



## Designing Commercial Accessibility Solutions: Avoiding the Six Most Common Mistakes

*Platform lifts are an excellent solution for public accessibility when they are used properly, and the application makes sense for users. This paper is intended to help you avoid some common mistakes made by design professionals when using platform lifts for accessibility in public places.*

1. **Platforms for People:** Platform lifts are designed for use by people with disabilities to gain access. Use for any other purpose is misuse. This opens the architect, the installation company, and the lift owner to liability in the case of an accident. It will also void any warranty in effect and likely cause equipment failure or malfunction. A common mistake is to design a platform lift partly for the purpose of transporting freight, e.g. for transferring heavy materials instead of people. You would need to investigate another solution (possibly a freight lift) for transferring heavy items or materials.
2. **Logical Lift Location:** Be sensible when locating platform lifts outdoors in extreme environments. If needed, overhead structures can be built to protect passengers and equipment from excessive water infiltration or snow build up. Platform lifts located in extreme weather environments will require more maintenance.
3. **Leave it to the professionals:** Do not buy accessibility equipment online for self-installation, or for installation by anyone other than a licensed professional. Accessibility Equipment is regulated in much the same way as elevators. There are residential models and models intended for commercial applications. Using residential equipment or non-licensed installers for commercial accessibility applications will create considerable problems and cost much more than doing it properly the first time.
4. **Planning for Platforms:** Plan ahead! All lifts and elevators require solid structure to attach to. Do not design in-floor radiant heating where an inclined platform lift is to be installed. Do not plan to install plumbing, heating, or electrical conduit within an elevator hoist way wall. Adequate structural support must always be located correctly within the supporting structure.
5. **Considering the end user:** Think of user-friendliness. Just because a particular design is code-compliant, that does not always guarantee that the use is practical or safe. One example, is when ramps are used to gain access to a vertical platform lift at the lower landing. This is required to gain access to the platform when the lift is installed without a pit. It may not be required by code to install a powered door operator in such a situation, but this feature will allow the lift to be used safely and easily.
6. **Keeping up with Codes:** Electrical codes, elevator and lift codes apply to all installations. In some jurisdictions, residential installations are not directly inspected by government inspectors, but licensed installers ensure code compliance. These people ensure designs do not create code problems, installations are conducted correctly and that the end-result meets all the relevant local codes. Some common mistakes:
  - a. *Locating plumbing or electrical lines in a lift hoist way that is not directly related to the lift.*
  - b. *Hostway surfaces that are not plumb, level, and square.*
  - c. *Locating an inclined lift where there is not enough overhead clearance by code.*
  - d. *Inconsistent running clearance.*
  - e. *Stairway width clearance for inclined platform lifts.*
7. **Evacuation:** As with elevators, platform lifts are not to be used in the event of an emergency. A sensible accessibility plan should also include a proper evacuation plan, using evacuation chairs to facilitate the safe transfer of people with disabilities downstairs in case of emergency. Currently, codes in most jurisdictions require areas of rescue assistance located at the top of the stairs.

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In conclusion, designing accessibility solutions using platform lifts can be tricky. So how do designers and architects ensure a user-friendly and code-compliant design? The answer is to *consult with an expert* as soon as it is determined that a platform lift is under consideration.

