



EUROPEAN CONFERENCE  
OF MINISTERS OF TRANSPORT



*Summary Document*

# IMPROVING ACCESS TO **TAXIS**







The European Conference of Ministers of Transport (ECMT) is an inter-governmental organisation established by a Protocol signed in Brussels on 17 October 1953. It comprises the Ministers of Transport of 44 full Member countries: Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, FRY Macedonia, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine and the United Kingdom. There are seven Associate member countries (Australia, Canada, Japan, Korea, Mexico, New Zealand and the United States) and one Observer country (Morocco).

The ECMT is a forum in which Ministers responsible for transport, and more specifically inland transport, can co-operate on policy. Within this forum, Ministers can openly discuss current problems and agree upon joint approaches aimed at improving the use and ensuring the rational development of European transport systems.

At present, ECMT has a dual role. On one hand it helps to create an integrated transport system throughout the enlarged Europe that is economically efficient and meets environmental and safety standards. In order to achieve this, ECMT assists in building bridges between the European Union and the rest of the European continent at a political level. On the other hand, ECMT also develops reflections on long-term trends in the transport sector and, more specifically, studies the implications of globalisation on transport.

In January 2004, the ECMT and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) brought together their transport research capabilities by establishing the Joint Transport Research Centre. The Centre conducts co-operative research programmes that address all modes of inland transport and their intermodal linkages to support policy-making throughout member countries.

Ministers at their Dublin Council in May 2006 agreed a major reform of ECMT designed to transform the organisation into a more global body covering all modes of transport. This new international transport Forum will aim to attract greater attention to transport policy issues, and will hold one major annual event involving Ministers and key sectoral actors on themes of strategic importance. 2007 is a transitional year for the setting up of the Forum. The new structure will be fully operational as of 2008.

Further information about the ECMT is available on Internet at the following address:

[www.cemt.org](http://www.cemt.org)

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## INTERNATIONAL ROAD TRANSPORT UNION (IRU)

Founded in Geneva in 1948, the International Road Transport Union (IRU) upholds the interests of the road transport industry worldwide. Through its network of national Member Associations, it represents the operators of buses, coaches, taxis and trucks, from large fleets to individual owner-operators.

The IRU has been working in close partnership with the ECMT since its creation in 1953.

Started by 8 national associations from western European countries, the IRU today numbers 180 Members in 70 countries across all five continents. The IRU established a Permanent Delegation to the EU in Brussels in 1973, a Permanent Delegation to the CIS region in 1998 in Moscow, and opened an IRU Permanent Delegation to the Middle-East and region in 2005 in Istanbul.

The IRU aims to facilitate road transport and use training to promote professional competence of the sector and to further improve the quality of services it offers. It represents the road transport industry to public authorities, private bodies and the media, and promotes co-operation and complementarities with other modes of transport. Its activities fall under two strategic priorities: sustainable development and facilitation of road transport.

The IRU's Active Members are the most representative national road transport associations. The IRU's Associate Members are drawn from industries that have close ties with road transport, including the manufacturers of vehicles, fuels, tyres and information systems.

IRU Members contribute know-how, experience and political weight to the organisation's worldwide network. Their unity gives the sector authority, credibility and strength when addressing governments, inter-governmental bodies, other industrial sectors and civil society.

The IRU group "**Taxis and Hire-Cars with Driver**", gathers 28 Member Associations from 25 countries, represents the taxi industry within the IRU. Apart from the accessibility of taxis and hire cars with driver, the group's areas of concern for 2007 include the integration of access to profession rules in legislation and the creation of standards for Certificate of Professional Competence training for taxis and hire car with driver.

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For more information, visit [www.iru.org](http://www.iru.org)

## ***FOREWORD***

Accessibility to transport services and infrastructure is an essential factor in ensuring a high-quality, efficient, sustainable transport system. Both the IRU and the ECMT have for many years worked toward improving transport accessibility in their respective memberships. And considerable progress has been made in making transport services and operations more accessible.

Access to taxis remains a particular challenge, largely due to the structure of the trade and its operations, as well as the design of the taxi vehicle itself. The importance of taxi services in providing reliable door-to-door transport services for disabled and older people, however, has necessitated concerted focus on this sector.

ECMT and IRU recognised this need in the late 1990s, and together produced a study examining economic factors that make improving taxi accessibility difficult<sup>1</sup>. That work revealed the need to explore issues related to the design of the taxi vehicle itself. So in a renewed joint initiative, ECMT and IRU set out in 2005-2006 to focus on how better taxi vehicle design over the long term can benefit users and the trade as a whole. This report is the fruit of this latest joint initiative.

For the first time, this study brings together the perspective of all stakeholders in taxi services, infrastructure and vehicle design. It starts from the perspective of what the user needs, considers what is realistic in the medium- to long-term for vehicle manufacturers and converters, identifies how operators – through comprehensive training in interfacing with disabled clients – can contribute to ensuring full accessibility of taxi services, and proposes ways in which government can promote improvements to vehicle design and infrastructure within this time frame.

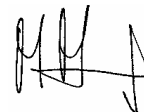
In this way, the recommendations emerging from this initiative reflect the range of perspectives gathered in the preparation of the report. Our hope is that they provide a framework for improving taxi vehicle design, services and infrastructure over the medium to long term, and thereby contribute to a higher quality, more equitable and socially sustainable transport sector.

Jack Short



ECMT Secretary General

Martin Marmy



IRU Secretary General

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1. ECMT-IRU Joint Report on the Economic Aspects of Taxi Accessibility, ECMT 2001.



## ***ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS***

The ECMT and IRU would like to sincerely thank the members of its joint Task Force on Improving Access to Taxis for their expertise in the development of this report alongside the members of the ECMT Working Group on Access and Inclusion and of the IRU Group “Taxis and Hire-Cars with Driver”.

Both organisations are particularly grateful to the representatives of car manufacturers and converters – listed in annex 1 – who lent their insight and perspective to the preparation of the study.

Special thanks are extended to accessibility expert Philip Oxley of the United Kingdom for his expertise in the analysis and drafting of this report.

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# SUMMARY

## 1. Context

Taxis have a key role to play in the provision of door-to-door services for disabled and older people. The combination of the personal service offered by taxis, their wide availability in terms of both time of day or night and area and their door-to-door operations mean that they are of particular value to people with disabilities.

Whilst access to public transport for disabled and older people in recent years has improved considerably, taxis remain a challenge for transport accessibility, primarily due to the structure and organisation of the taxi sector. In particular, the predominant design of vehicles used for this purpose in most countries remains difficult for many disabled and older people to use.

In 1994 ECMT Ministers of Transport approved a Resolution which, among others, recommended that vehicle manufacturers and designers should be encouraged to address accessibility in the design of all taxis. Although progress in improving the accessibility of taxis has been made in some countries, implementing the 1994 Resolution has generally been slow. Only one European country is known to have more than 20 percent of its taxi fleet accessible for wheelchair users. Most countries have less than 10 per cent and, in some cases, none at all.

Given that there are in excess of 45 million disabled people across Europe, including as many as three to four million wheelchair users, it is clearly important that accessibility to taxi services should be improved.

With this objective in mind, the ECMT and the IRU joined forces to examine how the design of taxis can be improved to meet the needs of disabled people. The objective was to develop as realistic a set of recommendations as possible for vehicle design for manufacturers, whilst ensuring that the needs of the user are fully addressed.

The study, which follows up to the ECMT- IRU joint study on the *Economic Aspects of Taxi Accessibility published in 2001*<sup>2</sup>, has therefore been carried out in consultation with major European motor manufacturers, the single purpose-built taxi manufacturer in Europe and specialist conversion companies that adapt mass-produced vehicles for the taxi market. This consultation has been conducted in two special seminars and in discussions with individual manufacturers. In addition to the manufacturers, transport authorities, the European umbrella association for disabled

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2. ECMT-IRU Joint Report on the Economic Aspects of Taxi Accessibility, ECMT 2001.

people and national representative organizations for taxi operators have also been closely involved in the preparation of the study.

In this way, the study starts from the point of view of the disabled users' needs. It goes on to take account of what would be feasible so far as the vehicle manufacturers are concerned and what would be acceptable to the taxi trade.

## **2. The ECMT-IRU Taxi Vehicle Design Recommendations**

When considering the design recommendations made in this paper, it should be borne in mind that these represent a template for the future. It is not intended – nor indeed would it be realistic – to expect the design changes to be made immediately or in the near future. Rather they should be regarded as a guide for the medium- and longer-term development of taxis that can be safely and comfortably used by the majority of disabled people. It is recognized that it is impossible to provide for 100% of wheelchair users without reducing the operational viability of the vehicle for the operator and other passengers. There will be a small proportion of people who, because of the size of their wheelchair or the nature of their disability are unable to access taxis or indeed other forms of mainstream public transport. They will continue to need specialist door- to-door services.

The ECMT-IRU recommendations for taxi vehicle accessibility are based on two design levels:

Type One: Wheelchair Accessible Taxis: accessible vehicles capable of carrying the majority, but not all, passengers who travel in their wheelchair as well as people with other disabilities.

Type Two: Standard Accessible Taxis: vehicles with features designed to make use by disabled people easier, but which would only be able to carry a wheelchair user who can transfer to a taxi seat.

It is recommended that fleets of taxis used for regular services should be composed of a combination of these two types of vehicle. The proportion of each type within the taxi park is likely to vary from place to place, both within and between countries. This is a matter for decision by national and local governments.

The recommendations include specific design guidance for the key features of these taxis. For the wheelchair accessible vehicles these include the height and width of passenger doors, headroom inside the taxi, the space allocated for the wheelchair user and the acceptable ramp gradients for wheelchair access.

The guidance is expressed as a recommended dimension and a minimum acceptable measurement, thus providing a range rather than a single figure. In addition, performance criteria, which describe how each feature should work in practice, have been included in the recommendations. This has been done to ensure that current manufacturers of accessible taxis would not be excluded from the taxi

market. However, it is hoped (and expected) that over time, the design of vehicles will move towards achieving the recommended standards.

The recommendations also include guidance on other features that can help to make the use of taxis easier for disabled people. These include seat design, provision of grab handles, colour contrast, interior lighting, induction loops and taxi meters that are clearly visible and which give the fare audibly. These recommendations apply to both Type One and Type Two taxis.

If the two design levels are applied progressively to mainstream taxi fleets the travel opportunities for disabled people will be greatly improved. They will also make the use of taxis easier for many other people.

### **3. Ensuring Taxi Accessibility: Other Essential Factors**

While the actual design recommendations are at the heart of the study, other factors are essential to ensuring access to taxis: these include ways that central and local government might encourage the provision of accessible taxis, the design of infrastructure to make the use of taxis easier and taxi staff training in disability awareness.

#### ***Encouraging the provision of accessible taxis***

This can be done by regulation and by financial incentive, or by a combination of both. National governments may, if they deem it appropriate, introduce regulations requiring the replacement (over time) of non-accessible vehicles with accessible taxis. Alternatively, national government may permit local licensing authorities to require that all, or a proportion, of the taxis in their area should become accessible, again over a reasonable period of time.

Government can also promote better taxi accessibility by introducing financial incentives, for example, by reducing duties or taxes on accessible taxis and/or reducing the cost of a taxi licence for accessible vehicles. The introduction of user-side subsidies - that is, providing disabled people with the money to buy taxi services themselves, so encouraging the trade to provide more accessible vehicles. Local authorities frequently contract taxi services, for example, to take disabled children to school or disabled adults to social service facilities. Where such contracting is done, the provision of accessible taxis could be stimulated by the contracts requiring that the vehicles be accessible.

Which option is appropriate will depend on the circumstances of both the country and the local licensing areas. However, it is considered that national governments should take the lead in this as leaving it purely to local initiatives would probably result in a patchwork of provision, lacking consistency from area to area.

### ***Infrastructure design***

Providing good infrastructure for taxi services is also important and is mainly a matter for local authorities. Taxi ranks should be provided at railway, bus and coach stations and in major centres. Ranks should be designed so that there is adequate space for wheelchair accessible taxis to deploy their ramps, preferably onto a raised footway so that the ramp gradient is reduced. Seating should be provided, as should appropriate information (e.g. times of operation, taxi telephone numbers etc.) and ranks should be well lit.

### ***Driver training***

Finally, and most importantly, taxi staff should be trained in disability awareness. This applies not just to taxi drivers but to other staff as well, for example call-takers at dispatch centres. Training needs to cover all disabilities - sensory and cognitive as well as physical. Staff should learn how best to assist people with any disability, how to use any equipment on the vehicle and how to ensure that the passenger is carried safely in the taxi.

The study has identified a number of good training guides and instructive videos/DVDs that have been produced in various countries. These can be used as the basis for training programmes, but it is strongly urged that any training programme should involve disabled people themselves. They are the experts in their disability and are best placed to explain to taxi drivers and other staff what kind of assistance is appropriate.

## **4. Key Conclusions and Recommendations**

The two levels of accessibility set out in this recommendation, if applied progressively to the taxi park, should result in much improved travel opportunities for disabled people. A mainstream taxi park composed of Type One and Two vehicles would meet the requirements of the great majority of disabled people, including a substantial proportion of wheelchair users.

### **4.1 Authorities**

- National government should promote the introduction, over time, of requirements for taxis to meet the accessibility recommendations.
- National (or local) governments (as appropriate) should also develop action plans indicating the timescales for taxis to meet, initially, at least the minimum requirements and, in due course, the recommended design dimensions. Any guidance or standards set should allow for the continued manufacture and use of current wheelchair-accessible taxis for a reasonable period. To introduce any requirements that preclude the continued use of these vehicles over a reasonable design life would not be in the interests of disabled passengers.

- Concurrently, governments should examine what financial incentives might be appropriate to assist the taxi industry in buying and using these vehicles.
- Local government should also ensure that infrastructure provision plans include necessary improvements to be made as the number of fully accessible taxis increases. They should also ensure that their parking control policies do not conflict with the use of taxis by disabled people.

#### **4.2. *Vehicle manufacturers and converters***

- Vehicle manufacturers should take account of the design parameters set out in this paper when planning and developing new vehicles (or major upgrades of existing vehicles) that will be used as taxis.
- Conversion specialists should continue their development of ways of making mass-produced vehicles more easily usable by disabled people: not just wheelchair users but people with other disabilities, sensory as well as physical.

#### **4.3. *Taxi operators***

- Taxi operators should pay particular attention to training their staff in disability awareness. This training should be given to taxi drivers and to other staff - for example, those in booking offices - who deal with members of the public.

In conclusion it should be reiterated that the recommendations made in this paper should not be interpreted as formal standards. But equally the recommendations have been developed from extensive discussions and research with the industries involved and, most importantly, with disabled people. They do not attempt to produce an ideal solution, but to give practical guidance, which if adopted by national governments, will be of considerable benefit to the more than 45 million disabled people who live in Europe.

# **ANNEX 1. COMPANIES AND ORGANISATIONS CONSULTED\***

## **Vehicle manufacturers**

ACEA  
DaimlerChrysler AG  
Fiat Auto S.p.A.  
LTI Limited  
Mercedes-Benz GmbH  
PSA Peugeot Citroen  
Renault  
Volkswagen AG

## **Conversion companies**

Allied Vehicles  
Aquablue Minibus Industries  
Gruau Laval  
Manganese Bronze Holdings PLC  
Modec Ltd

## **Organisations representing disabled persons**

European Disability Forum

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\* Individual companies and organisations did not necessarily subscribe to all detailed aspects of the ECMT-IRU approach.

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