

MRC VEHICLE MODIFICATION PROGRAM FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ'S)

Vehicle modification services can be one of the most complex and costly vocational rehabilitation services offered by the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC). It entails a significant investment of resources by the consumer in the purchase of the vehicle and by the agency in the necessary modifications. This fact sheet was developed to answer some of the most frequently asked questions.

1. What kind of services does the MRC Vehicle Modification Program provide?

The Vehicle Modification Program provides driving evaluations, vehicle modifications and equipment installation to privately owned vehicles of individuals with disabilities to enable them to achieve an employment outcome by removing barriers to transportation.

Vehicle modification services include structural (major) vehicle modifications, non-structural (minor) vehicle modifications and driver evaluation services. Structural modifications may include a lowered floor on mini and full-size vans, raised roof, raised entry, automatic wheelchair lift, automatic door opener, servo primary controls, and reduced-effort steering and braking, and similar modifications.

Non-structural modifications may include mechanical hand controls, car-top wheelchair carriers, scooter lifts, steering knobs and similar modifications.

2. How do I apply for vehicle modification services?

If your VR Counselor determines you might benefit from obtaining vehicle modification services, they will complete the "Motor Vehicle Modification Program Referral" form. You will need to sign the referral and the "Motor Vehicle Modification Authorization" form. Both forms (along with other relevant information) will be sent to the Principal Engineer in the Rehabilitation Technology Department who will coordinate your vehicle modifications

3. How do I qualify for vehicle modification services?

Your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor is solely responsible for determining your eligibility for any vehicle modification services.

Eligibility for actual modifications is determined by your counselor based on MRC policies, your standing in the rehabilitation process, your vocational goal, and your financial eligibility.

4. Are there income requirements in order to qualify for vehicle modification services?

Vehicle modification services (with the exception of driving evaluations) are subject to a financial participation test administered by your VR Counselor. It is your responsibility to provide required income/financial verification.

5. Do I have to be working in order to qualify for vehicle modifications?

You must be employed or within one-year of employment to qualify for structural vehicle modifications.

Non-structural modifications do not require competitive employment.

6. Who coordinates the vehicle modification services?

Vehicle modification services are coordinated by the Principal Engineer in the Rehabilitation Technology Department of the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission. He may be reached by phone at 617-204-3721 or e-mailed at Eugene.Blumkin@mrc.state.ma.us

7. Do I need a driving evaluation?

In most cases of structural vehicle modifications, you will need to participate in a driver evaluation. In some cases additional evaluation(s) may be required to determine your ability to drive and/or specific equipment necessary. The MRC will provide driver evaluations at no cost to you. Generally, you are eligible for a driver evaluation immediately after applying to the MRC.

In the case of non-structural modifications, the MRC will accept a prescription from your physician or a written evaluation from a licensed driving school listing what equipment/modifications you need.

8. What if I am unable to drive?

If it is determined you are unable to or request not to drive, the MRC will modify your vehicle for you to be transported as a passenger, as long as you are eligible for vehicle modifications.

9. What kind of vehicle should I purchase?

If you have been determined eligible for vehicle modification services and you are planning to purchase a new or used vehicle, you are **REQUIRED** to consult with

the Principal Engineer regarding your vehicle choice. Some vehicle makes or models may not be suitable for your adaptive needs.

The MRC will **not** modify your vehicle if it is not considered to be suitable for safe and reliable modifications.

10. When I purchase a vehicle to be modified by the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission, what items should be included in the initial purchase?

The MRC recommends that power windows, power locks, towing hitches, remote starters, remote door openers, mobile telephone or radio equipment, rear detection systems and similar equipment be included in your original purchase if available from manufacturer. You also should make necessary arrangements for obtaining any after-market equipment/modifications not covered by MRC.

Some options may interfere negatively with adaptive equipment. Please consult with the Principal Engineer before you order your vehicle.

11. Is there any where to receive financing to buy a vehicle or modifications (or both) that I need right away?

Yes, the Massachusetts Assistive Technology Loan Program offers reduced rate and long-term re-payment schedule loans to eligible individuals to purchase a van, cover the cost of modifications or purchase an already modified vehicle. The program might be able to provide lower monthly payments for a longer term. Also, by obtaining an AT loan you may be able to take advantage of manufacturers' cash rebates that are, usually, offered instead of low interest manufacturers' financing. The program is operated by Easter Seals. For more information on this program call 1-800-244-2756 x 428. Another option is to write a Plan for Achieving Self Support (PASS). Talk to your VR counselor or an MRC benefits specialist to find out if this could work for you.

Some non-profit and charity organizations may also consider funding your modified vehicle purchase.

12. Can a used vehicle be modified?

Yes, in most cases a used vehicle can be modified. Generally, the MRC requires vehicles be no older than two years with no more than 24,000 miles on the odometer. The Principal Engineer will consider a waiver if you can supply a statement from an auto mechanic confirming that the vehicle is in good running condition with no body rust. In some cases, such a vehicle would require an inspection by Principal Engineer.

You should be aware that it may not be financially feasible for you to modify a used vehicle due to its future maintenance and repair cost. The MRC does not fund regular maintenance, repairs or retrofitting of modified vehicles.

Additionally, some modifications simply cannot be performed on older/used vehicles per our vendors' requirements.

13. Who can drive a structurally modified vehicle?

In most cases, if the vehicle is modified for you as a driver, you should be the only driver of that vehicle even if all driving systems could be switched back to their regular non-adapted mode. If another person must drive your vehicle, we recommend that person receive formal adaptive driving training.

14. Is there a waiting list for vehicle modification services?

The MRC may have an established agency-wide waiting list for paid services. There is not a separate waiting list for any vehicle modification services.

15. What is the bid process?

The bid process is a state-required procedure for obtaining vehicle modifications from a pool of pre-qualified vendors at the lowest reasonable cost to the program.

Under the bid process, the MRC solicits bids based on a Bid Request that lists all equipment and modifications required, based on your driver evaluation. Consumers will receive a copy of the bid as well as a list of all eligible vendors under contract with the MRC.

For structural modifications, eligible bidders are required to conduct a site visit to introduce their company, take necessary measurements, etc. In some instances, the MRC will conduct a pre-bid conference with prospective vendors. Your participation in such site visits or pre-bid conferences will be required

16. How are vendors selected?

After the bids are received, opened, and compared, the job will be awarded based on the lowest reasonable bid. You will receive a copy of the Award Notification Letter.

For all vehicle modifications other than so-called "high-tech" modifications you would be able to choose the vendor under a pilot consumer choice program developed by MRC. You will be responsible for any difference in cost between the bid of a vendor of your choice and the lowest qualified bid presented to MRC.

The payment for the difference will have to be issued and applied before the vehicle modification work could be initiated.

17. Can I talk to prospective vendors prior to the bid award?

Yes, in most instances you will be able to meet and/or speak with prospective vendors before the bids are submitted.

The list of current MRC-approved vendors is available from the Principal Engineer and from your VR Counselor.

18. Will I be responsible for any charges?

You may be responsible for additional charges and out-of-pocket expenses in connection with the vehicle modification process. Those charges include, but are not limited to, transportation charges, non-adaptive upgrades and after-market equipment, and/or additional labor and parts charges that are outside of the scope of your vehicle modifications.

In most cases, these charges will be identified and quoted to you before the start of the job. Any additional personal requests should be addressed directly with your vendor. Always ask your vendor for a written itemized estimate of all out-of-pocket charges and expenses before the work could proceed.

If you would like to receive equipment/modifications other than ones specified by the selected vendor, you may be able to directly arrange that with your vendor, but only if such equipment/modifications are approved by the MRC and its driving evaluator. You will be responsible for any increase in price resulting from your request. Should such a request result in a decrease in price, such a decrease will be passed along to the MRC. Any such requests must be presented to the Principal Engineer for approval as early as possible.

19. How long will it take to get my vehicle modified?

The MRC will try to facilitate the completion of vehicle modifications in the shortest time possible. However, mostly due to events beyond our control, occasional delays may and do occur. We will be happy to update you on the progress of your modifications. The MRC, however, is not responsible for any additional costs you may incur as a result of delays.

20. How long is the warranty on adaptive equipment and modifications?

The MRC requires vendors to provide a one-year (two-year for high-tech equipment) warranty for all adaptive equipment and modifications procured by the MRC. This warranty includes the cost of parts, labor, pick-up, delivery and the cost of gasoline associated with warranty-related repairs.

Manufacturers of adaptive equipment often provide additional warranties at no cost to consumers. Sometimes, extended warranties can be purchased from an MRC vendor.

21. Who do I call if the adaptive equipment fails?

You should call the vendor who modified your vehicle first. You should also call the Principal Engineer if your problem is safety-related or persistent.

22. Do I have to pay sales or excise tax on my vehicle?

In most cases, you may be eligible for an abatement of the sales and excise taxes on your vehicle. Please contact the Registry of Motor Vehicles for sales tax questions. Your excise tax questions should be addressed to your local municipal government. Though most towns will abate the excise tax, this is a local decision.

In both cases, you will need to provide a note from your doctor confirming your status as a person with disability.

23. Who is responsible for the maintenance and repair of my vehicle?

You are solely responsible for regular maintenance and non-warranty repairs of your vehicle. After the warranty on the modification expires you will be responsible for the cost of any repairs and maintenance.

Any retrofitting of your vehicle or equipment is your responsibility as well.

24. After my vehicle has been adapted, when can I start driving?

Depending on your licensing status and on the recommendations of your driving evaluator, you may need to complete a full or refresher driver training course before you can start driving.

25. Do I have to apply the manufacturer's rebate on adaptive equipment to the total cost of the structural modifications?

Under MRC policies you are required to apply manufacturer adaptive equipment rebates toward the cost of modifications. Please note this does not affect all other manufacturers' rebates available to the general public which may be applicable to your vehicle. See the Appendix for contact information for rebates.

26. Can I qualify for subsequent vehicle modifications and are there any additional charges for those?

You may be eligible to obtain subsequent structural modifications seven years after the completion of a previous modification. You will have to demonstrate a two-year cumulative competitive employment within those seven years. Additionally, you will be responsible for contributing a \$1000.00 of your previous modification retained value towards your subsequent vehicle modification.

For structural high-tech modifications only, MRC will consider your experience in driving of and satisfaction with previously-installed high-tech driving system in determining the vendor for your subsequent vehicle modifications.

Subsequent non-structural modifications may be obtained after three years.

27. Should I buy insurance to cover the modifications?

You should insure your modified vehicle for the full cost including the modification charges. Family members who may drive the vehicle should also be added to the insurance policy. Vendors can provide you with a copy of the total itemized bill for your insurance company.

Please investigate the cost of your insurance before initiating the vehicle modification process. In some cases, proper insurance coverage could be extremely high and simply unaffordable.

MRC would not be able to help you with your insurance coverage.

28. What is the process for getting my license if I need specialized controls to drive?

You should contact the Registry of Motor Vehicles' Medical Affairs Division regarding any issues related to licensing.

Please note that you are responsible for maintaining your driver license current including all necessary endorsements.

29. How do I apply for disabled person's designated license plates or placard?

The Registry of Motor Vehicles is responsible for issuing DP plates and placards.