if visual or verbal cues make you believe it will become physical, you will need to change your approach. Stop trying to defuse the situation. Instead, take actions to protect yourself and the other passengers.

This is also when law enforcement will need to get involved. Follow your employer’s procedures to notify your employer or call law enforcement, or make sure a passenger makes the call.

Your best protection in such situations, normally, is space. Get yourself and other passengers away from the combative individual. Do not allow the individual to take control of the vehicle if there are passengers on board, but keep in mind that the lives of your passengers are more important than the vehicle itself.

If the combative individual is near the front of the bus with you, try to encourage them to leave the bus. You may be able to accomplish this by promising to continue the discussion outside. You might say, “Let’s continue this discussion outside where we have more room to talk,” for example.

If the passenger is near the rear of the bus, you may need to start evacuating other passengers at the front of the bus.

Keep in mind: you will never be expected to have a physical fight with a combative passenger. The expectation is that you will take steps to protect yourself and your passengers, and seek help from emergency services or law enforcement when needed.

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SAMPLE



Chapter 9: Passenger Management Quiz

Directions: Read each statement carefully and mark the response that best answers the question.

1. Which area describes the safest loading zone?

- A. Dark with several benches near the curb
- B. Well lit with clear, level ground
- C. Intersection on a city street
- D. Inside the first level of a parking garage

2. What should you be doing during the boarding process?

- A. Providing assistance near the entrance door
- B. Double-checking lug nuts on the wheels
- C. Verifying all emergency exits are locked
- D. Confirming all exterior lights are working

3. Which is a best practice for unloading passengers on a street?

- A. Park, open the exit door, and start working on paperwork
- B. Park with the vehicle exit facing traffic
- C. Ask for a passenger volunteer to supervise luggage removal
- D. Check the area and keep four-way flashers on the entire time

4. What do you need to do if your vehicle has a “standee line”?

- A. Make sure standing passengers are in front of the line
- B. Keep standing passengers behind the line
- C. Allow only one standing passenger at a time
- D. Prevent passengers from standing when driving over 30 mph

5. What is a good way to handle a situation with a combative passenger?

- A. Tell the passenger to be seated and quiet
- B. Ask other passengers to restrain the offender
- C. Calm the passenger with positive communication
- D. Stop and remove the passenger’s baggage from the vehicle