



Comments from Imtac on proposals for Taxi Driver Test and Periodic Training

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About Imtac

Imtac is a committee of disabled people and older people as well as others including key transport professionals. Our role is to advise Government and others in Northern Ireland on issues that affect the mobility of older people and disabled people.

Our aim is to ensure that older people and disabled people have the same opportunities as everyone else to travel when and where they want.

Imtac receives support from the Department for Regional Development.

General comments

Imtac welcomes the opportunity to comment on the current proposals. The Committee has been a key stakeholder throughout the process of reform of the taxi trade. Our members contributed to the initial review of taxi regulation here and the passage of the Taxis Bill (Act) through the assembly. At every stage of this process Imtac has stressed the importance of training in removing the barriers that making using taxis difficult for disabled people and older people. In responding to the detailed proposals issued by the Department Imtac has highlighted areas where we agree with the approach proposed as well as areas where we feel more measures may be required.

Disabled people and older people still experience unacceptable difficulties accessing taxis ranging from accessing the most suitable type of vehicle, paying more for journeys and unacceptable attitudes of drivers and dispatch staff. Many disabled people in particular are telling us that accessing taxis is getting harder rather than easier. The Committee is frustrated at the slow pace of progress in implementing the changes associated with the Taxis Act. Whilst consultation is a hugely important in developing proposals it is now essential that Department get on with the task of implementing change without further delay.

Specific comments on the proposals

In general Imtac supports the option put forward by the Department to require new drivers to undertake a Driver Test and for this Test to have both theory and practical elements. The Committee supports the proposal requiring all drivers to undertake periodic training.

Imtac broadly welcomes the recognition given in the consultation to the importance of training relating to the needs of disabled passengers. It is essential that all aspects of future testing (including both practical and theory) and training for taxi drivers require drivers to demonstrate a knowledge of how best to meet the needs of disabled customers.

The Committee recognises the specific skills and knowledge required to drive a wheelchair accessible vehicle. Imtac does believe there is merit in specifically testing drivers of these vehicles and does believe there is merit in looking at an approved training scheme for drivers of these vehicles.

However many other disabled people and older people do not use wheelchair accessible vehicles for whom the attitudes and knowledge of drivers is equally important. For example many people with a visual impairment may not require physical assistance to get in and out of vehicles but may require assistance locating their final destination. Imtac believe that drivers of saloon type vehicles also need to demonstrate that they have a range of necessary skills and knowledge. The Committee would therefore recommend that approved training through a practical test be required for both drivers of WAVs and saloon vehicles with the training required tailored depending on the vehicle used.

Imtac supports the proposal that all drivers be required to undertake 21 hours training every three years. The Committee strongly recommends that training relating to the needs of disabled customers be a mandatory requirement of any periodic training. The Committee agrees that any training should not be restricted to the assistance of wheelchair users and WAV's but should encompass issues important for the broad range of disabled people, using both WAV and saloon vehicles.

The Committee is content for training to be delivered either by DVA or for a DVA approved training course to be delivered by an external body. However Imtac does recommend that the Department involve disabled people in the development of any training course relating to disabled people and include incentives under any approval arrangements that favour the involvement of disabled people in the delivery of such training.

It is essential that training developed in comprehensive and addresses issues for all disabled people. The Committee acknowledges that the current consultation gives only a broad outline of proposals and cannot

give the level of detail sought by many disabled people. However it is a concern to Imtac that for example people with a learning disability are not mentioned in the document. The Committee believes this omission reinforces the need to work with Imtac and others in developing detailed proposals which are comprehensive and fully inclusive.

Imtac supports other proposals in the consultation not specifically related to disabled people or older people but linked to broader issues of customer care and passenger safety. These include support for Departments suggested approach to questions 9,10,11 and 12 in the consultation covering issues such as assessing an ability to drive in a smooth manner. The Committee all passengers will benefit from these proposals not just disabled people and older people.

The Committee also supports the proposal in question 14 to require drivers whose licence has expired either to undertake the Driver Test or to complete three days training before receiving a new licence. In the opinion of the Committee this requirement should come in if drivers are out of the industry for more than 12 months.

Conclusion

Imtac would like to thank the Department for the opportunity to comment on the proposals relating to taxi drivers and training. Whilst Imtac broadly supports the approach taken by the Department and welcomes the recognition given to the importance of training relating to the needs of disabled customers, significant work is needed to develop detail around these issues. The Committee would welcome the opportunity to work with the Department in developing detailed proposals.