



**Access to taxis and minicabs
for guide dog owners**

and other blind and partially sighted people

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This document provides information relating to access for guide dog owners to taxis and minicabs.

It sets out the legislative duties that drivers and operators have under the Equality Act 2010, or Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 in Northern Ireland, which specifically requires drivers to carry guide dogs (and other assistance dogs) at no extra cost. Further, that the driver or operator must not treat the guide dog owner less favourably because of their impairment.

It describes that there may be occasion for an individual driver to hold an Exemption Certificate which relates to a specific medical condition but that it is not acceptable to refuse carriage due to religious or cultural beliefs (a view that is supported by the Muslim Shariat Council).

A guide dog owner equally has responsibilities to ensure that the dog is clearly an assistance dog, through use of a harness and / or identification card.

The document goes on to provide tips and advice for drivers, operators and licensing authorities on communicating and dealing with bookings for guide dog owners, as well as recent legal cases in this area and contact details for more information.

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 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.

In terms of travel, 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 and minicabs (private hire vehicles or PHVs) are a vital link in the accessible transport chain and it is important that disabled people who use guide and any other registered assistance dogs, have confidence that they can hire a taxi or book a minicab which will carry them and their dog at no extra charge.

Taxi and minicab drivers and vehicles, and minicab operators, are licensed by the local authority licensing department or in London by Transport for London. The main difference between taxis and minicabs is that licensed taxis can be hailed on the street, picked up at ranks or pre-booked, but you can only pre-book minicabs. Minicabs must be run by a licensed operator.

What the law says

Disabled people including guide dog owners and other blind or partially sighted people have important rights under the Equality Act 2010, or Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 in Northern Ireland (as extended by the Disability Discrimination (NI) Order 2006 (DDO)). The Equality Act 2010 consolidates and replaces previous discrimination legislation including the Disability Discrimination Act in England, Wales and Scotland.

Duty to carry guide and assistance dogs

The Equality Act 2010, and the DDA 1995 in Northern Ireland, place a duty on taxi and minicab (private hire) drivers to carry guide and other assistance dogs at no extra cost. Drivers that cannot carry assistance dogs will carry a certificate of exemption confirming they have permission to refuse on medical grounds.

Sections 168 to 171 of the Equality Act 2010 deal with the carriage of guide dogs and other assistance dogs and England and Wales. (In N Ireland the provisions are in Section 37 of the DDA 1995. The requirements are effectively the same.)

Taxis

Taxi drivers must (unless they have a medical exemption):

- carry the assistance dog and allow it to remain with their owner
- not charge extra for carrying an assistance dog

Minicabs

Minicab or private hire vehicle drivers (unless they have a medical exemption):

- Must carry the assistance dog and allow it to remain with their owner
- Cannot refuse a booking, or to carry out a booking, due to someone having an assistance dog with them
- Cannot charge extra for carrying an assistance dog

Duty to provide a reasonable service

As well as the duty to carry assistance dogs, taxi and minicab drivers must also ensure that they do not discriminate against a person because of their disability including vision loss. They must not treat a disabled person less favourably or fail to make a reasonable adjustment to their service.

Reasonable adjustments may include:

- The driver guiding a blind or partially sighted customer to the vehicle, and assisting with entry into the vehicle. At the customer's destination, assisting the customer to exit from the car and guiding them to a safe location/destination point before departing.
- The taxi or minicab firm having a standard training programme to include disability awareness for all drivers and booking staff.

Exemption certificates

A driver can get an exemption certificate if they have a medical condition that is made worse by contact with dogs, such as severe asthma. Exemption certificates are issued by the licencing authority - having a certificate means that the driver doesn't have to carry an assistance dog.

A driver who has been given an exemption must display a yellow 'Notice of Exemption' notice on the windscreen of their vehicle. The front of the notice will have the letters 'ED' (Exemption Dogs) and will show the driver's licence number.

Local Authorities should consider having a clearly defined tactile symbol on exemption certificates, as in Aberdeen City Council. This assists blind and partially sighted people to identify a genuine certificate.

There are no exemptions from the carriage of guide dogs for taxi or minicab operators. An exemption certificate is specific to a named driver of a specified vehicle. The certificate should not be left in a vehicle when the named driver is not using it. It is recommended that operators ensure they have drivers available who are not exempt from carrying assistance dogs.

Religious considerations

Guide dog and other assistance dog owners should not be refused access to taxis or minicabs 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 Muslim Shariat Council have clarified that Muslims should accept assistance dogs in their businesses.” (EHRC, 2013)

That position has also been confirmed by the Public Carriage Office (PCO) which is responsible for taxi and PHV licensing in London:

“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)

Advice for guide dog owners

Your responsibility

Taxi and minicab drivers have been told how to identify guide and assistance dogs. This is why guide dogs should wear a harness and other assistance dogs a jacket with the name of the charity that trained them. If an identification card was issued for the dog, this should also be carried.

Dogs should remain on the floor and under control at all times. If your dog causes any damage to the vehicle, the driver could ask you to pay for it.

Reporting problems

You should report any problem or refusal to carry your dog. You can report such problems to your local licensing authority. Contact details can be found at the end of this document.

Advice for drivers: How to communicate with vision-impaired people and provide sighted guidance

- When addressing a blind or partially-sighted person, speak to the person, not their guide dog, and tell them who you are.
- Ask the vision-impaired person what assistance is needed before making assumptions as to what might be required.
- When picking up a blind or partially-sighted person from home or other premises, you should knock on the door, or enter the premises, to announce your arrival. It is helpful to know the customer's name.
- If the vision-impaired person asks to be guided to your vehicle, stand by the person's side and allow them to take hold of your arm/elbow in order for you to guide them along. Do not take hold of them and drag or push them in a particular direction.
- Remember to tell the person where you are going and what obstacles or hazards might be approaching. Tell them 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 vehicle, inform the passenger of the type of vehicle and which direction it is facing. Using your guiding arm, reach for the door handle and allow the person you are guiding to slide their hand down your arm and get hold of the handle. They will then hold the door and enter the car themselves. Ensure both the dog and passenger are safely in the car before closing the door.
- If you are guiding a person 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, you should offer to help the passenger with the seat belt, and not set off until the passenger is seated and secure.
- If you 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 passenger footwell, between the feet of their owner.

- If air bags are fitted to both the passenger and driver's side front panel, it is essential that if guide dogs are carried in the front footwell they are lying down at all times. You should let the vision-impaired 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.

Advice for Operators

- Where vehicles are pre-booked it is advisable for the operator to check what will be required. This information will help the 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.

Advice for Licensing Authorities

- Raise awareness among drivers and operators of the requirement to carry guide and assistance dogs, and of the training and hygiene standards of these dogs. Where relevant, include details of these requirements in the guidance issued to drivers and operators.
- Monitor exemptions on medical grounds to ensure there are sufficient taxis and minicabs available throughout the area who can carry assistance dogs.
- A number of organisations offer awareness training tailored for taxi and private hire drivers. A good starting point is the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee. They have published a report called 'Making private hire services more accessible to disabled people - a good practice guide'. It contains information on how to set up a training scheme, examples of best practice and details of some training providers.

This information booklet is purely for guidance purposes. Please tell your local Guide Dogs mobility team when you encounter an access refusal so we can advise you on next steps to take.

Useful publications

'Assistance dogs – A guide for all businesses'

(EHRC, 2013)

www.equalityhumanrights.com/publication/assistance-dogs-guide-all-businesses

'Transport if you're disabled:

4. Taxis and minicabs

www.gov.uk/transport-disabled/taxis-and-minicabs

Guidance to local authorities and operators on provisions in the Equality Act in respect of taxis.

Department for Transport

www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-local-authorities-and-operators-on-provisions-in-the-equality-act-in-respect-of-taxis

Civic Government

(Scotland) Act 1982

An Act to make provision as regards Scotland for the licensing and regulation of certain activities including taxis and minicabs.

www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1982/45

Northern Ireland:

www.nidirect.gov.uk/travelling-with-guide-dogs

'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))

www.docstoc.com/docs/27462062/Making-private-hire-services-more-accessible-to-disabled-people-A

'Guide and Assistance Dogs' Private Hire News

issue 63 Autumn 2013

www.lphca.co.uk

Contact details for Guide Dogs

For further information, please contact Guide Dogs

Guide Dogs,
Hillfields, Burghfield Common,
Reading, RG7 3YG.

Telephone: 0118 983 5555

Fax: 0118 983 5433

Email: guidedogs@guidedogs.org.uk

Website: www.guidedogs.org.uk/accessallareas

List of useful contacts - For information:

Equality and Human Rights Commission

Website: www.equalityhumanrights.com

Government Transport Information

Website: www.gov.uk/transport

List of useful contacts - For advice:

The Equality Advisory and Support Service

was commissioned by Government in 2012 to replace the EHRC Helpline,
which is now closed

Telephone: 0808 800 0082

Textphone: 0808 800 0084

Website: www.equalityadvisoryservice.com

Post: FREEPOST Equality Advisory Support Service FPN4431

Opening hours:

09:00 to 20:00 Monday to Friday

10:00 to 14:00 Saturday

closed on Sundays and Bank Holidays

List of useful contacts - For legal advice and support:

RNIB Helpline

Telephone: 0303 123 9999

Email: helpline@rnib.org.uk

Website: www.rnib.org.uk

Law Centre Network

The Law Centre Network is unable to give advice, but can help you find a local Law Centre that can:

Website: www.lawcentres.org.uk

To report a problem with a taxi or minicab:

Local Licensing Authority

Website: www.gov.uk/find-your-local-council

London Website: www.tfl.gov.uk/corporate/useful-contacts/?cid=pp022#page-link-taxis-and-private-hire-including-minicabs

Northern Ireland Website: www.nidirect.gov.uk/making-a-complaint-about-a-taxi-or-private-hire-service

Assistance Dogs

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

Assistance Dogs (UK)

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

Phone: 01844 348 100

Fax: 01844 348 101

Website: www.assistancedogs.org.uk

Assistance Dogs UK Member Organisations

The seven registered charities that form Assistance Dogs (UK) are:

- Guide Dogs
- Hearing Dogs for Deaf People
- Dogs for the Disabled
- Canine Partners
- Support Dogs
- Dog A.I.D
- Medical Detection Dogs

Information and contact details for individual organisations available from Assistance Dogs UK

Website: www.assistancedogs.org.uk/member-organisations

Registered office:

Hillfields, Burghfield Common, Reading RG7 3YG

Website: www.guidedogs.org.uk

Email: guidedogs@guidedogs.org.uk

Telephone: 0118 983 5555

The text of this document is available on request in Braille, audio, large print and electronic formats.

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.

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