

# **Scottish Accessible Transport Alliance (SATA)**

## **Full Meeting**

**Minutes of meeting held on Thursday 11 February 2010 in the Forth Valley Sensory Centre, Camelon, commencing at 1.30 pm.**

**Present:** Maggie Killin (in the Chair), John Ballantine (Individual), Chris Clark (Transport Scotland), Dean Couper (Transport Scotland), Kate Cross (Individual), Paul Cross (Individual), Arthur Cowie (Lochaber Disability Access Panel), Amanda Finnigan (Quarriers), Douglas Gilroy (Individual) David Goldthorp (Inverclyde Council on Disability), Stephen Joyce (Deaf Blind Scotland), Lilian Lawson (Scottish Council on Deafness), Bill MacIntosh Scottish Taxi Federation), Douglas Hush (Individual), John MacDonald (CTA), Pat McGuigan (Glasgow Access Panel), Jim McKay (Individual), Ryan McQuigg (LCD), C.Tumath (Quarriers), Rod Merchiston (Individual), John Moore (LCTS), Patrick Nyamurandira (ScotRail), Andrew Overton (LTI), Garry Ranson (LTI), Jim Ritchie (Individual), Johanna Stewart (Inverclyde Council on Disability),

In attendance: Andy Hunter (Guide/Companion for Stephen Joyce), Sue Mowat (Interpreter),

**Apologies:** Donald Anderson (Glasgow CIL), Stan Flett (Chairman), Tom Porter (Individual), Liz Rowlett (SDEF), Alan Rees (Secretary).

### **1. Chairperson's opening remarks:**

Maggie welcomed everyone to the meeting and informed members that Stan Flett was unable to be present due to ill health and Alan Rees had submitted his apologies as his wife was in hospital.

### **2. Minutes of Open Meeting, 12th November 2009.**

These were adopted on the motion of Paul Cross and seconded by Pat McGuigan.

### **3. Matters arising not otherwise on the agenda**

None.

### **4. Presentation on Access to Taxis by David Goldthorp, Project Manager, Inverclyde Council on Disability.**

In speaking to his paper previously circulated, David said: "Our organisation is a user led body of disabled people in Inverclyde. Accessible taxi provision has been an ongoing issue in Inverclyde for quite some time. Currently 5% of

licensed taxis and private hire vehicles are wheelchair accessible. Lobbying of the Local Authority culminated in 2008 in research being undertaken into the matter. Some of the difficulties experienced were: Inability to obtain a wheelchair accessible taxi at nights and weekends. Accessible vehicles being used at specific times for alternative work e.g. to take residents from nursing homes to hospitals etc. There were varied responses to the research - see previously circulated paper for details”.

Referring to data sent out by Alan Rees, “Inverclyde had 8.2% accessible vehicles but comparing this to Paisley (Renfrewshire) with 81.9%, North Ayrshire 15.9% and Glasgow 100%. Consequently, they were quite concerned at the wide differences across Scotland. Even comparing Inverclyde with North Ayrshire, West Dunbartonshire, areas with a similar geographical spread of urban and rural areas. One other matter identified was the fact that powers have been available since 1995 under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and only now trials are being undertaken in 3 areas to look at the definition of what an accessible vehicle is.

David then answered questions.

Andrew Overton of LTI commented: “One of the most interesting points David made was the comparison between Inverclyde and other areas. You might ask yourself why there is such a discrepancy – it’s all down to local authorities. Local authorities make up their minds what they want in their individual areas. In the case of Glasgow, many, many years ago, they decided they wanted a 100% accessible taxi fleet, as they do in Edinburgh. Interestingly, Renfrewshire is a good example of an authority which predominantly has saloon cars. They decided that this was unsatisfactory and over time moved to a 100% accessible fleet. Now of course, if you have a 100% accessible fleet, you never have a problem getting an accessible taxi. So the question is, is it possible to move from one scenario to another and how do you do it?

There are 17 accessible taxis in Inverclyde, so how did these come about? I spoke to Bill MacIntosh earlier and he believes that these will not be 'dedicated' plates. In other words, the number of taxis in Inverclyde is fixed but the Council can issue licences with conditions attached e.g. wheelchair accessible. So it's quite within the possibilities that the Council could decide that they are going to make an exception over unmet demand. The survey is primarily about unmet demand for taxis overall. We should remember your story about ringing up unsuccessfully for an accessible taxi and then going round the corner to find one on the rank. The reality is, we know that disabled people tend to make their journey from home and if this is in early evening then they probably get one but when they want to go home again – say around 11 pm, then they are not going to get one with such a small percentage of accessible taxis. Drivers have other work to do and so will not take the hire. But if the fleet is accessible then the disabled passenger should have the same rights as non-disabled passengers.

So it is possible for additional plates to be issued for accessible taxis.

Now the trade, in this case Bill, may disagree with me and will not be keen to see that. So, there is one of two ways of doing it, you either have a policy that states you want an accessible fleet, then nobody is disadvantaged or you can disadvantage – there isn't any middle ground. Because when there is a £12,000 price difference between a saloon car and accessible taxi, percentages don't work unless Councils are going to give £12,000 – which I don't think they are. This is a fundamental decision for every licensing authority in Scotland, they all face that situation. Those who have already committed don't have the option of offering additional plates. The only thing they can do is then decide that in future, all new plates issued will be accessible taxis e.g. Aberdeen. They don't allow the transfer of plates, instead plates have to be returned and when reissued, are issued as an accessible taxi. So this is something you as a lobbying organisation need to do with your local authority and it has to be a fair and balanced system.

Your comment about what an accessible taxi is. In your report you quite rightly say that the Government hasn't come up with a specification. No it hasn't – so what has happened in the last 40 years? How have we got all these wheelchair accessible taxis? Well the local authorities made up their mind on what an accessible taxi is. Now it may not be right but there should be a specification and each individual local authority can make up its own mind, as it is legally entitled to so do, to attach such conditions to the issue of an accessible taxi. So it is up to you to say to the local authority, these are the requirements we have, this is what we would like to see incorporated into the specifications of an accessible taxi. Yes, they have to go through a consultation period. It would be sensible to talk to manufacturers and make sure they can accommodate what you want. At least the debate should still be had”.

Lillian Lawson raised the question of communication ie. using some text messaging to request a taxi and receive information as to when it has arrived. The other issue is where English is not the first language of the taxi driver, a problem arises when a deaf person gives the address of where he/she wants to go but the driver cannot read it.

Andrew Overton responded: “I will take your questions in reverse order: The answer to the second is; you need to lobby local authorities to make them wake up to the fact that this is an issue. There is no question that there are local authorities In England & Wales who do English tests e.g. Birmingham with a high number of Asian drivers, they try to check that the driver is capable of speaking and reading basic English. Your first question on interacting with people, is about driver training. Driver training is an ongoing issue, which is way behind the issue of accessible taxis. There are two recognised training courses: 1) Tec and 2) NBQ. Local authorities are wary of compelling drivers to take training because it costs money for the trainers and for the driver while off the road. As a manufacturer of taxis, we try to persuade taxi operators to undertake training but

again, local authorities have the power to require operators to undertake training. Which ever local licensing authority you come under in Scotland, go and speak to them on this matter”.

Pat McGuigan raised a question over drivers with a criminal record driving, especially private hire cars. Andrew’s perspective was: “Bill might like to respond to this but I believe whether you are driving private hire or hackney carriage, you are required to undertake a criminal records bureau check”.

Bill MacIntosh said: “Andrew has explained the point very well. Basically, councils have difficulty in refusing licences where they may be spent under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act. In Glasgow we are doing checks on every current driver and operator and on all new applicants. Some offences in the past were absolutely horrifying. The licensing committee explained that they were not in the business of not giving people a second chance. It’s down to the local authority to decide whether someone is going to get a licence or not. Often they issue licences to drivers despite police objections”.

"I would like to give you the taxi operators perspective on the vexed question of wheelchair accessibility. I know Andrew has said the ideal situation is for everywhere to have 100% accessibility, where there are wheelchair accessible taxis available 24 hours, 7 days a week, thus the problem disappears into the background or goes away. Perhaps, in saying that, he is wearing his manufacturers hat. Taxi operators, generally speaking mostly in Scotland, are small self-employed business people. They are running a small business and that business has to be viable and they have to make sufficient money to sustain all the outgoings required of a taxi operator. To use Glasgow taxis as an example, 2 years ago I was the secretary and that company has invested £1.8 million in new premises. Twice in 5 years, they have invested over £1 million in radio despatch equipment. When I left, they employed more than 100 people. All the associated bills i.e. wages, national insurance etc, all has to be met from subscriptions the driver pays into the circuit. There are no other external advantages as far as the taxi operators are concerned. We get no grants or assistance from anywhere. So the bottom line is, the business has to be viable and if purchasing a vehicle, which is twice the price of a normal saloon vehicle and it makes your business unviable. Then perhaps you will begin to understand why it is that a lot of people avoid buying wheelchair accessible vehicles”.

"Having said that, looking into statistics from the Government website, it doesn’t make good reading. The number of wheelchair accessible vehicles in Scotland has actually dropped since last year’s figures. A number of years ago, SATA’s petition requesting 50% accessibility passed through the Scottish Parliament. From a taxi operators perspective, keeping in mind the problems taxi drivers have in making their business viable and trying to ensure that disabled people get the proper access they expect. Then I would suggest that your approach of 50% at least, is more attainable than 100%. If it became 100% then I suspect a

lot of taxi operators would simply just give up or go out of business".

"To highlight one small point in your report, it suggests that many regular users of wheelchair accessible taxis, defines a regular user as someone who only uses a taxi once per month. If every user of a taxi only used a taxi once per month, the taxi business simply would not exist. So I hope you will see that there are difficulties there. I think the Government should be and you should be lobbying for a reduction in the level of VAT on accessible taxis, so that we can encourage more drivers to move into that sphere. That would be a great help to the taxi trade and disabled people".

In the ensuing question and answer session, Jim Ritchie made the point that the Fraser of Allander report appeared not to have made any attempt to contact many disabled people, especially those using day centres. Douglas Gilroy enquired of the Scottish Taxi Federation if any approach had been made to the Department for Transport for Scotland to be included in the 3 pilot schemes. Bill Macintosh replied that "he had only been notified of the trials 2 weeks previously and that councils were to be invited to bid. Hence he was not aware of any bid from Scotland but would make further enquiries following the question". Andrew Overton advised that the Government "had agreed to go down the 'demonstration scheme route' and local authorities will be invited to bid. Scotland was to be included in the bidding process but exactly what councils were being asked to bid for was not clear"

The question of how SATA, Inverclyde Council on Disability (ICOD), the Scottish Taxi Federation, could all best work together towards a solution was raised. Bill stated "that the Taxi Federation was willing to discuss matters. It has a lot of experience in working with the TRI taxi study group of Napier University, Edinburgh, whose methodology was among the best".

Maggie Killin concluded by thanking all contributors and advising that the Management Committee had expressed the view that Scotland should be included in the trials.

## **5. Report from the Management Committee**

Alan Rees has dealt with the following:

**Circulated papers:** from ICOD; Scottish Transport Statistics on taxis.

**Events attended:** Cross Party Group on Disability in December and Alan has been approached to co-ordinate issues relating to transport at the group's next meeting in March. Items possibly for discussion include: Thistle Travel Card; concessionary fares and Edinburgh trams.

## **6. Treasurer's report**

John Ballantyne reported that there was just over £3,000 in the bank; £1,000 with Standard life and the remaining in the Bank of Scotland. John was thanked for his report.

## **7. Sub Groups report:**

Douglas Gilroy reported that the sub groups were on Air, Bus/coach, Rail, Sea, Taxi/door-to-door and Policy. Each group is either led by a Management Committee member or other senior SATA members. Issues being worked on include:

Air – the beach landing at Barra. Bus & Coach – A submission was made to the consultation by Charlie Gordon MSP, with TACTRANS bus information review.

Rail – we are represented on the Scottish Rail Accessibility Forum and some members participated in a consultation event on level crossings.

Sea – on possible threats by SPT to withdraw/cut concessionary fares on some sea routes, proposals to replace the Erskine ferry with a waterbus service across the river Clyde.

Taxi/door to door – as you have heard today, SATA is still pursuing access issues.

Policy – examining a wide range of issues relating to travel information.

In order to widen the breath and depth of experience on sub groups, members were urged to join and assist with their work. Please contact either Alan Rees or Douglas Gilroy by email to: [at.rees@sol.co.uk](mailto:at.rees@sol.co.uk) or [dgilroy@talktalk.net](mailto:dgilroy@talktalk.net), with details of the group/s you would like to join.

## **8. Information exchange:**

### **8.1. ScotRail**

Patrick Nyamurandira reported:

RNIB – REACT: we have now received Listed Building Consent to install RNIB REACT at Dumfries station and this project is expected to start as soon as possible and finished by end of this financial year.

Access for All – Small Schemes: We have agreed with Transport Scotland to carry out feasibility study on the provision of a ramp at Rosyth and subject to the outcome of this study, we may carry out the works.

Access for All – Main Schemes: Motherwell lift is now operational with new footbridge to platform 4. Phase Two; Network Rail and Transport Scotland are continuing discussions on options for Linlithgow, Hyndland and Perth. Completed Works; Variable height ticket office counters have been completed at Kirkcaldy, Perth and Barrhead. Two more stations will be completed around 22 February 2010.

Planned works:

Accessible toilets at Blairhill, Barrhead, Cambuslang, Hamilton West and Hyndland  
Help points – replacing BT autodial phones.

Other: Network Rail is working on the damaged platforms which was caused by the bad weather and has advised that it would have to take off some of the tactile surfacing and replace them in the near future. A list of ongoing or planned station work will be circulated.

## **8.2. Transport Scotland**

Chris Clark reported that improvements to 6 rail stations had been made through the Access to All programme and the next phase would see work at Easterhouse and Airdrie prior to the start of the new Airdrie-Bathgate service in December; a new bridge at Montrose; Perth would have a new bridge and lifts to all platforms in addition to all stairs/ramps; lifts at Haymarket; work would be signed off at Hyndland and Linlithgow.

Terry Robinson of 'Describe Online' had created over 20 guides to stations and it was hoped that by the end of 2011 this would have risen to over 50. Chris referred members to the National Rail website for links to Stations Made Easy – for accessibility/facilities etc.

## **9. Agenda items for next meeting:**

Members are invited to submit suggestions in advance to Secretary Alan Rees.

## **10. Date of next Meeting:**

An Open Meeting of members and non-members will take place at 1.30 pm on Thursday 6 May at SPT, Consort House, West George Street, Glasgow.