

Taunton Deane Disability Discussion Group
27th November 2007

Group Facilitated by Mandy Seaman – Compass Disability Services, SAIN Project Coordinator.

1.0 Introductions

This months meeting was dedicated to Transport. Transport continues to be an important issue raised by participants attending this meeting.

Three speakers kindly agreed to attend the meeting to attempt to provide more information on the services available in the area;

Frank Bishop – Trustee, Taunton Deane Community Transport
Olivia Walton – Licensing Officer, Taunton Deane Borough Council
Gail Lanigan – Team Leader, Accessible Transport, Somerset County Council.

2.0 Taunton Deane Community Transport

Frank Bishop provided an overview of the services provided by Taunton Deane Community Transport and an indication of the prices. Community Transport is a low cost form of transport for people with mobility problems and can be used for journeys to Health Services, Shops, Day Centres, and Sports Facilities etc. The service is a non-profit making service for the community. Charges start from a minimum cost of £2.50 for the first mile and then 50p per mile thereafter, plus concessions can be given for parties which require transport for a longer journey. 24 hours notice is required when making a booking. If you have travelpass you are entitled to a 50% concession when the fare is up to £12 which is supported by Somerset County Council. The office is open from 9am until 4pm Monday – Friday.

One participant shared an experience with the group of using Community Transport, when the collection time had been arranged for after 4pm, the driver did not arrive and they could not reach anyone at the office to speak to. They had to organise a taxi to get home and later found out that the

driver had a puncture. Mr Bishop responded to say that this was an unfortunate occurrence and hopefully one which did not happen every day.

A representative from the carers support group commented that many carers use the service and some find they are never sure when transport will arrive and some have found that they can have waited for up to an hour in the past. Mr Bishop advised that traffic can sometimes cause a delay but that the office do not mind a phone call to ask where the transport is if they have not arrived within 10 minutes of the expected time. The service relies quite heavily on volunteer drivers (for cars) and can often find problems trying to get them. A question was also raised as to whether the service would be extended to the weekend and bank holidays. Unfortunately it is not possible to extend the service currently.

3.0 Taxis

Olivia Walton – Licensing Officer explained there are 201 Licensed Taxis operating in Taunton, with those that have a plate number over 63 have to be wheelchair accessible. They are aware that some drivers are not fully trained regarding the lifting of wheelchairs into taxis and the use of certain electric chairs and are therefore looking at more training so that drivers are not afraid to assist any individuals that have particular equipment.

Olivia offered her contact details for any individual complaints concerning taxis and explained that once a year they carry out a trial with local taxis and ask a disabled person to book one to act as a ‘mystery shopper’ to see if their access needs are being met. Any person wishing to volunteer for this service should contact Olivia at the Council.

The issue of assistance was discussed and whether a driver is legally required to assist someone to and from the car. The only legal obligation that exists concerns the use of equipment; if they have equipment installed in the taxi (brakes for wheelchairs) they have a legal obligation to use that equipment correctly. The issue of assistance to and from the taxi is down to the individual driver.

If you wanted to use a particular taxi at a taxi rank and choose not to take the first one due to your access needs, part of a drivers knowledge test is that they have to move out of the way if you want to go to the second or third in line, as it is the publics choice as to which vehicle you use. The drivers should also let those in front know that you have chosen them for which ever reason.

Problems with communication were raised that some members had experienced when the person on control does not get the particular message through to the driver. Olivia advised that unfortunately if you make a booking over the phone there is no legal obligation for you to be collected, the only legal obligation exists under the original Hackney Carriage Law which states that a taxi must stop if you try to hail a taxi down at the road side.

Participants shared their experience both good and bad with local taxi firms. Olivia also suggested methods of complaining when you have had a bad experience with a particular company such as addressing a letter to the organisation concerned.

Olivia responded after the meeting to say she had made an enquiry with a taxi company as to why a different vehicle may be sent when a specific vehicle had been requested? They explained "This can be due to the fact that the call was put on the radio and the nearest taxi to the address went to the pick up. The taxi they may need, might be further away, so they will send the closest one to save time. But if the taxi is not acceptable to take the person, a call will be made that a certain type of taxi will need to be sent. This may mean that the caller might have to wait longer for a taxi, but also explains the frequency of wrong taxis being sent.

Following the meeting a member raised the issue of Hackney Carriage Law and the fact that it is so old and the issue of campaigning to get this changed. Compass Disability Services works with local bodies on local issues and provides points of contact for our members when other issues are raised. Compass are not a campaigning organisation. The Equalities and Human Rights Commission may be able to help with this (contact

details below). If a group of individuals wished to gather to campaign on this issue Compass cannot organise or arrange this but if a member wished to take this campaign up we could promote it in our newsletter.

4.0 Accessible Transport

Gail Lanigan explained the type of services on offer in the area including Public Transport, Community Transport, Taxis, Social Care Transport, Hospital Car Scheme and the Slinky Bus. Information was also shared with the group concerning transport to take people to and from hospital appointments, this would only be available for individuals who have a treatment which leaves them unable to drive home. For individuals receiving certain benefits re-imbursment for travel costs is available, more information on either of these can be obtained from your local hospital or bed clerk in particular cases.

The issue of public transport and local buses was raised and the fact that if you are waiting for a bus to come along, you do not know if you are going to get one with a low floor or not. Gail suggested the use of Travelline to pre-plan a journey and provide information on the buses in use.

Gail mentioned that there is a legal requirement for all public transport to be accessible by 2015 and that the County Council works with companies such as First national buses etc.

The Slinky service is a pre-booked demand responsive accessible transport service which can be very busy and difficult to book at times. Unfortunately it is not available in all areas such as Bishops Lydeard. A concessionary travelpass is issued to disabled people and can be used after 9am on public transport. The Slinky service is free to people with a Somerset Travelpass. Taxi vouchers are also available for local disabled people from the local Council – although it was noted that they do not go very far.

The subject of the reliability of the Slinky bus was raised and the rudeness encountered over the phone by an individual. The reliability can

sometimes be down to the number of vehicles available, a subject that they are aware of and is down to funding to upgrade the fleet. The issue of rudeness is also something which has been addressed.

Can smaller vehicles be used to deliver the service? Current legislation does not allow a vehicle of less than 9 seats to be used.

Would Slinky look at a text service for Deaf people? There are no plans to implement this at the moment.

Gail kindly offered her contact details for those at the meeting to contact her, if they wished.

5.0 Complaints

The issue of complaints was discussed and different experiences individuals have had in raising these with the County Council. Other organisations were then discussed that can help you if you experience difficulties with dealing with your complaints such as A4E and the Equality and Human Rights Commission (was Disability Rights Commission). Please see contact details provided at the end.

6.0 Other Issues from those not able to attend on the day.

A visually impaired member who regularly uses public transport wanted to raise a view about Park and Ride schemes, that in their opinion, should of worked with Rail transport to provide more integrated travel for long distance. This would have been ideal at Silk Mills or near the M5 junction and should be considered for Henlade. Other stations such as Whirl (Weston) and Parkway, Bristol have integrated the park and ride services with Rail Services. This will be raised with the officer responsible for a response.

Minutes compiled by Mandy Seaman

Somerset Access and Inclusion Network

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HELPFUL CONTACTS:

Somerset County Councils Roads and Transport	0845 345 9155
Taunton Deane Community Transport	01823 331266
Taunton & Wellington Slinky Bus	0844 800 9646
Traveline (Public Transport Information Enquiries)	0871 2002233
A4E – Disability Advocacy Service (for people aged who are 18-65 and have a physical disability or sensory loss).	01823 339494
Age Concern – Advocacy Services	01823 326212

Equality and Human Rights Commission Disability Helpline

Telephone 08457 622 633

Textphone 08457 622 644

Address:

Equality and Human Rights Commission Disability Helpline (England)
FREEPOST MID02164
Stratford Upon Avon
CV37 9BR

If you are a British Sign Language User or have a learning disability and would prefer to contact them face-to-face, they can arrange a videophone call with you.

Website for internet users: www.equalityhumanrights.com

