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**Access to taxis and private hire vehicles: the experiences of disabled people in Wales**

In April 2017, it became illegal for taxi and private hire vehicle drivers to discriminate against wheelchair users. The change in law meant that drivers could no longer refuse to take wheelchair users or charge them extra for their journeys. It also required drivers to provide appropriate assistance to wheelchair users.

We wanted to know whether this change in law had made a difference to the experiences of disabled people using taxi and private hire vehicles in Wales.

In November 2017 Disability Wales launched an online survey to capture the experiences of disabled people using taxi and private hire vehicles across Wales. We had been made aware of different issues disabled people were experiencing with taxis and private hire vehicles. We wanted to know how wide spread these issues are across Wales.

Over a three month period we received 97 responses to our survey from across Wales. 78 per cent of respondents identified as disabled people. The overwhelming majority, 64 per cent of respondents stated they had experienced problems when using taxi and private hire vehicles.

**The main issues raised**

**Availability**

Disabled people often endure longer waiting times due to a lack of accessible vehicles.

The most common problem reported through the survey was the lack of availability for wheelchair accessible vehicles. Disabled people responding to this survey reported: having to wait hours for pre-booked journeys; being told that accessible taxis are not available during school runs or in the evenings; or standard vehicles being sent instead of the requested accessible vehicle.

*“I called taxi companies in Torfaen - only one said they had an accessible taxi, but when I tried to book it for 6.30 pm, they said they didn't take disabled people out in the evenings!”*

The experience of a son booking a taxi for his father to attend a birthday party.

*“I waited over an hour and called three times and they said the driver couldn't see me. I was stood under a light and by an entrance. I noticed a police van so I went and asked for help. The taxi company soon sent a driver”*

The experience of a disabled person waiting for a pre-booked taxi.

*“You have to give at least 24 hours’ notice and if its school run time for them, you have no chance between 2 and 4 pm.”*

A wheelchair user

**Journeys to school or college**

Parents responding to this survey on behalf of their children noted that drivers had poor attitudes towards children with additional needs. School transfer routines were often changed without notice and without considering the effect it may have on the child. School escorts did not seem to have the required training or knowledge to support children with additional needs.

A number of responses from the Bridgend area in particular raised issues with school transport.

*“Either not turning up, turning up late, forgetting to pick up my child, sending cars that are not clearly Taxis. Rude staff who don’t understand the complexities. Different drivers constantly”*

A parent of a child with autism’s experience of using school transport in Bridgend.

The survey did highlight an example of best practice by one firm in Bridgend “My son has autism, and the original taxi firm were great. They took the time to come to our home and meet my son.”

**Refusing to take disabled passengers**

Disabled people report being repeatedly ignored when hailing taxis or are being refused journeys.

15 per cent of respondents reported being refused a journey due to using a wheelchair or being accompanied by an assistance dog.

***“****Frustration at observing many companies using accessible taxis but being told that they are not available as they don't have willing or trained drivers”*

The experience of a wheelchair user in Torfaen.

*“I had an awful time when a taxi driver drove up and saw my wheelchair and shouted “I'm not taking you, ring for a different one”, I was very upset”*

A wheelchair user regarding a pre-booked journey in Wrexham.

Journey refusal is a regular occurrence for some disabled people with assistance dogs: “Taxi drivers have refused to take me once they see I have a guide dog.”

Another guide dog user said “I was threatened by a driver to get my 'stinking dog' out of the car”

**Issues with clamps and ramps**

Disabled people’s lives are potentially put at risk as drivers refuse to properly secure wheelchairs into their vehicles.

Drivers are refusing to secure wheelchairs by using clamps, claiming that clamps are not needed. This poses a serious safety issue for wheelchair users as they are at risk of their wheelchair tipping when the vehicle is in motion. Respondents also noted that drivers often do not carry or know how to use the ramps and clamps for their vehicles and rely on the wheelchair user to advise them.

*“A lot of drivers do not know how to use ramps correctly or how to use seat belts with wheelchairs. We have walked away from some taxis due to safety fears”*

A wheelchair user’s experience of using taxis and private hire vehicles.

*“I’ve had taxi drivers refuse to secure my chair in properly saying they take someone else in my type of Wheelchair and they don’t need securing so they don’t see why they need to do mine even though I’ve explained if it’s not harnessed securely it will move and slide and may even tip over.”*

A respondent from Swansea.

**Extra charges**

Disabled people requesting accessible taxis are reporting being charged higher fares. Many respondents claimed being charged extra simply because they are disabled. Wheelchair users attributed being charged extra due to requiring an accessible vehicle. “Taxi firms will often use the cost vs usage argument as justification for inflated costs.”

*“I was charged more £5 instead of £4 for a wheelchair accessible vehicle”.*

A wheelchair user from Torfaen

*“I have been given the wrong change because they think I can't see the money so won't notice.”*

A vision impaired respondent

**Attitudes**

Negative experiences using taxi and private hire vehicles are putting many disabled people off using them.

*“Driver assuming a physical impairment means they have a learning difficulty too and not speaking appropriately to the young person.”*

An individual working with young wheelchair users in South Wales reported.

*“Rude staff who don’t understand the complexities” of disability. It was 'not worth his while driving me as he would now have to take time off to clean his car”.*

A mother of a child with autism

*“There is no awareness no training and understanding!”*

The thoughts of a mother of a child with autism.

**Methods to book journeys**

Private hire operators need to increase ways passengers can book a journey, to include text-relay, text messages and digital communication.

*“It regularly took me over 2 hours to book anywhere as the companies I tried were, in their own words, not allowed to answer Text Relay calls”*

A Deaf respondent’s experience of booking a journey

**Conclusion**

Despite the recent changes in law, some taxi and private hire vehicle drivers are still discriminating against disabled people. Stronger action needs to be taken by local authorities, taxi and private hire vehicle companies to ensure that disabled people have equal access to taxi and private hire vehicles.

It is important that local authority licencing departments work with operators to provide Disability Equality Training (DET), designed and delivered by disabled people, to increase understanding and ensure disabled people are treated equally. Disability Wales would like DET to be an essential requirement for obtaining a taxi or private hire vehicle license.

**Summary of issues raised in Local Authority area:**

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| **Blaenau Gwent** | * No accessible vehicles available during evenings and at night |
| **Bridgend** | School transport:   * lack of disability awareness * inconsistency of drivers |
| **Caerphilly** | * Increased fares * guide dog refusal * lack of disability awareness |
| **Carmarthen** | * Lack of accessible vehicles * guide dog refusals |
| **Cardiff** | * Guide dog refusals * lack of accessible vehicles * lack of disability awareness * increased fares clamps not carried in vehicles., drivers insisting claps are not needed * refusal to take wheelchair users * drivers unsure how to use ramps and clamps in their vehicles |
| **Conwy** | * Lack of accessible vehicles * refusal to take wheelchair user |
| **Denbighshire** | * Lack of disability awareness * refusal to secure wheelchairs in the vehicle |
| **Flintshire** | * Lack of disability awareness * Drivers unsure how to use clamps and ramps on vehicles |
| **Monmouthshire** | * Lack of accessible vehicles |
| **Neath Port Talbot** | * Lack of accessible vehicles * Lack of disability awareness |
| **Newport** | * Lack of availability for accessible vehicles * Issues with school transport and poor driver attitudes * Drivers unsure how to use access features on vehicle |
| **Pembrokeshire** | * Lack of accessible vehicles |
| **Powys** | * Lack of accessible vehicles * Drivers refusing to transport wheelchair users * Lack of accessible booking systems for D/deaf and hearing impaired customers |
| **Rhondda Cynon Taf** | Problems with school transport   * lack of disability awareness |
| **Swansea** | * Lack of accessible vehicles * Guide dog refusals * Drivers unsure how to use clamps un vehicles |
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| **Torfaen** | * Lack of accessible vehicles * Drivers unsure how to use ramps in vehicle * No availability at night for accessible vehicles * Booking systems are not accessible for D/deaf and hearing impaired customers |
| **Vale of Glamorgan** | * Lack of accessible vehicles |
| **Wrexham** | * Lack of accessible vehicles * Guide dog refusal |