

TAXIS ARE NUMBER ONE

London's taxi trade is renowned for its service to passengers. It was voted Number one choice by passengers arriving at airports for transport into London recently. Although the taxi is an icon in itself it is the driver and his Knowledge that really count for passengers. The Knowledge need not stop at knowing their way around London; taxi drivers with a little know how of dealing with various disabilities can make all the difference to their passengers. Taxis are an invaluable means of door-to-door transport for many people. But some of London's taxi drivers may be missing an opportunity for increasing their income if they do not use all the facilities in their purpose built taxis to help transport disabled passengers. Many drivers have never used their ramps to accommodate a wheelchair passenger – even though the ramp is easy to use. Other disabilities may not be so easy to spot and need drivers to use a different method to help the passenger. So why not unlock some of the hidden potential of your taxi and help those less able at the same time.

ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORT

Elderly and disabled people use taxis as a lifeline; although not the case for everyone, many find taxis are their only means of accessible local transport. This also affords them access to other means of transport such as airports and stations. By definition a disabled person is more likely to be planning in advance before making a journey.

There are 343 licensing authorities in England and Wales and 43 of these have a mandatory policy for wheelchair accessible taxis. There are 32 licensing areas in Scotland and of these have conditions, specifications or policies in place regarding wheelchair- accessible taxis. Every taxi driver in London is driving a wheelchair accessible taxi. Developing taxis is an expensive job and the cost is included in the manufacture of the vehicles, so if you have paid for it, why not use it? It is also important to understand the needs of the disabled person and deal with them in an understanding way. If you are not sure how to help or if you are not willing to help elderly or disabled passengers you may lose money and the passengers lose a route to independent mobility.

DISABILITY AWARENESS CHAMPIONED BY COMCAB

In August 2007 Computer Cab plc, London's largest licensed taxi radio circuit, launched a unique set of Disability Awareness Guidance Notes to their fleet of taxi drivers. The notes are in the form of an easy to read airline style card, with clear images of how to provide a better level of service to taxi passengers with any form of disability. The notes were created with the help of Scope, the leading disability rights organisation in the UK and offer simple but effective tips to help taxi drivers offer assistance to the diverse range of passengers they pick up. In 2006 Computer Cab plc became the first ever taxi company to receive the Platinum Access Equality Award from Scope, for its efforts in improving the service provided to customers with disabilities. Computer Cab plc was the first taxi company to launch a Disability Awareness Training module to its drivers and since 2004 has made this a fully integrated part of joining the radio circuit.

HOW TO USE YOUR RAMPS – AND MORE

Late in 2007, media reports focused on the difficulties experienced by one lady wheelchair user who complained of difficulties when getting a black cab.

It seems that for some drivers their reason is because they are not confident of how their ramps work; but help is available from various agencies to show drivers both how to use the ramps and how to deal with various disabilities.

Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC) has plenty of advice for taxis drivers. They say: "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. Additional information is given in the video "Call a Cab"

available on free loan from the Department of Transport's Mobility Unit, DPTAC Secretariat, Zone 1/14, Great Minster House, 76 Marsham Street, London SW1P 4DR. Telephone: 020 7944 8011 & 020 7944 8013."

When drivers buy a taxi whether a new TX4 or a used model, the dealer will be happy to explain the features, including the ramps. DPTAC recommend that it is always advisable to ask passengers what help they would like you to give them, please do not make assumptions. Drivers could often offer the use of the swivel seat that is available to help passengers. Once you are confident in using these features you will help both the passenger and yourself.

If the passenger is a wheelchair user you should always pull up as close as possible to the kerb; ask if they would like to use the ramps; insist that the passenger travels in the correct position as recommended by the vehicle



manufacturer. 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); 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.

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SWIVEL SEAT HELPS LESS MOBILE

Further advice includes passengers who are less able to move easily. Offer the use of the swivel seat and the step, be ready to help but do not insist on 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. Be aware that some blind and partially sighted people hold up a "TAXI" card to hail a cab; if collecting a blind or partially sighted passenger from a pre-booked location, please knock at the door on arrival and make sure you advise them they are entering a 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

