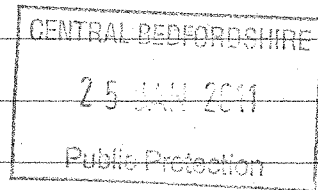


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Dear Margaret

Many thanks for giving us the chance to comment on your questionnaire regarding Accessibility of Hackney carriages survey. I myself am not disabled one or two of our members are and I know at least one person out of your area has great difficulty with the use of taxis and pre booked vehicles. In fact, within Luton the majority of private hire and taxis are not particularly interested in ferrying disabled passengers.

You gave our Association a talk on the subject some months ago, which proved Central Bedfordshire system far surpassed Luton and still does, I am told. With the help of a local newspaper we, a journalist and I, phoned around all the cab companies in Luton asking what assistance their drivers would give to help a disabled passenger. The answer was not many wanted to know about disabled passengers, mainly, it appeared was due to the training of drivers to handle the disabled and getting your outlay allowance back again. It may well be that some form of adjustment would be allowed to be charged for transporting disabled passengers. This however, is something of a two edged sword, asking for a disabled person to pay more for a fare and yet one of the persons <sup>receiving</sup> ~~receiving~~ a high cost of living. But some form of repayment to those prepared to be trained to handle the disabled ~~should~~ be allowed.

Your questionnaire is asking the relevant questions and it will be interesting to know what the final results are. The ones to be ~~added~~ <sup>arrived</sup> ~~at~~ <sup>at</sup> might be 1) Assistance to the passenger from front door to cab. 2) Getting the passenger

secured by the seat belt, 3) Putting the wheel chair securely in the cab 4) Getting wheel chair out of the taxi. 5) Getting the passenger into the wheel chair 6) On the way home, the taxi driver will assist the passenger to their front door.

A point one could make here is that in quite a few cases, the area the passenger wants is covered by certain parking regulations, in which case the passenger can find themselves quite a distance from where they wish to be. I have often wondered if a disabled passenger cab, might have extra markings on it stating it could be used for disabled passengers. Perhaps a red lamp alongside the taxi sign that would only be used for a disabled wheel chair user? i.e. the red lamp would only be on when the wheel chair fare paying customer was being assisted from the cab. After all allowance is made for the off loading of freight in these areas, so why not allow the disabled fare payer the same favour?

It would be of greater assistance to the wheel chair bound if the issue of the folding type only was issued for their use. It would take much less room in the cab and would seem common sense to me. Folding wheel chairs would be handled much easier by the cab driver.

The cab driver of a disabled access cab will continue to need training as they do now. How to get the person from their home into the cab. How you help get the passenger from the wheel chair into the cab and fasten the seat belts, secure the wheel chair after folding. Training in folding and locking the wheel chair in the cab and vice versa on the return home.

The foregoing are some of the assistance requirements for the wheel chair bound, there are, no doubt, others and it is very satisfactory that you have raised the questionnaire the

The main problem I see is that the ultimate result will cause  
 a cost <sup>rise</sup> in a modified disabled hackney cab, of a considerable  
 amount as Health & Safety will be required to vouch for the  
 safety of the disabled person in getting to the cab, being safely  
 seated in the cab, safe stowage of the wheel chair in the cab and  
 removing the wheel chair and passenger in a safe manner at the  
 end of journey. Modification of the cab and the training of  
 the drivers, the training of the cab drivers will be very important  
 and I suspect expensive. All this adds up to an added  
 expense to meet the requirements of some of the disabled who  
 will need to raise the cost of fares for the disabled. This  
 will be the crux of the matter. The cab company owner will  
 wish to get their training fees back and this will result in  
 a higher fare for the disabled user of the cab. The disabled  
 person is the least able to pay more for such a basic service.  
 This problem will be the one that will have to be overcome.  
 Perhaps one method that might be applied is that the  
 bus pass might envelope the disabled person's wish to travel.

I write this on behalf of disabled members of the Donstable  
 and District Association of Senior Citizens and as a member  
 of the Social Services Working Group LINK Bedfordshire.

Yours sincerely,