

The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association

Access to taxis, private hire vehicles and private hire cars for guide dog owners



Moving forward together



Guide Dogs

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 private hire vehicles (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 PHV which will carry them and their dog at no extra charge.

The Disability Discrimination Act and duties on service providers

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) provides legislation to protect the rights of disabled people and has been implemented over a number of years.

It gives disabled people the rights of access to services on non-discriminatory terms.

The use of taxis or private hire vehicles by disabled people is covered under both Part 3 and Part 5 of the DDA 1995 (as amended by the DDA 2005).

Duties under Part 5 of the DDA

In England and Wales:

Since 31 March 2001, drivers of licensed taxis (hackney carriages) have had a duty to carry, without additional cost, any guide dog, or any other registered assistance dog, travelling with a disabled person.

Since 31 March 2004, drivers of licensed private hire vehicles have had a similar duty. Similar provisions also apply to PHV operators, who are prohibited from refusing a booking by a disabled person accompanied by a guide dog or other assistance dog.

In Scotland:

Since 1 March 2003, drivers of taxis have had a duty to carry, without additional cost, any guide dog, or any other registered assistance dog, travelling with a disabled person.

Since 31 March 2004, drivers of licensed private hire cars have had a similar duty.

Breaches of these duties can be reported to the local licensing authority which 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 local licensing authority to show that they are unable to carry the assistance dog due to health reasons. A notice to this effect must be displayed in the vehicle while the exempted driver is using it.

In England and Wales, a PHV operator should not refuse to take a booking from a guide dog owner wishing to travel with their guide dog.

All operators and drivers are reminded of these requirements. If they fail to comply with these duties, they will be guilty of a criminal offence and, on conviction, liable to a fine of currently up to £1,000 (Level 3 on the standard scale).

Duties under 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, PHVs and private hire cars:

- 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.
- 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 adjustments under Part 3 of the DDA

‘Reasonable adjustments’ is a phrase used within law to give some flexibility and allow different solutions in different situations. Reasonable adjustments may vary according to the:

- Type of service provided;
- Nature of the service provider and its size and resources;
- Effect of the disability on the individual.

In relation to taxis, PHVs and private hire cars, reasonable adjustments may include:

- The driver guiding the 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 private hire firm having a standard training programme to include disability awareness for all taxi drivers and private hire vehicle drivers and operators, and private hire car drivers.



Religious considerations

Guide dog and other assistance dog owners should not be refused access to licensed taxis, PHVs or private hire cars 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 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)

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)

How to communicate with visually-impaired people and provide sighted guidance

- When addressing a blind or partially-sighted person with a guide dog, speak to the person, not the dog, and tell them who you are.
- Ask the visually-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.
- If the visually-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. 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 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. You should let the visually-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.
- 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 clients 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 DRC website: www.drc-gb.org

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 DRC, RNIB, National Law Centres or other specialist legal services.



List of useful contacts

Equality and Human Rights Commission Disability Helpline

www.equalityhumanrights.com

England

Telephone: 0845 604 6610

Textphone: 0845 604 6620

Fax: 0845 604 6630

Scotland

Telephone: 0845 604 5510

Textphone: 0845 604 5520

Fax: 0141 228 5912

Wales

Telephone: 0845 604 8810

Textphone: 0845 604 8820

Fax: 0845 604 8830

Northern Ireland

Telephone: 028 90 500600

Textphone: 028 90 500589

www.equalityni.org

Royal National Institute of the Blind – RNIB

DDA Legal Information Officer

Tel: 01733 375 308

Email: DDAEnquiries@rnib.org.uk

RNIB Helpline

Tel: 0845 766 9999

Email: helpline@rnib.org.uk

Tel: 0207 388 1266

www.rnib.org.uk

Law Centre

National Advice Line

Tel: 0207 791 9800

Minicom: 0207 791 9801

www.lcf-disabilityrights.org

Department for Transport

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)

‘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))

‘Know Your Rights! Assistance Dog Owners’ (DRC SP8, 2003)

‘Carriage of Assistance Dogs in PHVs and Taxis: Advice for Operators and Drivers’ (PCO Notice 01/06) (Transport for London)

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

Contact details for Guide Dogs

For further information, please contact Guide Dogs' local district teams, of which there are 28 across the country. Details can be obtained from www.guidedogs.org.uk or by contacting head office:

Guide Dogs

Hillfields
Burghfield Common
Reading
RG7 3YG

Tel: 0118 983 5555

Fax: 0118 983 5433

Further information is also available from **Guide Dogs' Information and Support Officer on 0845 241 2178.**

The advice in this information booklet relates to taxis, PHVs and private hire cars. Information on access to other services can be obtained from Guide Dogs' Information and Support Officer.

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



Guide Dogs

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@hearing-dogs.co.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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The text of this document is available on request in Braille, audio, large print
and electronic formats.