

# Company Training



**REAL**  
REAL Passenger REAL Person

  
Department  
for Transport

# Are You Ready?

## Make Sure Your Company is Ready

Think about how you will **enable people with mobility issues to travel** in safety and comfort.

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Ensure communications staff understand **the importance of producing materials that are accessible** to people with a range of impairments.

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Train telephone and customer service staff to recognise when customers may need specific assistance, to converse clearly and with empathy and to **communicate the needs of passengers to drivers and other staff** to ensure passengers receive the assistance they need. (Dementia Friends training is one way of helping staff to support a particular group of passengers.)

# Continued

When procuring new vehicles think about **maintaining a balance** between wheelchair accessible and non-wheelchair accessible vehicles, depending on your licensing authority’s policies. Try to choose non-wheelchair accessible vehicles that are easy to use for passengers with mobility impairments.

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**Make it easy** for passengers to complain about poor or inappropriate service, and proactively report cases of discrimination to the relevant licensing authority.

# Bookings

Customers might try to find out about taxi or private hire vehicles (PHVs) services and make a booking in a variety of ways. They might telephone, turn up at a booking office or use the internet. **It makes sense to be prepared.**

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**Think about:**

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Whether your premises are accessible

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How you can communicate effectively with people with visual and/or hearing impairments

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Whether information will be clear to people with learning disabilities or dementia

**Continued**

Whether booking staff know how to communicate effectively with a range of people

Whether websites or apps you use have accessible design principles and have been tested with specialist access auditors or people who use adaptive technologies

Whether a range of people will be able to book, such as people with visual and/or hearing impairments

Whether there are alternatives to the telephone

# Printed Material

If you produce leaflets or cards, or you have a website, think about what information you can give to disabled passengers.

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Remember, a large proportion of the travelling public have impairments and/or long-term health conditions. Taxis and private hire vehicles (PHVs) are vital in providing door-to-door journeys, and ensuring that disabled people can play a full part in society.

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There is guidance online about making printed materials accessible.

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You could list the types of vehicle available and give a range of ways of booking.

# Driver Training

This is crucial to ensure that drivers understand **what they must do** and **what they can do** to support disabled people.

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Most taxi and PHV drivers will want to support disabled passengers. If any seem unhelpful, make clear that **disabled passengers must be offered a safe, comfortable and dignified service** just like anyone else.

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Support drivers to understand the practical steps and **best ways to communicate with disabled passengers** so that they feel confident to do so.



# What is an ‘Accessible Vehicle’?

This term is often used to describe a vehicle that can accommodate someone who needs to travel while seated in their wheelchair.

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However, many people with other impairments find that such vehicles present barriers to them because they may have a high floor which involves a big step up, or, in the case of the hackney carriage (the black cabs seen in London and other big cities) and some other converted vehicles, there is a large space from the entrance to the seat.

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Although the latest designs of the traditional ‘black cab’ include features such as a swivel seat to resolve such problems, there are many disabled people who find a conventional saloon car easier to use.

# Picking up Passengers

A driver cannot refuse to carry a passenger because they know or find out that the passenger is disabled.

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If a driver refuses to carry a disabled passenger who is able to use their vehicle (even if this is with reasonable assistance from the driver) once they have stopped as a result of being hailed, or have been approached at a rank, they will be breaking the law.

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This doesn't mean that a driver must carry a disabled passenger under all circumstances. For example, if a disabled person is drunk and abusive, a driver can refuse to carry them, just as they would a non-disabled person in the same condition.

# Assisting Passengers

Drivers should offer to assist disabled people in and out of their vehicle, and with their luggage.

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For all passengers who might require assistance, the driver should be prepared to get out of the vehicle and, for example, hold the door open, stow luggage, offer an arm for support and adjust the seat if necessary.

**Continued**

The driver should also be familiar with the operation of ramps and swivel seats that might be used as boarding aids. Hackney carriages (black cabs) and many multi-purpose vehicles (MPVs) are equipped with a step that can be used to reduce the height of the step up from the kerbside. As with other devices designed to help passengers get in and out of the vehicle, where this step is available, the driver should know how to operate it.

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When meeting a passenger who has notified in advance that they are blind or partially sighted, the driver should not simply wait outside, but should announce their arrival by knocking on the door or entering the premises.

**Continued**

It is important to give as much information to the passenger as necessary (for example, the type of vehicle that is being used, which way the door opens, which way the vehicle is facing).

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The driver should provide guidance to the vehicle's door, place the passenger's hand on the open door, and indicate the position of the roof (having remembered beforehand to ask whether such assistance is needed).

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When guiding a blind or partially sighted person, it is important to avoid pushing or pulling them, and to keep them informed of what is ahead (for example, steps, inclines, doorways or any other obstructions).

**Continued**

At the end of the journey, the driver should offer to guide the customer to their final destination.

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If, when booking the PHV or taxi, the customer has identified themselves as being Deaf or hard of hearing, it is especially important that the driver goes to the door and ensures that they have attracted the attention of the customer.

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These points should be covered in any disability-awareness training undertaken.

# Wheelchairs

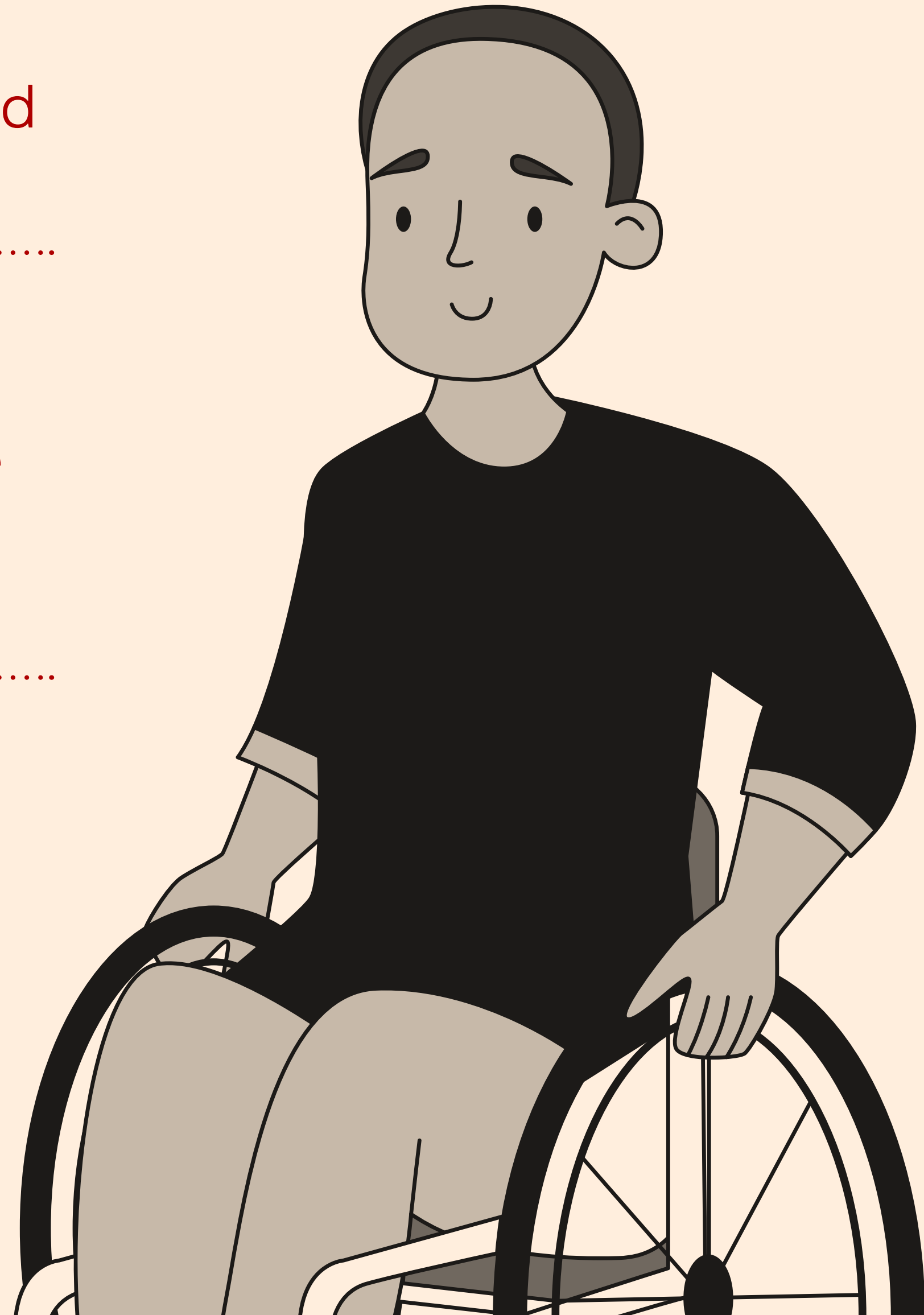
Drivers should be aware that leaving a wheelchair user at the roadside could put that person at risk, and should take all possible steps to avoid this outcome.

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Drivers should not allow wheelchair users to travel sideways in their wheelchair and must ensure that the wheelchair is restrained in the designated space correctly. An occupant restraint should be offered to the wheelchair user.

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To do this effectively, drivers must receive training in the use of all relevant belts and other restraint and locking mechanisms.



**Continued**

If wheelchair users wish to transfer from a wheelchair to a seat in order to travel in the vehicle, the driver should ask what assistance is required before touching either the passenger or the wheelchair.

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Drivers should be prepared to fold up a manual wheelchair if necessary (under instructions from the wheelchair user) and stow it safely for the journey.

# Mobility Scooters

Recent developments in design have led to an increase in smaller and more manoeuvrable scooters that can be accommodated in wheelchair accessible taxis and PHVs.

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Drivers should be mindful, however, that scooters are generally less stable than wheelchairs. Passengers should not remain seated in their scooter while travelling in the vehicle, as to do so risks injury if the scooter tips over.



**Continued**

Drivers of vehicles using channel ramps should note that three-wheeled scooters cannot use these ramps. If at all possible, scooters should be carried in the boot of a vehicle or the luggage hold.

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If scooters are to be carried inside the main body of the vehicle (for example, in a black cab), they must be safely secured. This can sometimes be difficult as scooters are not always designed with appropriate anchorage points.

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A driver would be entitled to refuse to carry a scooter that cannot be secured, as it would constitute a serious hazard in the event that they had to suddenly stop the vehicle.

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Some scooters are designed to be quickly and easily disassembled to enable them to be carried in a vehicle. In the majority of cases, such scooters can be carried in the boot of a conventional saloon car.

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Drivers should not be expected to disassemble and reassemble the scooter, and could refuse to lift any element of the scooter that weighs in excess of 20kg.

# Seatbelts

Once inside the vehicle, as with all passengers who might require assistance, the driver should offer to assist with the seatbelt. They should not set off until the passenger is seated and secure.

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Particular care should be taken when assisting wheelchair users. Some disabled people are exempt from the need to wear a seatbelt. These people will carry a certificate to confirm this.

# Communicating During the Journey



Visual material (including maps) should be available in vehicles, in order to help the driver to communicate with a passenger who is Deaf or hard of hearing.



Drivers should also be prepared to write down information, so it is important to have a pen and paper available at all times.

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If the driver has to divert from their normal route because of congestion or a road closure, the driver should be aware that this may be worrying for some passengers, particularly those with learning difficulties or mental health problems, who may become confused. People with a visual impairment may also be anxious.

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Drivers should explain **what they are doing and why.**

# Driving

Drivers should always drive with a high standard of care and attention. With some disabled passengers in particular, sudden braking and acceleration should be avoided because not only might this cause alarm, but it could also be painful for people with certain types of condition (for example, arthritis, back problems).

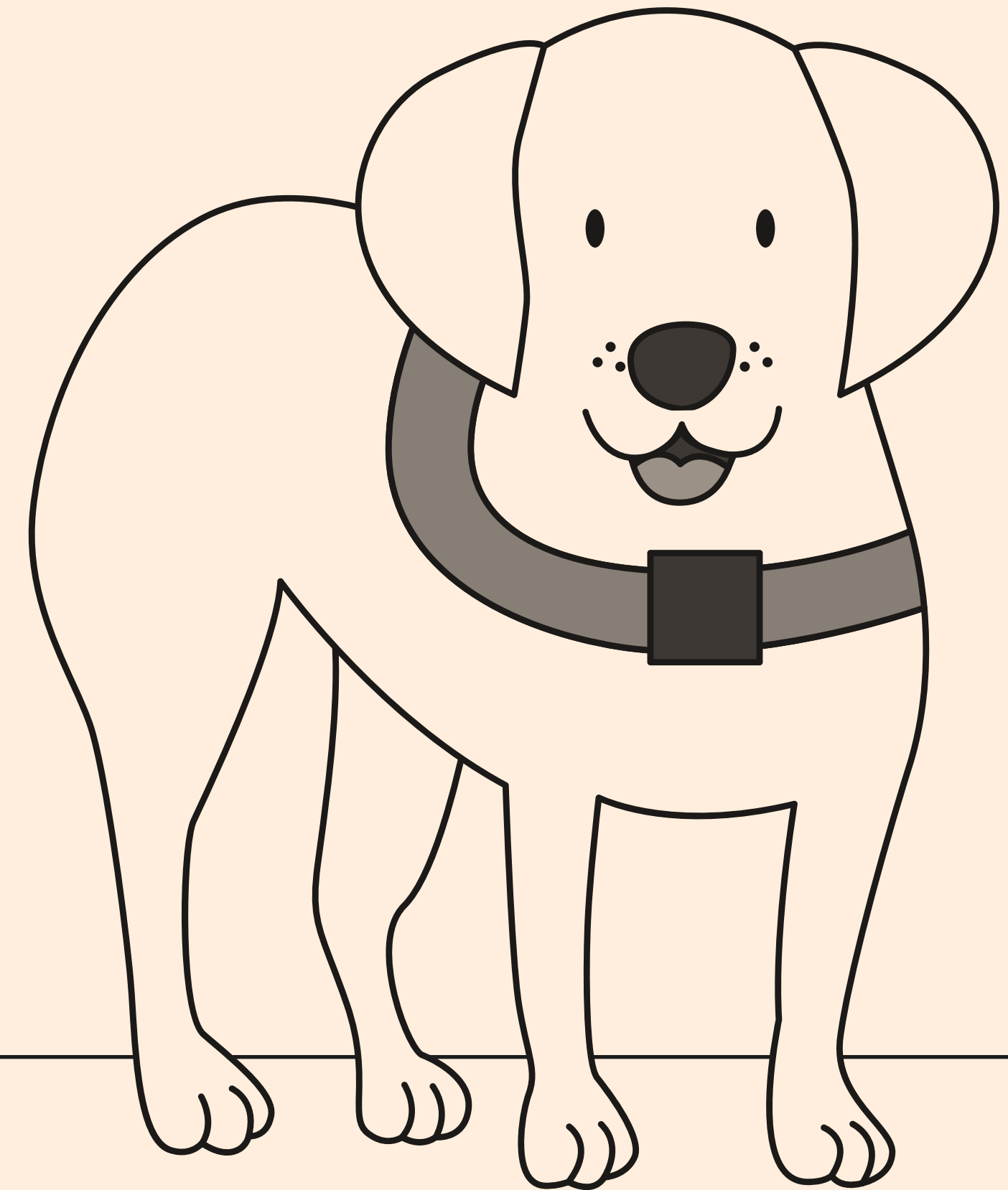
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If fitted, drivers also need to be aware of the correct use of swivel seats. When used, these seats must be correctly locked in position by the driver once back inside the vehicle. As with any equipment or auxiliary aids, drivers should ensure that these seats are well maintained and in good working order at all times.

# Assistance Dogs

The law says both taxi and PHV operators should accept bookings made by, or on behalf of, a disabled person who is accompanied by a guide, hearing or other assistance dog. The dog should be allowed to remain with the passenger. Drivers and other staff should be aware that a number of different types of assistance dog might accompany a disabled passenger. **These might include:**

**Guide dogs:** trained by the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association to guide a visually impaired person. These dogs wear a reflective harness.



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**Hearing dogs:** trained to assist a Deaf person. These dogs wear a jacket bearing the words ‘Hearing Dogs for Deaf People’.

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**Other assistance dogs:** for example, those trained by Dogs for the Disabled or Canine Partners to assist a disabled person with a physical impairment. These dogs should wear a jacket inscribed with the name of the relevant charity.

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In addition, the owners of all of these dogs will carry an identity card with the name of the relevant charity.

**Continued**

Assistance dogs are highly trained animals. They are trained to remain on the floor of the vehicle, and are unlikely to damage or dirty the vehicle in any way.

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Where the vehicle has a separate passenger cabin, there is plenty of space for the dog. In saloon cars, the dog will generally curl up in the footwell of the front passenger seat, next to its owner.

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Where there is an airbag fitted, it is important to tell the owner if they are sat in the front of the vehicle. They can adjust their seat to make sure that the dog can lie down, or move to the back seat where the dog will once again curl up on the floor.

# Dogs and Islamic Law

Guidance from the Islamic Sharia Council in 2002 confirmed that trained assistance dogs may accompany disabled people in taxis and private hire vehicles managed or driven by Muslims.

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The Council’s guidance helps to clarify religious law and prevent any possible conflict with secular law.

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Lord Ahmed, a Muslim spokesperson in the House of Lords, said at the time: “Islam is a religion that cares for people. Although it is not encouraged to keep a dog in the house, if the dog is owned for reasons of safety then it is permitted. When a disabled person is accompanied by a trained dog, such a dog becomes a blind person’s eyes and therefore should not be stopped from entering with a blind person.”

# Refusing to Carry Assistance Dogs

This issue is highlighted by disabled people as a frequent breach of their rights.

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Research from Guide Dogs for the Blind backs this up.

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The failure of a driver to admit an assistance dog makes them liable to a fine of up to £1,000 in addition to costs.



## Continued

The July 2018 Inclusive Transport Strategy stated that by the end of 2019, the DfT would ‘take steps to understand why taxi and PHV drivers continue to refuse to transport assistance dogs [...] We will undertake research to identify why the risk of fines and the loss of a driver’s licence appear insufficient in some circumstances to prevent them from discriminating against assistance dog owners. We will use evidence from this work to support any further action that we may take in this area to ensure that assistance dog owners are able to travel by taxi and PHV free from the fear of discrimination.’

# Exemption

If a driver has a medical condition, such as severe asthma, which is aggravated by contact with dogs, or if they are allergic, or have an acute phobia of dogs, then it may be possible for them to qualify for an exemption.

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These are granted by the licensing authority. When considering such an application, the licensing authority would need to verify the driver’s medical condition, and may require the driver to be assessed by an appropriate healthcare professional. The type of vehicle driven (for example, whether or not it has a fixed partition segregating the driver from the passenger compartment) may also be considered.

**Continued**

Successful applicants for an exemption certificate will be issued with a Notice of Exemption. This must be exhibited in the vehicle, either in the windscreen or in a prominent position on the dashboard.

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If the licensing authority refuses to issue an exemption certificate, the applicant has a right of appeal to the local Magistrates’ Court. This right must be exercised within 28 days of the date of the licensing authority’s refusal.

# Charging Policies

A taxi or PHV operator should not charge a disabled person more than anyone else would be charged for the same journey. Neither should any conditions be imposed that would not be imposed on others, such as insisting that the disabled passenger pays in advance.

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Regardless of whether a wheelchair user sits in their wheelchair during the journey or transfers to a seat and stows the wheelchair in the vehicle’s boot, there should be no charge for the carriage of the wheelchair.

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No extra charge should be made for carrying an assistance dog.

# Continued

It is common practice for taxi drivers to start the meter as soon as they arrive at the point of origin for a trip. Although this might apply to all journeys, and to both disabled and non-disabled passengers, such a practice disadvantages people who take longer to get into a vehicle and be safely secured. The disabled passenger should not be charged for this extra time: instead the meter should only be started when the journey commences.

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In practice, a taxi driver is rarely deployed for 100% of the working day, so there should be no reason for charging a disabled passenger extra for taking longer to get into the vehicle. However, this does not mean that a disabled person who asks the driver to wait while they attend to other matters unrelated to their disability should not be charged for waiting time, in the same way as any other passenger.

**Continued**

Taxi drivers should be aware that passengers might not be able to read the vehicle’s meter. Standard practice should be to tell all passengers what the meter reading is at the end of the journey.

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When a drivers gives change for a fare, some passengers may find it helpful if the driver counts out coins and notes into the passenger’s hand. This will help anyone who has difficulty using cash, including some blind and partially sighted people, and some people with learning disabilities.

# Insurance

Taxi insurance tends to cover vehicles rather than people, and so may not include cover for personal injury to a driver or passenger.

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Operators who employ drivers will have employers' liability insurance to cover the risk to drivers.

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Self-employed drivers should consider taking out their own insurance.

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In addition, some licensing authorities insist on public liability insurance as a licensing condition.

# Damage to Mobility Equipment

As with the goods of other passengers, drivers are likely to be responsible for any damage to mobility equipment that occurs during a journey.

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If the damage is the result of an accident that is the fault of another driver, it should be possible to claim on the insurance of the other driver.



**Continued**

In all circumstances, however, careful stowage of mobility equipment is recommended. The risk of damage to mobility equipment should not be offered as a justification for not providing a service for a wheelchair user who wishes to transfer from their wheelchair.

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Operators who are concerned about this should take out appropriate insurance.

# Getting it Right

Disabled people make up a large proportion of your customer base – as many as 1 in 5.

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Many people use taxis and PHVs because this provides a safer, more comfortable journey than travelling by train or bus.

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If disabled people receive a good service, they will come back to you again and recommend you to friends and family.

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Thinking through the different elements of your business is likely to improve customer service for all your clients.

# Your Role

**Offer training** to your drivers and call-booking and dispatch staff on disability equality, including on the law, good communication, information about vehicles available, and how to offer assistance to disabled passengers.

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**Provide information** on how to complain about taxi and PHV services within vehicles.

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**Review the accessibility** of your fleet frequently.

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Make clear to drivers that **complying with the Equality Act 2010 is essential** to their employment with you.

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**Consider information in accessible formats**, as well as information about the types of vehicle available from your company.

# How would you handle these issues?

A complaint about a driver refusing to assist a passenger with mobility problems.

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A complaint from a wheelchair user that they have been made to sit sideways.

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A complaint from a blind passenger that a driver took an unnecessarily long route to push up the fare.

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A complaint that the driver refused to help load a mobility scooter into the vehicle.

# Next Steps

Is there anything new from this session that you need to consider for your company?

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What can you do to support drivers and other staff to understand the law and their role in providing a safe, accessible service to disabled passengers?

REAL

Respect

REAL

Empathise

REAL

Ask

REAL

Listen

REAL Passenger REAL Person



Department  
for Transport