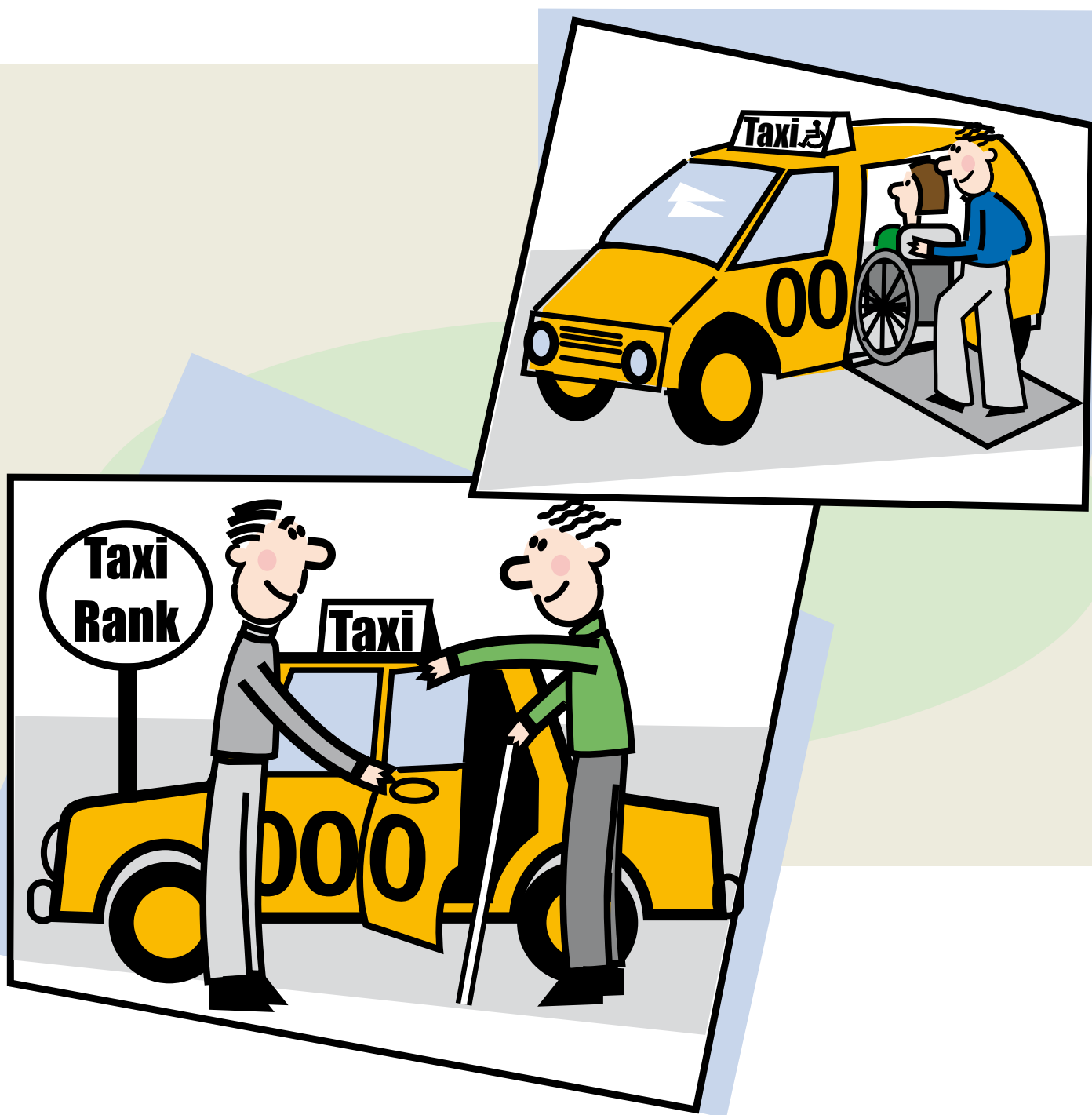


# Towards an Accessible Taxi Service for All



Recommendations on how to  
make taxi services accessible



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# Executive Summary

## Background and Introduction

This report has been funded as part of the European Year of People with Disabilities. The proposal for the project was developed by a consortium of disability representative organisations, namely:

- Disability Federation of Ireland;
- Irish Wheelchair Association;
- National Council for the Blind of Ireland;
- National Training and Development Institute;
- Not For Profit Business Association; and
- RehabCare.

The objective of the project was to identify the most suitable taxi/hackney service in the Irish environment, for both urban and rural users, by reviewing international best practice in relation to:

- Models of service in place to provide taxis to meet the requirements of passengers with physical and sensory disabilities;
- Alternatives to a commercial taxi service that would work in tandem with private accessible taxi services;
- Taxi vehicle design and specification;
- Technology used to support service delivery;
- Level of government intervention and incentives;
- Level of driver training and codes of practice;
- Taxi industry structure; and
- Financial implications and solutions.

Taxis are a very important method of transport for people with physical and sensory disabilities – for some they are the only option. The newly government-appointed Taxi Commissioner, relevant legislative considerations such as the Equal Status Act 2000 and the imminent publication of the Disabilities Bill provide an opportunity to consider changes to current taxi legislation for the benefit of taxi users with a disability.

This report shows how Ireland could adopt practices from different international taxi service models and incorporate them with a strategy developed following consultation with relevant parties in Ireland, in order to move towards an accessible taxi service for all.

## **Consultation process and research**

Stakeholders' issues were identified via three consultation workshops, surveys, email correspondence, and individual interviews with potential taxi users, the taxi trade and statutory bodies. The following are some of the issues that emerged, from the perspective of people with disabilities:

**“They are useless when it comes to wheelchairs. Some wheelchair taxis do not have clamps in them and the attitude of some of the drivers is awful” (youth with disability).**

**“I am not happy about using them because I had a bad experience. The driver gave out to my mum about the wheelchair. I felt sad” (youth with disability).**

**“Often I can't get a taxi to go out at night and have to end up with my parents driving me – which is not what you want at the end of a night out” (youth with disability).**

**“The driver had no idea how to anchor my wheelchair.”**

**“When I explained I was deaf he just kept shouting at me.”**

**“I stood with my guide-dog for ages while the taxis kept passing by!”**

**“I spend half my income on taxis and have to cut down on other essentials like food to cover this!”**

**“There aren’t any buses and I can’t afford to take taxis!”**

**“The saloon taxis are very difficult to get in and out of – they’re cramped and too low to get into. On the other hand the van type taxi has a step that’s much too high!”**

**“With my poor eyesight, I can’t see whether the car coming is a taxi or not – they’re all different shapes, colours and sizes!”**

**“There just aren’t any taxis where I live!”**

The consultation process highlighted the importance of the availability, accessibility and affordability of taxi transport for people with disabilities. Taxis often represent the only possible public transport option for carrying out daily activities such as work, education, shopping, banking, medical appointments and social activities.

International research was carried out on models of best practice in taxi service provision in the United Kingdom, USA, Australia, Sweden and the Netherlands. As there was no one model that could in its entirety be ‘imported’ into Ireland, elements of different models from the various countries have been combined in recommending a suitable model for Ireland that meets the needs of all people with sensory and physical disabilities.

## Recommendations

The consultation process and international research informed the recommendations outlined below:

### Recommendations: Booking the trip

- Introduce a national information service for all passengers that includes advice about all travel options, including information about taxi accessibility for people with disabilities. This information service should have an accessible website and telephone system.
- Dispatch wheelchair accessible taxis via a central booking system, for all taxi companies, monitored via a GPS system. When the system has been implemented, appropriate sanctions should be put in place for non-compliance. The central booking system should be operated by an independent agency following a Department of Transport tender process.
- Taxi companies and taxi operators should install fax, minicom, email and SMS messaging facilities for booking.
- When a vehicle arrives to collect a person with a vision impairment, the customer and driver should exchange an agreed password before the passenger boards the taxi.

### Recommendations: Ranks and infrastructure

- Include information about taxi rank locations on town and city maps. Make lists of these locations available in other accessible formats for people with vision impairments.
- Develop a Best Practice Design Guide for accessible taxi ranks.
- Carry out national audits and develop accessibility plans for ranks and pickup points.
- Improve signage at ranks by increasing colour contrast and letter size. Ensure the appropriate positioning of signs especially from the pedestrian perspective.

- Provide underfoot tactile indicators at taxi ranks for people with vision impairments.
- Encourage local authorities to provide taxi ranks as part of planning initiatives.

## **Recommendations: Hailing a taxi**

- Introduce a national mandatory bright yellow taxi livery so that taxis can be easily distinguished from other traffic.
- Illuminate the sign on top of the taxi brightly.
- Include a clear indication on taxi signs to show whether or not the vehicle is wheelchair accessible.

## **Recommendations: Vehicle requirements**

To meet the varying needs of people with physical and sensory disabilities, two models of accessible taxis are required in the future:

- Standard accessible taxi: this saloon taxi has specific accessibility features for all taxi users except those who need to remain in their wheelchair;
- Wheelchair accessible taxi: as well as having the same accessibility features as the 'standard accessible taxi', this taxi is specifically designed to allow passengers to travel in their wheelchairs.

## **Minimum Accessibility Features for All Taxis**

- Minimum internal and boot size.
- Induction loop.
- Microphone between driver and passenger, where there is a dividing screen.

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- Talking meter.
- GPS (global positioning satellite).
- Licence numbers written in jumbo sized black numbers on external passenger door.
- Licence numbers, complaints telephone number and taxi fares displayed on a panel on the back of the driver's and front passenger's seats in large clear print, e.g. white letters on black using both upper and lower case lettering. This information should be provided in Braille on the same panel.
- Floor colour contrasting with seat colour.
- Non-slip floor covering.
- Bright yellow grab handles and clearly marked seat edges.
- Contrasting delineation of any gap for passing money through a screen.
- Mandatory national bright yellow livery.
- Strong illumination of roof sign with clear indication of wheelchair accessibility.

### **Additional Features for Wheelchair Accessible Taxis**

- Maximum step height.
- Ramps with minimum slope.
- Wheelchair anchor points and seat belts.

## Recommendations: Ratio of wheelchair accessible taxis

- There should be a minimum availability of wheelchair accessible taxis based on a combination of area size and population, with research commissioned to establish details.
- The rate of new issue of saloon car taxi licences should be slowed down via some of the quality control measures discussed in later sections until the ratio of wheelchair accessible to saloon car taxis is 1:5.

## Recommendations: Providing incentives for an accessible taxi service

- Establish a 3 year timetable for moving towards a totally accessible taxi fleet. The entire taxi fleet should meet the specifications outlined in the 'Minimum Accessibility Features for all Taxis' table, with a ratio of 1:5 being wheelchair accessible.
- Four strategies, listed below, are suggested to increase support for taxi drivers when purchasing wheelchair accessible vehicles. Further research is required to establish the most effective option or combination.
  - i. Maintain the dual standard of taxi licensing, with one licence for 'standard accessible taxis' and a concessionary licence for 'wheelchair accessible taxis'.
  - ii. A VRT/VAT amnesty for the purchase of new purpose-built wheelchair accessible taxis (including a licence fee rebate proportionate to the expiry time). A detailed specification to identify eligible vehicles would need to be developed.
  - iii. Award and monitor public service contracts as a means of providing incentives to the taxi industry to provide wheelchair accessible vehicles.
  - iv. Tax rebates/credits.

## **Recommendations: Driver training**

- Licensing requirements should include an introductory driver training course. The training should include disability awareness, e.g. how to communicate with a person who is deaf or hard of hearing, how to safely guide a person with vision impairment, and how to clamp and secure wheelchairs.
- It is important that such training is customised and carried out in co-operation with taxi trade organisations. This training should be a precondition of obtaining a licence.

## **Recommendations: Fares**

- Introduce a user concession for taxi users with a disability, which places the subsidy in the control of the user, taking account of additional time incurred by taxi drivers.

## **Recommendations: Monitoring, complaints and sanctions**

- Establish independent monitoring procedures to check on the treatment of people with disabilities by the taxi trade. This should include carrying out surveys and consultation with taxi users with disabilities.
- Provide better information to people with disabilities regarding how to complain about taxi services. Information should be provided in accessible formats to people with vision impairments, including Braille, large print, on computer disk and audiotape. Driver identification number and complaints telephone number should be placed in large print and Braille on the back of the front seats. Driver identification number should also appear in jumbo sized black numbers on external passenger door.
- Reconsider the process for complaints and penalties for misdemeanours, in favour of a more user-friendly and conciliatory system.

- Introduce a system of sanctions to ensure a high level of compliance. Persistent offenders should face withdrawal of licence and/or substantial fines.

## **Recommendations: Rural issues**

- Re-examine existing legislation that precludes hackneys from holding wheelchair accessible licences.
- Encourage enhanced co-operation among wheelchair accessible transport providers in rural areas.
- Particular attention should be paid to specific requirements in rural areas when examining the integration of public transport services.

## **Recommendations: Integration with other public transport services**

- Research should be carried out into models of interchange between systems of transportation, concessionary travel systems and information provision.

## **Recommendations: Towards a sustainable structure for the taxi industry**

- Encourage individual drivers to combine and join taxi companies. There are many ways of organising such companies but the most feasible format in Ireland would be for drivers to maintain their self-employed status whilst the taxi company provides information, training and dispatch systems. An alternative would be for Trade Union organisations to develop such systems with membership on a co-operative basis.
- Accelerate the formation of such taxi companies and cooperatives by introducing appropriate and innovative incentives.
- A Charter of Rights for taxi users and a Code of Good Practice for the taxi trade should be developed in consultation with all interest groups – providers, associated interests (e.g. the Gardaí and regions) and taxi users, including users with disabilities.

## Conclusion

This study highlights serious problems in relation to the provision of taxi transport for people with disabilities in Ireland. There is a marked and continuing decline in the number of wheelchair accessible taxis; in some areas there is no service. In addition, the report finds that there is widespread dissatisfaction with the current level of taxi service among people with disabilities.

One of the fundamental objectives of this report has been to ensure that the needs of passengers with disabilities are served by the taxi industry. However, it is likely that the market alone will not fully provide for the needs of people with disabilities, therefore a number of strategies for achieving their inclusion in the service are suggested.

Although the recommendations have been presented individually, it is clear that they come as a package. Choosing to implement only some of them will not achieve the objective of integrating the needs of people with disabilities into the taxi service. Some of the findings and recommendations of this report will require further analysis by each of the stakeholders.

The full report contains recommendations that are explained and justified in detail using international best practice in taxi provision, the views of people with disabilities in Ireland and views of other stakeholders about what is suitable and feasible in the Irish context.

It is intended that this report will provide the Taxi Commissioner, the taxi industry and people with disabilities with the information necessary to make informed decisions about the future accessibility of the taxi service in Ireland.

# 1. Introduction

# Introduction

## Background

**1.1** This report has been funded as part of the European Year of People with Disabilities. The proposal for the project was developed by a consortium of disability representative organisations, namely:

- Disability Federation of Ireland;
- Irish Wheelchair Association;
- National Council for the Blind of Ireland;
- National Training and Development Institute;
- Not For Profit Business Association; and
- RehabCare.

## Project Objective

**1.2** The objective of the project was to identify the most suitable taxi/hackney service in the Irish environment, for both urban and rural users, by reviewing best practice internationally in relation to:

- Models of service in place to provide taxis to meet the requirements of passengers with physical and sensory disabilities;
- Alternatives to a commercial taxi service that would work in tandem with private accessible taxi services;
- Taxi vehicle design and specification;
- Technology used to support service delivery;
- Level of government intervention and incentives;
- Level of driver training and codes of practice;
- Taxi industry structure; and
- Financial implications and solutions.

The report shows how Ireland can adopt practices from different international taxi service models and incorporate them with a strategy developed following consultation with relevant parties in Ireland.

- 1.3** The newly government-appointed Taxi Commissioner, relevant legislative considerations such as the Equal Status Act 2000, and the imminent publication of the Disabilities Bill provide an opportunity to consider changes to current taxi legislation for the benefit of taxi users with a disability.

## Why undertake the study?

- 1.4** An accessible taxi service for people with disabilities forms a key component of transport requirements due to its flexibility and the current lack of accessible public transport.
- 1.5** This report provides researched information specifically in relation to people with disabilities but will assist the development of a fully inclusive accessible taxi service for all users. While the recommendations are particularly aimed at resolving the problems and issues recognised as being barriers to freedom of movement for people with disabilities, implementing the recommendations will also benefit the general public.

## Project Methodology

- 1.6** Transport Planning (International) Ltd. (TPi) in association with Social Research Associates (SRa) were appointed by the consortium to undertake the project.
- 1.7** The methodology employed in this project included:
- A critical examination of taxi service models in other countries to identify best practice internationally so that a suitable taxi service model for the Irish market could be recommended.

- Documentary research of relevant reports and submissions.
- Compilation of the issues and concerns for relevant stakeholders. Consultation workshops, surveys and interviews recorded the opinions of people with disabilities, taxi federations and local government.

## **2. Taxis in Ireland**

# Taxis in Ireland

## Introduction

- 2.1** This chapter outlines the context in which accessible taxi services are currently provided in Ireland. It concentrates on issues which are specifically relevant to people with disabilities as taxi users rather than setting out in detail the broad legislative context for taxi provision and the development of the industry before and after deregulation.
- 2.2** It is proposed that to meet the varying needs of people with physical and sensory disabilities, two models of accessible taxis are required in the future:
- Standard accessible taxi: this saloon taxi has specific accessibility features for all taxi users except those who need to remain in their wheelchair.
  - Wheelchair accessible taxi: as well as having the same accessibility feature as the 'standard accessible taxi', this taxi is specifically designed to allow passengers to travel in their wheelchairs.

## Background

- 2.3** Before deregulation in 2000, the Irish taxi industry was very tightly regulated. The decision to deregulate the taxi industry came as a result of a High Court decision in October 2000 and taxi provision changed from closed entry to open entry almost overnight.
- 2.4** The differing roles of taxis and hackneys in Ireland can be summarised as follows:
- Taxis can stand in public places waiting for potential clients, there is a maximum fare structure applicable to taxis, and they are identified by a roof sign.
  - Hackneys are restricted, as they cannot wait in stands for hire and cannot display signs on the exterior of the vehicle to advertise. They are not subject to a maximum fare.

## Taxi Provision

- 2.5** Throughout Ireland, there has been an increase in the number of licensed taxis since deregulation. In Dublin for example, in 2000, prior to deregulation, there were 2,722 taxis operating. Following deregulation, licences were issued at a rate of 340 per month<sup>(1)</sup>. In December 2001, 6,861 taxis were registered in Dublin and by March 2003, numbers had increased to 8,573, a rise of 215% since November 2000<sup>(2)</sup>.
- 2.6** Table 2.1 (page 22) shows the demographic spread of taxi licences in Ireland. The figures indicate that there are more wheelchair accessible taxis in urban areas and that many rural areas have few if any wheelchair accessible taxis.
- 2.7** It is interesting to note the trends in the demand for wheelchair accessible taxi licences. At the time of deregulation, there were a total of 840 wheelchair accessible licences representing over 21% of the total taxi licences issued. By March 2003, the total had increased to 1,188 but the proportion of wheelchair accessible taxi licences had fallen to 10.2%.
- 2.8** In summary, for every 200 licences issued since deregulation, only 9 have been for wheelchair accessible vehicles. Furthermore, the figures in the table do not accurately reflect the availability of wheelchair accessible taxis, since it is widely reported that some of the accessible taxi licences are not in active use.

**Table 2.1: Number of Taxis plus Wheelchair Accessible Taxis (WATs) on 21 November 2000 and 31 March 2003<sup>(3)</sup>**

|                    | Total no. of taxis 21/11/00 | No. of W.A.T. 21/11/00 | No. of ordinary taxis 31/3/03 | No. of W.A.T. 31/03/03 | Total taxi plus W.A.T. 31.03.03 | Increase in total numbers and % 21/11/00 to 31/03/03 |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| Athlone Town Co.   | 50                          | 0                      | 75                            | 3 (+3)                 | 78                              | 28 58%   |
| Ballina Town Co.   | 42                          | 0                      | 44                            | 2 (+2)                 | 46                              | 4 9%   |
| Bray Town Co.      | 0                           | 0                      | 35                            | 10 (+10)               | 45                              | 45 100%  |
| Carlow Co. Co.     | 6                           | 0                      | 4                             | 1 (+1)                 | 5                               | (-1) (-17%)  |
| Carlow Town Co.    | 15                          | 1                      | 38                            | 6 (+5)                 | 44                              | 29 193%  |
| Castlebar Town Co. | 76                          | 1                      | 86                            | 2 (+1)                 | 88                              | 12 16%   |
| Charleville area   | 0                           | 0                      | 4                             | 4 (+4)                 | 8                               | 8 100%   |
| Cobh Town Co.      | 0                           | 0                      | 29                            | 2 (+2)                 | 31                              | 31 100%  |
| Cork City Co.      | 216                         | 10                     | 615                           | 32 (+22)               | 647                             | 431 199%   |
| Donegal Co. Co.    | 12                          | 0                      | 17                            | 1 (+1)                 | 18                              | 6 50%  |
| Drogheda Borough   | 51                          | 0                      | 127                           | 4 (+4)                 | 131                             | 80 157%  |
| Dublin City Co.    | 2,722                       | 797                    | 7,592                         | 981 (+184)             | 8,573                           | 5,851 215%   |
| Dundalk Town Co.   | 20                          | 0                      | 68                            | 4 (+4)                 | 72                              | 52 260%  |
| Dungarvan Town Co. | 18                          | 0                      | 22                            | 2 (+2)                 | 24                              | 6 33%  |
| Ennis Town Co.     | 20                          | 0                      | 85                            | 1 (+1)                 | 86                              | 66 330%  |

|                      |              |            |               |              |               |              |             |
|----------------------|--------------|------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|-------------|
| Galway City Co.      | 148          | 17         | 319           | 42 (+25)     | 361           | 213          | 144%        |
| Kilkenny Borough Co. | 17           | 1          | 91            | 4 (+3)       | 95            | 78           | 459%        |
| Killarney Town Co.   | 25           | 2          | 64            | 7 (+5)       | 71            | 46           | 184%        |
| Laois Co.Co.         | 15           | 0          | 37            | 9 (+9)       | 46            | 31           | 207%        |
| Letterkenny Town Co. | 0            | 0          | 90            | 10 (+10)     | 100           | 100          | 1000%       |
| Limerick City Co.    | 206          | 0          | 449           | 8 (+8)       | 457           | 251          | 122%        |
| Longford Town Co.    | 14           | 1          | 39            | 1 (-)        | 40            | 26           | 186%        |
| Longford County Co.  | 7            | 1          | 5             | 1 (-)        | 6             | (-1)         | (-14%)      |
| Mallow Town Co.      | 15           | 0          | 26            | 1 (+1)       | 27            | 12           | 80%         |
| Naas Town Co.        | 17           | 0          | 55            | 5 (+5)       | 60            | 43           | 253%        |
| Navan Town Co.       | 50           | 0          | 115           | 6 (+6)       | 121           | 71           | 142%        |
| Sligo Borough        | 25           | 0          | 78            | 4 (+4)       | 82            | 57           | 228%        |
| Thurles Town Co.     | 6            | 0          | 8             | 0 (-)        | 8             | 2            | 33%         |
| Tipperary Town Co.   | 3            | 0          | 2             | 0 (-)        | 2             | (-1)         | (- 33%)     |
| Tralee Town Co.      | 18           | 2          | 57            | 2 (-)        | 59            | 41           | 228%        |
| Waterford City Co.   | 41           | 0          | 132           | 14 (+14)     | 146           | 105          | 256%        |
| Westmeath Co. Co.    | 79           | 7          | 96            | 19 (+12)     | 115           | 36           | 46%         |
| <b>Total</b>         | <b>3,934</b> | <b>840</b> | <b>10,504</b> | <b>1,188</b> | <b>11,692</b> | <b>7,758</b> | <b>197%</b> |

## Demand for taxis by people with disabilities

- 2.9** In Ireland it is estimated that 10% of the population has a disability, with 150,000 of the total 360,000 living in the Dublin area<sup>(4)</sup>.
- 2.10** All groups in society need and use taxis. However, taxis are the only option for people with physical and sensory disabilities for many journeys, e.g. out-of-hours travel or journeys to places without accessible public transport.
- 2.11** In relation to taxi use by people with disabilities, it is important to make a distinction between revealed and depressed demand. For a range of reasons, which we discuss below, people with disabilities cannot gain access to taxis. Many people with disabilities are literally confined indoors due to lack of accessible and affordable transport.
- 2.12** In Ireland, estimates suggest that half the population use a taxi at least once every six months, that a quarter of the population make a taxi trip at least once a week and that usage is rising<sup>(1)</sup>. Rounding this up from national statistics implies that 100,000 people with disabilities make a taxi trip at least once a week, 10,000 of whom would be wheelchair users<sup>(5)</sup>. However, in practice it would be more than this, given the lower rates of car ownership amongst people with disabilities, and an aging population. These are all factors that make people with disabilities more dependent on taxis<sup>(5)</sup>.
- 2.13** Clearly, in the absence of reliable travel surveys, these figures are speculative and indeed are likely to be distorted by the effects of the obstacles to taxi travel outlined later in Chapter 4. It is our contention that current usage figures detailing usage of taxis by people with disabilities are a reflection of the availability of accessible taxis and not of actual demand by people with disabilities.

## Taxis and Accessibility

**2.14** Ireland is one of the few countries in the European Union that has specifications for wheelchair accessible taxis. The standards were developed initially in 1993, revised in 1997 and included in the Road Traffic Act 1998 and the Road Traffic (Public Services Vehicles) (Amendment) Regulations 1998.

**2.15** Table 2.2 shows the requirements for wheelchair accessible taxis in Ireland.

### Table 2.2: Requirements for Accessible Taxis in Ireland<sup>(6)</sup>

- 1.** The vehicle must have been constructed or adapted so as to be capable of accommodating a person seated in a wheelchair.
- 2.** The vehicle must have seating accommodation for at least three passengers in addition to the person seated in the wheelchair.
- 3.** The vehicle must have at least two doors giving access to the area in the vehicle where the wheelchair and its occupant are to be accommodated. Each of these doors must have an aperture height of at least 1250mm and an aperture width of at least 735mm.
- 4.** The vehicle must be provided at all times with a ramp or other mechanism to permit the safe entry and exit of a passenger seated in a wheelchair. The ramp or other mechanism must be capable of transporting a combined wheelchair and occupant mass of 300kg minimum between the road and the vehicle interior without the assistance of any person but the driver of the vehicle. A ramp, where used, must be such as to provide at least 3.6 units of length for each unit of height, measured at its highest point.

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- 5.** The wheelchair and its occupant must be accommodated in either a forward facing or rear facing position in such an area of the vehicle that the occupant has an unrestricted view of the taximeter. This area must be at least 1300mm in height measured from the floor to the roof lining and have a length of at least 750mm available for the exclusive accommodation of a wheelchair and its occupant at all times while the vehicle is standing or plying for hire.
- 6.** The area designated for the accommodation of the wheelchair and its occupant must be provided with a restraint system or systems fixed to the structure of the vehicle by an appropriate means for the purpose of securing the wheelchair and its occupant.

**2.16** These specifications fail to address problems for passengers who are not confined to wheelchairs. In particular, the specifications' limitations relate to:

- height off the ground of the vehicle, which is not appropriate for many older people;
- lack of reference to the specific needs of people with sensory or ambulant disabilities.

**2.17** Wheelchair accessible taxis in Ireland are generally converted vans. The majority of these are not purpose-built and have undergone conversions to meet the specifications outlined in Table 2.2.

**2.18** Taxi provision in rural areas must be considered as part of a wider rural transportation initiative.

## Conclusion

- 2.19** The provision of wheelchair accessible taxis in Ireland has decreased since deregulation. This leaves many people with disabilities, who are particularly reliant on taxis, with no alternative transport option. It is proposed that the current level of usage of taxis by people with disabilities is a function of availability rather than of actual demand.
- 2.20** Current legislation limits the potential to import purpose-built vehicles and makes no reference to the needs of people with sensory or ambulant disabilities or older people.



# **3. International Models of Best Practice**

# International Models of Best Practice

## Introduction

**3.1** This section of the report forms an important part of the study as it examines specific elements of best practice in taxi provision internationally so that they can be considered in the Irish context. Some of the 'best practices' explored in this chapter would require modifications to certain elements before they could be applied in the Irish context for all people with disabilities. Certain models relate specifically to either people with physical or sensory disability and may need to be refined to become more inclusive of all.

## Methodology

**3.2** International practices in taxi service provision are discussed under the following headings:

- Starting the journey;
- Making the journey;
- The wider context.

**3.3** When looking at different international examples of taxi services, it is difficult to draw direct comparisons between them. This is because transport networks can vary significantly between countries, with elements such as road infrastructure, public transport networks, public-private relationships, transportation planning, integrated policy, land use planning and tax issues, all affecting how and why systems are managed and implemented. However, by citing examples of "best practice" in different countries, it is possible to form an opinion regarding the suitability of services for Irish conditions.

## Selection of case countries and cities

**3.4** The main objective in the selection of countries and cities is to cover a number of different taxi systems and their relationship with people with physical and sensory disabilities.

**3.5** In order to shortlist areas around the world, the following criteria were used:

- areas that have undergone a regulatory change in taxi provision;
- areas with different regulatory systems; and
- areas where people with disabilities and taxi systems have interacted to present 'models of best practice'.

**3.6** Whilst some areas do not fulfil all the above criteria, examples of good practice have been highlighted in this report and the primary areas for sourcing information are:

- United Kingdom (UK);
- USA;
- Australia;
- Sweden; and
- The Netherlands.

## Starting the Journey

### Booking the trip

**3.7** The type of telephone booking system used is an important factor in the provision of a valuable service to passengers with disabilities. This is often where discrimination begins and also where the technology used can be inadequate from the perspective of people with disabilities. However, there are examples of good practice and these are described below.

## UK

- 3.8** Recently, in parts of the UK, changes have taken place in taxi booking systems to increase the interaction with the passenger with a disability. Taxi company telephone operators in the UK are encouraged to improve knowledge of the customer's specific needs in order to match the customer with a suitable vehicle. When a wheelchair accessible vehicle is requested, sufficient information is obtained from the passenger to ensure that both the vehicle sent to collect, and the perceptions of the driver are appropriate.
- 3.9** To meet the requirements of the passenger, telephone operators are required to give as much information as possible about the vehicle, for example, whether it has a swivel chair or not. Obtaining the name of the driver can be of benefit to people with vision impairments as well as to the general public.
- 3.10** Telephone booking systems can be a challenge for those with speech impediments and hearing difficulties. Operators in the UK are now encouraged to be responsive to this, by using good listening techniques, not finishing sentences for the caller, asking the customer if they require the information to be repeated and using simple language so as not to intimidate<sup>(7)</sup>.
- 3.11** Besides telephoning, booking a taxi in the UK is now possible using other forms of booking methods. Callers who are deaf or hard of hearing are encouraged to use a 'Minicom' system. This is a service that allows callers to make enquiries through a keyboard linked to a telephone system. The potential for kerb-side booking terminals is currently being tested in cities such as London. These terminals, which could be placed at specific locations, such as outside cafes and theatres, allow the customer to book a taxi using a touch screen or a voice-activated system.

- 3.12** 'Tripscope' is a national travel advisory service for people with disabilities. It provides information about all modes of transport including taxi links with bus and train services and whether taxis are wheelchair accessible. Tripscope offers expert advice and information to people with physical and sensory disabilities on overcoming travel difficulties<sup>(8)</sup>.
- 3.13** In the UK, people with access to the Internet will increasingly have opportunities to find a taxi firm on the Internet. Users enter their location or postcode and are provided with a list of taxi contact details, including the means to specify whether a wheelchair accessible vehicle is required. The site can also be accessed by WAP mobile telephones. For this to be beneficial to all people with disabilities, taxi companies must ensure that their websites are accessible.

### **Chicago, USA**

- 3.14** One of the most notable features of the Chicago model is the operation of one central dispatch centre for all wheelchair accessible taxis, regardless of differing operators/owners. All wheelchair accessible taxi drivers are therefore continually in touch with each other. This is particularly beneficial in meeting the needs and expectations of people with disabilities; should a certain driver be requested by a customer, the driver can recommend another driver to take the passenger, if they themselves are unavailable<sup>(9)</sup>.

### **Australia**

- 3.15** The New South Wales taxi industry introduced an innovative system of telephone booking by implementing a separate, dedicated phone line for people with speech impediments and people who are deaf or hard of hearing. These phone lines are run by a team of operators, trained specifically in interacting with people with disabilities. The provision of such a dedicated phone service aims to minimise feelings of fear and apprehension about booking the service.

## Sweden

**3.16** In Sweden, the taxi industry has a high level of computerisation with most dispatch centres having computerised contacts with operators. In Stockholm, 90% of drivers are affiliated to a dispatch centre with 95% in the country as a whole, and the result is a high level of telephone bookings compared to those originating from on street calls<sup>(10)</sup>.

## The Netherlands

**3.17** An interesting mobility innovation introduced in Achterhoek has been a Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) system, 'Regio Taxi'. Previously branded as Mobimax, the service is open to all social groups and is completely flexible regarding routes, stops and timetables. Mobimax was introduced as a service for people with disabilities in 1997 and in contrast to regular bus services, it only runs in response to a reservation by a passenger<sup>(11)</sup>.

**3.18** Reservations are made by telephoning a Travel Dispatch Centre, which is run by a consortium of private taxi companies. This centre automatically creates clusters of individual bookings and allocates these to available vehicles in the most efficient way in terms of time and distance. The vehicles themselves are equipped with a navigational system, which calculates the shortest or fastest route to reach the allocated destinations. The system is flexible enough to accommodate both ad-hoc bookings and more regular journeys that may be scheduled in advance<sup>(11)</sup>. The navigational system is useful for everyone, but particularly some people with vision impairments, who may not be familiar with a route.

## Ranks and Infrastructure

**3.19** In marked contrast to the attention paid to bus and rail access, there are few regulations in most countries relating to taxi ranks and infrastructure.

### UK

**3.20** In the UK, the Department for Transport has set out the following guidelines for local authorities for the provision of accessible taxi ranks:

- Taxi ranks should be placed adjacent to railway and bus stations;
- Ranks should be sited close to the facility being served and should have large, clear distinctive signs (at eye level and with good colour and contrast) within the facility showing where they are;
- Ranks should be sited so that passengers board or alight onto the footway from the nearside of the taxi;
- The width of unobstructed footway should be sufficient to allow deployment of wheelchair ramps (up to 1620mm) and adequate manoeuvring space for wheelchair use;
- A dropped kerb or raised road crossing should be provided close to the rank if passengers need to cross a street to get to or from the taxi<sup>(12)</sup>.

**3.21** Some local authorities in the UK have made provisions for speaking signs to assist people with vision impairments. One such example is South Tyneside, where speaking signs are placed outside local shopping precincts, local parks, along the coastline, and at certain bus stops in the area. The speakers give directions and are activated by a card carried by the person. Once a person with a vision impairment approaches the bus stop, the speaker activates and announces that the customer is standing at the bus stop. Such speaking signs are also evident in local authorities in London, Leeds and Glasgow.

This system is not in place at taxi ranks in South Tyneside as yet. However, the system is an example of a practice that could be applied to taxi rank provision<sup>(13)</sup>.

## **Chicago, USA**

**3.22** In Chicago, there are no facilities at on-street taxi ranks for people with disabilities. This is because all services are arranged by telephone and usually in advance.

## **Australia**

**3.23** Under the Sydney Safe City Strategy, a network of supervised taxi ranks has been established to provide for the safety of all passengers using taxis. Such ranks are supervised by qualified Passenger Relations Officers, who operate on Friday and Saturday nights and busy afternoon periods. The aim is to provide locations that enable passengers to obtain a taxi safely and to organise assistance if required. The City of Sydney Authority has also updated and published City Access Maps, which now include the location of all such supervised taxi ranks for the information of those with physical and sensory impairments<sup>(14)</sup>.

## **Hailing a Taxi**

**3.24** International research reveals that provisions for hailing a taxi are not explored to the same extent as other elements. In particular, it is clear that there is little awareness of the difficulties experienced by people with disabilities when hailing a taxi.

## **UK**

**3.25** In the UK innovative steps have been taken in providing alternative methods to the traditional hailing system. The Zingo Taxi Service, operating in London, represents an attempt to assist customers to hail a taxi. The system operates as follows:

- Customers call the special 'Zingo' taxi number to request a taxi to collect them at a particular point;
- The call is transferred to and answered by the driver nearest the customer;
- The customer tells the driver when and where to collect them;
- Once the taxi arrives the customer and driver exchange an agreed password and the passenger boards the taxi;
- The taxi meter starts only when the passenger is fastened and secure.

**3.26** The advantages of this system are outlined in Figure 3.1

### **Figure 3.1: Features of the Zingo Taxi Service<sup>(15)</sup>**

**Easy** – Ring a number on your mobile phone and you'll be connected directly to the closest available licensed driver. Unlike radio circuits, you speak directly to the driver, so you can confirm the journey details and arrangements for collection.

**Convenient** – You can hail the taxi from the comfort of your work, home or restaurant. Some people with vision impairments may find it easier to have only one taxi telephone number to memorise.

**Quick** - You can only hail a taxi that is a short distance from your location and your call will never be held up by customer services, as you speak directly to the driver.

**Safe and comfortable** – You don't need to leave the safety and shelter of your home or office to stand in the street to hail a taxi.

**Secure** – Because you speak directly to the driver of the taxi, you know exactly where they are and when they will arrive. If you need to check what is happening, you can reconnect to the driver.

## Number of Wheelchair Accessible Taxis

**3.27** The proportion of taxi fleets that are wheelchair accessible varies from one country to another and this is partly due to how markets are regulated and the nature of the service offered to people with disabilities. In addition, the number of wheelchair accessible taxis varies depending on how wheelchair accessible other modes of public transport are. There are different balances between quantity and quality control but as a general rule, where there is no quantity control there are stricter levels of quality control.

### UK

**3.28** In the UK, the taxi system is regulated and in many areas there is significant control over entry to the market, driver/operator requirements, fare structure and passenger information. This control is implemented at local authority level and can lead to varying levels of wheelchair accessible taxi service provision in the country. The main objectives for the regulation of the industry include:

- monitor service provision and reduce passenger waiting times;
- reduce mismatch between supply and demand; and
- improve quality of service at all levels<sup>(16)</sup>.

**3.29** As an example, Table 3.1 shows the characteristics of three different local authorities with regard to wheelchair accessible taxi provision.

**Table 3.1: Wheelchair Accessible Taxi (WAT) Provision<sup>(16)</sup>**

|  | <b>Newcastle-<br/>Upon-Tyne</b> | <b>Exeter</b> | <b>Llandrindod<br/>Wells</b> |
|--|---------------------------------|---------------|------------------------------|
| Settlement Type                          | Large City                      | Small City    | Rural                        |
| Number of registered taxis (total)       | 800                             | 58            | 22                           |
| No. of Wheelchair Accessible taxis (WAT) | 400                             | 35            | 2                            |
| No. of WAT as % of total                 | 50%                             | 60%           | 9%                           |
| Population                               | 295,573                         | 111,078       | 4,348                        |
| Population per WAT                       | 739                             | 3,174         | 2,174                        |

**3.30** These figures reflect the general tendency for a higher level of wheelchair accessible taxi provision in urban areas. Having contacted each authority, the diversity of policies becomes apparent. In Newcastle, the service offered is seen by the authorities as being adequate and no new licences have been issued since 2002. The view in Exeter differs somewhat as it is Exeter City Council's policy not to impose quantity controls provided all new taxis are wheelchair accessible. In Llandrindod Wells, there are few wheelchair accessible taxis, however, those that are there are mostly on contract with Powys Health Board. The local authority, Powys County Council, has no plans to limit the number of taxis in the area but also has no conditions other than standard operating regulations laid out for licence applicants<sup>(17)</sup>.

## Chicago, USA

**3.31** The Chicago Department of Consumer Affairs monitors taxi service in the city and controls the provision of licences ('medallions') to drivers of wheelchair accessible taxis. There are approximately 6,950 taxis operating in Chicago at present, 48 of which are wheelchair accessible. It is recognised that this is inadequate and there are plans to increase this by up to 80 more vehicles<sup>(9)</sup>.

## Australia

**3.32** In Australia, the current level of wheelchair accessible taxis is low and is shown in Table 3.2:

**Table 3.2: Level of Wheelchair Accessible Taxis, Australia<sup>(18)</sup>**

|                             | Number of registered taxis (total) | Number of WAT as % of total |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Australia Capital Territory | 243                                | 9.4%                        |
| New South Wales             | 834                                | 11.0%                       |
| Northern Territory          | 184                                | 4.9%                        |
| Queensland                  | -                                  | 10%                         |
| South Australia             | 971                                | 7%                          |
| Victoria                    | 4,003                              | 6%                          |
| Western Australia           | 1,005                              | 8%                          |

**3.33** Whilst the percentage provision is low compared to the UK for example, the authorities in Australia argue that in some cases there is one wheelchair accessible taxi to 70 wheelchair users, while at the same time, one standard taxi to as many as 1,100 people. However, the lack of taxi accessibility for wheelchair users is exacerbated by the geographical

size of each county, with a total of only nine wheelchair accessible taxis in the whole Northern Territory area, seven of which are in Darwin, its capital<sup>(18)</sup>.

## Sweden

**3.34** Sweden has a land area of 450,000 square kilometres with most of the population of 8.8 million living in the southern region<sup>(13)</sup>. According to the Swedish Taxi Association, there are 14,500 taxi cars in the country and whilst not many cars have wheelchair access, approximately 15% of the total number of taxis are wheelchair accessible mini-buses<sup>(19)</sup>.

### Summary – Starting the journey:

Overall levels of wheelchair accessible taxis, in terms of the proportion of total taxis, are generally very low. Given this situation, crucial elements to enable people with disabilities to gain access to taxi services are accessible booking systems, taxi ranks and infrastructure arrangements. With regard to communication requirements, international experience shows that a central dispatch centre gives a superior booking service for the customer compared with direct contact between driver and passenger.

## Making the Journey

### The Vehicle

**3.35** There is a wide range of accessible vehicles available internationally but their accessible features vary and some would not be considered suitable for people with certain disabilities. Features considered necessary internationally include swivel seats, low entry step, grab rails, child seats, side door wheelchair access with integral ramp, illuminated door handle, intercom and induction loop, and colour highlighted and coded outlining of seating.

**3.36** Throughout the world, it is not common to have a diverse taxi vehicle fleet or to allow diverse livery colours. In many countries the regulations ensure that the vehicles types and livery are consistent across the fleet. In some cases the vehicles are purely conversions of vans or MPV's (multiple purpose vehicles). In other areas, the vehicles are purpose-built in order to address the specific concerns and challenges of people with disabilities. Purpose-built vehicles are generally considered far more satisfactory than conversions and there is a growing preference for such vehicles.

### **New York, USA**

**3.37** The New York taxi service offers a model of best practice to people with vision impairments, as it includes most of the required accessibility features. These are:

- bright yellow livery;
- driver licence number on exterior passenger door in large black print;
- information on back of front seats in Braille and large print stating licence number, telephone number for complaints and fares; and
- talking meter.

## **The Driver**

**3.38** Provision of driver training is seen as one of the most important elements in securing a satisfactory service for all passengers, not just people with a physical or sensory disability. There is a growing realisation that, however accessible the vehicle, customer care is just as important. There are an increasing number of training schemes available, many of which have been developed in partnership with people with disabilities.

## UK

- 3.39** A number of local authorities in the UK (e.g. Edinburgh, Huddersfield, London Borough of Camden) are stipulating driver training as a requirement for obtaining a taxi licence. The Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC) has produced guidance on video and there are an increasing number of certification schemes for such training.
- 3.40** For people who are deaf or hard of hearing, drivers are encouraged to carry a supply of pen and paper, and be prepared to write information down for the passenger. Also, if the passenger is accompanied by an interpreter, the driver is advised to address all questions and information directly to the passenger. An example of the driver training syllabus used in the UK is given in Figure 3.3 (overleaf).
- 3.41** Government legislation in the UK now outlaws refusal to accept passengers with guide-dogs and there is further ongoing investigation into the provision of facilities for guide-dogs by hackney drivers. It is intended that driver training in the UK will look at how best to facilitate passengers who are reliant on a guide-dog.

## Chicago, USA

- 3.42** In Chicago, training for taxi drivers comprises a mandatory twelve-day course and all drivers are legally required to complete a minimum of two days before certification as a driver of a wheelchair accessible taxi. The most important elements of the training course include the following:
- training in the Taxi Access Program (TAP) (see Paragraph 3.52);
  - sensitivity to those with a disability; and
  - loading/unloading of passengers<sup>(9)</sup>.

**Note: The needs of passengers with sensory disabilities would need to be incorporated into this training programme before it could be adopted in Ireland as a model of “best practice.”**

### **Australia**

**3.43** The New South Wales (NSW) taxi industry has led the way in recent years in promoting the provision of wheelchair accessible taxis and anticipating the needs of those with physical disability. Wheelchair accessible taxis are provided in close consultation with people with disabilities and other public transport operators. Such interaction has resulted in formal training for drivers of wheelchair accessible taxis. In order to operate in New South Wales, a taxi driver must complete driver training in conjunction with holding a valid driver licence<sup>(20)</sup>.

### **The Netherlands**

**3.44** The current system in the Netherlands under which taxi drivers are licensed in a particular locality is being abolished and the taxi market is being opened up to greater competition. A precondition for being allowed to transport passengers by car in return for payment is a certificate of proficiency – the taxi-driver’s ‘pass’ – which must be clearly displayed in each taxi<sup>(11)</sup>.

## Figure 3.3: Taxi Driver Training in the UK – Syllabus Components<sup>(21)</sup>

### General syllabi for theory training include:

- Legal training for taxi drivers;
- Health and safety training;
- Communication skills;
- Road safety and equal opportunities;
- Handling conflict and stress;
- Training for medical issues covering illnesses such as epilepsy and autism.

### Practical elements of taxi driver training generally include the following:

- loading/unloading wheelchairs;
- facilitating passengers with mobility impairment;
- facilitating passengers who are deaf or hard of hearing; and
- facilitating passengers with vision impairments.

### Loading/unloading wheelchairs

This element of driver training is taught on a practical basis and a number of local authorities in the UK have published videos to further assist drivers once the training course has been completed. Syllabus requirements include the following:

- how to use the ramp or ramps fitted to the taxi vehicle, and how this varies between different types of taxi vehicle;
- when to use the ramp extension, depending on whether the passenger is at pavement level or lower;
- how to handle a manual wheelchair up the ramp;

**continued on next page**

## Figure 3.3: Taxi Driver Training in the UK – Syllabus Components<sup>(21)</sup> continued

### continued from previous page

- how to handle a manual wheelchair off and onto a kerb;
- manual handling training;
- how to secure the passenger and wheelchair with seatbelts and restraints;
- correct procedure for commencing the journey, for example starting the taxi meter at the appropriate time.

### Passengers with mobility impairments

- Exploration of the needs of people with different disabilities, making drivers aware that some disabilities may be 'hidden';
- Consideration of how different parts of the journey can affect those with mobility impairments, for example, driving over a ramp may injure the passenger even though the driver may not feel the same impact;
- Practical advice on how to give physical support to mobility impaired passengers. One such example is that the driver is shown how to offer his/her arm to the passenger rather than holding on to the passenger's arm.

### Passengers who are deaf or hard of hearing

The need for a separate syllabus covering this aspect of disability stems from passenger concerns that there was often a communication breakdown between driver and passenger, and that drivers were not attuned to the different communication needs of those passengers with hearing impairments.

Communication skills are now seen as one of the most important elements in training drivers to facilitate passengers who are deaf or hard of hearing. Drivers are encouraged to adopt the following general guidelines:

## Figure 3.3: Taxi Driver Training in the UK – Syllabus Components<sup>(21)</sup> continued

- Ensure that you approach the person from the front and that you have the person's attention.
- Look directly at your passenger – don't cover your face or turn away when talking.
- Facial expressions and gestures are important when communicating with a deaf person.
- Point at destinations to facilitate communication.
- If you want to attract a deaf person's attention, tap them on the shoulder.

The following are comments from drivers recorded at training courses on hearing impairments:

**“We were better able to communicate with each other,”**

**“There are different ways to communicate, signing and lip reading!”**

### **Passengers with vision impairments**

As well as teaching correct guiding techniques, the following communication tips are encouraged:

- Identify yourself as the taxi driver and let the customer know that you are speaking to them.
- Be patient when the customer is paying the fare; remember he or she may take longer due to having to identify notes and coins correctly.
- Don't assume that assistance is needed, ask the person first what would be most useful for them.
- When you arrive to pick up the passenger, instead of sounding the horn, go to the door to meet them and walk to the taxi with them.

## The Fare

**3.45** There are a number of economic issues relating to the development of an accessible taxi service. These include benefits to the vehicle owner/driver (such as VRT and VAT reductions, subsidies for capital cost outlay, local authority/civil service contracts) and various taxi user subsidies. This report does not provide a detailed analysis of each subsidy; however, it is clear that there is scope to introduce varying beneficial incentives for both taxi service providers and users.

### UK

**3.46** In London, the 'Taxi-Card' system is a very popular incentive with a total budget of over £5 million sterling in 1999/2000. The scheme is funded by the majority of London boroughs and is a means of providing subsidised door-to-door transport for people with serious mobility and sensory impairments and for those who find it difficult to access public transport. The number of trips per month is approximately 40,000 and the system allows passengers to pay a minimum fare and then an excess amount above a defined limit if the fare price is higher<sup>(11)</sup>.

**3.47** Evidence from surveys shows that the existence of a taxi voucher/taxi-card scheme makes a considerable difference. For example, in Bedford, England where there is no scheme, people with disabilities were making only 1.5 taxi trips a month compared to 5-6 taxi trips in Cambridge where they did have a taxi-card scheme in place<sup>(11)</sup>.

### Chicago, USA

**3.48** The Chicago Transit Authority has addressed the needs of people with disabilities by introducing a Taxi Access Program (TAP). The TAP gives certified customers an opportunity to travel in taxis at reduced rates for trips that originate within Chicago city limits. Since the introduction of the scheme, taxi drivers have been encouraged to accept as many TAP vouchers as possible, returning them to the Chicago Transit Authority.

This scheme, coupled with incentives for taxi drivers collecting vouchers, has helped provide an improved service for people with physical and sensory disabilities in Chicago<sup>(23)</sup>.

## **Australia**

**3.49** In rural Australia, the taxi industry often forms the basis of transport service provision. The rural taxi industry serves a broad cross-section of society and the requirements for service trips vary. User subsidy schemes have been established for people with disabilities in rural Australia and the amount of taxi contract work has increased<sup>(24)</sup>. The Taxi Transport Subsidy (TTS) was introduced in the early 1980's to promote accessibility of taxis for those with physical disabilities, particularly those who were unable to use other forms of public transport. Each state government sets membership criteria and entitlements for the schemes. Strict eligibility assessments are made by Government Medical Officers. It should be noted however, that while the scheme may be an example 'good practice', it does not have any provision for people with sensory disabilities and so falls short of being 'best practice'. The essential elements of the scheme in South Australia are shown in Figure 3.4<sup>(20)</sup>.

## **The Netherlands**

**3.50** In the Netherlands, the DRT system (described earlier) is provided using around 20 vehicles, rising to 40 at peak times, made up of a combination of cars and minibuses, the latter being wheelchair accessible. Passengers can travel up to 5 zones at significantly reduced rates, although after 5 zones passengers must pay regular taxi rates. This service is available from 06:30 to midnight, seven days a week. Connections to other bus and rail services are guaranteed where reservations are made at least 50 minutes in advance<sup>(11)</sup>.

## Figure 3.4: Taxi Transport Subsidy Scheme, South Australia<sup>(20)</sup>

### TTS Scheme

Transport Subsidy Scheme members are assessed as belonging to one of the following categories, which reflect their mobility status:

- M40 Ambulant members, who are able to use a standard taxi and receive a 50% subsidy per eligible taxi trip.
- M50 Members in wheelchairs, who require the use of specialised taxis and vans and who receive a 75% subsidy per eligible taxi trip.

Approved members of the scheme receive a book of 60 vouchers, together with a laminated identification card containing a photograph, name, address and membership number.

### Conditions of membership include:

- travel vouchers can only be used by the member named on the voucher - they cannot be transferred and cannot be used for sending parcels or sending people on errands;
- members can share a ride with carers/relatives/friends (who are not members), without incurring additional costs;
- only one voucher per trip is permitted and does not include the return trip; and
- every care must be taken to ensure that vouchers are filled out accurately with fare details and signed. (Note: This system may not be appropriate for people with vision impairments).

**3.51** The DRT system has succeeded in providing all residents of Achterhoek, the Netherlands, with access to public transport. People with disabilities are able to travel throughout the region and the system is becoming a key link in the wider public transport network. Over 1,200 trips are made

each weekday and the system is predominantly used by people with disabilities, who constitute 90% of the passengers carried<sup>(11)</sup>.

## **Sweden**

**3.52** In Sweden, anyone who is unable to drive a car or to use available public transport is entitled to 'fardtjänst' (travel service). This is a system run by the local council and the user pays part of the cost of the trip. Usually, normal taxi vehicles are used for the service, but if requested, a car or mini-van with wheelchair access will be provided<sup>(19)</sup>.

## **Contracts**

**3.53** The role of contract work forms an important link between any taxi industry and meeting the needs and expectations of people with disabilities. Contract work includes services for children with special needs, people travelling to day centres or adult learning centres and patients travelling to and from hospitals or medical centres. Such work can be an important source of revenue for the taxi industry, particularly for those who invest in an accessible taxi.

## **UK**

**3.54** In some local authorities (e.g. London of Tower Hamlets), important savings have been made by incorporating taxi provision into non-emergency hospital transport services and social services. This is seen as being more cost effective and more flexible for patients than using ambulances.

**3.55** A key theme in this area is the value of a brokerage approach, which puts the needs of the passenger at the centre and shops around for the best value to meet these needs, irrespective of departmental or organisational boundaries. Devon County Council in the UK currently adopts this approach. A typical brokerage system works with a 'one stop shop' and a common information system for vehicle and driver allocation. A wide range of service users,

including non-emergency hospital transport, social services, education and the voluntary sector, can use this system. The needs of users are met from the most suitable options available, including taxis.

**3.56** Comments made by people with disabilities in the UK, suggest that there is room for improvement in existing group services and that many users would welcome the taxi option. Taxis provide a form of transport that is used by all sections of the community and therefore is not stigmatised. Some people disliked group travel and saw it as “herding.” Taxis are quicker and more direct and not dependent on complicated and restricted booking arrangements. Indeed there is a growing view that the future of public transport in general outside of large cities lies with such forms of demand responsive transport. This clearly has implications for rural areas of Ireland. Another advantage is that funding agencies know that their money is going into actual trips rather than vehicle purchase, maintenance, garaging, fuel, offices and administration. It also rewards the investment that the taxi trade makes in accessible vehicles.

### **Australia**

**3.57** In Australian states, such as New South Wales, the taxi industry has proven to be valuable in providing a service for those attending medical appointments and assisting the local health sector in fulfilling responsibilities and commitments to customers, including the transportation of blood samples and x-rays between hospitals and doctor surgeries<sup>(24)</sup>.

### **The Netherlands**

**3.58** In the Netherlands, close to 60% of taxi trips are carried out via public sector contracts. This ranges from a low of 21% in urban areas to a high of 76% in rural areas. Revenue from contract work amounts to approximately 65% of total taxi turnover<sup>(25)</sup>. Contract work in the Netherlands includes the following:

- Transportation for older people aged 65 plus – this service is subsidised by local authorities and is very attractive to users;
- Transporting children with disabilities to school;
- ‘Treintaxi’ – shared taxi system with a lower price for the consumer; and
- CVV Transportation – provided in regions where the taxi takes over the role of public transportation. Local authorities or municipalities receive budgets from central government for the provision of this service<sup>(25)</sup>.

### Summary – Making the journey:

There is a growing recognition of the importance of driver training.

There is an increasing tendency to provide taxi user subsidies and economic incentives for owners of taxis to provide accessible vehicles, including contract work.

## The Wider Context

### Customer Care

**3.59** There is an increasing trend internationally to empower customers with a disability. In relation to the use of taxis, this takes the form of evaluation, market research and encouraging passengers to complain.

#### UK

**3.60** People with disabilities in the UK have raised concerns about the procedure for collecting the passenger, particularly from home. The procedure for passenger collection now encourages the driver not to wait outside the customer’s residence but to announce themselves and their company at the customer’s door, over intercom, or by telephone<sup>(7)</sup>.

## **Chicago, USA**

**3.61** In Chicago, the taxi licence and the vehicle licence must be displayed in clear view on the right side of the dashboard. The taxi's licence number is located on the licence plate and on an information card attached to the rear of the front seat. A Braille card is attached to the rear of the front passenger seat, for use by those with vision impairments who read Braille. (Note: the taxi number is also on the light attached on top of the vehicle<sup>(23)</sup>. Although this is usually not visible to people with vision impairments, it could be useful to other passengers).

**3.62** One of the most important elements of the Chicago taxi service relates to complaints and the focus on complaints procedures as exercised by the Chicago Department for Consumer Affairs. Passengers are entitled to make a complaint if they feel they have been overcharged, have experienced discrimination, or have been refused entry to a taxi. Whilst this procedure is in practice elsewhere, the better publicity afforded to the Chicago model and its relative simplicity appear to encourage passengers to report to the Department. The necessary steps are then followed, leading to an Oral Hearing if deemed necessary by the Department of Administrative Hearings.

## **Australia**

**3.63** In Australia, customer service has become a priority, with each state agreeing the following as the key concerns of customers in providing for an efficient taxi service:

- driving skills;
- ability to take shortest route;
- knowledge of routes;
- timeliness of arrival;

- availability; and
- driver behaviour and attitude<sup>(20)</sup>.

**3.64** One example is the new set of standards introduced by the Australian Capital Territory. In this new code of practice, drivers/operators must now become accredited to a local taxi network. It is the function of the network to provide services such as telephone booking systems to operators. Any operator/driver that does not adhere to affiliation requirements can face reprimand or have his/her licence revoked. The set of standards include requirements for the maintenance and safety of taxis, driver training, booking services, insurance provision and ease of driver identification for customers<sup>(27)</sup>.

## Regulations and Controls

**3.65** The administration of regulation and control varies from one country to another and it generally fits in with the division of responsibilities between central and local government. The needs of passengers with disabilities have increasingly been integrated into mainstream public transport services, although the extent to which this includes taxis varies. In most countries, the accessibility of taxis is lagging behind that of buses and trains.

### UK

**3.66** In the UK the responsibility for taxi services is borne by the district authority for a large urban region (for example, London) or a local authority for a rural area. The UK taxi system is heavily regulated and local authorities are allowed to set and monitor the number of licensed taxis in their area. The local authority can also set fares and standards for driver/operator requirements<sup>(25)</sup>.

**3.67** An important element of the UK taxi industry is that driver/operator requirements are governed by the regulated system. This is most evident

in London, where the London Cab Drivers Act 1968 sets out specific driver/operator standards. These standards, which are uniform throughout the UK are outlined as follows:

- new drivers must be at least 21 years old;
- drivers must take a special driving test;
- drivers must provide a medical health statement or take a medical test; and
- all drivers must undertake a Criminal Record Check<sup>(16)</sup>.

**3.68** Enforcement is also initiated from a central level. Legislation is passed centrally and is translated to local authority level. Local police are charged with enforcing legislation and the local authority deals with any complaints that arise.

### **Chicago, USA**

**3.69** The majority of US cities deregulated the taxi industry during the 1970's and 1980's. The taxi industry is still governed by the US Department of Transportation, yet is controlled locally at the state/municipal level. There is varying experience between cities since deregulation. Many authorities have addressed any shortcomings by implementing specific standards for drivers, proper systems of redress, and scope for customer involvement<sup>(28)</sup>.

**3.70** In the US, the Department of Transportation monitors the taxi industry and sets out specific requirements for the provision of services to people with a disability in conjunction with the Americans With Disabilities Act 1990.

**3.71** An important remit of the Department under the Act, is the enforcement of discrimination offences. For example, a taxi driver may not impose special charges on individuals with disabilities, including wheelchair users, for providing services required by the passenger. Also, no driver

can charge for the presence of a guide-dog in the vehicle or the storing of a wheelchair in the vehicle. The enforcement remit of the Department includes sanctions against drivers/operators who are proven to refuse to carry a passenger with a disability because of perceived stigma attached to any particular disability<sup>(28)</sup>.

**3.72** In Chicago, the relationship between the taxi industry and people with disabilities has led directly to the development of a committed service for those with physical and sensory disabilities. Since 1988, both the number of wheelchair accessible taxis and the extent of the service provided have grown.

**3.73** The involvement of the Chicago Department of Consumer Affairs and the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) has also played an important part in the development of the service. Having monitored the performance of licence holders, the CTA noticed that even though drivers were operating with a wheelchair accessible licence, they were not taking enough passengers with disabilities. As a result, the Authority introduced a condition on licence holders that drivers of wheelchair accessible taxis must pick up a minimum of two passengers with disability per day.

## **Australia**

**3.74** The taxi industry in Australia is regulated at state level under the Passenger Transport Act 1990. Each state's Department of Transport sets out standards and requirements for the provision of entry to the market and for monitoring operator/driver requirements. The mechanics of the industry vary from state to state, however, recent legislation and co-ordination between states has attempted to harmonise the industry.

**3.75** The taxi industry in Australia has come under review in recent years, with standards now being debated and implemented for the provision of wheelchair accessible taxis at both an urban and rural level. The review of the taxi industry was initiated by the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 in

conjunction with the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission. This important link between service provision and national disability law has formed an important part of best practice in Australia.

**3.76** The Disability Discrimination Act also laid the foundation for the development of Draft Standards for Accessible Public Transport in Australia, which has become directly applicable to the taxi industry<sup>(18)</sup>. One of the main objectives of these standards is to reduce discrimination against passengers with disabilities. It is the intention of the standards to appreciate the expectations and requirements of operators, in conjunction with imposing certain responsibilities to be regulated and monitored at state level. The preparation of Draft Standards for Accessible Public Transport in conjunction with Road Transport (Public Passenger Services) Regulations 2002, has led to a concern regarding requirements for driver/operators, with certain states preparing new criteria for entry to the market and the monitoring of taxi vehicles.

**Summary – The wider context:**

Internationally, authorities are working towards developing and implementing clear non-discriminatory standards. This includes the establishment of regulations governing the vehicle, the driver and the service provided. However, compared to other public transport modes, taxis are still neglected and levels of accessible taxis are still generally low.

## **4. Consultation**

# Consultation

## Introduction

**4.1** Effective consultation is seen as a key element of this study. Consultation made a significant contribution to all stages of the study and, in particular, to the identification of problems and development of recommendations for an accessible taxi service. In view of the scale and nature of the study, a variety of consultation techniques were adopted to engage specific interest groups, the general public, and public representatives. These techniques include questionnaires, consultation workshops and an “on-street” survey of people with disabilities.

## Consultation workshops

**4.2** As part of the research for this project, a series of workshops were held around the country. Those attending included people with ambulant disabilities, vision impairments, hearing impairments and wheelchair users. Total attendance at the workshops was 70 and details are given in Table 4.1. A list of invitees is given in Appendix A.

**Table 4.1 – Details of Consultation Workshops**

| Location  | Venue                                      | Date     |
|-----------|--|----------|
| Mullingar | Mullingar Arts Centre                      | 24/11/03 |
| Dublin    | Disability Federation of Ireland Buildings | 25/11/03 |
| Cork      | Rochestown Park Hotel                      | 26/11/03 |

**4.3** At the workshops, discussions focused on the experience of using and supplying taxi services from the perspective of people with disabilities. In addition, an exercise in choosing and prioritising issues (such as vehicle design, payment systems and driver training needs) was undertaken to help develop a preferred strategy for taxi provision.

## Survey in Dublin

**4.4** In addition to the workshops, a survey of people with disabilities was carried out in Dublin. People were approached and invited to discuss taxi provision using a questionnaire based on feedback from the consultation workshops. Using this method, 63 people with disabilities were interviewed, of whom 34 were wheelchair users, 10 had vision impairments and 19 had ambulant disabilities. All age groups were represented including young people.

## Individual and organisational responses

**4.5** Comments were also obtained from all over Ireland via e-mail, telephone and written communications. Some of these communications referred to reports and documents that had previously been written following calls by the Government for consultation about taxis.

## Overall consultation

**4.6** Overall, 200 people with a wide range of disabilities have taken a direct part in discussions. In addition we have spoken to a number of representatives of disability organisations. The issues raised and results of the consultation are summarised below.

## Results of consultation

**4.7** The results of the consultation process are presented in terms of the process of making a taxi journey from its origin to its destination. This enables a clear picture to emerge as to where the problems associated with using accessible taxis arise. The structure used to present the results is as follows:

- Booking a taxi
- Ranks and infrastructure
- Vehicle
- Charges
- Customer care

## Booking a taxi

**4.8** The structure of the taxi industry in Ireland is mainly a collection of small one-person businesses with relatively few taxi groups. However, there is an increasing tendency for individual drivers to join taxi radio groups especially in the Dublin area. When booking taxis people with disabilities experience a range of problems.

**“I’m deaf and none of them have minitel facilities.”**

**“I have a speech impediment so email or text messaging is the way I communicate but not many of them offer that method of booking.”**

**“The time I have to wait for a taxi is ridiculous. It is not fair on my mother to wait so long” (youth with disability).**

**“ My mother has to keep ringing to double check where the taxi is until it comes” (youth with disability).**

**4.9** However, people requiring special vehicle facilities experienced the greatest problem. In particular wheelchair users experienced a high level of refusal of bookings, due to discrimination.

**“I have to specify a wheelchair accessible vehicle so that gives them a chance to pretend they’ve no suitable taxis available. We’ve proved it wasn’t true time and again.”**

**“The driver was very outspoken – he said ‘people like you don’t tip, you take a lot of effort to get in and out when the meter isn’t going and if you have an accident that’s my insurance up the spout!”**

**“Although I can travel without my wheelchair, I am large and some taxis are too small for me so I have to tell them this and it often leads to refusals!”**

**4.10** Other issues related to reluctance to accept guide-dogs.

**“One driver turned up but drove off when he saw the dog. He said he didn’t want dogs in the saloon cars because they get hairs all over the seats and smell!”**

**4.11** When hailing a taxi on the street, these problems were accentuated. A common experience was to be deliberately ignored.

**“We’ve got to the point that my husband hails a taxi while I hide round the corner – otherwise they won’t stop if they see me in the wheelchair!”**

**4.12** Solutions generally involved the selection of a specific local taxi provider who could be relied on not to discriminate either due to personal contact or via a taxi company.

**“I use a radio cab company – the dispatcher knows I need a wheelchair accessible taxi but they don’t mention it to the driver – they just send the nearest suitable taxi to my address!”**

**“After a lot of trouble I use a certain driver with a hackney licence – he knows me and sees me all right. I try to book ahead so I can get him but sometimes he’s not available so it’s not ideal!”**

**4.13** Such experiences have led to calls for stiffer enforcement and penalties for discrimination. It was also noticeable that none of the many people with disabilities who had experienced discrimination had ever officially reported this.

**“Passengers are all different – who’s to say a wheelchair passenger is more trouble than someone who’s been drinking. It’s their job, but I’m afraid to say anything.”**

**“I accept it takes more effort to help me in and out – I always try to tip a bit extra but I can’t always afford it. I don’t complain.”**

## **Ranks and Infrastructure**

**4.14** One of the issues affecting the use of taxis by people with disabilities was the link with related infrastructure. The general point made was that it was no use having good quality vehicles if access to the vehicles was difficult. We heard many examples of such difficulties.

**“There should be clear markings of where the ranks are.”**

**“You have to get across three lanes of traffic to access the rank.”**

**“There are no dropped kerbs across to the rank.”**

**“At the train station, the railing acts as a guide when I leave the station but then ends before I get to the taxi rank. It would be better if the railing went as far as the taxi rank. Otherwise textural changes on the ground could be used to indicate that I have reached the taxi rank.”**

**“The taxi shelter is well lit up so it is easier to find.”**

**“The rank at the train station is not vision impaired friendly as it starts yards from the main door & stretches back towards the entrance. It is particularly difficult at night, with the lights from oncoming traffic making it hard to determine whether the approaching vehicle is in fact a taxi or an ordinary car. I think the rank should start closer to the main door with the queue stretching away from the entrance so that as the next taxi arrives it passes the queue as it moves towards the top of the rank to collect the next passenger.”**

## **The Vehicle**

### **Supply of Wheelchair Accessible Taxis**

**4.15** Apart from lack of supply due to discrimination, one of the main points raised by those consulted was the continuing decline in the number of wheelchair accessible taxis.

**“In 1999 it was estimated that there were 850 disabled taxis, this figure is now more likely to be 120 accessible taxis in Dublin” (taxi union representative).**

**4.16** Time and again we heard that the number of wheelchair accessible taxis available at peak times does not meet current demand and that the situation is getting worse. The lack of peak service coverage restricts the ability of people with disabilities working a normal week.

**“I work at the City University and I try to work 9 to 5 but sometimes I have to sit around for over an hour before I can get a taxi home which takes a wheelchair.”**

**“I am always lifted into the taxi by at least two people. This means if I want to go anywhere I can’t because taxi drivers choose not to use ramps. Many times I have got a taxi and was surprised to see a ramp that the taxi driver could have used for me” (youth with disability).**

**4.17** In other parts of Ireland (especially rural areas) there were no wheelchair accessible taxis at all.

**“Since I don’t drive, my only chance of getting out is to transfer from my wheelchair but this is very difficult and the drivers aren’t trained how to help.”**

**“In our area there are no accessible taxis at all. None of my family drive either so we just have to stay local!”**

**4.18** We also heard from the perspective of the taxi trade, reasons for the decline in wheelchair accessible taxis.

**“I’ve not renewed my licence even though it’s cheaper. There’s no second hand value in the van conversions – the costs are a write-off so even with the cheaper licence it’s not worth it.”**

**“The licence is cheaper but the insurance is going up all the time and you can’t even get it if you’ve made a claim.”**

**“If you’ve got a conversion, the dispatcher gives you all the disabled bookings while the cars get the ordinary fares – so I get all the hassle!”**

## **Regulation of taxi numbers**

**4.19** Most participants in the consultation process were aware of the history of recent taxi deregulation. From the perspective of people with disabilities, deregulation was not perceived as an improvement. Deregulation of the service was seen to have increased the overall number of available taxis and decreased waiting times. However, this had not increased the number of wheelchair accessible taxis – many felt that quite the opposite has occurred. It was seen as harder to get a wheelchair accessible taxi, numbers were declining, and the service had deteriorated.

**4.20** Users and taxi drivers alike commented on the need for regulation of numbers in order to provide a professional service; regulation of numbers being just the first stage in providing a regulated service. A Charter of Rights for users and a Code of Practice for drivers are further regulated measures required to provide a service.

## **Features of Accessible Vehicles**

**4.21** Respondents were asked to consider whether all taxis should be wheelchair accessible or whether there should be a mix of taxi types. There was much debate about this including what constituted an accessible taxi. It is clear that different disabilities result in emphasis on different desirable features. Appropriate desirable features are discussed later in the report (Chapter 5 – Recommendations).

**4.22** There was also debate about the extent to which these features were compatible with each other. In particular there was a view that wheelchair accessible vehicles were uncomfortable for people with certain ambulant disabilities, such as arthritis.

**“You get bounced about in the van conversions and it’s hard to get up the high steps too.”**

**“I can transfer from my wheelchair but the boots of some taxis are too small to carry it.”**

**4.23** For people with vision impairments, consistency was important.

**“The taxis are every shape and size under the sun. There’s no way I can get used to where everything is as I need to.”**

**4.24** Another issue was the visibility of the meter. Many people could not see this.

**“You have to trust the driver not to cheat you.”**

**“I can’t see or hear very well so it’s a real problem.”**

**“The driver should turn on the light in the taxi when giving over money so that I can see it” (person with a vision impairment).**

**“The meter display should be larger. A meter could be placed in the back seat or the meter could bleep every time it goes up a euro but it wouldn’t want to bleep too often as then I would get confused” (person with a vision impairment).**

**“I can’t see the meter digits clearly if the digits are made up of dots. The digits should be illuminated with a bright colour.”**

**“In New York, a fare card is given in print on the back of the seat. It’s helpful if the price ranges are also given in Braille.”**

**“If I sit in the back of a wheelchair accessible taxi, then I am further away from the meter and it is more difficult to see.”**

**4.25** There was a widespread view that some of the wheelchair accessible taxis were not very comfortable for anyone. In addition, some saloons were considered unsuitable for some people with ambulant disabilities.

**“The saloon car taxis are much too small for me to stretch out my legs and the sill heights are difficult to negotiate.”**

**“Many so called accessible taxis are just cheap van conversions and more like goods vehicles than the standard you would expect for taxis.”**

**“I would be against getting rid of the saloon car taxis – I just can’t get in the vans.”**

**4.26** Such views inevitably led to discussions about purpose-built taxis which some people had experienced elsewhere.

**“We got a Metrocab at Birmingham airport and it was very comfortable” (passenger with arthritis).**

**“The London taxis are much more comfortable for everyone.”**

**4.27** However, most people based their experience on the situation in Ireland and had little awareness of the additional features of purpose-built vehicles such as swivel seats and folding steps. Nevertheless, there was support for an accessible taxi fleet, especially in terms of wheelchair access, with two thirds opting for full wheelchair accessibility while a third preferred a mixed fleet. However, this may reflect the composition of the type of disabilities at workshops, as the number of attendees with sensory disabilities was much lower than the number with physical disabilities.

**4.28** Reasons for preferring a mix of taxi types sometimes related to the experience of using the wheelchair accessible taxis currently in service. The view was that many were poor quality van conversions, which were uncomfortable and unsafe. In particular the high step up into the vehicle was very difficult for people with ambulant disabilities and also for wheelchair users for whom the steep incline and long ramps made entry and exit difficult. Some people said they had already injured themselves and were seeking compensation.

**4.29** The knock-on effect is that insurance for an accessible vehicle is reported to be increasing. Taxi companies say they are finding it difficult to get public liability insurance for drivers of accessible taxis and are facing a number of claims from taxi users resulting from injuries incurred while entering or exiting the vehicle.

- 4.30** There was a sense of vans being unsuitable for taxi travel and that able bodied people shunned them, thus stigmatising those who used them out of necessity.
- 4.31** The National Council for the Blind of Ireland make the point that some of the taxis that are wheelchair accessible, particularly the van conversions with high steps, pose major problems for older persons with vision impairments. Of the number of people registered as 'legally blind', approximately half are over the age of 65 years. These problems will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

## **Distinction between Public Service Taxis and Hackneys**

- 4.32** Compared to other taxi regimes, it appears that people in Ireland are generally clear about the difference between public service taxis (which can be hailed in the street) and hackneys (which have to be pre-booked). However, the distinction was felt to be rather artificial given the widespread use of mobile phones.

**"I have my favourite taxi firm and I just ring them up when I see one of their taxis outside the pub. I call them on my mobile and I'm immediately picked up"**

- 4.33** Many people with disabilities preferred to pre-book even when using a public service vehicle.

**"I always telephone first to make sure – I can't afford to be stuck. But the firm I use is a taxi firm – they're the only ones which have the vans" (person who is a wheelchair user).**

**4.34** The main problem with hackneys was the lack of a meter, which could be worrying financially or require negotiation. Nevertheless, nearly three-quarters of all those consulted favoured the retention of a distinction between taxi types.

## Charges

**4.35** Half of the people with disabilities who were consulted supported the idea of subsidies to the passenger. A frequent comment was that this should be combined with existing subsidies for use on buses and trains especially for people who could not use or do not have access to bus transport.

**“It’s not fair if you can’t use buses and have to rely on taxis like me.”**

**4.36** Such views were particularly common at the Mullingar workshop, where people came mainly from a rural background. It was felt that taxis are an expensive option for people with a disability, given the lack of a comprehensive public transport system. One elderly lady spoke of the weekly cost of €20 incurred in collecting her pension on Thursday and attending mass on Sunday.

**“I spend half my income on taxis – it’s my only option.”**

**4.37** Subsidising the passenger was also seen as more empowering than subsidising the taxi driver since it would enable people with disabilities to take their custom to those who treated them well.

**“It’s essential that the passenger has control of the cost – I could tell you lots of instances of being charged more because of my disability. It’s not right but you’re in their hands. If they knew you had access to your own funding they might be more careful.”**

**“One of our clients has been charged €3-€5 more for a particular journey than ordinary taxis and this return journey has to be made twice a week so our client is down €6-€10 each day.”**

**4.38** In contrast, those supporting subsidies for the taxi providers felt that this would enable a better quality of vehicle to be provided. It was seen as a way of encouraging investment in purpose-built taxis, which due to VAT and VRT are currently beyond the means of many in the Irish taxi trade.

**“The accessible taxis cost twice as much here in Ireland as in other European countries. Surely that can’t be right – there’s the ideal taxis and we Irish can’t use them.”**

## **Customer Care**

### **Driver Training**

**4.39** As part of the need for better quality control there was very strong support for driver training.

**“The ideal thing would be well trained drivers with accessible vehicles but if I had to choose between them it would be to have a sympathetic driver.”**

**“The taxi driver stands back and lets my mother get me into the taxi by herself. I don’t know what is wrong with them, they are there to help” (youth with disability).**

**4.40** Many experiences of poor understanding by drivers of the needs of people with disabilities were recounted, including some dangerous practices that had resulted in injuries. Other passengers said they had been treated in a very patronising manner, spoken to like children or, in one woman’s case, physically assaulted by a saloon car driver whilst transferring her from her wheelchair.

**“In rural areas there’s no wheelchair accessible taxis and you have to put up with the driver lifting you in and out. It’s humiliating”**

**“I tend to use the same local taxi companies because otherwise I often get treated very badly such as being left out of the taxi queue or taking me on longer routes thinking I don’t realise because I am blind. Some of the drivers ask all sorts of personal questions too about my blindness – they’re trying to be kind but they wouldn’t ask a regular passenger all those things.”**

**“The taxi drivers at the taxi rank never get out to ask me if I want a taxi. I have to rely on other customers to inform me that I am next in the queue and that a taxi has arrived. Some taxi drivers talk directly to my friends and not me” (person with vision impairment).**

**4.41** Simple actions were identified, which drivers could carry out to help people with disabilities.

**“I find it useful if the taxi driver switches on the light when I am getting into the taxi so I can see the step and if there is anything on the seat.”**

**4.42** There was praise for drivers who were sympathetic. Two users from Hollyhill commented:

**“We’re pleased with the service we receive – the drivers are helpful and pleasant – always happy to assist and they are polite on the switchboard too.”**

**“I’d be lost without my driver – he helps me get into the house and even gets some shopping for me on the way home. It’s particularly important for me as I live alone.”**

**“I usually use my local taxi companies – I have got to know one of the drivers”**

**4.43** Both people with disabilities and taxi drivers agreed that none or very little training is given to drivers; deregulation has ensured that what training was given by the established companies is now not required. Those consulted were almost unanimous in agreeing that driver training should include a disability training requirement.

**4.44** An interesting comment, regarding the use of wheelchair clamping systems, proved again the lack of training available. One taxi operator wanted to train his drivers in the use of clamping mechanisms recently installed. However the garage that installed the system was unaware of the methodology required and the manufacturer provided no instructions on how to correctly use the system. It is not surprising then that wheelchair users spoke of not feeling secure when travelling in taxis.

## **Complaints**

**4.45** It was noticeable that in spite of giving many examples of problems with customer care aspects of taxi services, we did not meet anyone who had actually complained. This appeared to be due to a combination of low expectations and not knowing how to complain.

**“You learn to expect it and just put up with the problems.”**

**“I wouldn’t know where to start – it’s no use telling the driver himself especially when you need help to get out at the end of the journey.”**

## Conclusion

- 4.46** A wide range of people with disabilities has been involved in discussions about taxi provision in Ireland. It is clear that the current situation is very unsatisfactory and in many ways the situation has deteriorated in recent years. In particular, there is strong evidence of discrimination, which, added to a marked decline in the numbers of wheelchair accessible taxis available, is literally trapping some people in their homes. The opportunity of introducing quality controls to compensate for the loss of quantity control has not been utilised. The result is that many people with disabilities are experiencing the worst of both worlds.
- 4.47** There is an urgent need to address these issues. The report's recommendations are set out in the next Chapter.



# **5. Recommendations**

# Recommendations

## Introduction

**5.1** As previously outlined, to meet the varying needs of people with physical and sensory disabilities, two models of accessible taxis are required in the future:

- Standard accessible taxi: this saloon taxi has specific accessibility features for all taxi users except those who need to remain in their wheelchair.
- Wheelchair accessible taxi: as well as having the same accessibility feature as the 'standard accessible taxi', this taxi is specifically designed to allow passengers to travel in their wheelchairs.

**5.2** A key conclusion from the previous chapter is that for many people with mobility and sensory disabilities, taxis are the only option for journeys to school, to work, involving out of hours travel or to places without public transport.

**"If I could afford more taxis my life would be a lot better. I have to ration when I go out and even when I do plan a taxi trip it often goes badly wrong and doesn't work out ."**

**5.3** Our recommendations are based on the fact that both saloon and wheelchair accessible taxis currently lack important accessibility features. For example, people with vision impairments find the external signs for both saloon and wheelchair accessible taxis difficult to see in sufficient time to hail. Similarly the sill heights in saloon taxis and the step height of wheelchair accessible vehicles are too high for many people with ambulant disabilities.

**"Of the taxis currently out there, there is no one type of taxi that suits me."**

**5.4** The recommendations made in this report are set out in no particular order of importance. This is to emphasise that a complete taxi service ‘package’ is required to provide a satisfactory service from the perspective of people with disabilities. We are confident that the recommendations, if implemented, will result in an improved taxi service for all – both people with disabilities and the general public.

### **Table 5.1 Summary of current problems**

| <b>Interest group</b>           | <b>Issues</b>   |
|---------------------------------|---|
| <b>People with disabilities</b> | ■ Marked and continuing decline in numbers of wheelchair accessible taxis.  |
|                                 | ■ No disability awareness or customer care training for drivers.  |
|                                 | ■ Widespread reluctance to provide a service for wheelchair users.  |
|                                 | ■ Inflexible booking systems not catering for those with hearing and speech impairments.  |
|                                 | ■ Many people with disabilities cannot afford taxis yet have no access to alternative public transport.   |
|                                 | ■ Van conversions are uncomfortable and unsafe. For example, for both ambulant passengers and wheelchair users the high step and steep incline of ramp can make entry and exit difficult. |
|                                 | ■ Current specifications for all types of taxi are inadequate for needs of people with disabilities.  |

**continued on next page**

## Table 5.1 Summary of current problems continued

|                               |  |
|-------------------------------|--|
|                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Difficult for people with low vision (including increasing number of older people) to distinguish taxis from other traffic.</li></ul>  |
|                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Inadequate taxi ranks and infrastructure for passengers with disabilities.</li></ul>   |
|                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Inadequate or sometimes no service provision in rural and provincial areas.</li></ul>  |
|                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Limited access to information about availability of wheelchair accessible taxis.</li></ul>   |
| <b>Taxi service providers</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Vehicle Registration Tax and VAT taxes make purchase of purpose built taxis expensive.</li><li>■ Poor second-hand value in converted vehicles.</li><li>■ Perceptions that passengers with disabilities are more time-consuming (e.g. takes time to secure a wheelchair) and converted vehicle owners get higher percentage of such passengers.</li></ul> |

**5.5** Table 5.2 sets out the structure of the recommendations as presented in this chapter. This mirrors the approach used elsewhere in the report and follows the process of using the taxi service from booking a vehicle to making the journey.

## Table 5.2 – Structure of recommendations

| Issue headings              | Detailed issues   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| <b>Starting the journey</b> | Booking the trip<br>Ranks and infrastructure<br>Hailing a taxi  |
| <b>Making the journey</b>   | Vehicle requirements and ratios<br>Providing incentives for an accessible taxi service<br>The driver<br>The fare  |
| <b>The wider context</b>    | Monitoring, complaints and sanctions<br>Rural issues<br>Integration with other public services<br>Towards a sustainable structure for the taxi industry |

## Starting the Journey

### Booking the trip

**5.6** The majority of people with disabilities prefer to pre-book taxis, as there is a need for greater certainty about journey plans since the consequences of being left without transport can be very difficult. On a practical level there is a lack of specialist equipment such as minicom, email, text messaging or even fax for booking taxis. These options are very useful to people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

**“I’m deaf so I try to fax for a taxi and sometimes I find a driver who I can text!”**

**5.7** As both saloon and wheelchair accessible taxis are provided in Ireland, customers must specify their need for a wheelchair accessible vehicle. As shown within the consultation process, this situation often leads to excuses being made by taxi providers to provide a service, particularly when there is high demand for taxis e.g. at peak times or in poor weather conditions. A typical response is that “there are no suitable taxis available.” However, it appears that only in some cases is this actually true.

**“We rang hours before our train was due but couldn’t get a wheelchair accessible taxi but when we didn’t mention about the wheelchair we had no trouble getting a larger vehicle!”**

**5.8** In addition, licensing requirements for hackneys specifically exclude provision of wheelchair accessible vehicles, so wheelchair users are entirely reliant on taxis. Many people with disabilities are forced to overcome these problems by developing a good relationship with a particular taxi provider, which limits the person’s choice and is an inappropriate constraint on their freedom to travel.

**5.9** Another issue relating to booking taxis, is the difficulty obtaining information about taxi travel in the first place. Some resources exist, for example a booklet from Iarnród Éireann, which publishes tables of taxi provision at stations<sup>(29)</sup>. However, the key factor of whether or not the taxis are wheelchair accessible is not recorded. Publications relating to other modes of transport such as buses or coaches do not give information about links with taxis and most tourist maps do not show the location of taxi ranks. Lists of taxi rank locations are not available in accessible formats, such as large print, Braille or on audiotape for people with vision impairments.

**5.10** Finally, there is no travel information system that provides details of the whole journey. Other countries have or are developing such systems (see Chapter 3 – Booking the Trip) comprising accessible websites or telephone help-lines, which advise people with disabilities about transport services or assist with bookings and journey planning.

### **Recommendations**

- Introduce a national information service for all passengers that includes advice about all travel options, including taxis for people with disabilities. This service should include an accessible website and telephone system from which people with disabilities could obtain specialist advice.
- Wheelchair accessible taxis should be automatically dispatched to those requesting them, via a central booking system monitored by GPS, for all taxi companies. When implemented, appropriate sanctions should be put in place for non-compliance. The central booking system should be operated by an independent agency following a Department of Transport tender process.
- Taxi companies and taxi operators should install fax, minicom, email and SMS messaging facilities for booking.
- When a vehicle arrives to collect a person with a vision impairment, the customer and driver should exchange an agreed password before the passenger boards the taxi (see Chapter 3, Zingo Taxi Service).

## **Ranks and Infrastructure**

**“I can’t possibly get across to the main taxi rank in O’Connell Street because crossing the main road is very difficult.”**

- 5.11** One of the main difficulties mentioned by people with disabilities during the consultation process was poor access to ranks. For example, people experience difficulty crossing to ranks where there are no dished kerbs, no safe pedestrian crossings or an absence of space on the pavements for a ramp. There is also a lack of hackney dropping off points. Kerb heights are often inaccessible or in some cases non-existent. The latter in particular makes the camber for getting into taxis steeper and sometimes impossible for both wheelchair users and passengers with ambulant disabilities.
- 5.12** In some cases the ranks are not in convenient locations – perhaps due to their historical placement and a failure to keep up with new developments in towns and cities. In some areas, local authorities have banned taxis from particular locations in town centres where previously people with disabilities were able to access taxis. These issues need to be addressed by local authorities when planning urban design projects and should be included in suitable design guidelines.
- 5.13** Shortcomings of particular concern to people with vision impairments include the lack of signage at ranks, inadequate lighting, and the absence of tactile indications underfoot or talking signs to alert users of the presence of a taxi rank (see Chapter 3 - Ranks and Infrastructure). Shelter and queuing arrangements at ranks are often inadequate. The recent increase in taxi numbers has resulted in overcrowding at ranks and there are other places (for example at hospitals) where more ranks are needed.

## Recommendations

- Include information about taxi rank locations on town and city maps. Make lists of these locations available in other accessible formats for people with vision impairments.
- Develop a Best Practice Design Guide for accessible taxi ranks.
- Carry out national audits and develop accessibility plans for ranks and pickup points.
- Improve signage at ranks by increasing colour contrast and letter size. Ensure the appropriate positioning of signs especially from the pedestrian perspective.
- Provide tactile indicators underfoot for people with vision impairments.
- Encourage local authorities to provide taxi ranks as part of planning initiatives.

## Hailing a Taxi

**5.14** Discrimination experienced by some people with disabilities when attempting to hail a taxi has been described earlier and our recommendations about tackling this are discussed later in this chapter.

**5.15** One practical issue that has yet to be addressed in Ireland is how people with vision impairments can identify and hail taxis. The vehicle should be made more visible to all potential passengers.

## Recommendations

- Introduce a mandatory bright yellow taxi livery so that taxis can be easily distinguished from other traffic.
- Illuminate the sign on top of the taxi brightly.
- Signs should include a clear indication to show whether or not the vehicle is wheelchair accessible.

## Making the journey

### Vehicle Requirements

- 5.16** Compared to most other European countries, taxi vehicle requirements are less stringent in Ireland. The wide range of models, colours, ages and condition of vehicles demonstrates this. The sign on top of the taxis is the only visible common denominator and it is not clearly visible to most people with vision impairments.
- 5.17** Accessible vehicle requirements are loosely defined and standards have been criticised by people with disabilities on a wide range of issues. These included difficulty identifying a taxi, lack of contrasting handrails, door handles and seat edges etc. for people with vision impairments, lack of an appropriate means of communication for people who are deaf or hard of hearing, and entry and exit problems, difficulties securing wheelchairs and overall unsatisfactory design for people with ambulant and physical disabilities.
- 5.18** During our consultation, people with ambulant disabilities, including arthritis, noted their difficulties in using van conversions. People with such disabilities often preferred saloon cars to van conversions on the grounds of less vibration and easier entry. However, not all saloon cars are suitable either, since many of the saloon models used as taxis are too cramped with high sill heights that are difficult to surmount when getting in and out.

**5.19** There are no purpose-built taxi models in Ireland. Most purpose-built taxi models meet the requirements of the majority of passengers with physical and sensory disabilities. These purpose-built taxis would include most of the features listed in the table below - Minimum Accessibility Features for All Taxis.

**5.20** Irish legislation currently stipulates that entry and exit from the vehicle must be possible from both sides. This stipulation prevents the importation and use of purpose-built taxis, which meet the common standards in other countries, and which have a single entry and exit point. It is recommended that this limiting stipulation should be re-examined.

## **Recommendations**

■ To meet the varying needs of people with physical and sensory disabilities, two models of accessible taxis are required in the future:

**Standard accessible taxi:** this saloon taxi has specific accessibility features for all taxi users except those who need to remain in their wheelchair.

**Wheelchair accessible taxi:** as well having the same accessibility features as the 'standard accessible taxi', this taxi is specifically designed to allow passengers to travel in their wheelchairs.

### **Minimum Accessibility Features for All Taxis**

Minimum internal and boot size.

- Induction loop.
- Microphone between driver and passenger, where there is a dividing screen.
- Talking meter.
- GPS (global positioning satellite).

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- Licence numbers written in jumbo sized black numbers on external passenger door.
- Licence numbers, complaints telephone number and taxi fares displayed on a panel on the back of the driver's and front passenger's seats in large clear print, e.g. white letters on black using both upper and lower case lettering. This information should be provided in Braille on the same panel.
- Floor colour contrasting with seat colour.
- Non-slip floor covering.
- Bright yellow grab handles and clearly marked seat edges.
- Contrasting delineation of any gap for passing money through a screen.
- Mandatory national bright yellow livery.
- Strong illumination of roof sign with clear indication of wheelchair accessibility.

## **Additional Features for Wheelchair Accessible Taxis**

- Maximum step height.
- Ramps with minimum slope.
- Wheelchair anchor points and seat belts.
- There should be a minimum availability standard for wheelchair accessible taxis based on a combination of area size and population, with research commissioned to establish details.
- The rate of new issue of saloon car taxi licences should be slowed down via some of the quality control measures detailed below until the ratio of wheelchair accessible to saloon car taxis is 1:5.

## Providing incentives for an accessible taxi service

**5.21** The main reason given for the absence of purpose-built vehicles in Ireland is the VRT and VAT charges on new vehicles which adds around 40% to the list price and brings new purpose-built vehicles up to the €60,000 cost range.

|              | <b>TX1 (Purpose Built Accessible Taxi)</b> | <b>Saloon Car</b>             |
|--------------|--|-------------------------------|
| List Price   | €39,262                                    | €22,925                       |
| VAT          | €7,853                                     | €4,814                        |
| VRT          | €20,192                                    | €5,514                        |
| <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>€67,307</b>                             | <b>€33,253<sup>(30)</sup></b> |

**5.22** At this cost level, new purchases will be deterred and in turn no second hand trade will develop, which is important in stabilising the market. However, this research suggests that the abolition of VRT is not supported politically; even fire engines and ambulances have failed to bring about changes.

**5.23** A way around this (for which there is precedent in Ireland) is to grant a 'tax holiday', which would enable the introduction of purpose-built taxis into Ireland. This could be done for a year and financed via an increase in the saloon car taxi licence fee. Such a strategy would acknowledge the fact that the majority of countries in Europe do offer financial benefits to purchasers of specialised taxi vehicles (see Table 5.4).

**Table 5.4 – Examples of Operator/Driver Incentives<sup>(11)</sup>**

| Type of incentive                               | Countries where driver incentives have been implemented   |
|---|---|
| Reductions in VAT or Purchase Tax               | Austria, Denmark, Finland (totally exempt for fully accessible vehicles), Germany, Spain, the Netherlands, Portugal |
| Reductions on sales tax and fuel                | France  |
| Reductions on fuel                              | Quebec  |
| Grants towards capital costs of modifying taxis | Certain regions of France   |

**5.24** Alternatively, a tax credit could be offered over three years to cover the additional costs of operating a wheelchair accessible taxi compared to a saloon car taxi. This could take the form of greater licence differentiation, a subsidy on conversion, or a claw-back from a taxed income band.

**5.25** A third option would involve the introduction of a fixed ratio of wheelchair accessible taxis as a prerequisite to tendering for public sector contracts.

**“You see the ambulance minibuses going around with just a couple of people – we have spent the money on accessible taxis – why can’t they make use of our investments?”**

**5.26** Local taxi services are currently fulfilling a range of social transport needs both via individual bookings and contracts with statutory and not-for-profit organisations. Statutory bodies are dependent on taxis to provide transport to and from their services. Public service contracts, e.g. Health Boards and Department of Education, are currently a significant source of income for the taxi trade. Research should be undertaken to quantify the current value of these contracts.

### **Recommendations**

- Establish a 3-year timetable for moving towards a totally accessible taxi fleet. The entire taxi fleet should meet the specifications outlined in the 'Minimum Accessibility Features for all Taxis' table, with a ratio of 1:5 being wheelchair accessible. A taxi fleet meeting these specifications will go a long way towards meeting the needs of people with sensory and physical disabilities, older people and the general public.
- Maintain the dual standard of taxi licensing but with improvements in accessibility requirements for all taxi vehicles.
- Four strategies, listed below, are suggested to increase support for taxi drivers when purchasing wheelchair accessible vehicles. Further research is required to establish the most effective option or combination.
  - i. Maintain the dual standard of taxi licensing, with one licence for 'standard accessible taxis' and a concessionary licence for 'wheelchair accessible taxis'.
  - ii. A VRT/VAT amnesty for the purchase of new purpose-built wheelchair accessible taxis (including a licence fee rebate proportionate to the expiry time). A detailed specification to identify eligible vehicles would need to be developed.

- iii. Award and monitor public service contracts as a means of providing incentives to the taxi industry to provide wheelchair accessible vehicles.
- iv. Tax rebates/credits.

## The Driver

**“Some drivers are all right but others show they can’t be bothered with helping and quite a lot don’t know how to help.”**

**5.27** As part of the need to create a good quality taxi service in Ireland, it is important to improve the quality of driver training as well as to maintain a system of stringent checks on the background of licence applicants.

**5.28** The most consistent demand emerging from the consultation process was for disability awareness and customer care training for taxi drivers as a condition of licensing. Interviews with people with disabilities revealed that lack of driver training was a major cause of many problems experienced by both passengers and taxi drivers. Discussions with both the taxi trade and with customers revealed strong support for improving standards in this area. Currently, there is no statutory requirement for driver training and the majority of licensed drivers have not received any.

### Recommendations

- Taxi licensing requirements should include an introductory driver training course (two days training followed by further refresher sessions of half a day every two years). The training should include disability awareness, e.g. how to communicate with a person who is deaf or hard of hearing, how to safely guide a person with vision impairment, and how to clamp and secure wheelchairs.

- Driver training should be customised and carried out in co-operation with taxi trade organisations.
- Training should become a precondition of obtaining a licence.

## The Fare

**“They should introduce concessions for taxi fares for people who can’t use other types of transport. It’s only fair.”**

- 5.29** Even though free travel passes are available, the majority of public transport is not wheelchair accessible. Even where it is accessible, it is often the case that secondary transport is required to get to the bus/train. As a result, some people with disabilities are spending a high proportion of their disposable income on taxi fares. There is a continuing debate about how concessions could be organised in Ireland, with the majority of people with disabilities preferring user subsidies.
- 5.30** Research from other countries shows that user concessions result in increased take-up of taxi transport by people with disabilities, strongly suggesting that cost is a deterrent.
- 5.31** Further research should be carried out into the range of mechanisms for introducing user concessions, for example, transport tokens, smart cards, or vouchers. The use of technology has the ability to control costs on a rolling basis. The administration of such schemes is a specialised task and needs to be planned carefully in the context of local circumstances.
- 5.32** To transport wheelchair users correctly and comfortably involves extra boarding time on behalf of the taxi driver. The cost incurred for this additional time should not be passed on to the passenger. In the same way, there should be no additional charge to passengers who are guide-dog owners.

## Recommendations

- Introduce a concession for taxi users with a disability, which places the subsidy in the control of the user and takes account of additional time incurred by taxi drivers.

## The Wider Context

### Monitoring, complaints and sanctions

**“You have to have a lot of courage to complain to the driver when you rely on him to help you out. I don’t know what else I can do!”**

- 5.33 An independent monitoring system and complaints structure would ensure compliance with a consistent standard of service nationwide. Particular attention should be paid to how passengers with disabilities are treated.
- 5.34 Consultation with people with disabilities indicated that very few had made a complaint about unsatisfactory service that they had experienced. The principal reasons for this were lack of awareness of the complaints process and reluctance to pursue the issues through the Courts.
- 5.35 All taxi drivers should have a clear understanding of the appropriate standards required. Failure to adhere to these standards should be dealt with within a well-defined penalty/sanction system.

## Recommendations

- Establish independent monitoring procedures to monitor the treatment of people with disabilities by the taxi trade. This should include carrying out surveys and consultation with taxi users with disabilities.

- Provide better information to people with disabilities regarding how to complain about taxi services. Information should be available in accessible formats to people with vision impairments, including Braille, large print, on computer disk and audiotape. Driver identification number and complaints telephone line should be placed in large print and Braille on the back of the front seats and in jumbo sized print on the external passenger door.
- Reconsider the process for complaints and penalties for misdemeanours, in particular the current requirement that complaints are processed through the court system, in favour of a more user-friendly and conciliatory system.
- Introduce a system of sanctions to be introduced to ensure a high level of compliance. Persistent offenders should face withdrawal of licence and/or substantial fines.

## Rural issues

**“In rural areas there’s no wheelchair accessible taxis and you have to put up with the driver lifting you in and out. It’s humiliating”**

- 5.36 The international research carried out for this study, did not identify any taxi service model where taxis alone covered all transport needs in a rural context. Models of service have been identified where taxis, in partnership with other transport providers, operated an adequate service with all elements of the service being accessible.
- 5.37 Research indicates that a high proportion of taxi operators in rural areas are hackneys and, as licensing requirements for hackneys exclude provision of accessible vehicles, rural areas may have no wheelchair accessible taxis. This problem is further exacerbated by the lack of accessible public transport in such areas.

**5.38** Enhanced co-operation among Health Boards, voluntary agencies, community transport, and public and private transport agencies is necessary in order to optimise the supply and use of accessible transport networks. Such a measure could be implemented immediately in order to improve the current situation for people with disabilities who are living in rural areas.

### **Recommendations**

- Re-examine existing legislation that precludes hackneys from holding wheelchair accessible licences.
- Encourage enhanced co-operation among wheelchair accessible transport providers in rural areas.
- Particular attention should be paid to specific requirements in rural areas when examining the integration of public transport services.

## **Integration with other public services**

**“Even if I manage to get a taxi for a simple trip, it is almost impossible to combine this with going on a bus or train. There’s always one bit of the journey which is inaccessible. I’ve missed all sorts of college trips over the years because of these problems.”**

**5.39** When people use taxis they often incorporate this as one stage of a journey rather than a simple ‘there and back’ by one mode of transport. As more bus and train services become wheelchair accessible, the key factor in achieving an integrated transport service in Ireland in the future will be the ability of the different public transport providers to co-operate with each other.

**5.40** It is recommended that taxi travel should continue to be integrated into the general public transport system. This would help people with disabilities to plan journeys economically, using taxis when cost effective and mainstream public transport at other times. There are implications here for the design of interchanges, concessionary travel systems and information provision.

### **Recommendations**

- Research should be carried out into appropriate models of interchange between systems of transportation, concessionary travel systems and information provision.

## **Towards a sustainable structure for the taxi industry**

**5.41** The taxi trade in Ireland is composed mainly of small owner-drivers with few larger taxi companies. Some drivers are members of radio taxi groups (estimates suggest 25%)<sup>(31)</sup> and these groups have varying degrees of sophistication built into their dispatch systems. Some offer a range of modes of payment, contact options and time-based booking systems with automated back up.

**5.42** The establishment of a Charter of Rights for Taxi Passengers would provide local authorities and others involved in taxi provision with guidelines for good practice. An advisory forum on accessible taxis should be established to feed into the newly formed Taxi Council. This forum should comprise the local authority, taxi drivers, trade unions, operators, disability representative organisations and people with disabilities.

## **Recommendations**

- Encourage individual drivers to combine and join taxi companies. There are many ways of organising such companies but the most feasible method in Ireland would be for drivers to maintain their self-employed status whilst the taxi company provides information, training and dispatch systems. An alternative would be for Trade Union organisations to develop such systems with membership on a co-operative basis.
- Accelerate the formation of taxi companies and cooperatives with appropriate and innovative incentives.
- A Charter of Rights for taxi users and a Code of Good Practice for the taxi trade should be developed in consultation with all interest groups – providers, associated interests (e.g. the Gardaí and regions) and taxi users, including users with disabilities.

## Summary of recommendations

The key recommendations detailed in this chapter are summarised in the table below.

| Measure   | Beneficiary              |                |              |
|---|--------------------------|----------------|--------------|
|   | People with disabilities | General public | Taxi drivers |
| Ratio of wheelchair accessible taxis to saloons 1:5 with minimum set for rural areas  | ✓                        |                | ✓            |
| Incentives to encourage wheelchair accessible taxis via VRT/VAT amnesty, tendering prerequisite for public service contracts, tax rebates | ✓                        |                | ✓            |
| Accessibility standards to be enhanced for both wheelchair accessible taxis and saloon taxis  | ✓                        | ✓              |              |
| National travel information service   | ✓                        | ✓              | ✓            |
| Use of technology, fax and minicom for booking  | ✓                        | ✓              | ✓            |
| Best Practice Design Guide for accessible taxi ranks and signage  | ✓                        | ✓              | ✓            |
| Mandatory national bright yellow taxi livery  | ✓                        | ✓              |              |
| Bigger and brighter sign on taxi to show wheelchair accessibility   | ✓                        |                | ✓            |
| Driver training in disability awareness & customer care to become licensing prerequisite  | ✓                        | ✓              | ✓            |

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| Measure  | Beneficiary              |                |              |
|--|--------------------------|----------------|--------------|
|  | People with disabilities | General public | Taxi drivers |
| Develop and monitor a charter of rights for taxi users and code of good practice for service providers | ✓                        | ✓              | ✓            |
| User concessions for passengers with disabilities  | ✓                        |                | ✓            |
| Make driver identification easier  | ✓                        | ✓              | ✓            |
| Simplify and monitor complaints system and enhance penalties   | ✓                        | ✓              | ✓            |
| Include taxi users with disabilities in policy development   | ✓                        |                | ✓            |
| Re-examine existing legislation that precludes hackneys from holding wheelchair accessible licences    | ✓                        |                |              |
| Improve links between taxi transport and other public transport systems, particularly in rural areas   | ✓                        | ✓              | ✓            |
| Encourage drivers to join taxi companies with dispatch systems   | ✓                        | ✓              | ✓            |
| Encourage Taxi Quality Partnerships  | ✓                        | ✓              | ✓            |

## **6. Conclusion**

# Conclusion

- 6.1** This research and consultation process has highlighted a serious problem in relation to the provision of taxi transport for people with disabilities in Ireland. There is a marked and continuing decline in the number of wheelchair accessible taxis; in some areas there is no service. In addition, our research has found that there is widespread dissatisfaction with the current level of taxi service among people with disabilities.
- 6.2** One of the fundamental objectives of this report has been to ensure that the needs of passengers with disabilities are served by the taxi industry. However, it is likely that the market alone will not provide for the needs of people with disabilities, therefore a number of strategies for achieving their inclusion in the service are suggested.
- 6.3** Although the recommendations have been presented individually, it is clear that they come as a package. Choosing to implement only some of them will not achieve the objective of integrating the needs of people with disabilities into the taxi service. Some of the findings and recommendations of this report will require further analysis by each of the stakeholders.
- 6.4** The report contains many recommendations, which are explained and justified in detail using international best practice in taxi provision, the views of people with disabilities in Ireland and views of other stakeholders about what is suitable and feasible in the Irish context. The report shows how Ireland can adopt practices from different international taxi models in order to move towards an accessible taxi service for all.

- 6.5** The appointment of the new Taxi Commissioner, other relevant legislative considerations such as the Equal Status Act 2000, and the imminent publication of the Disabilities Bill provide an excellent opportunity to change current taxi legislation for the benefit of people with disabilities.
- 6.6** It is intended that this report will provide the Taxi Commissioner, the taxi industry and people with disabilities with the information necessary to make informed decisions about the future accessibility of the taxi service in Ireland.



# Appendix

# List of Consultation Invitees

- Age Action Ireland Ltd.
- Age and Opportunity
- Amputee Support Association
- Automobility Ltd
- Carers' Support Group
- Central Remedial Clinic
- Centre for Independent Living
- Charleville and District Association for the Handicapped
- Clarecare
- Cork Alzheimer Foundation
- Cork City Council
- Cork Taxi Co-Op
- Cystic Fibrosis Association of Ireland
- Disability Federation of Ireland
- Disabled Drivers' Association of Ireland
- Down's Syndrome Association of Ireland
- Dublin City Council
- Dublin Transportation Office
- East Coast Area Health Board
- Eastern Regional Health Authority
- Enable Ireland
- Eurocab Ireland
- Forum of People With Disabilities
- Friedreich's Ataxia Society Ireland
- Garda Síochána
- Independent Living Community Services
- Irish Deaf Society
- Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind
- Irish Hard of Hearing Association
- Irish Motor Neurone Disease Association
- Irish Senior Citizens Parliament
- Irish Society for Autism
- Irish Taxi Drivers' Federation
- Irish Wheelchair Association
- Mental Health Ireland
- Mental Health Services
- Mid Western Health Board
- Midland Health Board
- Mullingar Taxi Cabs
- Multiple Sclerosis Society of Ireland

- Muscular Dystrophy Ireland
- National Association for the Mentally Handicapped of Ireland
- National Association of Intellectual Disability of Ireland
- National Council for the Blind of Ireland
- National Council on Ageing and Older People
- National Disability Authority
- National Federation of Voluntary Bodies
- National Parents and Siblings Alliance
- National Radiocabs
- National Rehabilitation Hospital
- National Taxi Drivers Union
- National Training and Development Institute
- North Eastern Health Board
- North Western Health Board
- Northern Area Health Board
- Not For Profit Business Association
- Parents and Friends Association for the Mentally Handicapped
- Parents of Deaf Children
- People With Disabilities In Ireland Ltd.
- RehabCare
- Retirement Planning Council of Ireland
- Social Inclusion Unit
- South Western Area Health Board
- Southern Health Board
- Spina Bifida Association
- Taxi Carriage Office
- TaxiTaxi Ltd.
- Third Age Active Retirement Group
- Vantastic
- Western Health Board
- Westmeath County Council



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Disability Federation of Ireland

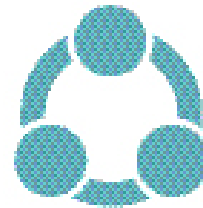


**Irish Wheelchair Association**

*National organisation of people with limited mobility*



**NATIONAL TRAINING &  
DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE**



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This project is funded by the European Year of People with Disabilities



Transportation Planning (International) Ltd.