

Summary of views

The use of rear loading wheelchair accessible vehicles as licensed vehicles has been the subject of much debate and to date there is no consensus of opinion.

Some information relating to both sides of the debate is set out below:-

- Department for Transport Guidance issued on February 2010 includes “best practice is for local Licensing Authorities to adopt the principle of specifying as many different types of vehicle as possible and might usefully set down a range of general criteria leaving it open to the trade to put forward vehicles of their own choice so there can be flexibility for new vehicle types to be readily taken into account”. It goes on “Licensing Authorities should give very careful consideration to a Policy which automatically rules out particular types of vehicle.....”
- Several authoritative national organisations such as RADAR, SCOPE, Disabled Person’s Transport Advisory Committee and other bodies concerned with road safety, have had policies advising against rear loading wheelchair taxis being used as taxis. Their main concerns revolve around wheelchair users being in the road when entering and leaving the vehicle, drivers not being confident in assisting the wheelchair user on/off the kerb, and passengers being seated in the ‘crumple zone’ near the back of the vehicle. They highlight other practical problems such as rear-loading vehicles blocking already scarce rank space, and lack of alternative exits for wheelchair users in the event of an accident.
- Promoters of rear-loading wheelchair taxis point out that thousands of disabled people; special schools/charities have rear-loading vehicles often bought by individual wheelchair users on the Motability Scheme. It is claimed that entering and leaving the vehicle is quicker than with a side loading vehicle and easier for the driver, especially when the vehicle is fitted with a lift or a winch to pull the wheelchair into the vehicle. They submit that, if the vehicle was unsafe they would not be permitted to be on the road and would not meet the relevant safety standards. It should be noted that the medical services make considerable use of such rear-loading vehicles.
- The Department for Transport in its guidance document “Ergonomic Requirements for Accessible Taxis” states “There are advantages and disadvantages associated with wheelchair access from the side and rear of a vehicle. Side access does not require wheelchairs to negotiate a kerb or enter the carriageway and enables shallower ramp angles from the pavement. Rear access may be the most practicable means of access in non-urban environments. It may also enable

simpler manoeuvres to a secure travelling position inside the vehicle, but may not be possible from a taxi rank or kerbside”.

- Because rear-loading vehicles tend to be cheaper to purchase, and to run, than side loading vehicles, it could be argued that the standard of the fleet could improve as Proprietors would be able to afford newer vehicles.
- Side-loading vehicles meet with the requirements for people using a ‘reference wheelchair’, However, people who use heavy or powered wheelchairs, or people who need a significant amount of ‘headroom’, can find side-loading wheelchair taxis difficult or impossible to enter. Rear-loading vehicles are understood to be more likely to be able to accommodate them.
- All passengers should either face **forward** or backwards out never sideways. With side loading vehicles the wheelchair user has to enter the vehicle and then do a ninety degree turn. Some people need assistance from the driver in order to achieve this turn and it can turn out to be an awkward manoeuvre for passenger and driver alike.
- There could be concerns that because rear-loading vehicles are cheaper than side loading vehicles over the passage of time the entire fleet may become rear-loading. Due to the fact that these vehicles can only accommodate four passengers, many drivers may prefer the option to carry more passengers and in doing can command a higher fare.
- At present some adjacent local authorities have licensed rear loading vehicles and these include Bracknell Forest, the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, West Berkshire, Wokingham and Runnymede.