



IRU Taxi Accessibility Guidelines

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF THE SERVICE BY MAKING TAXIS MORE ACCESSIBLE FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES AND PERSONS WITH REDUCED MOBILITY



IRU GUIDELINES FOR TAXI OPERATORS AND DRIVERS

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The¹ objective of these guidelines is to provide guidance and advice to taxi operators and drivers in order to raise their awareness and help them improve the quality of the services offered to their customers and, in particular to customers with disabilities and customers with reduced mobility, including older persons, pregnant women, parents with small children, schoolchildren etc. These guidelines can also be used for training purposes, by associating with and drawing from the practical experience of disabled people and people with reduced mobility themselves.

Chapter 1: General advice and recommendations to taxi operators and drivers on providing good customer service to persons with disabilities and persons with reduced mobility

Fear of an unsuccessful journey is related to practical problems or embarrassing social situations. Practical problems for passengers with disabilities may include finding the right vehicle or being able to enter and exit the vehicle independently.

It is important to remember that persons with disabilities are passengers, like any other passengers and must therefore be treated with respect and courtesy. However, some persons with disabilities or reduced mobility might have some particular needs that you need to be aware of in order to contribute to a greater customer satisfaction. In addition, some passengers might need some assistance when travelling by taxi, depending on the disability of the individual and the accessibility of the vehicle.

Never make assumptions about your customers. Identifying a customer's impairment does not tell you anything about that person's abilities. Customers with the same impairment often need different types of assistance to travel independently. It is also essential to remember that a person is not disabled because of his or her impairment only, but because of the way in which society is organised.

Disabled people wish to maintain their independence. Offer your help, but do not insist on assisting a passenger with a disability if he or she declines your offer.

1. Communication

- 1.1 Speak directly to passengers with disabilities. Don't address an accompanying person unless directed to do so by the passenger.
- 1.2 Use appropriate language when speaking to a person with a disability. Appropriate language emphasises the person first, not the disability. Do not refer to the person as "handicapped" or a "wheelchair" or a "wheelchair passenger."

¹ These guidelines were developed by the IRU Group "Taxis and Hired Cars with a Driver", based on a selection of, already published materials such as:
Pocket Handbook: ADA Training Program published by Easter Seals Project ACTION and the American Bus Association;
Accessible customer service in public transport by the Finnish Ministry of Transport and Communication (ISBN 9 52-201-297-1);
Guidelines on accessibility to hard of hearing people when travelling by taxi by EFHOH (www.efhoh.org);
Access to taxis, private hire vehicles and private hire cars for guide dog owners (Ref: PPC 07/02), published by The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association (www.guidedogs.org.uk).
In particular, *Pocket Handbook: ADA Training Program* by Easter Seals Project ACTION and the American Bus Association; and *Accessible customer service in public transport* (ISBN 952-201-297-1) by the Finnish Ministry of Transport and Communication were used and quoted extensively in this publication. Throughout the elaboration of these guidelines, advice was sought and actually received from representatives of organizations representing the interests of people with disabilities at international level.

- 1.3 Speak clearly. Try to keep conversations private. Do not shout across the street.
- 1.4 Ask directly what kind of assistance the passenger might need. Asking shows courtesy and respect for the customer's needs and abilities.
- 1.5 Maintain eye level contact. When speaking to a person using a wheelchair, it may be appropriate to sit, in particular for longer conversations.
- 1.6 Sunglasses are a small but important detail. If you are wearing them, the passenger is not able to see your eyes and may even perceive you as threatening. Consider pushing them back on your head, which communicates friendliness and consideration towards the customer.
- 1.7 If you are asked to repeat or write what you said, do so calmly and pleasantly.

2. Behaviour

In order to maximise customer satisfaction of all clients, including passengers with disabilities and passengers with reduced mobility, it is recommended to respect the following advice:

- 2.1 Treat all customers as you would like to be treated.
- 2.2 If the passenger has difficulties or moves slowly, be patient and do not make him or her feel guilty about minor mistakes. If the situation is positive, the passenger can concentrate on his or her actions and mobility without feeling rushed, and eventually the journey will be faster for everybody.
- 2.3 A shy or timid passenger may seem rude. A calm and friendly attitude will make the situation easier. Pay attention to your own gestures and movements.
- 2.4 Smile. Listen. Show respect. Be courteous. Say "please" and "thank you."
- 2.5 Offer help but do not insist. Abide by the customer's wishes.
- 2.6 During the journey, avoid all sudden movements or stops. Careful driving and politeness creates confidence among passengers and also among other drivers on the road.

3. Solving potential problems

- 3.1 Solve problems in a professional manner that shows care and concern.
- 3.2 Handle angry or upset passengers by staying calm.

4. Older persons, pregnant women, parents with small children, schoolchildren

- 4.1 Older persons, pregnant women, parents with small children and schoolchildren typically have several factors that limit mobility and function. In terms of customer service, the same guidelines apply.

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Chapter 2: Offering high-quality service to customers who are blind or partially sighted

Visual disabilities vary widely. One person may have a total loss of vision while another may have difficulty seeing only under certain conditions. Actually, perception depends on both the individual's eyesight and the conditions in the surrounding environment. Older people make up two-thirds of

the partially sighted population. As the overall population grows older, the number of blind or partially sighted individuals is also likely to grow.

1. Recommendations to operators when booking

- 1.1 When vehicles are pre-booked, it is advisable to find out what will be required. This information will help both the driver and the blind or partially sighted customer.
- 1.2 Inform the customer which driver will be collecting him or her and ask the driver to introduce himself to the customer.
- 1.3 Ask the customer booking to confirm that they will be travelling with an assistance dog if they have not already done so.
- 1.4 Tell the driver of the vehicle that he/she will be carrying an assistance dog.

2. General recommendations to drivers

- 2.1 When picking up a blind or partially sighted person from home or other premises, knock on the door, or enter the premises to signal your approach.
- 2.2 Use the customer's name if you know it, or:
- 2.3 Lightly touch the customer's arm as you introduce yourself to show that you are addressing him/her. Don't touch or grab an arm unexpectedly.
- 2.4 Ask the customer what type of assistance is needed and how you can best provide it. Many people can manage on their own and do not wish to be assisted.
- 2.5 If the blind or partially sighted customer asks to be guided to your vehicle, stand by his/her side and offer your arm.
- 2.6 Let the customer take your upper arm near your body; this way, he or she can feel your change in gait as you approach different barriers and prepare for them. Don't take the customer's arm and push him/her along, as it will throw him/her off balance, and never grab the arm that is holding a cane or the assistance dog harness.
- 2.7 Inform the customer about obstacles such as stairs or revolving doors as you lead. Slow down a bit and announce the obstacles before you get there. If you're not sure how to handle an obstacle, ask the person.
- 2.8 On arrival at the vehicle, inform the passenger of the type of vehicle and which direction it is facing. To help the customer sit down, use your guiding arm, reach for the door handle and allow the person you are guiding to slide their hand down your arm and get hold of the handle.
- 2.9 Assist with luggage by bringing it to the customer's seat or storing it. In any case, if you take a person's luggage, make sure he or she knows exactly where you are putting it.
- 2.10 Once inside the vehicle, you should offer to help the customer with the seat belt, and not set off until the passenger is seated and secure.

3. Recommendations to drivers concerning customers with an assistance dog

- 3.1 If the customer has an assistance dog, go to the side opposite the animal, and offer your arm (this will normally be the person's right side). The customer will drop the harness and take the animal's leash. This signals that the dog is to heel, not work.
- 3.2 Never grab a service animal's harness or in any way interact with the assistance dog without the owner's permission. Do not take hold of the dog's lead or harness and, if the

owner tells the dog to do something, do not interfere as this may confuse the assistance dog.

- 3.3 If you have been hired to carry an assistance dog owner, ask the customer where they would prefer their dog to be. In purpose-built taxis, the dog will normally travel in the passenger cabin with the owner. In saloon cars, assistance dogs are normally trained to lie in the front passenger footwell, between the feet of their owner. If it is a modern vehicle, air bags are fitted to both the passenger and driver's side front panel. In such vehicles it is essential that if guide dogs are carried in the front footwell they are lying down at all times. You should let the customer know if that applies. If the front footwell is not large enough to accommodate the dog, the assistance dog owner should be advised to travel in the rear of the vehicle with the dog in the footwell behind the front passenger seat. The front passenger seat should be pushed forward to make space for the dog. In an estate car, if the assistance dog owner is in agreement, the dog may travel in the boot space.
- 3.4 Ensure both the dog and customer are safely in the car before closing the door.

4. Payment

- 4.1 Clearly inform the customer of the fare or meter reading. (A 'talking meter' is recommended.)
- 4.2 When a customer gives you money, say the amount he or she has given you before you put it away.
- 4.3 Place the change directly into his/her hand.
- 4.4 Count the customer's change out loud, as you would for any other customer.
- 4.5 Give the coins first and then the bills, the biggest one first. Most people who are blind or partially sighted fold their bills so they can distinguish the denominations. Identify the denomination of the bills when you give the customer the change, and allow time to fold each bill.

5. While travelling

- 5.1 During the journey, the passenger should be informed about any delays or any deviations from the route that he or she might have expected to take.
- 5.2 When you describe locations, use the words "front", "back", "left" and "right". Always state the directions from the blind or partially sighted person's perspective. When you speak, do not be afraid to use the words "see" and "watch" normally.
- 5.3 Inform the person early of his/her stop. Allow plenty of time for disembarking—depending on the amount of luggage and the person's needs.

6. Upon arrival

- 6.1 Upon arrival at the passenger's destination, inform the passenger of the location, offer to assist the passenger to exit the vehicle and guide him/her to a safe location before leaving.
- 6.2 When giving verbal directions to a customer who is blind or partially sighted, your instructions should be very simple and very specific. Say "turn right," "turn left," or "turn toward the front/back of the car" rather than "over there" or "that way."
- 6.3 Put the person in touch with his/her surroundings. It is better to put the person next to a wall, bench, pillar, or another person rather than to put him/her alone in the middle of a sidewalk or room.
- 6.4 Describe a room or space upon entering: how big the room or space is, who is present, what kind of furniture it has etc.

- 6.5 Finally, tell the person you are leaving, so that he or she will not continue to speak when left alone.

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Chapter 3: Offering high-quality service to deaf or hard of hearing customers

Chances are you won't notice a person who is deaf or hard of hearing unless you see the person using sign language or wearing a hearing aid.

Persons who are born deaf rely primarily on sign language for communication. Their capabilities in other languages vary.

Speech reading helps all hard of hearing persons. It is based on the observation of lip movements and facial gestures. If the hearing loss is mild, speech reading confirms and supports the heard message. The greater the hearing loss, the more important speech reading becomes.

If some kind of monitor is providing information for the passenger while riding, the sound from the monitor should be available in the listening system. Specific attention should also be paid to visual ways of communicating with the telephone service when ordering a taxi: Text-phone, e-mail, SMS etc.

Make sure that important information such as tariffs, payment and other facts about the ride are actually communicated to customers who are deaf or hard of hearing.

- 1.1 Get the person's attention before you start to talk, by gently touching on the shoulder.
- 1.2 Follow the customer's cues to find out if he/she prefers sign language, gesturing, writing, or speaking. If you have trouble understanding the speech of a person who is deaf or hard of hearing, let them know.
- 1.3 If the conversation will last more than a few seconds, move to a quiet place. Don't try to talk in a very noisy environment. The environmental sounds may be amplified for people who are hard of hearing or wear hearing aids.
- 1.4 Position yourself to be seen, facing a light source if possible.
- 1.5 Face the person, make eye contact and make sure that the person sees your mouth.
- 1.6 Use gestures and facial expressions to get your message across.
- 1.7 Don't eat, smoke, chew gum, or hold your hands in front of your mouth when talking. These make it difficult to lip-read. Be aware that a moustache may also obstruct lip-reading.
- 1.8 Let the movements of your lips show, but don't exaggerate.
- 1.9 Many words have the same lip movement. For example, "15" and "50" cannot be distinguished when lip-reading.
- 1.10 Speak clearly and slowly. Speak out loud, but don't shout - shouting distorts both the sound of words and the lip movement.
- 1.11 Be prepared to write it down.
- 1.12 Check for understanding by using common words and short sentences.
- 1.13 Don't assume that a blank expression means that the person understands.
- 1.14 Ask a yes/no question to check understanding.

- 1.15 The person who is deaf or hard of hearing may ask you to repeat what you just said. Be patient.
- 1.16 Rephrase your message when the person doesn't understand, instead of simply repeating it word for word.

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Chapter 4: Offering high-quality service to speech-impaired customers

When a customer has a speech impairment it may render the communication between the driver and the customer more difficult. Below are some recommendations that may facilitate your communication with a speech-impaired customer.

- 1.1 Find out how the person wishes to communicate. Pay attention to his or her attempts to communicate.
- 1.2 Maintain eye contact.
- 1.3 Don't interrupt or finish the customer's sentences. Do not try to guess what he/she is trying to say.
- 1.4 Ask only one thing at a time.
- 1.5 If you have trouble understanding, ask additional questions that can be answered with a "yes" or "no".
- 1.6 If, after trying, you still cannot understand the person, ask him/her to write it down or suggest another way of communicating.

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Chapter 5: Offering high-quality service to customers with reduced mobility

Many persons have reduced mobility to some extent. Some persons might experience difficulties to move, walk, stand, or use the upper body for activities such as eating, drinking, lifting. Parents with small children or passengers with heavy luggage often have similar difficulties.

1. General recommendations

- 1.1 Passengers with reduced mobility may use canes, crutches, walking aids or wheelchairs. Some will not use any assistive devices.
- 1.2 When you assist a passenger, always ask first how you can be of help. Do not touch the cane or crutches, but support the body or offer your arm.
- 1.3 Act only according to the passenger's wishes. Careless assistance may cause severe pain and do more harm than good.
- 1.4 The passenger usually knows best what kind of help is needed. Sometimes the best way to help is to stay out of the way. Even in these situations, it is never wrong to ask if you can help, which is a sign of good customer service skills.

- 1.5 Wheelchairs and other mobility aids are individualised. Do not make assumptions about how they work.
- 1.6 Help with the small but important things, like opening a door, recommending routes and pointing out places to rest.
- 1.7 Bear in mind that it is easier to enter a taxi if the door is as close as possible to the pavement edge.
- 1.8 During the journey, any sudden movements or stops must be avoided.
- 1.9 To prevent falling and slipping, the taxi should stop in a place where the passenger can exit onto a steady surface. For example, it is risky to cross a deep gutter.
- 1.10 If you have to stop at a slippery location, or you notice a puddle of water, remember to warn the passenger before he/she exits.

2. Additional recommendations to taxi drivers on providing good customer service to passengers using wheelchairs

- 2.1 Primary concern is for the occupant, not the seating system.
- 2.2 A wheelchair is part of the customer's personal space. Do not hold onto or lean on the wheelchair or mobility aid without the customer's permission.
- 2.3 Wheelchairs may be manual or electric:
 Manual wheelchairs are light, and it is usually fairly easy to take them apart and reassemble. Most of the passengers who use manual wheelchairs can manage independently. In the vehicle, most of them are able to move themselves to an ordinary seat, and the wheelchair can be stored elsewhere.
 Due to accumulators, electric wheelchairs are large and heavy. Some people need additional equipment, such as respirators. When you move an electric wheelchair, you need to know how to switch it on and off.
- 2.4 When pushing a wheelchair, pay attention to curbs and other obstacles. Steps can be managed by tilting the wheelchair slightly backwards, lifting the front wheels on the step, and pushing the wheelchair over the step. Alternatively, you can turn the wheelchair and pull it backwards over the step, taking advantage of the large back wheels.
- 2.5 In a vehicle, the seat belts need to be fastened in the wheelchair. The brakes of the wheelchair need to be on, and the body of the chair (not the foot or arm rests) has to be fastened into the attaching points provided for this purpose. During the journey, all sudden movements or stops should be avoided.

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Chapter 6: Offering high-quality service to customers with unapparent disabilities

Many types of disabilities are not immediately obvious. You cannot always tell at first glance that a person has a disability and may need assistance. Psychosocial, cognitive, and developmental impairments are examples of disabilities that may not be easily detected.

As a matter of fact, you will sometimes meet passengers that will react in an unexpected way, sometimes because of the disability of that passenger, sometimes because of other factors. It is not necessary to know the reasons for the unexpected behaviour, however it is necessary to apply

the same principles of respect and courtesy as for any other passenger, and to show an understanding and calm attitude towards all passengers.

1. General recommendations

- 1.1 Treat the person as an individual, with respect and dignity.
- 1.2 Most passengers appreciate kindness and consideration. Peaceful and convincing behaviour makes the passenger feel safe.
- 1.3 Do not assume that the person is in danger or is dangerous to others.
- 1.4 Reasonable requests may include:
 - Written or repeated instructions
 - Detailed directions
 - Priority boarding at taxi stops
 - Travelling with a support person or service animal
- 1.5 Respond to passengers in a calm, professional manner.
- 1.6 If you feel that the passenger's behaviour is strange, try to carry on the discussion to find out if the passenger needs help. If the situation seems problematic, indifference may lead to worse consequences.

2. Customers who have epilepsy

Epilepsy is a disorder of the central nervous system that causes seizures, which can be controlled by medication. There are different types of seizures: convulsive and non convulsive.

- 2.1 If a person has a convulsive seizure:
 - 2.1.1 Stop the taxi in a safe place.
 - 2.1.2 Remain calm and follow these steps:
 - Help ease the person onto the floor on his/her back, and place soft material (jacket or sweater) under the head.
 - Loosen clothing around the neck, and gently turn the customer's head to the side.
 - Allow the seizure to run its course. Do not attempt to restrain the person's movements.
 - Do not expect to be able to communicate during the seizure.
 - Do not insert anything into the person's mouth.
 - Stay with the person until they are fully reoriented.
 - Call for medical assistance if the seizure lasts more than five minutes, if seizures occur repeatedly and/or other injuries have occurred.
 - 2.1.3 When the person is coherent, resume your route.
- 2.2 If a person has a non convulsive seizure:
 - If necessary, stop the taxi in a safe place.
 - When the seizure is over, ask the person a few simple questions about themselves or their surroundings.
 - When the person is coherent, resume your route.

3. Customers with cognitive disabilities

Some people have disabilities that affect their ability to know, think, remember, learn and communicate.

- 3.1 Always treat the person as an adult with respect and dignity.
- 3.2 Be direct. Say what you mean. Express your message clearly and in a logical order.
- 3.3. Be specific. Use words that relate to things you can see. Avoid professional vocabulary or dialect.
- 3.4. Refer to landmarks or other visual cues to help the person understand direction. Avoid using directional terms like right, left, East, West. Write or draw if it helps get the information across.
- 3.5. Use body language and gestures that say you're willing to help. Maintain good eye contact. Show how to do something while you tell how to do it.
- 3.6. Use simple, concrete words and short sentences. Be willing to repeat information and break information down into smaller pieces.
- 3.7. Check to see if the person understood you by asking the person what he/she is going to do; use questions that begin with who/what/where.
- 3.8. Be patient and allow the person to take his/her time.
- 3.10. Reasonable requests may include:
 - Written or repeated instructions
 - Detailed directions
 - Priority boarding at taxi stops
 - Travelling with a support person or assistance dog
- 3.11. Respond to passengers in a calm, professional manner.
- 3.12. In the case of Alzheimer's disease, at times people who have this disorder may become agitated, fearful or confused. There are no obvious characteristics indicating that a person may have Alzheimer's disease. Many mildly and moderately disabled individuals appear as alert or physically fit as anyone else their age. The average person with Alzheimer's disease may exhibit some signs that suggest the individual has a memory disability:
 - Failure to exit the taxi or attempt to exit while it is still in motion
 - Repeating requests for directional assistance
 - Wearing inappropriate clothing
 - Appearing intoxicated
- 3.13. Passengers with Alzheimer's disease may travel with a companion or personal care attendant. If you know that the customer has Alzheimer's before the route starts, you should verify that a responsible party will meet him or her at the destination.

Glossary

<u>Avoid using...</u>	<u>Use instead...</u>
The blind	Person who is blind
Visually impaired	Partially sighted
Confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair-bound	Wheelchair user
Crippled	Has a mobility disability, person with tetra/quadruplegia
Lame	
Deaf-dumb, the deaf	Person who is deaf
Hearing impaired	Hard of hearing
Handicapped, invalid	Disabled person
Insane, crazy, psycho, maniac	Has a mental health problem
Retarded, Idiot, "downs"	Has a learning disability or an intellectual disability
Normal, healthy	Able-bodied, non-disabled
Suffers from, afflicted by, victim of...	Has e.g. cerebral palsy/autism/epilepsy...
Dwarf, midget	Person of short stature

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for a better future*



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