

Anne McGuire MP
Parliamentary under Secretary for Disabled People
Department for Work and Pensions
Caxton House
Tothill Street
London SW1H 9DA

30 June 2008

Dear Anne,

Application of the Disability Discrimination Act and taxis

London TravelWatch is the official watchdog for all transport users in and around London. We take a keen interest in the accessibility of transport provision in the capital and I chair our Transport Accessibility Committee.

We were concerned to learn that some of the provisions of the DDA in relation to taxis have never been implemented. We believe this has left an unacceptable situation where, although taxis may be accessible, drivers can still refuse to carry a passenger who is a wheelchair user. We are aware of complaints from disabled people that when hailing a taxi it is not unusual for the driver to go past once they have seen their wheelchair. A recent report by Leonard Cheshire Disability, *'Into the Unknown: disabled people's experiences of public transport'* confirmed this and I understand that disabled members of the House of Lords have also had direct experience of this form of discrimination.

Sections 32-36 of the DDA place duties on drivers of taxis that are defined as accessible which would require them to carry wheelchair users, to assist them entering and leaving the vehicle and so on. Sections 32-35 define what is meant by an accessible taxi, and section 36 imposes the duties on drivers. However, no commencement order was ever made in respect of these sections and thus they are not enforceable.

Interestingly, Section 37, which covers the requirement for taxi drivers to carry guide dogs is in force. This would appear to be completely inconsistent and at odds with the Government's attitude to discrimination against disabled people.

We are aware that this issue was raised during the passage of the Local Transport Bill in the House of Lords by Baroness Chapman. We also understand that on 16 January 2008 when Lord Low withdrew his amendment to the Bill to bring sections 32-36 into force the Government gave an undertaking to take the issue away and consider it.

Although there may be an argument that sections 32-36 as currently drafted are unsuitable for implementation we believe it is incumbent on Government to introduce the necessary legislation as soon as possible. As the Government Minister responsible for Disabled People could you advise us of the action being taken by Government to ensure that wheelchair users are protected by law from discrimination by taxi drivers.

I look forward to hearing from you

Lorna Reith
Chair, Transport Accessibility Committee and
Deputy Chair London Travelwatch