

Disabled Travellers' Experiences of Taxi and Private Hire Services in London

Focus groups debrief

November 2016

Transport for London

Summary General observations

- Access to taxi or private hire services is very important for disabled people. They can be seen as something of a lifeline.
- Disabled travellers can have an increased sense of vulnerability.
- Disabled travellers do not expect to be discriminated against in any way due to their disability.
- Some of the difficulties disabled people face on public transport are specifically linked to their disability.
 - Difficulties that all public transport passengers experience, such as not being dropped off close to their destination, are often a bigger issue for disabled travellers because of their disability.
- Guide dog owners had particular problems with some drivers refusing to take dogs.
 - More of an issue with private hire, but not exclusively so.
- While most happy with paying by cash (mainly out of habit) some would like to pay by card but do not do so because of a surcharge (actual or potential).
 - Contactless card particularly attractive option for Visually Impaired Persons (VIPs).
- A 'green' (non diesel) vehicle was described as part of the 'ideal' taxi or private hire experience.

Summary Value of taxi and private hire services

- Taxis generally seen as superior to private hire.
 - Key differentiator is 'The Knowledge' – some acknowledgement that this is reducing in importance.
- Taxi drivers are generally seen as more professional than private hire vehicle drivers.
 - Drivers do vary considerably though, irrespective of type of whether they are taxi or private hire.
- Taxis also tend to be more suited to disabled travellers' needs.
 - Easier to get in and out of.
 - Newer, larger cabs particularly praised.
- But most people have a local trusted minicab company they are happy to use.
 - Also, Addison Lee recognised by some as superior to regular minicab companies.

Summary Value of taxi and private hire services, continued

- There was a call for more regulation of private hire with minimum service standards required.
- Taxis considered more expensive than private hire – and don't know cost in advance.
- Taxicard scheme makes use of taxis possible, though inconsistently applied across the boroughs.
- Uber praised (by one traveller) for cost, reliability, and the fact that the fare is known in advance.

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Research objectives

- To discuss with disabled people their current experience of using both taxis and private hire vehicles in London.
 - What works well and what does not?
 - What are the major issues disabled travellers face?
 - How could the experience of disabled travellers be improved?
- To explore a typical 'cab' journey from start to finish.
- To explore the differences between the different providers.
 - Taxis
 - Private hire
 - To explore use of the Taxicard and Capital Call schemes by disabled people.
- To explore (briefly) disabled people's experience of other modes of transport in London.
 - The Tube
 - The bus

Method and sample

- Two qualitative research groups - 1 hour 45 minutes each.
- One group at Steer Davies Gleave office, near Waterloo, and one group at Research House, Wimbledon SW19.
- Group One, six respondents
 - One man VIP (visually impaired person) with a guide dog
 - One woman with osteoarthritis with a walking frame
 - One woman with osteoarthritis
 - One man with partial sight and heart problems
 - One woman with osteoarthritis and acromegaly
 - One man with Coronary Artery Ectasia
- Group Two, five respondents
 - One man VIP
 - One blind man with a guide dog
 - One woman with MS in a wheelchair
 - One elderly man with no specific disabilities – had had a bad back in the past
 - One elderly woman with no specific disabilities – had suffered from dizziness in the past

General findings

Contextual observations

- Most of the people in this sample had suffered their disability later in life.
- Suffering from a disability is a big change and can leave people with an increased sense of vulnerability.
- There can be frustration with the restrictions their disability places on them but there is a desire not to be discriminated against in any way due to their disability.
- There seemed to be some dissatisfaction with the fact that developments in services for disabled people do not always keep pace with developments in services for the non-disabled.
- In this sample there was only one person who seemed both interested in technology and savvy about technology, and a couple of people who were interested in technology.

Travel in London for disabled people

- There was a general recognition that those planning public transport services try to take account of the needs of disabled people – public transport was on the whole ‘good’.
- Despite this, there are some irritations and annoyances disabled people experience with all modes of transport in London.
- Some difficulties and irritations are specifically linked to their disability.
- They can also vary by disability – not all face the same problems.
- And other irritations are ones able bodied people are just as likely to have – they are not linked to disability at all, but due to disabled people’s increased feeling of vulnerability, these unlinked irritations can be accentuated or exacerbated.

Travelling by Tube - positives

- Some find the Tube experience in relation to disability very good.
 - Staff are alert and helpful – will take blind passengers to the platform.
 - Passengers can be considerate – will offer seats to those with obvious mobility issues.
 - Station access has improved and is still improving (more lifts etc.).
 - You know you are going to end up at a very specific destination – you won't be dropped off somewhere unexpected as can happen with both taxis and buses.
 - However, the experience varies with the type of disability – the more visible your disability issue the more likely you are to be helped.
- *I find that the tube is absolutely first class. People do look after me very well on the tube.*
 - *I find the Underground fine. Certainly you can ask for assistance if you are at a station that you are not familiar with.*
 - *It seems for some reason people behave more kindly to me on the Tube rather than on the bus.*

Travelling by Tube - negatives

- Some disabled people have issues / difficulties using the Tube and try to avoid using it as a result.
 - There can be a feeling that you have to plan a trip on the Tube more than for other services – check that the station is accessible and that staff will be there to help you.
 - The general environment can be unsympathetic.
 - Very crowded, people hurrying and pushing, becoming irritated with those who hold them up, limited space.
- *I plan my journeys so I don't have to use the Tube but I don't avoid using it.*
 - *I much prefer to spend three times as long going by bus as it is more comfortable [than the Tube].*
 - *I won't use the Tube because I go very slow and people get very impatient and then you feel bad, so the bus is better.*

Travelling by Tube - negatives

- For those with mobility and sight issues this can be difficult.
 - Can feel vulnerable, even get physically hurt (one woman was bruised after being pushed into a wall by the crowd).
 - Can also feel like a nuisance – delaying people, a bit of a burden.
 - Fellow passengers can be inconsiderate – don't think or care.
 - Do not offer seats to those less able to stand, even those seats which are designated for that purpose.
 - There can be uncertainty as to whether a station is accessible or not, and further uncertainty as to whether accessible services are working.
 - No lifts or lifts broken. Disabled travellers can be faced with stairs they cannot use.
 - Only escalators available which some guide dogs won't use.
- *Not all guide dogs will go down an escalator [if there is not step free access at the station].*
 - *The crowds did put me off the Tube. I was going to Covent Garden and I was shoved into a wall by people. I was going slower and it was like 'get out of my way'.*

Travelling by Tube – negatives

- There can be difficulties with the station platforms and trains.
 - Gaps vary between the platform and the train and some can seem very wide – can be a worry.
 - Need to step up on to some Tube trains – again can be difficult.
 - Sometimes Tube staff do not or cannot help in a timely fashion.
 - May have to wait to be escorted to the platform by a member of staff. For a VIP especially this can leave them feeling vulnerable.
 - Other issues are ones non-disabled people may also experience.
 - The Tube can feel threatening at night.
 - Aesthetically it can feel intimidating – dark, limited space.
- *If we can enter the station I then need someone to assist me to the platform and on to the tube, and then find a seat for myself and Rufus.*
 - *Sitting on a tube late at night it can be quite threatening.*

Travelling by bus - positives

- While experiences of the bus can vary, the general view was positive, with the bus being preferred to the Tube.
 - The bus can feel like an easy and pleasant experience for some.
 - There are physical aids for disabled people to make it easier to use the bus.
 - The platform can be lowered or raised to facilitate getting on and off.
 - There is a designated spot for wheelchair users.
 - There are designated seats for disabled people.
 - The driver is visible and contactable in case of concerns.
 - The environment can feel pleasant – light and bright.
- *The reason for [using] the buses is because of the assistance that is required on the trains or the Tubes.*
 - *I prefer to use the bus rather than the tube, as I like to see where I am going.*
 - *Buses are fine when you know the route and know where you are going to get out.*

Travelling by bus - negatives

- However some disabled travellers do have issues and difficulties using the bus.
 - Drivers seeming lack of awareness of the needs of disabled people can cause problems.
 - Buses queue up one behind the other at busy bus stops and the bus at the back drives off before disabled travellers can reach it.
 - Drivers are not aware what the back door is opening on to if they do not stop exactly at the bus stop – the front door opening may be clear but the back door may open on to a tree or waste bin. This is especially problematic for a VIP.
 - Other drivers' attitudes towards the bus can cause problems: buses might be prevented from pulling into the kerb because other drivers are blocking the access to the bus stop space.
 - Can make it hard for those with mobility or sight problems to get on the bus or can cause them inconvenience (a VIP can end up in a puddle).
- *The drivers do not seem to recognise that the front door may be at the bus stop but that the back door is directly in front of a tree and that is difficult for me.*
 - *When I have a problem with buses is when you get two or three buses using the same stop.*
 - *Very frequently the bus is not stopped where I expect it to stop and it is some way off from the kerb and not infrequently I find myself standing in a puddle.*

Travelling by bus – negatives

- Fellow passengers' attitudes can also cause problems.
 - Lack of queuing at bus stops.
 - Rush towards the bus if it does not stop right outside the bus stop leaving those with mobility and sight problems behind.
 - Audio aids on the bus do not always work.
 - Destination announcements not working or switched off – can make it hard for a VIP to know where they are.
- *If you get around a bus stop these days no one queues anymore and it is all a bit of a scrum and I hate that - being in a scrum - I find that very difficult.*

Other issues

- One VIP brought up the issue of streetscapes in relation to pavements.
 - He felt there was some confusion on tactile pavements with the pavements outside Tubes not using the same signals as those near kerbs.
 - What he felt was needed was more consistency in this area.

- ***Could I respectfully ask TfL to sort out tactile pavements? We need more consistency here [a VIP].***

Taxi and private hire experience

General observations

- Taxi and private hire services are a lifeline for disabled people – they provide an ability to get out and socialise.
 - Taxis and private hire services are especially important for going to and returning from new places – can feel safer than on other public transport.
 - They are also important for getting to regular health appointments, which those with disabilities are more likely to have to do.
 - As such, schemes like Taxicard, which give disabled people cheaper access to taxis, are generally considered ‘vital’, ‘great’, by users, despite some operational faults.
 - In these groups there was more confidence expressed in the standards and professionalism of taxi drivers versus private hire.
 - But there was also some acknowledgment that drivers of any vehicle can be good, bad or indifferent – they are all individuals.
- *Very often I find myself going to various parts of London quite a long way out and I’m there late at night not knowing bus routes and so on. And that is when I use taxis, and I prefer black cabs. I know they are more expensive but I use my Taxicard and I know that I am in the hands of someone I trust.*

General observations

- There are specific issues with taxis and private hire that came up that are disability related, but these can vary by disability and solutions may differ too.
 - VIPs can prefer to step up to get into a taxi; those with osteoarthritis may prefer to have a lower step to get in.
 - Wheelchair users may need to have a lot of space in a taxi; but others do not need a lot of space.
 - Guide dogs can be a particular issue when using taxi and private hire services – with some drivers (especially private hire) either refusing or trying to avoid taking dogs.
 - Being dropped off some way away from where you want to be was also a big issue for those with mobility and sight disabilities (mainly an issue with private hire).
 - Some issues that disabled people felt strongly about were not especially related to their disability.
 - Private hire drivers asking the passenger for directions.
 - Taxi drivers not wanting to go south of the river.
- *Because I am a guide dog owner unfortunately I find a lot of resistance whether it is black cabs or minicabs.*
 - *The minicabs do not always seem to try to drop you where you want to be dropped whereas the black cabs do.*

General observations

- General problems travellers experience are often accentuated for those with disabilities
 - Being asked for directions when blind can be very difficult and places an often unwelcome focus on the disability.
- The key general things disabled people wanted from taxis were:
 - Access – having the same access as the non-disabled to all taxis.
 - All taxis appropriately fitted out to cater for all disabilities; not having to wait for taxis longer than anyone else.
 - Certainty – that taxis will turn up on time and be able to cater for the disabled person - can get in and out; will take guide dogs etc.
 - Friendly and approachable drivers who are willing to help and ideally have had disability training.
 - Drivers who can speak English and know the way, and who will drop you off directly outside where you want to go.

- *I want the minicab drivers to have a basic knowledge of English so they can understand what I am saying and I don't care if that is not politically correct.*
- *I should not have to wait any longer than anyone else!*

Reasons for using a taxi or private hire vehicle

- Ease and safety were the main reasons given for use of taxi and private hire services:
 - Quickest and most convenient way of travelling - can go from A to B directly.
 - Avoid having to interact with the general public who can be unpredictable in their attitudes and behaviour.
 - Most controllable way of going to a new / unfamiliar location – less risk of getting lost.
- In terms of choice between taxi or private hire:
 - Most preferred to book taxis if possible as it was felt that they would offer the best vehicle, driver and journey experience.
 - But most had a fall-back private hire company they trusted which they used for either cost or convenience reasons.
 - Addison Lee was seen as offering a service equivalent to the taxi experience.
 - The one Uber user preferred Uber to any other offer.

- *They drop you right down outside the door and pick you up there so it is ease and convenience.*
- *It was easier to have a cab booked for the return as I had had a couple of beers.*

Booking a taxi or private hire vehicle

- In these groups most were using the phone – familiar, direct, personal – but a couple did use online booking systems too.
 - For important appointments (mainly health related) most were booking a taxi well in advance – some doing so the day before.
 - For more spontaneous needs most were happy to book and wait up to half an hour for a vehicle; the Uber user felt he could always get a minicab to come within minutes.
 - There was some irritation with ComCab that no matter how far in advance you book it was thought that they will only start looking for a taxi thirty minutes before it is needed.
 - Some irritation also that the company must be notified about a disability and what additional needs they have as a result, e.g. have a guide dog or will need help entering the vehicle.
- *The problem with ComCab is you have to give them a one hour window.*
 - *I go to Barts and it is a nightmare to park there. So I always get the ComCab – it picks me up and straight there – no hassle at all.*
 - *For me there is not a major distinction in the booking process as I have to say I have a guide dog and it is almost like a barrier goes up! But to be fair to the black cabs that is less of an issue than with the minicabs but it happens with both.*
 - *Where I live you can't get a cab without booking and to get a black cab very difficult to come out.*

Vehicles

- Taxis were felt to be well equipped to cater for all disability needs - platforms to aid getting in and out of the vehicle.
 - Wheelchair users found the newer, bigger taxis even better as they could swing around in them and face the front.
 - Private hire vehicles were much more varied in terms of age, cleanliness, and ease of getting in and out of.
- *With the minicabs I struggle to get into them. With my walker (frame) they are expecting me to lift it up and you actually have to ask them to put it into the back for you. With black cabs you don't have to ask anything, they are wonderful.*
 - *There is another reason I don't use private hire because I cannot physically get in and out of their cars.*
 - *I love the big ones they have. The Mercedes. They are very spacious and my walking frame goes perfectly in it.*

Drivers

- Drivers could be good or bad, have a helpful attitude or not, regardless of whether a taxi or a private hire vehicle driver.
 - But most felt that taxi drivers were likely to be more professional – have a better attitude, more helpful – plus, importantly, more likely to know where they were going.
 - Not being dropped off directly outside destinations was a difficulty many seemed to face, particularly when using private hire.
- *Every one of them [drivers] is a different person with a different personality.*
 - *I have a lot of friends who can't get into minicabs because they won't take any dogs because of the religious sides of it and they won't take dogs full stop whereas with the black cabs there isn't a problem.*

Fares

- Most would like to know a cost for their journeys before they get into the taxi or private hire vehicle. Private hire were seen to be better than taxis for this.
 - It was felt ComCab should perhaps be able to confirm or indicate the fare in advance, but at present it does not.
 - Those making regular journeys knew what the cost should be anyway.
 - Taxis are seen as costly but their use is made possible by the use of Taxicard scheme.
 - The one Uber user felt that using Uber was an advantage as the app told you before you got in what the cost of the journey would be (as well as it being cheaper).
- *I have tried to ask if they could give me a rough estimate - they say that is for the driver to say. So if I could say that there is a failing that is probably it as you are not in a position to tell you exactly or even approximately what your outlay is going to be. That is for both private hire and black cabs.*
 - *Well with Uber you always know at the start.*

Payment

- Most paid in cash or by Taxicard – tradition, habit and easy to top up with small amounts if using the Taxicard swipes.
 - A number (particularly VIPs) would be worried about paying by card for security reasons – they did not feel comfortable giving out their card details.
 - Others were unsure if there might be a surcharge for paying by card, which they would be unhappy to pay.
 - However the Uber user liked the way it was billed to an account.
 - And some VIPs would appreciate the option of paying by contactless card – it would provide greater certainty that they were paying the right amount.
- *[I usually pay...] Cash as it happens but I would prefer to pay by card as otherwise you have to run around with a lot of money.*
 - *Yes [paid by cash]. It is habit and I noticed on some cabs that there is an extra charge for using a card of three or five percent and I begrudge it.*
 - *I paid cash. I always do. It is easier. I would pay by card if I didn't have to pay extra as I similarly begrudge paying the extra three percent or whatever.*

Tips

- Tipping is very much an individual decision – whether to tip, what for, and how much.
 - Some always tipped, some tipped sometimes, some never tipped.
 - Some tipped a little, some by a certain percentage which could be a lot.
 - Some regarded it as a tradition, others only if good service had been offered.
 - There was some feeling that a tip, especially for taxi drivers, might be expected, but at the same time they did not feel that you had to tip.
 - However some liked the idea that in some countries no tips are expected – Switzerland was quoted here.
- *I am not a generous tipper but I do tend to tip taxis and waiters in restaurants.*
 - *I find tipping anywhere really demeaning as people are doing a job and they should do it well and be properly paid for it.*
 - *It depends on if the driver has been helpful. If he is I give him a tip. If not they do not get a tip.*

Taxicard and Capital Call

- A number of people at the groups were using the Taxicard scheme.
 - It was generally thought to be an excellent scheme, allowing people to get to hospital appointments and out into the community in an easy and safe way.
 - There was some complaint about the limitations of the scheme.
 - Has to be used relatively sparingly as number of rides is limited and it often takes two swipes to cover one trip.
 - The amount of free rides varied by borough for seemingly no reason.
 - Some boroughs allowed rollovers from year to year; others did not.
- *It [Taxicard] is wonderful because Dial A Ride do not take you to hospitals and I am forever going to hospitals but I only get a certain amount and then I have to manage how to use them so that is a problem.*
 - *I have a Taxicard and Capital Call but one has to be sparing about them because one only has seventy odd journeys and if you use two at a time that is only thirty five trips which is less than one a week.*
 - *Well I find that it depends on the borough that you live in. Some boroughs are far more generous than others in the amount of journeys they allow.*

Taxicard and Capital Call

- There was also some criticism of the booking system.
 - Have to give an hour's notice so allows less spontaneity non-disabled people have.
 - But equally advance booking makes no difference as they only start looking for a taxi or private hire vehicle 30 minutes before you want one.
 - It can be difficult to use the Taxicard system without booking. Many taxis do not seem to be on the scheme so refuse to pick up.
 - There was also some feeling from one VIP that:
 - Controllers do not always pass on to drivers that a guide dog is being picked up.
 - Drivers can avoid taking guide dogs by saying they had not been told about them even if they had – and that they would still get some pay because of being on the scheme.
 - Only one person used Capital Call – he thought it was a good scheme for outer boroughs where taxis were more scarce.
- *It [Taxicard] doesn't work very well in my area. I know people in my flats who use it and the cabs just don't turn up.*
 - *But with the Taxicard I can book twenty-four hours beforehand but they will not start looking for a cab for me until twenty minutes or half an hour beforehand... That is a major issue.*
 - *I booked a cab and when I got the harness for the dog the guy freaked and we spent 10 minutes with him saying he could not take me because I have got the dog, and yet I had specifically said to ComCab I am travelling with my guide dog.*

Travelling by taxi - positives

- For most people in these groups taxis were in general much preferred to private hire vehicles.
- It was felt that the investment taxi drivers had made in doing The Knowledge meant that they were more professional and dedicated to giving a good service to clients.
- Also it was felt the taxi vehicles were of a consistent standard and one that catered for all types of disabilities.
 - Taxis have handles and a platform to make getting in and out easier.
 - The new taxi minivans even allow wheelchair users enough space to spin around to face the direction of travel.
- This consistency means that for some they do not necessarily have to say that they are disabled when booking as the vehicle that will turn up will be suitable for them anyway.

- ***Given the choice I would use the black cabs but as I say with the fare structuring I find them terribly expensive.***

Travelling by taxi – positives

- The fact the drivers had done The Knowledge also counted for a lot for some people.
 - They know where they are going and do not have to ask passengers.
 - They know routes around problems and shortcuts.
- Taxis were felt to be strictly regulated so standards were likely to be higher and adhered to. Most knew about the Public Carriage Office regulating taxis.
- All this can make people, especially some women, feel safer and more confident about using taxis than private hire.

- *There is a massive difference. The Knowledge for a start. You don't have to explain to black cabs. They just know where they are going. With minicabs there are ongoing problems with this.*
- *If there was a black cab outside I might take that because with a black cab they are fully trained and licensed.*

Travelling by taxi – negatives

- A major reason for not using taxis is the cost – they can be seen to be very expensive especially if one is not using Taxicard.
 - The cost is not set so it is unknown at the beginning of the journey - traffic etc. can add to the final cost.
 - Some feel that taxi drivers do not always go the shortest route and there is little to control them doing what they want to.
 - Some individual drivers are not particularly helpful.
 - One VIP had never been offered a platform to get in.
 - Guide dogs can still be an issue for some drivers.
 - Wheelchair users have to face sideways unless they slide into a seat which can be irritating.
 - Still a feeling that taxis do not like to go south of the river.
- *The black cabs are very expensive. And they have an attitude – ‘we are the only cab drivers’.*
 - *I am reluctant to use a black cab because of the issues that have been mentioned re cost.*
 - *It can be challenging because as a guide dog owner I have to say I am travelling with a guide dog and there are a number of taxi drivers whether minicabs or black cabs who do not like the idea of having a dog sitting in their vehicle.*

Travelling by private hire – positives

- Private hire firms tended to be cheaper than taxis.
 - They normally quote a fixed price for going from A to B which gives cost certainty.
 - Some private hire companies offer a very good service – most of the respondents had a trusted firm they used regularly where drivers were helpful and courteous.
 - Some knew the controllers and valued the personal recognition they got when they phoned up to book.
 - Addison Lee were seen to offer a service akin to a taxi service with spacious cars and well trained drivers – but were perceived to be very costly.
- *I use minicabs. I feel the black cabs are too expensive.*
 - *I have my own reliable minicab service that I know. I stick to that firm as they know what they are doing.*
 - *If I cannot get a black cab then I have a particularly company that I am familiar with and they know me and they are very, very helpful.*
 - *I would have a sub category of minicabs. I would take Addison Lee out of minicabs because I think that they are responsible people in my experience.*
 - *I have used them a couple of times and that is my experience too. I would not class them as minicabs in that sense at all*

Travelling by private hire – negatives

- Private hire firms are much more varied in the service they offer versus taxis – some are not seen to offer a good service at all.
 - There is a feeling that anyone can be a private hire driver, that regulation is much weaker than for taxi drivers, and as a consequence standards are much lower in general.
 - A number of irritations are not specifically linked to disability:
 - When booking promises can be made about arrival times that are not honoured.
 - Cars can be old, less clean, less comfortable, less well maintained, can smell of takeaway food.
 - Drivers do not always speak good English.
 - Drivers do not know their way around London so end up asking passengers for directions, or relying on Sat Navs which can be inaccurate or take a longer route to a destination.
 - Drivers may drive recklessly.
- *I have never had a problem with black cab driver attitudes but with minicabs – and I have just had to make a formal complaint against a minicab driver - the man was totally sexist!*
 - *As a woman I would be nervous travelling in minicabs.*
 - *My problem is sometimes they do not speak English, or they do not like to be spoken to by a woman.*
 - *The minicabs do not always seem to try to drop you where you want to be dropped whereas the black cabs do.*

Travelling by private hire – negatives

- But other concerns and irritants are specifically connected to disability issues:
 - Unlike with ComCab you do have to tell the controller about your disability needs in order to obtain the correct vehicle.
 - When they arrive drivers may not offer to help those with mobility problems.
 - They may not want to take guide dogs for religious or cultural reasons or simply because they think the dogs will dirty their cars.
 - Older cars can have lower, softer seats which can be hard for those with mobility problems to get in and out of.
 - Drivers may push their own seats back quite far making getting in and out even harder.
 - When dropping passengers off they may not stop directly outside the destination (a common irritation which can be a problem for those with mobility problems).
 - The driver may simply not want to be bothered – not thinking of the disabled persons needs.
- *My only problems are with private hire firms who are reluctant to take the dog.*
- *I think without being racist some minicab firms use a lot of Asian drivers and they are not very happy about the dogs, they are apprehensive.*
- *They turn up with a clapped out old heap of a car.*
- *They say they will turn up and don't.*
- *The biggest problem with the minicabs is some of them will refuse to drop me where I want to go as they think they will get a ticket.*

Using apps

- Only one person in these two groups had used Uber and he was also the only person to have used a taxi app.
- He found Uber to be excellent:
 - Could book and get a vehicle within minutes.
 - Knew the set cost before he started the journey.
 - No exchange of cash – all done on a card registered at Uber.
 - Found the drivers to be very friendly.
- But this person was one of the more mobile people in the groups and the most interested in technology.
- Some of the VIPs felt they were not able to use services like Uber yet as they could not access the sites or apps because:
 - Uber had not developed software on their own site for VIPs.
 - There is only limited software available more generally to help those with sight issues with access.

- *We tend to use Uber - to throw a dirty word into the mix. Because I know if I ring them and the guy says 'ok, four minutes', in four minutes he is going to be outside the door and he is going to be cheaper than anyone else too.*
- *The Knowledge today means absolutely nothing. I have been in a black cab where they do not know where to go... Whereas with a Uber he already knows where you are going and in fact he has already put it in the little piece of magic he has on his screen (phone) just like I have and the car takes you there – no problems.*

Using apps

- Others had not used Uber because they:
 - Were somewhat uncertain about what this new type of service involved.
 - Were not technologically minded so felt they could not access it, or access it easily.
 - Did not have mobile phones that supported apps.
 - Felt their needs were being already met by what was already on offer from taxis and private hire.
- Others had more concrete objections:
 - Did not like the fact Uber were undermining taxis.
 - Did not like what they understood about Uber's tax arrangements.

- *So how many of these companies make these apps accessible [for a VIP]?*
- *I would not use them on principle as they are undermining the black cabs and they do not have The Knowledge that black cab users have.*
- *I have heard about them and read about them and I know that Boris is against them.*

Complaints process and regulation

- A few had had cause to complain about the service they received from private hire and taxi drivers, regarding:
 - A refusal to take a guide dog.
 - Someone trying to charge more to take a guide dog.
 - A minicab driver threatening to drop a person with mobility issues a long way from her destination after an argument between the two.
- The complaints led to mixed success.
- Most felt they would know what to do if they wanted to complain:
 - For taxis complain to the Public Carriage Office.
 - For private hire complain initially to the controller of the firm and if no satisfaction then complain to the Council.
- If they did not know what to do to complain they would look it up online.

- *I have complained to ComCab about their service, about them not passing on the information to the drivers about who they are going to pick up (a VIP with a dog).*
- *Waste of time [complaining to TfL].*

Complaints process and regulation

- There was mixed awareness that TfL was involved in regulating both taxis and private hire vehicles.
- However even though they now knew TfL was the regulator they felt it would be unlikely that they would complain to TfL about taxis, because:
 - They associate TfL with the buses and the Tube.
 - Their experience of complaining about these other modes of transport did not engender confidence that anything would be done if they complained about a taxi experience.
 - Most felt they would be told to write in and then nothing would happen – maybe because TfL is so big with multiple responsibilities.
- One person thought that the Public Carriage Office was part of TfL anyway so a complaint to them was a complaint to TfL.

- *I would like to see a charter re minimum standards in minicabs.*
- *I know that TfL are responsible for the black cabs but I am not so sure what their responsibility is for minicabs. I have to say that I think of TfL as for buses and trains and tubes rather than for taxis.*
- *Yes I think them about as more for buses and trains than taxis.*

The ideal experience

Ways to book:

- A wide variety of ways to book should be offered.
- Most still like to use a landline or mobile phone.
- But online booking should be offered too.
- And VIPs would like appropriate software to be developed and distributed which uses audio instructions so they can book that way too and use apps like Uber.

Booking and wait time:

- For known / important appointments many want to be able to book up to 24 hours in advance – and they want that booking to be confirmed for that time.
- For more spontaneous bookings most are happy to wait for up to half an hour.
- However the Uber user has got used to getting a vehicle within five minutes or so, so he would expect that to continue.
- All want taxi and private hire vehicles to arrive when they say they will – for some they are happy to book well in advance to obtain this.

- *Phone – easy to get through and then you can also understand then if there is an issue whereas if you are doing it online then would you get a message saying there is a delay or something whereas on the phone you can actually have that conversation.*
- *Yes phone but to qualify that I would say mobile phone as these apps you cannot have on a normal phone.*
- *Ideally I would like to have all cabs accessible and have a wait time of ten to fifteen minutes.*
- *Half an hour is my limit.*

The ideal experience

The vehicle:

- Comfortable, clean (no food smells)
- Spacious - can turn wheelchair around in to face the front
- Wide door
- Step up or down available as appropriate for the user
- Handles to get in and out with
- Swivel chair for those with mobility problems
- Easy exiting in case of emergency
- An environmentally friendly 'green' vehicle

The driver:

- Has had disability training
- On time
- Helpful – proactive – asks to help
- Accepting of wheelchairs, guide dogs without having to be asked
- Speaks English; lets you decide whether to chat or have music on
- Knows where they are going

- *The new black cabs because they are very spacious and I am able to get my equipment in.*
- *I guess one that allows me to get in and out with no problems. It does mean a door that can open fairly wide.*
- *I also don't want a diesel... so in a word I want a 'green' vehicle.*
- *Clean, well dressed, English speaking, polite*
- *Someone who has had disability awareness training. People who understand the needs of disabled people.*

The ideal experience

Payment:

- Want a variety of ways to pay
- Some want to pay cash
- Easier for small top up fares if using Taxicard
- Some worried about disclosing their card details
- Others want to pay by card
- How they do for other things
- Easy and convenient
- Contactless payments may be particularly useful for VIPs
- More certain they are paying the right amount
- Very easy to use – just present and it is done

Regulation:

- Want a minimum standards charter for private hire vehicles published and publicised
- Want all drivers to be made aware of their obligations to disabled people re guide dogs, helpful attitude, etc.

- *I don't like to give out my bank details either because of my sight loss obviously I have to say I am a VIP and as soon as I say that they are taking the money out from my account as I am telling them my status.*

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