

**Chapter 36: Working on a Train Platform**

In this chapter, we will discuss how to safely work your dog on a train platform. It will include important elements to consider, such as your role as the handler, key targeting areas to show your dog, and ways to stay safe on the platform. Working on a train platform can be a daunting experience for some people as there is the potential to be in a dangerous situation. Working with your guide dog on a platform can be done safely, if you follow some important guidelines.

**First and foremost, as the handler you should be oriented and patterned to your particular platform.  Although there are some universal concepts that pertain to all platforms, it remains extremely important that you learn your specific platform.  Things to consider about your platform are:**

* Is the platform single or double sided?
* Is there a noticeable tactile strip on the platform edge; is the strip consistent throughout?
* Are the entrances and exits easily located, do they remain open at all hours or only during key time periods?
* Is there a ticket attendant in the station who could provide assistance if needed?
* Are there stairs, escalators and/or elevators in the given station?
* Is there a consistent size gap between the platform edge and train itself?
* How frequently do the trains arrive and how long do they remain stopped before leaving the station?
* Does the station have turnstiles or other types of exits?

Once you are familiar with your platform you can pattern your dog to the key locations. When doing this, it is important that you do a dry run first by going to the station when it is quiet, without a lot of pedestrian traffic.

**When patterning your dog to your platform:**

* Show your dog the key entry and exit points.
* Work both to and from the station as if going to and coming from work.
* Show the dog any stairs, escalators, etc. that are important and crucial to the route.
* If needed, take along a sighted friend to help with the first few trips.
* Bring a folding cane to help with identifying key points.
* Use clicker and food reward to help with land marking.

**If you have moved or are learning a new platform:**

* Contact an O&M instructor or guide dog mobility instructor to help with orientation.
* Orient and acclimate your dog during low traffic flow periods.
* Utilize a back-chaining method to build drive to the key target locations (go to the target location first and then work back to it in small increments).
* Work the route both coming and going.

Our dogs are trained to locate known targets. It is important to direct your dog where it needs to go when entering and exiting the station.  This is valuable in preventing yourself from having to travel on the platform unnecessarily.

**Additional ways to stay safe:**

* When entering onto a platform avoid unnecessary walking.  Locate your destination as quickly as possible.  It is usually safest to wait for the incoming train near the entrance to the platform.
* If the platform is double sided, always work with your guide dog on the edge side of the platform.  This allows for the dog to maintain a solid buffer zone between the edge and its handler.
* If the platform is single sided, you should exit the train and make contact with the nearest wall.  If the layout is set up that you must travel on the edge side of the platform, the team should shoreline as close to the wall as possible.  An example of this would be if the exit is to the right after exiting the train.
* Avoid walking when trains are entering and exiting the station as it can become very loud and disorienting to any traveler.
* Wait a few moments for the crowd to thin before working down the platform.  Pedestrian flow is heavy as people are entering and exiting train cars.  By waiting, it helps gives the dog more room to navigate the platform.
* The first car generally has the lightest volume of people but also is usually the farthest from the exit.

Not only is it important to know the layout of your platform, but you also want to be informed on the gap size between the platform and train as well as the lay out of the train cars as there is a big difference between commuter trains and subways.

**Commuter trains:**

* There is a sizeable gap between the platform and train. In this situation you will work your dog up to the door opening. They will stop at the gap. At this point you will set your handle down and reach out to feel for the train. Once you feel where the train is you will have an idea of how big of a step you need to take. You can then tell your dog let’s go and take a giant step in. Train cars can vary, and you might have to step up or down.
* Seats on a commuter train are often laid out in rows. When riding the commuter train your dog should be backed into the seat opening first prior to you sitting down. This will allow your dog an easy exit when it is time to get off the train.
* Your dog can be allowed to lie down but you will need to pay close attention to what your dog is doing. Keep a good hold of your leash and periodically check your dog to make sure they are in a safe position. Many people are not expecting a dog on the train and if their paws are sticking out, they may be stepped on.
* Once on the train, you should try and locate a seat as close to the exit door as possible. Do not linger in between cars as this is unsafe.

**Subways:**

* For most subways there is a very small gap. This means you can work your dog on and off. On a subway you want to enter and exit the train car swiftly as they do not linger.
* Try and locate a seat directly to the left or right of the door entrance.
* If you are unable to locate a seat and have to stand and ride, try to face the door you will exit from.
* You will want to put your dog in the close position between your legs to keep them out of the way of other riders and safe.
* Whether you are sitting or standing always be aware of where your dog’s tail is. Tails can get stepped on or caught in subway doors.

**\*Many big cities such as NYC have training courses for people utilizing the platform and train cars. Contact your local department of transportation for more specific details**

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