

Briefing

HELPTHEAGED WE WILL™

Local Transport Bill Committee Stage, House of Commons

Help the Aged has broadly welcomed the Local Transport Bill as we support measures to improve access to, and the quality of, local transport. Our briefing for the Second Reading of this Bill highlighted some of our broader areas of interest.

Below we outline some more specific areas in which Help the Aged would like to see amendments made to the Bill during the committee stages

- **Driver Training**
- **Taxi licensing**
- **Information provision**
- **Tendered Network Zones**

Driver Training

Help the Aged's research into the barriers to bus use for older people, has highlighted the need for age awareness training amongst drivers and transport operators as a key issue. Too often the attitude of drivers towards older people can make it difficult or unpleasant for them to use buses.

Help the Aged believes a national programme of age awareness training should be implemented. Training could address issues such as the need to wait for people to sit down before pulling off or stopping at a bus stop. Drivers pulling away from bus stops too quickly can lead to serious falls, the impact of which can be devastating and which in many cases prevent people ever using public transport again.

Help the Aged has welcomed the fact that new bus drivers in London are now required by TfL to take a BTEC which includes Disability Equality training. However, we believe other bus companies in England should be expected to do the same. When Local Authorities put a route out to tender, they should make it a prerequisite that the bus company's drivers are trained in this area.

In addition, we feel the skills needs of taxi drivers and drivers of private hire vehicles (PHVs) should be a priority.

We urge members to raise the need for skills targets and driver training for bus drivers, in addition to drivers of taxis and PHVs.

Taxi licensing

Taxis are regarded as public transport by transport planners and by the travelling public as an essential part of getting from A to B. In our *All Change* transport campaign on the need for a flexible travel concession, we have highlighted the way in

which older people rely on taxis to fill the gaps left by other modes of public transport. For those older people with limited mobility, taxis provide a more practical form of transport, as they are easier to access and minimise the amount of walking required.

Yet, despite the responsibility of County Councils and Unitary Authorities for local transport plans (which include taxis), commissioning bus services, and contracting taxis for social services and schoolchildren, they have no actual control over them. For historical reasons, responsibility for licensing taxis, together with the setting of their fares and standards falls to completely different local authorities as part of their general licensing powers.

Greater integration can however be achieved by moving the responsibility for taxi standards and licensing to the same authorities that plan their use. This can include: greater uniformity of standards; taxi ranks established outside stations; taxi signage becoming more distinguishable and concessionary fare schemes covering wider geographical areas.

We believe the responsibility for the licensing of Hackney Carriages and Private Hire Vehicles should be transferred to the local or regional authority primarily responsible for the planning, co-ordination and delivery of transport services.

Information provision

Another barrier to older people using buses is the lack of audio-visual information. This is not just an issue for some disabled older people but also for disabled people of all ages who may have learning disabilities, visual/hearing impairment, or for people who are unfamiliar with an area or for whom English may be a second language.

Help the Aged's recent survey on the barriers to bus use found that the physical state of bus timetables often caused problems for older people. Small print, timetables displayed too high, lack of prominent display and information distorted by vandals were all cited by our respondents.

We therefore welcome the recommendation in the Transport Select Committee's recent report "Going for Gold: Transport for London's 2012 Olympic Games," that all buses across the UK should have visual and audible information, and we are delighted that Transport for London has now made it clear that all London buses will have audio-visual announcements by 2009. We hope that other parts of the country will follow suit and that the Government will make it a priority to amend the Public Service Vehicles Accessibility Regulations PSVAR so that all buses will have to include audio-visual announcements.

Provision of information before and during a bus journey is one of the measures which we believe could help reverse the long term decline in bus usage.

We would urge members to press for amendments to improve information provision at bus stops.

Tendered Network Zones

Within the current framework for local transport planning, even when local transport authorities subsidise a majority of the bus routes, they have no ability to coordinate the bus network as a whole. We believe this is a nonsensical situation. Local transport authorities need powers to coordinate all bus services throughout their communities to enable them to have the opportunity to market an integrated bus network that makes sense to passengers.

The creation of a 'Tendered Network Zone' would allow the local transport authority to coordinate a single bus network with different buses operating independently but in a co-ordinated way. The authority would plan the network in consultation with bus operators, and it would be enforced by the Traffic Commissioners, if it was in the public interest.

We support the amendment tabled by the Campaign for Better Transport to enable local authorities in areas where most services are tendered to provide some coordination by integrating all bus services in an overall network.

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