

## RESPONSE TO THE DfT TAXI AND PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLE LICENSING CONSULTATION (June 2011)

### Introduction

SATA is an independent self-funding Scottish Charity with over 80 individual and corporate members active in the voluntary, public and private sectors. It is led by disabled people, works for improvements in transport services, and makes representations on issues of concern to disabled people.

QUESTION	COMMENT
1. Usefulness of the Guidance	The Guidance is useful but limited in what it seeks to achieve. There has been little progress in this area since the DfT Consultation on Improving Access to Taxis closed in April 2009. A great deal of effort was put into that consultation by the DfT, by the Scottish Government and by the many respondents, including MACS, DPTAC and SATA. It is disappointing that so little has been achieved in this area in the last two years. There should be a means of evaluating best practice guidance.
2. LA review of policies	We would like to see the Guidance reinforce the DfT advice that local authorities publish their policy on taxi and PHC licensing. Our evidence is that many authorities do not have a policy (especially on vehicle access and concessionary fares) or if they do they do not make them readily available. SATA's policy is that "every local authority should have a policy and strategy for delivering affordable and accessible taxis and private hire car services." Such policies should be formulated in the overall context of transport provision including demand-responsive and community transport.
3. Examples of amended policies	We can provide no examples of policy amendments where policies do exist but we have not conducted a recent survey. The Guidance should say that any amendments should be made public.
4. Issues in the original Guidance	A major issue is the lack of any marked improvement in availability of accessible vehicles overall. This is shown by the Scottish Government's own statistics compiled annually from figures supplied by local authorities. The Guidance does not show any government ambition to improve accessibility and glosses over the fact that private hire cars are usually less accessible than taxis. The number of accessible taxi vehicles varies significantly from one local authority area to another and generally speaking both the number of available vehicles and their accessibility declines significantly once one leaves the major cities and moves to the rural areas. There is also a fall-off at non-peak times.
5. Other issues not covered in the Guidance	See answers to Questions 1 and 4 above. We fear the Guidance, of itself, will do little to improve the provision of accessible taxis and private hire cars.

6. Accessibility (paras 14-17)	<p>SATA's policy is that "every local authority should have at least 50% vehicle fleet accessibility".</p> <p>There is a need to encourage full accessibility and the Guidance should make clear the need for local authorities to conduct demand assessments both for taxis and PHCs on a regular basis.</p> <p>The demonstration schemes originally proposed by DfT need to proceed so that conclusions can be drawn from them. Accessibility is not just an issue for wheelchair users. The vast majority of disabled people do not use wheelchairs. Accessibility for deaf people has to do with communication. Issues such as talking taxi meters are worth investigating.</p>
7. Assistance dogs (paras 18-20)	<p>It appears relatively easy for taxi drivers to obtain exemption from these duties. We have no evidence of enforcement measures.</p>
8. Equality Act 2010 (paras 21-26)	<p>There is a need to ensure that these duties are effective after 1 April 2011.</p>
9. Specification of vehicle types (paras 27-29)	<p>SATA's policy is for all new and transferred licences for taxis (Hackney Carriages) should be for side - loading wheelchair accessible vehicles with M1 ECWVTA and include features to cater for passengers with reduced mobility, vision and hearing (such as swivel seats, intercom, audible fare meters etc.) All new licences for private hire cars should require them to have an approved swivel seat fitted.. The Guidance should reflect this policy.</p>
10. Type approval of imported vehicles (para 30)	<p>See above.</p>
11. Vehicle testing (para 31)	<p>It is a good idea for local authorities to have more than one testing centre. It is not surprising that many vehicles fail emissions tests.</p>
12. Security (paras 32-35)	<p>All black cabs have a screen separating driver and passenger. Installation of CCTV in taxis is likely to be an expensive option.</p>
13. Vehicle identification (paras 36-38)	<p>There is still considerable customer confusion concerning the differences between taxis and private hire cars. An identification sign indicating "Pre-booked Hires Only" on private hire cars is now in use and seems a good idea.</p>
14. Environmental considerations (paras 39-40)	<p>We sympathise with the idea of reducing emissions but we really need more efficient use of fuel as it is undesirable to reduce the number of taxi and PHC vehicles.</p>
15. Exemptions from licensing (paras 41-42)	<p>Before an exemption is decided upon, passenger safety needs to be taken into account.</p> <p>Exemption certificates have to be displayed but they need to be tactile and placed in a standard position if a visually impaired person is to know they are there.</p>
16. Special events vehicles (paras 43-53)	<p>Accessibility and passenger safety need to be important considerations.</p>

17. Quantity restrictions of taxis licences (paras 54-60)	SATA's policy is that "every local authority should have at least 50% vehicle fleet accessibility. Restricting the number of licences is likely to benefit vehicles owners but not users.
18. Taxi fares (paras 61-65)	<p>Travel by taxi and PHCs is expensive and many disabled people live on low or fixed incomes. Moreover for many private transport is not available and they need door-to-door transport to get out and about. They therefore rely heavily on community transport (if available) or on taxis and PHC services. In the latter case some fare subsidy through 'taxicard' schemes is essential to make fares affordable. The majority of local authorities in Scotland do not have such schemes and those that still do are cutting back on their scope.</p> <p>SATA's policy is that "every local authority should have a fare concession scheme for disabled people to use taxi and private hire car services.". We would like the Guidance to encourage this. It would also make the investment in accessible vehicles more worthwhile because of greater use.</p> <p>We support the principle of taxi drivers being able to charge less than the maximum permitted fare. The practice of allowing taxi drivers to begin charging as soon as they arrive at their pick up point constitutes indirect discrimination against a wheelchair user or mobility impaired person under the Equality Act 2010. A fully mobile person would be able to enter a taxi without delay. Someone in a wheelchair or with severe mobility impairments may not be able to do so. The driver of a wheelchair accessible taxi has to unload the ramp, help the user into the taxi, secure the wheelchair and user in the taxi and remove the ramp. The entire process may take several minutes and if the meter is switched on results in an additional charge. This means that the charge made for the service is different for a wheelchair user from a fully mobile person. It would be a reasonable adjustment for the meter not to be switched on whilst the taxi driver is helping their customer access the taxi. Taxi drivers are obliged by Section 165 of the Equality Act to give the passenger such mobility assistance as may be reasonably required. In short, the Guidance should state when carrying a passenger in wheelchair or a passenger with mobility impairment, the meter is not started until the journey commences and is stopped upon arrival at the destination.</p>
19. Licensing of booking offices (paras 66-71)	Licensing of booking offices seems a very good idea in principle.
20. Duration of licenses (paras 72-73)	Three years seems a reasonable period.
21. Criminal record checks (paras 74-78)	Safety of passengers [who are often vulnerable individuals] should be the most important consideration.
22. Age limits (para 79)	The Guidance on age limits is acceptable..
23. Diabetes mellitus (paras 80-81)	The DfT advice seems to be appropriate.

24. Driving experience (para 82)	Again, the Guidance is acceptable.
25. Driving proficiency (para 83)	<p>Reference should be made to the GoSkills National Occupational Standards for Drivers of Taxi and Private Hire Vehicles.</p> <p>SATA's policy is that "every local authority should have a driver training scheme for taxi and private hire car drivers". This would include disability awareness and safety procedures. We should like to see the Guidance encourage a standard minimum training requirement for drivers across all authorities.</p> <p>Policies on training for drivers should be published on accessible websites.</p>
26. Guidance training (paras 84-85)	Vocational training should be encouraged.
27. Topographical knowledge (paras 86-87)	This is as important for drivers of private hire cars as it is for taxi drivers. It is not unknown for drivers and their passengers to get lost.
28. Enforcement (paras 88-89)  28. Return of plates (paras 90-92)	<p>No comment.</p> <p>No comment.</p>
29. Flexible services (paras 93-95)  29. Complaints procedures (paras 96-97)	<p>Much more needs to be done to create flexible transport services. Such services should form part of a spectrum of demand - responsive transport services and the Guidance should encourage this. It is important that authorities publish complaints procedures and provide information about them in accessible formats. The Guidance should reinforce this.</p>
30. Local transport strategies (paras 98-100)	<p>There needs to be more publicity about local strategies and plans including those for developing door-to-door DRT services including taxis and private hire cars. The role and functions of Regional Transport Partnerships have been much reduced since the Scottish Government took away their capital budgets and handed the money over to local authorities and it should decide how far they can be active in promoting partnership working.</p>