

January, 2004

INDIANA

VRS

CUSTOMER

VEHICLE MODIFICATIONS

HANDBOOK

VEHICLE MODIFICATIONS

The process of modifying a vehicle can involve a large investment both on your part and on the part of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS). This handbook is designed as a guide to help you through the process.

Questions that need to be answered are:

- whether or not you can drive, or learn to drive;
- what kinds of modifications are needed so that you can drive or ride safely;
- what type of vehicle you should purchase; and
- what financial assistance is available for vehicle modifications.

Principal parties in the modification process:

1. Your Counselor's name: _____

Telephone: _____

2. Your Vehicle Modification Evaluator's name and agency: _____

(Name) (Agency)

Telephone: _____

3. Your Vehicle Modification Modifier/Vendor _____

(Contact) (Company)

Telephone: _____

4. Your Vehicle Modification Inspector's name and agency: _____

(Name) (Agency)

Telephone: _____

WHAT ARE VEHICLE MODIFICATIONS?

Vehicle modifications are the addition of adaptive equipment or structural changes to a motor vehicle that permit an individual with a disability to safely drive or ride as a passenger in a motor vehicle. Vehicle modifications also include wheelchair or scooter carriers and lifts that mount on the roof, in the passenger area, or in the trunk or other storage areas of a motor vehicle.

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

CERTAIN TYPES OF VEHICLES
ARE NOT COMPATIBLE WITH
VEHICLE MODIFICATIONS YOU MIGHT NEED.

IF YOU INTEND TO REQUEST FUNDING ASSISTANCE FROM VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES (VRS) FOR A VEHICLE MODIFICATION, DO NOT BUY A VEHICLE UNTIL YOU HAVE DISCUSSED IT WITH A VRS COUNSELOR AND HAVE COMPLETED A VEHICLE MODIFICATION EVALUATION. WE WILL ASSIST WITH PROVIDING INFORMATION REGARDING A VEHICLE WHICH IS SUITABLE TO YOUR NEEDS, THE TYPE OF MODIFICATIONS NEEDED, AND THE AMOUNT VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION WILL BE ABLE TO CONTRIBUTE TOWARD NEEDED MODIFICATIONS. WITHOUT THE PROPER INFORMATION, YOU MIGHT PURCHASE A VEHICLE THAT CAN'T BE MODIFIED TO MEET YOUR NEEDS OR MIGHT COST YOU SIGNIFICANTLY MORE TO MODIFY THAN WILL BE CONTRIBUTED BY VRS. VRS WILL ONLY CONTRIBUTE FUNDS FOR THE LEAST COSTLY TYPE OF MODIFICATION. SOME VEHICLES CAN COST MORE TO MODIFY THAN OTHER VEHICLES. BE SURE VRS HAS AGREED TO PROVIDE MODIFICATIONS BEFORE YOU PURCHASE A VEHICLE.

If you are going to be driving your modified van from a power wheelchair, you must also consider the following.

- If you are in the process of obtaining a new wheelchair or will obtain one in the near future, you should alert your counselor and evaluator. The type of wheelchair you use can affect your modification; therefore, your wheelchair should be obtained before completing your driver evaluation.
- Be sure to tell the therapist who prescribes your wheelchair that you will be driving from it and transferring into the seat.

Once it has been determined what vehicle would be compatible with the modifications you need and type of wheelchair you use, you must obtain and pay for your own vehicle. VRS does not pay for the purchase of a vehicle. VRS can only modify the vehicle to suit your disability related transportation or driving needs for the purpose of reaching your vocational goal.

Purchase a new vehicle if at all possible. Vehicle modifications can cost thousands of dollars. Making modifications to a new vehicle will provide you transportation for a longer period of time. Please be advised that, once VRS has provided you with a vehicle modification, VRS will not provide any additional funding for more modifications within three years of the most recent vehicle modification unless you meet the criteria regarding progressive disability or additional disabilities. VRS may provide up to 50% of the cost of subsequent modification if the subsequent modification takes place between three years and five years of the most recent modification and the vehicle has been driven for 50,000 miles after its most recent modification by the customer. Only after five years from the most recent modification and the vehicle has been driven for 75,000 miles following its most recent modification by the customer will VRS assist with 100% of the cost of the modifications within the guidelines of its policy.

If you are not able to purchase a new vehicle, you should consider obtaining the best used vehicle possible.

a. If you purchase or possess a vehicle older than one year, VRS must obtain a written report from a qualified mechanic verifying that the vehicle is in sound condition, or will be after certain repairs are completed.

b. If you purchase or possess a vehicle that is older than ten (10) years or has more than one hundred thousands (100,000) miles on the odometer, VRS may not assist with any funding for modifications.

c. If you purchase or possess a vehicle that has been previously modified, VRS may authorize additional modifications only if all aspects of both previous and new modifications can be brought into compliance with VRS rules. Fancy interiors including carpeted floors, paneled sidewalls and ceilings, sofa beds, refrigerators, televisions and exterior modifications such as raised roofs are best avoided, as these may actually be hindrances during the modification process. You would be better advised to purchase a vehicle that is mechanically and structurally sound with as little customer interior work as possible.

IF YOU ALREADY OWN A VEHICLE, VRS WILL WORK WITH YOU WHENEVER POSSIBLE. HOWEVER, YOUR VEHICLE MUST MEET THE ESSENTIAL CRITERIA APPROPRIATE FOR THE LEAST COSTLY TYPE OF MODIFICATION YOU REQUIRE.

INSURANCE AND MAINTENANCE COST

It is your responsibility to see that your vehicle is properly insured from the moment you take possession. Both the vehicle and the modification equipment must be covered. If you are involved in an accident, VRS expects your insurance to pay for the necessary repairs/replacement. You should consult your insurance agency (or shop around several local agents) to predetermine insurance costs.

Another factor to consider is maintenance of the modified equipment. Lifts require adjustments and servicing; power assisted driving controls require servicing; switches wear out. For purposes of safety and to prevent premature wearing out of the equipment, maintenance of your adaptive equipment is important and is the responsibility of the customer.

YOUR EMPLOYMENT PLAN

Once an individual has been determined eligible for the program, a Plan for Employment will be developed. Vehicle modification services may be part of this plan if they are required for you to attain your vocational goal.

THE VEHICLE MODIFICATION PROCESS

EVALUATION

An evaluation is required to determine:

- if you have the ability to drive;
- what vehicle(s) meet your needs; and
- what modifications are necessary.

Whether you drive or ride as a passenger, a report or prescription will be written which will identify the necessary equipment for your particular needs. A copy of this report will be available from your counselor. VRS will pay for the evaluation if provided by an approved vendor agreed to by you and your counselor.

DRIVER TRAINING

Driver Training is provided to ensure you can use the recommended equipment and can obtain a driver's license. Customers are to obtain a driver's license prior to starting modifications to the vehicle. VRS will pay for driver training provided by any qualified vendor that is agreed to by you and your counselor.

PRE-INSPECTION OF USED VEHICLE

If you own a vehicle or are purchasing a used vehicle, you must obtain a written report from a qualified mechanic verifying that

the vehicle is road worthy. If there are repairs needed to the vehicle, these must be taken care of at your expense prior to beginning any modifications. VRS will pay for the pre-inspection of a used vehicle.

VEHICLE MODIFICATIONS

VRS follows the principle of least cost. Equipment required for you to safely drive to and from your workplace, or to carry out other vocationally related driving tasks, can be purchased by VRS.

Upon receipt of your vehicle modification evaluation report/prescription, your counselor will initiate the bidding process. Quotes are requested for needed modifications from all approved vendors capable of performing the level of modification needed. Vendors are generally given 10 working days to respond to the request for quotes. The vendor with the lowest quote from the three closest vendors from your residence submitting quotes will determine the maximum VRS will contribute toward the modification. You may select any vendor from those vendors submitting acceptable quotes. If you select a vendor whose quote is higher than the lowest quote from the three closest vendors, you will be responsible for the cost difference.

If the modification to your vehicle falls under the definition of a "minor" modification (i.e. hand controls, spinner knob, turn signal crossover, scooter/wheelchair hoist, car top carrier), then only two quotes are required. Quotes may be obtained from any vendors on the approved vendor list.

All customers will be required to sign the Vehicle Modification Customer Agreement. (See page 12).

VEHICLE MODIFICATION SCOPE OF SERVICE:

VRS may provide all adaptive equipment considered necessary for safe operation of a vehicle. For example, if you need a manual wheelchair for mobility, but have transfer skills, you may not need a van. VRS may equip an automobile with hand controls for you, and a car top wheelchair carrier may be provided if you do not have sufficient strength to load the wheelchair by hand. You should be quite clear on the minimum driving system you will need before purchasing a vehicle. If you require a van, VRS may provide all van modifications necessary for you to reach your vocational goal.

Generally, we suggest that your new van be equipped from the factory with certain equipment that will assist in your modification. An example of the new vehicle specifications might be: Ford Econoline E150, factory installed automatic

transmission, power steering, power brakes, automatic speed control, tilt wheel, factory air conditioning, power windows, heavy duty battery, larger tires.

Some customers may prefer a minivan instead of a full size van. In some instances, a minivan may not adequately meet your needs. The limited interior space and limited headroom are not advantageous for wheelchair maneuvering. Your evaluator can assist you in determining if a minivan is right for you.

There are many options, and technical assistance is available to help you make an informed decision.

INSPECTION/AFTER-CHECK OF COMPLETED MODIFICATIONS:

Inspections are generally required prior to the release of the vehicle unless the modifications are considered to be minor. At this point, one of three things will happen:

1. the vehicle passes inspection and is released to you;
2. the vehicle passes inspection, but some minor adjustments are needed—ordinarily the vehicle will still be released to you, but the vendor must provide for correction as soon as possible; or
3. The vehicle does not pass inspection and remains at the vendor's shop until it is adjusted and passes inspection.

Payment for the modifications will be processed once you have signed the VRS Receipt for Goods form and the vehicle has passed inspection/after-check.

TIMEFRAME

The entire vehicle modification process from evaluation to final delivery generally takes three to seven months, but can take longer, depending on the extent of the project.

The modification work usually takes up to 60 days. Modifications requiring a dropped floor may take up to 90 days; modifications requiring special driving packages may take up to 120 days. At times, vendors encounter unavoidable delays that set back the anticipated delivery time. If you feel that the vendor is taking unnecessarily long to complete the job, you should contact your counselor.

CUSTOMER RESPONSIBILITIES

You must notify either your VRS counselor or the consultant when your vehicle is available for work, when it is released to the vendor, and when it is returned to you. It is important for you

to maintain contact with your counselor and notify your counselor of any changes in your personal situation that may require amending, revising, or canceling your vehicle modification.

The customer is responsible for insurance and routine maintenance on adaptive equipment.

MODIFICATION VENDOR RESPONSIBILITIES

The modification vendor must provide a preventative maintenance schedule to you for all equipment requiring such work, and return to you any parts removed when performing the modification. In addition, the vendor must provide you with electrical and other appropriate diagrams to assist in emergency road repairs, as well as demonstrate to you or your representative the proper use of the equipment that has been installed or modified.

The vendor also must provide you with a written warranty specifying the terms.

TYPES OF VEHICLE MODIFICATIONS WHICH MAY BE PROVIDED

Modifications are limited to those modifications determined to be vocationally necessary given your particular situation. For example, the cost for powered hand controls will not be authorized if your vocational needs can be adequately met by less costly installation of manual hand controls. The customer must assume responsibility for the difference in cost if he or she chooses modifications that are more costly than what VRS can fund.

The following are examples of vehicle modifications that VRS may fund

- wheelchair tie-downs and lock-downs
- wheelchair lifts
- power doors and related controls
- electronic consoles for operating controls
- adaptive steering and braking systems which reduce or modify the physical effort required to operate them
- raised roofs and raised door openings
- lowered floors and other floor modifications
- power transfer seat bases

THINGS VRS WILL NOT PAY FOR

VRS will not purchase a vehicle.

VRS will not pay for routine maintenance or repairs to the vehicle itself.

VRS will generally not purchase standard or optional equipment items such as air conditioning (unless rear air

conditioning is specifically prescribed), automatic transmission, power steering, power brakes, manufacturer's power seats or power door locks.

INSTALLATION OF THE MODIFICATIONS

The vendor installing the modifications will make the arrangements to get your vehicle to the shop. In most situations, a "fitting" to position operating controls or tie-downs to best meet your need will be necessary. You will generally need to make at least one trip to the vendor for this fitting. VRS may assist with the cost of travel to the fitting if it involves traveling a long distance.

INDIANA PROTECTION AND ADVOCACY SERVICES/CLIENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The Client Assistance Program (CAP) is an independent advocacy program located within Indiana Protection and Advocacy Services, an agency of State government. CAP is available to you if you are seeking or receiving vocational rehabilitation services and you have questions or concerns about the VR program. CAP may also be able to assist you should you have performance issues with regard to the vehicle modifier you have selected and contracted with to perform your vehicle modification work. CAP provides advice, advocacy, and, if necessary, legal representation to individuals who have concerns about the vocational rehabilitation service they are receiving. You can contact CAP by:

- calling (317) 722-5555 or toll-free 1-800-622-4845 (both numbers are TTY-TDD equipped);
- writing to CAP at Indiana Protection and Advocacy Services, 4701 North Keystone Avenue, Suite 222, Indianapolis, Indiana 46205; or
- asking your VR Counselor to help you contact CAP.

CAP services are free and are available to you no matter where you live in Indiana.

This handbook has been provided to help you get the most out of your participation in the VR program. Keep it for your future reference. If you have any questions or need additional information, contact your VR Counselor. Your VR Counselor will be glad to assist you.

This publication is available in the following alternative formats.

- Audio tape
- Large Print

Appendix:

Rebate Program for Vehicle Modifications

Several manufacturers offer rebate programs if you purchase a new vehicle. This reimbursement will be applied toward the cost of the modifications, thereby reducing the amount of the VRS contribution.

At the time of this printing of this Handbook the following information on rebates was thought to be accurate but not guaranteed.

Daimler/Chrysler Corporation 800-255-9877
Automobility Program TTY 800-922-3826
P.O. 3124 www.automobility.daimlerchrysler.com
Bloomfield Hills, MI 48932-3124

Cash back up to \$750 for cars and trucks
\$1,000 for full size Ram vans, Wagons, and mini
vans
Six months to apply from purchase of vehicle.

Ford Mobility Motoring Program 800-952-2248
P.O. Box 529 TTD 800-833-0312
Bloomfield Hills, MI 48303 www.ford.com

Cash back of up to \$1,000 for Ford, Lincoln, Mercury
One year to apply from purchase of vehicle.

General Motors Mobility Program 800-323-9935
GM Mobility Assistance Center TTD 800-833-9935
P.O. Box 9011 www.gmmobility.com
Detroit, MI 48202

Cash back up to \$1,000
One year to apply from purchase of vehicle.

Saturn Mobility Program 800-553-6000
Saturn Assistance Center TTD 800-833-6000
100 Saturn Parkway www.saturnnbp.com
Spring Hill, TN 37174

Cash back up to \$1,000
Ninty months after purchase of vehicle for conversion
90 days to apply after conversion.

VW Access Program 800-374-8389
Volkswagen of America, Inc. www.vw.com/access
Mobility Access Program
P.O. Box 214378
Auburn Hills, MI 48321-9975

Cash back up to \$1,000
60 days to apply from purchase of vehicle.

Toyota Mobility Program 800-331-4331
Toyota Mobility Assistance Center www.toyota.com/mobility
H1200
1900 S. Western Avenue
Torrance, CA 90509-2714

Cash back up to \$1,000
One year to apply from purchase of vehicle.

INDIANA VRS CUSTOMER
VEHICLE MODIFICATION HANDBOOK

RECEIPT STATEMENT

The information in this handbook has been reviewed with me. I have been given a copy of the handbook.

Customer Signature
(Parent, Guardian, or other representative, if applicable)

Date

Counselor Signature

Date