



## **Regulated Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles**

# **Policy Statement**

**2001**

## **Joint Committee on Mobility of Blind and Partially Sighted People**

**Chairman: Tony Aston OBE**

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**MC39900D**

**Joint Committee on Mobility of Blind and Partially Sighted People  
Policy Statement on:**

**Regulated taxis and Private Hire Vehicles**

**Introduction**

The Joint Committee on Mobility of Blind and Partially Sighted People is an independent body consisting of representatives of all the principle organisations of and for blind, deafblind and partially sighted people with a specific interest in mobility. The Joint Committee believes that blind, deafblind and partially sighted people should be able to move around safely and independently.

The Joint Committee believes that currently this is not the position and that blind, deafblind and partially sighted people experience enormous barriers to freedom of movement, seriously limiting their opportunities and choices. The Joint Committee believes that all blind, deafblind and partially sighted people should receive the support and skills they need to enable them to meet the challenges of the travelling environment.

The Joint Committee believes that regulated taxis and private hire vehicles play a vital role in the overall transport system.

Regulated taxi and private hire vehicles are an essential form of transport for blind, deafblind and partially sighted people who rely on them for safe and independent mobility, particularly where public transport is inaccessible or unavailable. This policy statement aims to highlight those concerns and make recommendations that enable would regulated taxis and private hire vehicles to be part of a fully integrated and accessible transport system.

**The importance of regulated taxis and private hire vehicles to blind, deafblind and partially sighted people**

There are over one million blind and partially sighted people in the UK and nearly two million people with a significant sight problem. Regulated taxis and private hire vehicles represent a vital form of transport for blind and partially sighted people. For many, they are easy to use, convenient and accessible.

- One in seven people in a sample of over 500 stated that regulated taxis and private hire vehicles were their most frequently used form of transport

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- One in five blind and partially sighted people of all ages use a regulated taxi or private hire vehicle once a week or more
- Blind and partially sighted people rely more on regulated taxis than the general population, although their incomes are lower. 35 per cent of disabled people report spending more on their transport costs as a result of their disability. Higher charges for use of regulated taxis are one reason.
- Blind people do not receive the higher rate mobility allowance to assist with the additional costs of travelling.
- More than two in three people say they find regulated taxis and private hire vehicles easy to use compared to other forms of transport
- Regulated taxis and private hire vehicles can offer door to door services, particularly beneficial to people unable to walk far or use public transport.

### **Current Policy Issues with Respect to Regulated taxis and Private hire vehicles**

Under section 32 of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 the Government has powers to make taxi accessibility regulations (in Scotland this power is under the Civic Government (Scotland Act) 1982 as amended).

In 1997, the Government produced an informal consultation on its proposals for the taxi regulations that proposed all new vehicles would be accessible by 2002 and all vehicles used as regulated taxis by 2012.

The Joint Committee is concerned that the Government is yet to bring forward formal consultation on these regulations and implement the regulations, despite the proposed start date drawing close.

Section 37 of the DDA places duties on regulated taxi drivers to carry assistance dogs at no extra charge to the owner. This section of the Act is yet to be implemented although Government is now promising a consultation on possible exemptions during 2000. The Joint Committee is disappointed at the continued delay in implementing this section of the DDA.

The Joint Committee acknowledges the practical difficulties in extending accessibility regulations to private hire vehicles that could result in the loss of many services. However, it does think it is both practical and sensible to extend the requirement to carry an assistance dog at no extra charge to the owner to private hire vehicles.

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The Disability Rights Task Force has recommended removing the exemption of transport operators from the first and October 1999 phases of the DDA. The Joint Committee agrees this will provide rights to disabled people in relation to less favourable treatment and provision of auxiliary aids and services when using a PHV.

### **Key issues with regulated taxis and private hire vehicles for blind, deafblind and partially sighted people.**

The following section highlights some of the key problems identified by blind, deafblind and partially sighted people in using regulated taxis and private hire vehicles, together with recommendations for addressing these problems.

#### **Booking and hailing**

Over a third of blind and partially sighted people said that hiring a taxi is their greatest source of difficulty, particularly from taxis at a rank. Virtually every guide dog owner has experience of being refused access to regulated taxis or private hire vehicles due to his or her assistance dog.

Section 37 places duties on regulated taxis drivers to carry assistance dogs at no extra charge to the owner. Implementation of this duty by the Government is long overdue.

Exemptions to the duties should be strictly limited within narrowly defined medical conditions. They should not include exemptions on the grounds of cultural or religious beliefs.

Drivers of private hire vehicles are currently under no duty to carry assistance dogs at no extra charge to the owner. The Joint Committee believes this is wrong and should be addressed at the earliest possible opportunity.

The Disability Rights Task Force has recommended that the Disability Rights Commission and the Disabled Persons Task Force consider mechanisms for requiring the carriage of assistance dogs.

However, the Joint Committee understands Local Authorities already have the power to require the carriage of assistance dogs as the licensing authority for private hire vehicles. This power should become a standard condition on the issue of new licences.

When booking private hire vehicles blind, deafblind and partially sighted people should received the same standard of service as all other customers. They should

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not have to wait for a vehicle where the driver agrees to take an assistance dog; it should be a right to be able to use all private hire vehicle services.

The Joint Committee supports the removal of the transport operator exemption from the first and October phases of the DDA. This will provide disability people with the right to equal standards of service.

### Assistance

RNIB research showed that majority of taxi drivers were both helpful and courteous regarding the needs of blind and partially sighted passengers but nearly 40% found the level of assistance could be a problem. Blind, deafblind and partially sighted people often use a service they trust and develop relationships with the drivers, another advantage of regulated taxis and private hire vehicles.

However, there are several factors that could limit the provision of this valuable assistance.

The Joint Committee believes the transport operators should be covered under their insurance policies for the provision of assistance to disabled people. This removes any justification for failing to provide that assistance.

The Joint Committee is concerned about an increase in taxi and private hire vehicle drivers who have received parking tickets when assisting disabled people to reach their destination. The Joint Committee believes parking enforcement officers should be instructed that drivers providing this type of assistance should not receive penalties, unless causing an obvious danger to others.

Many drivers may not necessarily understand the needs of disabled people, including blind, deafblind and partially sighted people. Drivers of regulated taxis and private hire vehicles would benefit from a greater understanding of the needs of blind, deafblind and partially sighted people through formal training. The Joint Committee will be encouraging the development of training packages to assist drivers, building on existing examples.

### Cost

40 per cent of blind, deafblind and partially sighted people reported the cost of taxi travel as being their main concern about their use. For blind and partially sighted people, many of whom are on limited incomes, the additional costs of transport due to rely on regulated taxis can mean that journeys are not undertaken, increasing their isolation.

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The Joint Committee welcomes the wider use of concessionary fare schemes that incorporate regulated taxis within eligible transport services. This is particularly important in areas with limited public transport, such as rural areas, and providing transport when services are absent, such as in the evenings and weekends.

### Access to town centres

Within increasing use and size of pedestrianisation schemes, access for people with mobility difficulties can become a problem. Drop off and collection points for taxi and private hire vehicle services should be available within 50m of any point in a pedestrianised area to reflect the limited mobility range of many people.

### Accessibility Regulations

The Joint Committee supports the use of Accessibility Regulations to bring forward improvements to the design and use of regulated taxis and broadly welcomed the informal consultation on provisions in 1997 which proposed all new vehicles would be accessible by 2002 and all vehicles used as regulated taxis by 2012. The finalisation of regulations and their introduction should be brought forward to ensure full compliance in the near future.

The key design changes to the informal consultation requested by the Joint Committee included;

- Introducing a requirement for luminance contrast on internal and external door handles making them easier to locate
- Ensuring all handrails achieved luminance contrast, be warm to the touch and slip resistant.
- Any ramp edges or protruding parts should be clearly identified
- Lighting should be a key consideration when entering the vehicle

The Joint Committee understands the reasons why private hire vehicles can not be required to meet accessibility regulations. However, improvements to the accessibility of all private cars would benefit many disabled people.

The Joint Committee would welcome a national assessment of vehicle types against accessibility criteria to consider their suitability as a private hire vehicle. It could then become a licence condition for private hire operators to use suitable vehicles.

### Future developments

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The Joint Committee believes that Taxi licence numbers within vehicles should enable blind, deafblind and partially sighted people to identify the driver. Trials of such a system are likely in Scotland. If successful, this should be used to establish standards throughout the United Kingdom.

The development of a talking taxi meter should be encouraged to provide reassurance to blind and partially sighted people that they are paying the correct fare.

### Summary and recommendations

Regulated taxis and private hire vehicles play an important part in the safe and independent mobility of blind, deafblind and partially sighted people. For many people they offer an accessible and easy to use way transport service.

The following recommendations aim to address the key problems that remain;

- Section 37 places duties on regulated taxis drivers to carry assistance dogs, including guide dogs, at no extra charge to the owner. This should be implemented at the earliest opportunity with only limited exemptions on medical grounds.
- Local Authorities should use their power to require the carriage of assistance dogs, including guide dogs, as a standard condition in issuing licences for private hire vehicles.
- Transport operators exemption from the first and October phases of the DDA should be removed.
- Transport operators and drivers should be covered under their insurance policies for the providing assistance to disabled people. This removes any justification for failing to provide that assistance.
- Concessionary fare schemes should incorporate regulated taxis within eligible transport services. This is particularly important in areas with limited public transport, such as rural areas, and providing transport when services are absent, such as in the evenings and weekends.
- Accessibility regulations for licensed regulated taxis should be brought forward within the original timetable of 2002 for new vehicles and 2012 for all vehicles.
- Future development of talking regulated taxis meters and driver identification within the vehicle should be promoted.

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