

GUIDE
DOGS



Access to Taxis for guide dog owners



Introduction

The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association (Guide Dogs) aims to enhance the mobility, independence and quality of life of blind and partially sighted people by providing guide dogs and other mobility services. Guide dogs are working animals, not pets, and their owners rely on them for both independence and mobility. Guide dogs have up to two years of intensive training and are monitored closely throughout their working lives. In addition, guide dog owners are given training on how to maintain the extremely high standards of grooming, which the dogs require, and the dogs are checked regularly by vets.

When traveling, guide dogs are trained to sit at their owner's feet at all times, not to bother other people and not to climb on seats. Taxis are a vital link in the accessible transport chain and it is important that disabled people who use guide and other registered assistance dogs, have confidence that they can hire or book a taxi, which will carry them and their dog at no extra charge.

The Equality Act 2010 and Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995, Duties on Service Providers

The Equality Act 2010 in England, Scotland and Wales, and the DDA 1995 in Northern Ireland, provides legislation to protect the rights of disabled people. These Acts give disabled people the rights of access to services on non-discriminatory terms. The use of taxis by disabled people is covered under Part 12 of the Equality Act and part 5 of the DDA.

Duties Under Part 12 of the Equality Act and Under Part 5 of the Disability Discrimination Act

Including subsequent amendments to the Acts, since 2001, drivers of licensed taxis, and private hire taxis have had a duty to carry, without additional cost, any guide dog or other registered assistance dog, travelling with a disabled person. Breaches of these duties can be reported to the Local Licensing Authority in England, Scotland and Wales and the Driver Vehicle Agency (DVA), Northern Ireland, who can take appropriate action.

What these provisions mean in practice

Drivers should not refuse to take a blind or partially sighted person travelling with a guide dog, unless the driver has a medical exemption certificate from the appropriate licensing authority or DVA, to show that they are unable to carry the assistance dog because of health reasons. An exemption notice must be displayed in the vehicle when it is being driven by the exempted driver.

Taxi operators must not refuse to take a booking from a blind or partially sighted

person wishing to travel with their guide dog. Also, Taxi drivers and operators must not charge more for a service offered to a blind or partially sighted person because they are accompanied by a guide dog. All operators and drivers are reminded of these requirements as a part of their licensing terms and conditions. If they fail to comply with these duties, they could be guilty of a criminal offence and, on conviction, liable to a fine of no more than £1000 (Level 3 on the standard scale).

Duties Under Part 2 and 12 of The Equality Act and Part 3 of the DDA

Since 4 December 2006, transport operators have been under certain duties not to discriminate against disabled people.

In relation to taxis:

- It is unlawful for providers to refuse service to a disabled person, offer a lower standard of service or provide a service on worse terms to a disabled person for a reason related to his or her disability, for example by making an additional charge for passengers accompanied by an assistance dog.
- Providers must make reasonable adjustments for disabled people in the way they provide their services. This does not, however, include physical adjustments to the vehicle.

Reasonable Adjustment in the Equality Act 2010 and DDA 1995

'Reasonable adjustments' is a phrase used within law to give some flexibility and allow different solutions in different situations.

In relation to taxis, reasonable adjustments may include:

- The driver guiding the customer to their taxi, and assisting with entry into their vehicle.
- A driver assisting a customer with exiting their taxi and guiding them to a safe location/destination point before departing.
- A taxi operator having a standard training programme to include disability awareness for all taxi drivers and operational staff.

Religious Considerations

Guide dog and other assistance dog owners should not be refused access to taxis, on religious grounds.

“Religious or cultural beliefs have often been cited as a reason for refusal to carry guide dogs and other assistance dogs by taxi. However, it should be noted that there is a legal requirement to accept the carriage of guide dogs and other assistance dogs, and such beliefs are not a defence against non-compliance.

However, this is a sensitive aspect of the access issue and tact should be used by all involved. The Equalities and Human Rights Commission’s predecessor in matters related to disability, the Disability Rights Commission (DRC) has been successful in reaching agreement on this issue with a number of religious groups including the Muslim Shariat Council. The DRC has also worked with a number of businesses to successfully resolve problems that have arisen out of uncertainty about this issue.” (SP8, DRC 2003)

“Guidance from the Muslim Shariat Council in 2002 confirmed that trained assistance dogs may accompany disabled people in taxis and private hire vehicles managed or driven by Muslims. The Council’s guidance helps to clarify religious law and prevent any possible conflict with secular law.” (PCO Notice 01/06)

How can Drivers Affectively Communicate with Blind and Partially Sighted Passengers and Provide Sighted Guidance?

- When addressing a blind or partially sighted person with a guide dog, drivers should speak to the person, not the dog, and tell them who they are.
- Drivers should ask the blind or partially sighted person what assistance is needed before making assumptions as to what might be required.
- When picking up a blind or partially sighted person from a building, drivers should knock on the door, or enter the premises, to announce their arrival.
- If a blind or partially sighted person asks to be guided to a taxi, drivers should stand by the person’s side and allow them to take hold of their arm/elbow in order for them to guide the person along. Do not take hold of them and drag or push them in a particular direction.
- Drivers should remember to tell the passenger where they are going and what obstacles or hazards they are approaching. Tell passengers in advance about doors opening towards or away from them and about steps, kerbs or slopes going up or down to allow them time to adjust to their surroundings. This will help prevent accident and injury.
- On arrival at the taxi, drivers should inform the passenger of the type of vehicle and which direction it is facing. Using their guiding arm, reach for the door handle and allow the person they are guiding to slide their hand down their arm and get hold of the handle. Ensure both the dog and passenger are safely in the car before closing the door.
- If drivers are guiding a passenger with a guide dog, stand by the person's right-hand side (usually the guide dog will be on the left) and adopt the same procedure as above. Do not take hold of the dog's lead or harness and, if the owner tells the dog to do something, do not interfere as this may confuse the guide dog.

- Once inside the vehicle, drivers should offer to help the passenger with the seat belt, and not set off until the passenger is seated and secure.
- If drivers have been hired to carry a guide dog owner, ask the passenger where they would prefer their dog to be. In purpose built taxis the dog will travel in the passenger cabin with the owner. In saloon cars guide dogs are normally trained to lie in the front or rear passenger footwell, between the feet of their owner.
- If it is a modern vehicle, air bags are fitted to both the passenger and driver's side front panel. In such vehicles it is essential that if guide dogs are carried in the front footwell they are lying down at all times. Drivers should let the blind or partially sighted person know if that applies. If the front footwell is not large enough to accommodate the dog, the guide dog owner should be advised to travel in the rear of the vehicle with the dog in the footwell behind the front passenger seat. The front passenger seat should be pushed forward to make space for the dog. In an estate car, if the guide dog owner is in agreement, the dog may travel in the boot space.
- During the journey, the passenger should be informed about any delays, or deviations to the route that he or she might have expected to take.
- Upon arrival at the passenger's destination, inform the passenger of the location, offer to assist the passenger to exit the vehicle and guide them to a safe location before leaving.
- Drivers should clearly inform the passenger of the fare or meter reading. (A 'talking meter' is recommended.) When giving change, it is important to count out coins and notes into the passenger's hand.
- Where vehicles are pre-booked it is advisable to check what will be required. This information will help the operator, driver and the guide dog owner.
- Ask the person booking to confirm that they will be travelling with a guide dog if they have not already done so.
- Tell the driver of the vehicle that he/she will be carrying a guide dog.
- Inform the passenger which driver will be collecting them and ask the driver to introduce themselves to the passenger.

Examples of Legal Cases

There have been some cases which have been actioned by a local authority and the courts, for example:

In a recent case in London, a minicab driver who refused to take a blind couple was fined £150, having previously agreed to pay the complainants compensation of £250. A sentence for this type of offence could result in a driver losing their licence and heavier fines.

A contract hire minicab driver who called to collect a blind woman and her guide dog was ordered to pay £1,400 for refusing to take the dog (October 2006).

Further examples of legal cases are available on the Equality and Human rights website:
<http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/>

This information booklet is purely for guidance purposes. Guide Dogs can only provide informal mediation between service providers and guide dog owners.

Legal advice can be sought from the EHRC, RNIB, or other specialist legal services.

List of useful contacts

Equality and Human Rights Commission Disability Helpline

England - disability

Tel: **0845 604 6610**

Textphone: **0845 604 6620**

Fax: **0845 604 6630**

Wales

Tel: **0845 604 8810**

Textphone: **0845 604 8820**

Fax: **0845 604 8830**

Scotland

Tel: **0845 604 5510**

Textphone: **0845 604 5520**

Fax: **0141 228 5912**

Website for England, Wales and Scotland: www.equalityhumanrights.com

Northern Ireland

Tel: **028 90 500600**

Textphone: **028 90 500589**

Website for Ireland: www.equalityni.org

Royal National Institute of the Blind RNIB

Legal Information Officer

Tel: **01733 375 308**

Email: LegalRights@rnib.org.uk

RNIB Helpline

Tel: **0303 123 9999**

Email: helpline@rnib.org.uk

Website: www.rnib.org.uk

Department for Transport

Website: www.dft.gov.uk

Useful publications

'**Carriage of Assistance Dogs in Taxis – Guidance for Taxi Drivers**' (Department for Transport)

'**Carriage of Guide, Hearing and Other Assistance Dogs in PHVs – Guidance for PHV Operators and Drivers**' (Department for Transport)

'**Travelling with Assistance Dogs in Taxis and PHVs – Advice for Disabled People**' (Department for Transport)

'**Making private hire services more accessible to disabled people: A good practice guide for Private Hire Vehicle operators and drivers**' (Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC))
From website: <http://www.dft.gov.uk>

'**Know Your Rights! Assistance Dog Owners**' (DRC SP8, 2003)
From website: www.equalityhumanrights.com

'**Carriage of Assistance Dogs in PHVs and Taxis: Advice for Operators and Drivers**' (PCO Notice 01/06) (Transport for London).
From website: www.Tfl.gov.uk

Contact details for Guide Dogs

For further information, please contact the Guide Dogs' Mobility Team in your area. Details can be obtained from www.guidedogs.org.uk or by contacting Central Office:

Guide Dogs

Hillfields
Burghfield Common
Reading
RG7 3YG

Tel: **0118 983 5555**
Fax: **0118 983 5433**
Email: guidedogs@guidedogs.org.uk

The advice in this information booklet relates to all types of public licensed or private hirer taxis. Information on access to other services can be obtained from Guide Dogs' Mobility Teams throughout the UK.

The information given in this document was correct at the time of printing. This document provides basic information and is not a substitute for legal advice.

The information provided in this booklet about access for guide dogs and their owners, also applies to other registered assistance dogs.

Contact details for assistance dog organisations

Assistance Dogs (UK)

C/o Hearing Dogs for Deaf People
The Grange
Wycombe Road
Saunderton
Princes Risborough
Buckinghamshire
HP27 9NS

Tel: **01844 348 100**

Fax: **01844 348 101**

Canine Partners

Mill Lane
Heyshott
Midhurst
West Sussex
GU29 0ED

Tel: **08456 580 480**

Fax: **08456 580 481**

Email: **info@caninepartners.co.uk**

www.caninepartners.co.uk

Dogs for the Disabled

The Frances Hay Centre
Blacklocks Hill
Banbury
Oxfordshire
OX17 2BS

Tel: **08700 776 600**

Fax: **08700 776 601**

Email: **info@dogsforthedisabled.org**

www.dogsforthedisabled.org

Hearing Dogs for Deaf People

The Grange
Wycombe Road
Saunderton
Princes Risborough
Buckinghamshire
HP27 9NS

Tel: **01844 348 100**

Fax: **01844 348 101**

Email: **info@hearingdogs.org.uk**

www.hearing-dogs.co.uk

Support Dogs

21, Jessops Riverside
Brightside Lane
Sheffield
S9 2RX

Tel: **0870 609 3476**

Fax: **0114 261 7555**

Email: **supportdogs@btconnect.com**

www.support-dogs.org.uk

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