

NHRTAP News

New Hampshire RTAP Quarterly Newsletter

Quarter I 2026 Newsletter

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Have an idea for the newsletter? Let us know!
 Call 937-299-5007 or email Julie Schafer at
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New Hampshire Vehicle Inspection Update

Beginning January 30, 2026, the repeal for annual vehicle safety inspections for most vehicles will take effect. While this change reduces a long standing mandate, it does not eliminate transit agencies' responsibility to maintain safe, roadworthy vehicles. The information below explains what has changed, what has not, and what NHDOT funded transit systems should continue to do.

Did New Hampshire repeal annual vehicle inspections?

Yes. As a part of the two year New Hampshire state budget signed into law on June 27, 2025, the state will no longer require annual vehicle safety inspections for most vehicles beginning January 30, 2026. The legislation was adopted to reduce regulatory burden and lower costs for motorists.

What Changed?

Most passenger vehicles in New Hampshire, including many public transit vehicles, will no longer be subject to state mandated annual inspections. Transit agencies should be aware that this change affects state inspection requirements only and does not eliminate other safety or

maintenance obligations.

What Did NOT Change?

It is important for agencies to understand that this repeal does not eliminate existing vehicle safety or emissions requirements under New Hampshire law. This means all state requirements under RSA 266 regarding vehicle condition are still legally applicable. Vehicle safety requirements are found in New Hampshire Revised Statutes Annotated (RSA) Chapter 266

What Federal Rules Still Apply?

Although state mandated annual inspections may no longer be legally required for non CDL transit vehicles, federal requirements for FTA-funded transit systems still apply.

Under 49 U.S.C. § 5326 and 49 CFR Part 625, transit agencies must maintain vehicles in a state of good repair through a Transit Asset Management (TAM) program. Sub-recipients participating in the NHDOT statewide TAM Plan are still responsible for following written maintenance plans and ensuring vehicles and accessibility features are safe and functional. (continued page 2)

New Hampshire State Vehicle Inspection Updates

(continued from page 1)

In addition, federal regulations require periodic inspection of commercial motor vehicles (CMV's). Transit vehicles meet the CMV definition under federal or state law and therefore must continue to undergo safety inspections, regardless of the repeal.

Why Inspections Still Matter (Best Practice)?

Even where not legally required, regular vehicle safety inspections remain best practice for protecting passengers, drivers and fleet investments. Routine inspections support safe operations, reduce risk, and help agencies meet ongoing maintenance and compliance responsibilities.

⇒ Safety

- Prevents accidents caused by mechanical failures
- Improves driver confidence and operational readiness
- Ensures critical safety systems function as intended

⇒ Financial benefits

- Identifies minor issues before they become costly repairs
- Reduces risk of unexpected breakdowns and service disruptions

- Supports lower insurance risk through documented maintenance
- Protects vehicle resale value and lifecycle value

⇒ Environmental and legal compliance

- Supports emissions compliance and reduced environmental impact
- Helps agencies avoid penalties related to unsafe or non compliant vehicles

⇒ Mechanical longevity

- Extends vehicle life through routine condition monitoring
- Maintains optimal performance of engines and operating systems.

In Summary

While New Hampshire will no longer require annual vehicle inspections for most vehicles beginning January 2026, transit agencies remain responsible for maintaining safe, road-worthy fleets. Federal requirements and state safety laws continue to apply, and regular inspections remain a recommended best practice.

State Inspection Components

Documentation & Identification

- Registration and plates,
- Registration certificate,
- Vehicle identification number,

Safety & System Controls

- Steering, front end suspension,
- Service and parking brakes
- Horn and defroster
- Seat belts

Visibility and Electrical

- Lights and reflectors

Electrical System

- Mirrors
- Glass and glazing
- Windshield wipers

Mechanical & Structural

- Exhaust system
- On-board diagnostics
- Body and chassis,
- Frame Integrity
- Fuel system
- Tires

Winter Weather is Here—Stay Ready, Stay Safe

Winter conditions are well underway across New Hampshire, bringing ongoing challenges for transit operations. Mid-season is an ideal time for agencies to pause, review readiness practices, and confirm vehicles, facilities and staff are prepared for continued winter travel. The reminders below highlight key areas to support safe and reliable service throughout the remainder of the season.

Vehicle & Equipment Readiness

Regular winter checkups help identify issues early and reduce the risk of breakdowns during severe weather.

- Verify tire conditions, tread depth, and inflation
- Confirm brakes, steering, and suspension systems are functioning properly
- Check lights, reflectors, and mirrors for visibility in snow and low-light conditions
- Monitor fluids, batteries, and heating systems
- Ensure emergency equipment is stocked and accessible

Facility & Site Conditions

Facilities play a critical role in employee and passenger safety during winter months.

- Review snow and ice removal plans for garages, parking areas, and walkways
- Confirm exterior lighting is functioning properly
- Keep entrances, ramps, and fueling areas clear and well-marked
- Monitor roof loads and drainage to prevent ice buildup

Driver & Staff Preparedness

Supporting operators and staff with clear expectations and communication helps maintain safe service.

- Reinforce through pre-trip inspections, especially during extreme weather
- Encourage early reporting of vehicle or facility concerns
- Provide guidance on operating in reduced visibility and hazardous road conditions
- Remind staff of weather-related policies and decision making procedures

Service Adjustments & Communication

Weather Conditions may require operational flexibility to protect riders and staff

- Review procedures for delayed, modified or suspended service
- Ensure staff know how to communicate changes clearly and consistently
- Confirm passenger notification tools and contact information are current

Closing Reminder

Winter readiness is an ongoing process. Regular check ins throughout the season help transit agencies continue to provide safe, dependable service despite changing weather conditions.

Resources:

- [NH Office of Highway Safety Winter Driving](#)
- [AAA Winter Driving Tips](#)
- [NHTSA Winter Weather Driving Tips](#)
- [National Safety Council – Be Prepared for Winter Driving](#)

Mid-Winter Readiness Checklist

- Vehicles inspected and winter equipment verified
- Facilities cleared, lit and accessible
- Drivers reminded of winter procedures
- Communication plans reviewed



Drivers Trained to Proficiency

Driver training is a foundational element of safe and reliable transit service. Beyond initial onboarding, agencies are responsible for ensuring drivers are trained to proficiency and supported through ongoing instruction and oversight. This article highlights key considerations for maintaining effective driver training programs

What “Training to Proficiency” Means

Training to proficiency goes beyond completing required coursework or ride-alongs. It ensures drivers demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and judgment needed to safely perform their duties under real-world operating conditions.

Proficiency-based training emphasizes:

- Skill Demonstrations, not just attendance
- Consistent application of procedures
- Ongoing reinforcement over time

Core Elements of an Effective Training Program

While training programs vary by agency size and service type, effective approaches often include:

Initial Training

- Classroom and behind the wheel instruction aligned with agency policies
- Clear expectations for safe driving, customer service and reporting procedures .
- Documented sign-off before independent operation

Ongoing & Refresher Training

- Passenger Assistance Training (PAT) for drivers completed in person is required to be refreshed every three years to help ensure skills remain current.

- For other virtual training programs, agencies should follow NHDOT guidance to complete at least annual refresher trainings.
- Targeted training following incidents, near misses, or policy updates
- Seasonal or service-specific training, such as winter operations or mobility device securement

Documentation & Oversight

Maintaining clear training records supports both operational consistency and compliance

Common documentation practices include:

- Training checklists or curricula tied to job duties
- Records of completed training and evaluations
- Documentation of corrective or follow-up training when needed

Supporting Drivers Through Training

Training is most effective when drivers feel supported rather than monitored.

Agencies may consider:

- Using coaching based approaches instead of disciplinary framing
- Providing opportunities for questions and feedback
- Pairing new drivers with experienced mentors when feasible

A supportive training culture encourages retention and promotes continuous learning

Driver Oversight: Supporting Safe and Consistent Operations

Driver oversight is a critical component of maintaining safe, reliable transit services. When implemented thoughtfully, oversight reinforces training, supports consistent delivery, and helps agencies identify opportunities for improvement. Structured tools can help make oversight more objective, consistent, and supportive for both supervisors and drivers

What Driver Oversight Is- and Is Not

Effective driver oversight is intended to support safety and consistency, not to create a punitive work environment.

Driver oversight:

- Reinforces training and operational expectations
- Identifies trends or recurring issues
- Provides opportunities for coaching and skill reinforcement

Driver oversight is NOT:

- A one-time activity
- Substitute for training
- Solely disciplinary in nature (continued page 5)

Driver Oversight: Supporting Safe and Consistent Operations

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Structure Tools That Support Oversight

Using standardized tools to help agencies apply oversight consistently and fairly across drivers, routes, and service types. Two commonly used approaches include on-route observations and performance evaluations tied to passenger interactions.

These tools help agencies move beyond informal observations and create a shared understanding of expectation

Mystery Rider Observation

Mystery rider programs allow agencies to observe service delivery from a passenger perspective. Observations are typically conducted anonymously and focus on day-to-day operating practices rather than individual discipline.

A Mystery Rider Observation form can help agencies:

- Assess consistency in customer service and operating procedures
- Identify training needs related to safety, accessibility, or communication
- Capture observations in a standardized, objective format

When used appropriately, mystery rider observations support quality improvement and reinforce training priorities.

Download the Mystery Rider Observation form [here](#) or visit the NHRTAP website .

Passenger Assistance Performance Evaluation

Passenger assistance evaluations focus on how drivers support riders who require additional assistance, including individuals with disabilities or mobility devices.

A Passenger Assistance Performance Evaluation can help agencies:

- Assess proper securement and assistance techniques
- Reinforce ADA-related service expectations
- Document proficiency and identify refresher training needs

These evaluations are often most effective when paired with coaching conversations and follow-up training, rather than corrective action alone.

Download the Passenger Assistance Performance Evaluation form [here](#) or visit the NHRTAP website.

Documentation & Follow-up

Regardless of the oversight method used, documenting observations and follow-up actions help agencies maintain consistency and transparency.

Agencies may consider:

- Reviewing results with drivers in a support setting
- Using observations to guide refresher or targeted training
- Tracking trends over time to identify system wide issues

Resources

[Passenger Assistance Performance Evaluation Form](#)

[Mystery Rider Observation Form](#)

In Summary

Driver oversight is most effective when supported by clear, consistent tools. Structured observation and evaluation forms help agencies reinforce training, support drivers, and promote safe, reliable service.

Reasonable Modifications: Supporting Accessible and Consistent Service

Providing accessible services is a core responsibility of public transit agencies. Under Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), agencies must make reasonable modifications to policies and practices when necessary to ensure individuals with disabilities have equal access to transportation services. This article highlights key considerations for handling

reasonable modification requests consistently and efficiently.

What is a Reasonable Modification?

A reasonable modification is a change to a or procedure, practice or policy, that allows a person with a disability
(continued page 6)

Reasonable Modifications: Supporting Accessible and Consistent Service

(continued from page 5)

to access transit services. Requests are evaluated on a case by case basis and are intended to remove barriers without fundamentally altering the nature of the service.

When Modifications May be Limited

Agencies may limit a modification request if it would:

- Fundamentally alter the nature of the service
- Create a direct threat to health or safety
- Result in undue financial or administrative burden

Consistent application and documentation are important when evaluating these situations.

Supporting Drivers in the Field

Drivers are often the first point of contact for modification requests. Clear guidance helps drivers respond appropriately and know when to seek supervisory support.

Agencies may consider:

- Reinforcing when requests can be approved in the field
- Clarifying when to contact a supervisor
- Encouraging respectful communication and problem solving

Drivers should not be expected to make complex determinations alone.

Stop Announcements & Onboard Communication

Under ADA requirements, transit agencies must en-

sure stop announcements are provided so passengers with visual impairments can access service equitably. When vehicles are equipped with automated annunciators, drivers should verify systems are functioning properly. If automated systems are unavailable or malfunctioning, drivers are responsible for making stop announcements manually.

Clear training and consistent expectations help ensure announcements are provided reliably across all service types.

Training & Resources

NHRTAP addressed reasonable modification requirements and real-world scenarios during its December 2025 ADA training. Agencies are encouraged to reference this training as a part of ongoing driver education and support.

[NHRTAP December 2025 Reasonable Modifications Training Video](#)

In Summary

Reasonable modifications support equitable access to transit services. Clear training, consistent decision making, and documentation help agencies meet ADA requirements while supporting drivers and passengers alike.

SAVE THE DATE

Tri-State Transit Conference 2027



Date:

September 14-16, 2027

Venue:

Double Tree by Hilton Manchester Downtown

Hosted By:



If you are not receiving this newsletter directly, or know of someone who is not currently receiving it, and would like to, please contact Julie Schafer (jschafer@rlsandassoc.com). This publication is free.

TRAINING CALENDAR/SCHOLARSHIPS

NHRTAP offers its courses via webinar or in-person training. The Quarter 1 2026 training has been added.

<https://www.newhampshirertap.com/training>

Please note that certificates for the webinars are valid for one (1) year, and in-person trainings are valid for three (3) years. NHDOT encourages transit agencies to review their certificates and identify trainings that are needed and get them scheduled. If there is a training that is needed and is not on the training calendar, please email NHRTAP Assistant, [Dawn Tennant](#).

January

January 17, 2026 (7:30 am @ Concord NH)

Defensive Driving

January 17, 2026 (11:00 am @ Concord NH)

Emergency Procedures

February

February 12, 2026 (9:00 am-3:00 pm)

Defensive Driving Webinar

February 24, 2026 (12:00 pm-2:00 pm)

Emergency Procedures and Evacuation Webinar

March

March 21, 2026 (8:00 am-10:00 am @ Haverhill NH)

Passenger Assistance Techniques

Scholarships

Who Is Eligible?

Section 5311 and Section 5310 subrecipients under contract with NHDOT

What Events Do the Scholarship Funds Cover?

Section 5311 subrecipients are eligible to apply for scholarship funds for the following:

- Annual Tri-State Conference attendance
- Courses, seminars, workshops and conferences relating to rural passenger transportation
- Agency annual maximum is \$3,500 (this amount is in addition to attendance at the Tri-State Conference)

Section 5310 subrecipients/organizations are eligible to apply for scholarship funds for the following:

- Annual Tri-State Conference attendance
- Agency annual maximum is \$500 (this amount is in addition to attendance at the Tri-State Conference)

Please note that all 5310 subrecipients draw from an overall pool of funds; there is no guaranteed agency set aside

Application Process

Please visit the [Scholarships](#) page on the NHRTAP website to download an application and for detailed information on the application process.

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