



## Travel and Transport

### Factsheet No. 7

The Disability Foundation is a Registered Charity Number 1076761

Disabled people and their carers often face difficulties when travelling. This factsheet provides a quick summary of advice and an overview of the different options and opportunities to make travel as easy as possible for disabled people and their carers.

The Fact sheet is divided into the following sections:

- Travel advice
- Coach Travel
- Train
- Air Travel
- Going by Sea
- Disabled Travel Insurance (Also in the TDF Insurance Factsheet)

### Travel Advice

It is best to plan your travel arrangements before you set out, so that you can enjoy your trip and the journey itself can be more of a pleasure. The following is just a brief list of key points to remember when planning a journey, whether you are going on holiday or travelling for any other reason:

- Check that the accommodation at your destination is suitable for you.
- Make sure appropriate transport facilities are available for your needs whilst you are away.
- Establish how you will get from your home to the airport, port or station
- Find out if you can arrange for assistance at the airports, ports or stations you travel through.
- Establish how will you get from the airport, port or station at the other end of the journey to your destination.
- Ask your travel agent to check what facilities are available (eg toilets, food, shower etc)
- Make sure that however you are travelling, the provider knows what assistance you will need (e.g. if you use oxygen can an airline provide it and will there be a charge for it).

- If you are planning to take your wheelchair or scooter with you, check that this is possible and if not check that as an alternative it is possible to hire a wheelchair or scooter at your destination.
- Check whether you will be able to use a toilet on any transport and if not check what are the alternatives.
- Check that your medical insurance is adequate, that it includes pre-existing medical conditions, and that equipment (e.g. wheelchair) is covered, especially if going abroad.
- Check that your equipment will be usable at your destination. For example If you use oxygen, check you can obtain it at your destination, by contacting the appropriate embassy for more information.
- If you are taking an electric wheelchair or scooter abroad, check the voltage of the country you are visiting. If it is different from that used in the UK you will need to take/hire a transformer.
- If you are taking medication with you when you are travelling abroad, make sure each container is clearly labelled with its contents. It is a good idea to carry a doctor's letter certifying that you are taking prescribed medication, and to check with the relevant Embassy or High Commission if your medication is illegal or restricted in the country you are visiting.
- Take enough medication to allow for a delay to your journey (2-3 days)

## Coach Travel

### Things to Consider About Coaches

Due to the steps getting on, narrow walk ways and limited distance between a seat and the seat in front, most coaches are inaccessible to all wheelchair users. There are coaches fitted with wheelchair lifts on scheduled routes in the UK but at the time of writing, none of these carry powered vehicles. They will take folding manual wheelchairs but the coach operators normally require seven days notice.

### Traveline

An impartial national coach, bus and train journey advice centre which will provide information on the accessibility of coach stations.

**0208 608 2608**

visit their website at [www.pti.org.uk/](http://www.pti.org.uk/)

Your local Disability Information and Advice Line (DIAL) may also have information on transport in your local area. Look in your phone book for the number or at their website: [www.dialuk.info](http://www.dialuk.info)

Your local DIAL may be listed under a different name so if you have any problems please call the TDF Information Department on **020 8954 7373**

### **DDA and Coach Travel**

The DDA only applies to coaches that are on a scheduled time table. This includes the express network, regular commuter routes and airport services

Coaches have needed to be accessible to disabled people from January 2005 although this excludes wheelchair users. (deadline will be 2008).

These deadlines are similar for buses although you may find that bus services in the larger cities, especially London, are much more accessible than in other areas.

There is still a problem with bus drivers' attitudes to disabled people and this could be more of a hinderance than the bus itself.

A small, but increasing, number of specialist companies offer UK and European coach holidays with fully accessible lift-equipped vehicles.

If you know you will need assistance getting on and off a coach always ask for this when you book your ticket. Remember to check if there is a toilet on board. However, even if there is, if you are a wheelchair user or have limited mobility, the space inside will be limited and access to it may be down steep steps, so it is always worth finding out about the toilets provided and if there will be "comfort stops" along the journey.

You should always carry medication, money and valuables with you on the coach.

It may be possible to reserve special seats with more leg room when you book your ticket. If you need oxygen, and the equipment you use is portable and small, you may be able to take it with you. Always check with the coach company first.

### **Coach Stations**

Some coach stations are more accessible than others so check beforehand. The coach company should be able to tell you about them. Alternatively, you can contact Traveline for this information. They can also tell you the distance from the car, taxi or bus set-down point to where you will board the coach. This is especially important if you have luggage and find it difficult to carry things. The coach driver may assist you with your luggage but it is your responsibility to see it on and off the coach. Similarly, when you reach your destination, always check what distance you will have to walk from the coach stop or coach station for any onward connection. Furthermore, make sure you know where you will need to be met on arrival, or how you will get to your final destination.

### **Train Travel**

All rail companies provide assistance for passengers who need it. By giving the rail company advance notice, arrangements can usually be made for staff to meet you at your departure station, accompany you

to your train and meet you at your destination or interchange station, helping you onto the next stage of your journey.

To arrange for assistance from the appropriate rail company, telephone National Rail Enquiries on **08457 48 49 50** (minicom: **0845 60 50 600**)

Assistance can be arranged no matter how many railway companies your journey involves. At least two days' notice is usually required, and it is always worth double checking the day before you go that the arrangements for assistance are in place.

Remember to make arrangements for your return journey as well because platform access and station staffing hours vary. You can obtain timetable information, confirm fares and book tickets in advance by telephoning the train companies (usually a different telephone number).

Stations vary in their provision of disabled facilities so it might be worth undertaking a longer journey so that you can use a station which has better facilities. Alternative rail services may be available which avoid the need to change trains (some may avoid having to change in London).

Some stations have accessible toilets which are kept locked for which you need a RADAR key. At others you may need to ask station staff for the key. Ask the train company for information on the facilities available or contact Tripscope who will be able to inform you of all the options for making your journey.

Most trains can accommodate manual and powered wheelchairs up to 670 mm wide but scooters and larger powered vehicles cannot usually be carried.

If you are a wheelchair user a ramp will be provided for access to and from the train. Most main line trains have specially allocated wheelchair spaces. Most local services operate 'Sprinter' trains with sliding doors and have space for wheelchairs. Some have on-board ramps for access at stations where there is no ramp available. If you are not a wheelchair user, but have

### DDA and Trains

New access standards on trains should have been in place from January 1999. This, though, only applies to new trains entering the service so the trains should get much better over time.

These standards include:

- colour contrasts on doors, floors and screens, step edge markings, grab handles on seats, wheelchair spaces, easy use door controls and low level lighting among others.

These regulations do include underground trains although the actual (tube) stations are exempt.

The tram services available in the UK should be accessible as many of them are new compared to the train system.

## DDA and Air Travel

The DDA covers all airport buildings, booking services, travel agencies, tour operators and assistance on to the aircraft.

In-flight entertainment and services are not covered by the DDA and if you need any assistance on the flight you should take a companion.

Many airlines have restrictions on the number of disabled people it can take on one flight. If you are travelling as a group of disabled people you should liaise with the airline to make sure everything is agreed before you get to the airport.

difficulty in walking, it may still be advisable to ask for a ramp to be provided - there may be a high step up into the train and no grab rail to hold on to.

Only a few services have trains with wheelchair accessible toilets. If you cannot walk far make sure you book a seat near to the toilet. If you are worried about this matter, consult the continence adviser at your local health centre, or ask your local disability organisation.

If you need to use oxygen on the journey let the rail company know in advance, get advice on where you can and cannot place your equipment. Most modern portable equipment does not cause a problem.

Make sure you know where you will need to be met on arrival, or how you will get to your final destination.

## Air Travel

Firstly, it is important to let the airline know in advance if you have any special needs. For example, if you are taking special equipment such as dialysis equipment or a respirator, you will need to give the airline advice on how to handle it. Most disabled people travelling by air with permanent and stable conditions will not require medical clearance but you should check at the time of booking what, if any, medical information will be required and if you will need consent from a medical professional.

### **At the Airport**

Always let the airline know if you will need assistance at the airport. Whichever way you intend to travel to the airport, make sure the airline knows what help you will need getting from the car park, station or car/taxi set-down point to the check-in desk. If the airline cannot provide help with this, check with Airport Information to find out what assistance the airport operator can provide. Most airports publish a booklet about facilities at the airport, including those for disabled people. After check-in it is the airline's responsibility to provide the assistance you have requested.

Disabled passengers usually board before everybody else and leave the plane last, for their own comfort. Please let the check-in staff know your needs prior to boarding if you have an unseen disability.

If you use a powered scooter or wheelchair only those with dry gel batteries will normally be carried. Most airlines will not take wet-cell or spillable batteries.

If you are an electric wheelchair user you will usually have to transfer to an airline wheelchair whilst your own chair is stowed in the aircraft hold. Boarding the plane will either be by level access airbridge, by high lift vehicle or by a carry-seat. You will be transferred to your seat on the aircraft either by lifting or by means of a small aisle wheelchair.

If you have a hearing problem check with Airport Information if there are induction loops, minicomms or members of staff who are proficient in signing.

If you are blind or partially sighted and travelling alone you must be helped through the various stages to and from the aircraft.

If you will need oxygen on the flight you must let the airline know. You may have to pay for this service. You may not take a full oxygen cylinder with you, although an empty one may be carried in the hold for you to replenish at you destination.

Remember to carry any medication in your hand luggage.

### **On the Plane**

On the plane you will need to be able to manage by yourself or have a companion with you. The airline staff will not be able to help with feeding. They will be able to help you to, but not assist you in, the toilet. If you are a wheelchair user and have requested assistance, it is a good idea to check with a member of the cabin crew that the airport at your destination is expecting you and that the handling agents have a wheelchair ready to take you to the terminal building whilst your own is being unloaded. The pilot can radio ahead to check.

### **Dial-a-Ride Scheme**

A door-to-door service for disabled people run by most local authorities. It is only for local trips. To use the service you need to register with the scheme.

The London Dial-A-Ride service is the largest in the country and different areas have separate schemes. To find out what area you are in go to [www.tfl.gov.uk/dial-a-ride/](http://www.tfl.gov.uk/dial-a-ride/) or call **020 7027 5823** **020 7027 5824** e-mail [enquire@tfl.gov.uk](mailto:enquire@tfl.gov.uk)

If you live outside of London and want to find out if a Dial A Ride Scheme operates in your area, call The Disability Foundation's Information Department on **020 8954 7373**

## DDA and Sea Travel

Although the ports in the UK are covered by the act under Part III (access to goods and services) the ships themselves are not covered.

This means that under British law they have no duty to provide the same service to disabled people as other passengers.

Most ships though are becoming more and more accessible regardless of the Act.

If you are a member of the Disabled Drivers Association you may be entitled to a discount on ferry transport. To join the Association you should contact them on either of the following:

Tel: **0870 770 3333**

E-mail:

[hq@dda.org.uk](mailto:hq@dda.org.uk)

Website:

[www.dda.org.uk](http://www.dda.org.uk)

## Going by Sea

If you use a wheelchair when travelling or have severe walking difficulties, are blind or partially sighted, always let the ferry company or cruise ship operator know in advance what assistance you will need to ensure that this can be provided. Usually ferry and cruise ship operators require disabled travellers to be accompanied by an able-bodied companion.

### Ports

Most British ports have good facilities but those at European continental ports vary. Details should be available from the ferry companies. Where you need to use port facilities, check in advance the availability of lifts/ramps in the terminal building and the availability/location of wheelchair accessible toilets.

It is important to always check the distance to the ship from whichever means of transport you will be using to travel to the port (bus, coach, train or car). At ports with rail connections, some train services go right alongside the ship. At some ports in both the UK and Continental Europe accessible minibuses are available to transfer passengers directly to the quayside.

### Ferries

Most ferry companies operate fleets which are accessible to people with all disabilities, including those who use wheelchairs. If you give advance notice, most ferry companies will arrange for your vehicle to be parked on board by a lift, with easy access to the passenger decks. If you are taking a car, most ferry companies offer concessions to disabled motorists. Sometimes however these are restricted to members of disabled driving organisations, or are available only to disabled drivers (not disabled passengers).

### Cruise Ships

Some operators may require disabled travellers to have medical clearance. Modern cruise ships have lifts between decks and level access to cabins and public areas. It is imperative to check that there are no sills at doorways which make access difficult.

### Other things to think about if you are going on a cruise

- If you use a wheelchair, check with the cruise ship operator, that door widths and bathroom/toilets are suitable for your needs.
- Check if any special facilities are available for transferring ashore at ports of call for any excursions.
- Check that any special diet you need will be available.
- If you need oxygen, check with the operator that this will be available on board, or that you can bring your own supply.
- If you have any difficulty walking, check when booking if it is possible to have a cabin near the lift.
- If you use an electric scooter or wheelchair, check that you will be able to recharge it on board (the voltage may be different from normal, so you may need to use a transformer)
- Make sure the medical staff are aware of your condition so they can deal with all your needs

## Travel Insurance

To make the most of your holiday, and to avoid inconvenience if something goes wrong, you need to take out an adequate travel insurance policy (even if you are travelling within the UK). A travel insurance policy should cover you for:

- Cancellation to your holiday
- Any delays you may experience
- Personal property
- An accident
- Personal liability
- Legal expenses
- Medical expenses

Your travel agent or holiday organiser may offer you an insurance policy (see TDF's Holiday factsheet). Make sure to check the policy does not have any exclusion clauses that may affect you and that pre-existing medical conditions/disabilities are covered. (If you do find an exclusion clause, you may want to clarify that it does not breach the DDA.)

### Taxicard Scheme in London

Taxicard holders can make journeys in licensed London taxis for low cost. The subsidy applies directly to each trip. A Taxicard can be used anytime, 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year, subject to taxi availability.

To qualify you must either

Receive the Higher Rate Mobility component of the Disability Living Allowance or

Be registered as Blind (not partially sighted) or

Receive a War Pension Mobility Supplement

If you do not receive one you may still be eligible, ask your borough council.

Other councils around the UK may run similar schemes to London's Taxicard so it is worth investigating.

Taxi Companies:

Chequers:

**020 8205 6789**

Comcab:

**020 7432 1432**

### **DDA and Insurance**

Under the Disability Discrimination Act, it is illegal to discriminate against disabled people in the areas of goods, facilities and services.

Therefore it is illegal for insurance companies to refuse to provide you with insurance on the basis of your disability.

However, if they can provide convincing reasons why insuring you poses a higher risk, they are entitled to increase your premium. To discriminate on the basis of disability alone is unlawful; to discriminate on the basis of perceived risk, as long as it is well-founded is not.

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You do not have to buy your insurance policy from your travel agent. Often it is much cheaper elsewhere, banks and independent companies offer good rates. As with all types of financial products, it is a good idea to shop around before making any final decision, as costs of travel insurance vary greatly.

Insuring expensive mobility vehicles is difficult. Most companies have a single item limit of around £300. If a company is willing to insure your scooter or wheelchair, you may have to pay an extra premium. One alternative is to insure it as part of your household contents insurance.

When looking for travel insurance, ask as many questions as possible to ensure that the policy will be right for you, eg, make sure that there is adequate cover for your equipment or other property you take with you on holiday. Check that you will be covered if you have to go to hospital for any reason and that you are covered if you need to return home.

### **Exclusions**

Be careful to read the small print. You need to know what exclusions there are in your policy and what they mean to you. A particular exclusion of relevance to those with disabilities is that concerning a pre-existing medical condition. Basic cover excludes claims resulting from a pre-existing medical condition if in the past year you, or any person to be covered by the insurance, has:

- Received treatment as a hospital in-patient.
- Been under the care of, or referred to, a specialist consultant, or is waiting for the results of and medical tests.
- Been diagnosed with cancer.
- Been treated for a breathing or heart condition (including angina) and are still taking medication or receiving follow up consultation.
- Received treatment for any psychological or psychiatric disorder including anxiety, stress and depression.

There are organisations who cover those with pre-existing conditions, phone TDF for information on them.