

Introduction

HcL (Handicabs) has been funded by the City of Edinburgh Council and its predecessors since 1982 to provide transport needs of people with disabilities, elderly and others who have limited mobility to Edinburgh and the Lothians. Our quality of service which goes above and beyond providing door to door transport by providing a 'through-the-door' service, ensuring that our passengers receive the assistance they need at the start and end of their journey. This may be assisting people with getting their coat on, or making sure that they are settled safely in their home after the journey, for example.

The profile of our passengers indicates an exceptionally high level of mobility difficulty; some 35% of passengers for example using a wheelchair. Many of our passengers rely on our service to get out and cannot use buses or taxis. Our service is a particular lifeline to medical services: our trip data indicates that 12% of trips are health-related, with another 11% specifically for health-related appointments and a further 2% for respite care. In a normal year, we carry around 90,000 passengers, while in the past year we have adapted our services, for example providing free transport to people with mobility difficulties vaccination appointments.

Spaces for People

HcL shares the Council's vision of a transport system that is environmentally friendly and which works for everyone; we believe we have a big part to play in achieving this. We therefore support measures which shift modal use from private car to public and active transport. Traffic congestion (principally caused by private vehicles) is indeed one of the main challenges which we face in Edinburgh, severely limiting our capacity to carry more passengers.

Nevertheless, many measures introduced as 'Spaces for People' have caused us significant problems in the last year, and we would like the Council to take account of our experience in considering the retention of schemes on a permanent basis.

A fundamental requirement for a door-to-door service like ourselves is getting access to the kerb. This is needed to pick up and to drop off passengers and where bollards, wands etc. do not allow access to the kerbside, this causes us and our passengers significant problems. For example, if we are picking up or dropping off a passenger using a wheelchair at the Central Library on George IV Bridge, the vehicle needs to stop in the moving traffic lane, assist them disembarking to the rear of the vehicle using a passenger lift. Depending on what help the passenger needs and any wait time, this can take five minutes or more, with increased safety risk to staff and passengers and considerable disruption to traffic.

A second example of the impact of measures on HcL is Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs), and to an extent road closures such as Braid Road. Until adult day care was suspended during the pandemic, we were under contract to the Council to pick up local older and disabled people to attend a club at the Drumbrae centre. An LTN which physically stops traffic from running through residential streets could make this service unviable, as our vehicle would no longer be able to go efficiently from address A to address B and address C etc, but would have to return to the main roads bordering the LTN to go from address A to reach address B, then return again to the boundary road to reach address C etc. This problem could be solved in enforcement of the LTN to stop 'rat running' was by ANPR camera, with an exemption for HcL vehicles.

As stated above, we support the objectives of the new City Mobility Plan and Spaces for People principles. However, we would ask that the particular requirements of HcL are taken account of in all assessments of potential retention of SfP measures.

Kelvin Cochrane
Chief Executive
Handicabs Lothian