

Paul Brown

Submission on ***FUTURE OF SMALL PASSENGER SERVICES – CONSULTATION PAPER***

I am a blind person who is highly reliant on taxis for independent travel because of the inaccessibility of other public transport and the door-to-door nature of taxi services. The existence of the Total Mobility scheme recognises that many disabled people are wholly or heavily reliant on small passenger service sector providers to travel so any changes to the regulation of such services will significantly impact disabled people.

The review aims to ensure that small passenger services are flexible enough to accommodate new technologies and are fit for purpose. However I believe that the review has failed to give enough attention to issues of safety and disability – issues that are central to purpose and fitness - and has focused too heavily on aligning taxis with newly arrived services such as Uber.

As a blind person the only way I can tell the number of the taxi I am in is by reading the braille signage on the inside of the passenger door. This enables me to report the driver if anything happens. Without that, I have no way of knowing which taxi I was in. I need the taxi driver to have enough local knowledge to locate the place I want to travel to because I cannot guide them myself. I also need the driver to have sufficient English for them to understand where I want to go and to assist me when I arrive as I will usually need to be guided to the front door or reception area or sometimes to a particular room.

While it is sensible and appropriate to facilitate the development of new services and technologies, this should not involve the removal of current protections. Ensuring safety and accessibility for disabled people must be paramount. I believe that only options 1, 2 and 5 protect the rights of disabled people with 5 providing the greatest protection. Options 3 and 4 with their provisions to remove the regulation of: braille signage in taxis; local area knowledge in urban areas; and agreed English language standard will make small passenger services inaccessible to many disabled people.