



## **MEETING THE NEEDS OF DISABLED PASSENGERS**

### **ADVICE FOR TAXI DRIVERS**

Taxis are an invaluable means of door-to-door transport for many people. For a large and growing number of elderly and disabled people, they are quite literally a lifeline. Often taxis provide the only means of accessible local transport, or the only accessible link to long distance transport, for example, by rail or air. In fact, they are the most flexible form of public transport there is.

You may have a vehicle which has been designed to make travelling easier for many elderly and disabled people, including those who use wheelchairs. But the vehicle design is only part of the answer. **Your attitude and understanding are vital.** If you are not sure how to help or if you are not willing to help elderly or disabled passengers you may lose a significant potential market and they will have lost an invaluable source of independent mobility. Here is some basic advice to help you give the best service to your passenger and get the best from your vehicle. Disability comes in many forms – some visible, some invisible. Never make assumptions. Always ask what help (if any) a passenger may need from you. Make sure you are familiar with any access and safety equipment in your vehicle. It is a condition of a multi-seater hackney carriage vehicle licence that at all times the vehicle be capable of carrying a disabled passenger whilst seated in his/her wheelchair. Ramps must therefore be carried at all times. You have a responsibility to know how to use them safely and correctly. If the passenger is a wheelchair user and you drive a wheelchair accessible vehicle you should always:-

- Pull up as close as possible to the kerb;
- Ask if they would like to use the ramps;
- If necessary, tip up the back seat (in a London style cab) to give more space to manoeuvre the wheelchair;
- Insist that the passenger travels in the correct position as recommended by the vehicle manufacturer, or conversion team. In the case of a London style cab this position will be facing to the rear of the vehicle. In the case of wheelchair accessible vehicles which have been specially converted for the purpose of conveying wheelchairs, you should follow the converter's recommendations. **Any other travelling position is unsafe;**
- Always make sure that the brakes of the wheelchair are on;
- Be polite and ask before touching or moving your customer;
- Secure the wheelchair and suggest that the passenger also uses the seat belt provided (they may need your help with this);
- If it has been raised, lower the back seat in a London style cab, if the passenger would prefer it;
- Avoid sudden braking or acceleration;
- Bring the wheelchair out of the vehicle backwards down the ramp and ask if the passenger would like the brakes on once it is unloaded;
- Leave the passenger in a safe and convenient place which enables them to move away independently.

If you drive a saloon car, you may still be able to take wheelchair users provided that the passenger is able to transfer. In those circumstances, you should ask the passenger what help they require, listen to their response, and act only as advised. Take care when loading the wheelchair into the boot. Wheelchairs can be expensive to repair or replace and without it the passenger may be totally immobile. Remember, many disabled people who have mobility difficulties will not use a stick or crutches. People, with arthritis in particular, may be unable to walk using a stick or crutches due to

painful upper limbs. If the passenger appears to have walking difficulties, or is frail or elderly, always:-

- Offer to fit the additional step if there is one – this reduces the first step and makes it easier to get into the vehicles. Ask whether pulling up as close as possible to the kerb would be helpful. For saloon cars this may not be useful because it increases the height the passenger has to drop down to the seat and may make it more difficult for them to get out of the seat at the end of the journey;
- Offer the use of the swivel seat (if you have one);
- Be ready to help but do not insist in helping. If you are asked to help, listen carefully to the information given, or ask what is the best way to assist;
- If you have used the swivel seat, make sure it is locked back in position once inside the vehicle. If the passenger is blind or partially sighted, ask what assistance they require and always:-
- Look out for the "TAXI" sign which is held out by some blind or partially sighted people in order to hail a cab;
- If you are collecting a blind or partially sighted passenger from a pre-booked location, knock at the door on arrival – do not remain in the cab and hoot your horn;
- Tell your passenger whether they are entering a saloon car or purpose built cab;
- Demonstrate which way the doors open;
- If possible, place the blind person's hand on the open door and indicate the position of the roof;
- Make sure they know which way the vehicle is facing;
- Make sure they are seated and have secured the seat belt (where applicable) before you move off. They may like help with the belt;
- Advise them if there is a hold-up or diversion;
- Tell them the fare and count out the change;
- Set them down in a safe place and make sure they know where they are going. If they would like to be accompanied to the entrance of a building, offer them your arm; gripping just above your elbow will enable them to be guided more easily;
- Remember assistance dogs are trained to remain on the floor of a vehicle and will not abuse your vehicle. Refusal to carry a assistance dog, will be in contravention of the Disability Discrimination Act (unless the driver holds the relevant certificate of exemption). In saloon cars, there is more room for the dog on the floor in the front of the vehicle;

If the passenger is deaf or hard of hearing, always:-

- Look at them when you are speaking. Speak clearly – but don't shout;
- Always have a pad of paper and pen handy as it is sometimes easier to communicate in writing;
- Make sure that they are aware that you have understood their instructions and that you know where you are going.

#### **Maintenance of Vehicles:**

- Keep door handles, locks and hinges well oiled. This reduces the amount of physical (often painful) effort required to operate them.

If you drive a purpose built vehicle, make sure you know how to use the equipment. For example, you should know the correct way to secure and load a wheelchair and to operate the swivel seat for vehicles such as the London style Fairway or Metrocab models. In the case of vehicles specifically converted for the conveyance of wheelchairs, methods vary according to the conversion, therefore, you should consult your conversion specialists.

*This guidance is based upon the leaflet "Advice for Taxi Drivers – Meeting the Needs of Disabled Passengers" produced by the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC). The guidance includes details regarding vehicles which meet the Metropolitan Conditions of Fitness (London style cabs) and the use of swivel seats. At the time of writing both were not prevalent within the Boston hackney carriage fleet. Given the provisions contained within the Disability Discrimination Act, however, it was considered prudent to include the details for possible future reference.*