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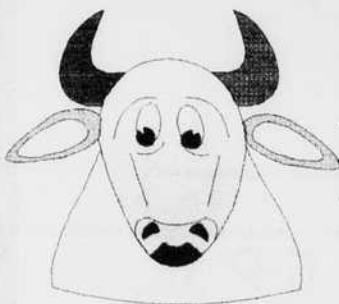


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Greyhound buses adapt for disabled ridership

By Katie Fairbank
The Associated Press

DALLAS—Greyhound Lines is embarking on a plan that they say should make bus service accessible to disabled passengers nationwide next year as long as they call two days in advance.

With the 48 hours' notice, Greyhound and its connecting partners will assure that a bus with a lift will be available to take a wheelchair passenger to any scheduled destination, the Dallas-based carrier said today. Together, the company and its partners have 4,000 stops.

"This service will be fully operational in the fourth quarter of 1999, three years earlier than required by proposed federal regulations," said Craig Lentzsch, president and chief executive.

So far, only 20 of Greyhound's 2,100 buses are equipped to handle wheelchair passengers. With the new plan, 80 buses will have lifts at a cost of \$30,000 each, according to the company.

Up to 1,200 disabled riders a month would benefit, Greyhound officials estimated.

Under Department of Transportation rules proposed in March, any new bus bought by a

non-municipal carrier would have to be fully accessible by 2000. Half of all fleets would have to be equipped with wheelchair lifts by 2006 and all their buses by 2012. With all buses equipped, a wheelchair passenger wouldn't have to book specially in advance.

Companies would have until 2002 to do what Greyhound is promising in 1999, with the promise of rides for wheelchair passengers giving two days' notice.

Advocates for the disabled said Greyhound would need to equip more than 300 buses with lifts for its plan to work.

"Our average ticket price is \$30 and we simply can't afford a \$30,000 lift on every bus," said Greyhound spokesman George Gravley.

For years, disabled activists have blocked Greyhound terminals to show that the bus network is largely inaccessible to them.

"We are the transportation that takes people where ever they want to go and we are the lowest cost transportation," said Gravley. "A lot of the handicapped are in the lower income groups, unfortunately, and this is the way they go."

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