

Taxi for Life?

**The Handy Guide to
Becoming a Professional
Cab Driver**



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1. Introduction

You may have grown up wanting to be a footballer, fireman or aircraft pilot but, well, things don't always work out that way. Perhaps the next best thing is finding a job that suits you.

For many thousands of people across the UK and Ireland, becoming a professional taxi driver offers regular employment, good banter and a considerable sense of freedom. There are also opportunities to start your own business and build lasting relationships with regular customers and fellow drivers.

Our handy guide to being a cab driver provides an insight into what to expect, what's involved and how to go about getting started. You can find out about the complex world of taxi licensing and which type of vehicles you can use as a cab in your area. There's advice on how to go about insuring your cab and how to get finance to buy a new or used taxi and some thoughts on which is the best option for you. We also offer some useful contacts for more information.

2. What's it Like?

Let's get it straight – don't let anybody tell you driving a taxi is the way to a guaranteed easy life. Like every line of business, cab driving has its challenges as well as its rewards.

First and foremost, you're dealing with people, all the time. If you're a people person – and many of us are – then taxi driving can offer a fabulous outlet for your interests and personality. Taxi drivers are, rightly, famed for sharing their opinions, after all! You can also make some pretty decent tips in the taxi business, especially if you're good at getting on with your customers. If you don't really enjoy chatting to lots of different people on a regular basis, then maybe cab driving isn't the answer for you.

As well as a way of life that means meeting new people all the time, the cab trade also gives thousands of workers a unique sense of freedom. Tried other things but got tired of meddling bosses telling you what to do all the time?

Of course taxi drivers have rules to follow but, most of the time, it's just you, your vehicle and your customers. It's up to you to keep the vehicle fuelled and tidy, find the best way to the destination and make the most of the journey. But there's no supervisor sitting with you all day, so really it's down to you how you approach the job and aim to get the most out of it for you and your family. This said, there's usually a strong sense of community among the local taxi trade in any area and you can expect plenty of support and advice from your colleagues in the cab business.

In terms of working times, you'll probably have a choice. For most people, 'unsociable' hours are part of the deal. Put simply, there's more money to be made at busy times, like evenings and weekends, when other people are off work and out and about socialising. Again, this isn't for everyone, though many taxi drivers find it gives them more time during the day to spend with the family or catching up with other jobs. There's also a good many cab drivers with enviably low handicaps on the golf course!

Some cab drivers - often older people 'winding down' in their career, stick to working quieter, day-time shifts. This becomes more of a life-style decision, where you can let yourself slow down while at the same time keeping your hand in, maintaining social contact and earning some spare cash. For many, this is an attractive option in later life, rather than going from full-time employment to sitting at home with nothing to do all day.

Many younger and middle-aged people in the cab trade do work longish hours – after all, the more you work, the more you earn. On the other hand there's usually plenty of time in between to catch up on reading, calling your pals or even learning a musical instrument.

The range of backgrounds among people in the taxi trade is usually quite surprising. Wander along a taxi rank in any major town or city and you'll likely find people of all ages, men and women. It's also common to find some drivers reading the local paper, someone reading a text book for an exam, someone else surfing on their smartphone and others in a group, chatting in the back of a cab. You'll find some who are great mechanically and look after their own vehicle, whereas others never so much as touch the bonnet and have a local garage that looks after all the technical stuff.

Overall, the UK's taxi drivers are a much more varied and skilled group of people than most people realise. Certainly if you're a people person or like being left to your own devices without too much interference, then the taxi trade could be a great choice for your career.

3. The UK Taxi Trade

Join the cab trade and you'll certainly not be alone. The taxi industry is a huge employer across the UK. In fact government statistics¹ are more than quarter of a million cabs across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. That works out at around one cab for every 250 residents across the country.

In many parts of the world a cab is a cab. Here in the UK, however, we have two distinct types of service – public hire 'taxis' and private hire cars. Most local authorities nowadays have both types of vehicle, both governed by its own set of rules. Specifics of these regulations can vary considerably from one local council to the next. Wherever you are, however:

- **Taxis – also known as black cabs, hackney cabs or hackney taxis** - can wait at a rank, be 'hailed' on the street or be pre-booked over the phone (some larger cities now also have smartphone taxi apps). Charging is almost always done by meter – usually so much for the hire plus so much for each mile of the journey. These fees are set by the local council, usually on an annual basis.
- **Private hire vehicles (PHVs) – also known as minicabs** - can only be pre-booked, whether over the phone, through a website or a company's smartphone app. Charging is by a set fee for any given journey. The vehicle operator is free to set these fees and should always tell the customer in advance what the cost will be for their required trip.

Public hire taxis have been around, in one form or another (back to carriages pulled by hackney horses) for centuries. The taxi trade is very well established and is usually made up mostly of individual owner-drivers. The public hire taxi trade tends to have more 'career' taxi drivers and is usually known to have a strong voice protecting the interests of the trade. Many areas have an active local taxi association or similar. Some larger cities have organised pre-booking services for public hire taxis, such as Mantax (Manchester) or Glasgow Taxis .

Private hire vehicles are a much more recent phenomenon. It's amazing to think that these vehicles weren't officially recognised and licensed, even in London, until 2001. The private hire business tends to be much more dominated by 'taxi companies', who advertise and compete to attract customers to call their magic

¹ Department for Transport and Scottish Government, 2013

number and handle bookings through a booking office or modern contact centre. Often bookings are organised using computerised despatch systems.

Although the public hire taxi trade has been about much longer, there are actually more private hire vehicles nowadays. In fact national figures show there are almost twice as many private hire cars (165,000) as public hire taxis (90,000)².

Thanks to its advantages as the UK's political and commercial capital, London alone boasts 22,000 public hire taxis (which they call 'licensed taxis' or just 'taxis') and more than 50,000 'minicabs'. Other cities with notably large taxi and/or private hire fleets include Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Sheffield, Leeds, Manchester, Liverpool, Newcastle, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Belfast. However, every town and city has its taxi ranks and private hire offices and even remote islands in the Highlands of Scotland and English Channel tend to have at least a one-man taxi service of some sort. Cabbies really are just about everywhere!

² As 1., above.

4. Employment Options

There are various different ways of getting into the taxi trade. The easiest is to start working as an employee for a taxi company; the other end of the scale is owning your own vehicle or even starting your own company. Here are some of the main options:

- **Apply for a job with a local taxi company.** You may sometimes see firms advertising for drivers but don't wait to see an advert – most companies have a turnover of drivers and will often be looking for more drivers, so just give them a ring or send in your CV and tell them you're keen. You might get part-time, occasional or full-time work. Some owner-drivers of public hire taxis may also employ a second or third driver to work their cab or cabs when they're not out driving themselves.

Whoever your employer is, often the main thing is getting your foot in the door. The hope is the more you turn up on time and do the job without any hassle, the more chance you have of getting more work as time goes on. You may earn tips as well as your wages, while fares collected all go to the taxi owner.

- **Rent a car from a local taxi company.** In London and some other big cities there are firms which specialise in renting out public hire taxis. Both here and in most other towns and cities local taxi companies rent cabs on a weekly basis, many of these being in the private hire trade. Renting a cab means you keep the fares you earn, in return for paying for the fuel you use plus a weekly fee for the use of the vehicle. Usually it includes insurance and access to the company's advance booking service. This fee is often collected on a given day of the week, commonly known as 'weigh-in' day.

Renting is usually open to anyone, provided you meet the criteria as a driver. Your credit history won't necessarily affect you, provided you make the required payment to the taxi company every week. If for any reason you

miss a payment, don't expect to be in the vehicle too long – taxi companies don't want you building up arrears they might not get back and will just move the vehicle on to someone else.

- **Buy your own cab.** Owning your own cab means more responsibility in return for the chance to earn more and enjoy maximum freedom. Self-employment is very common in the UK taxi industry. Like renting, owning means you keep all fares and tips you earn. Assuming you need to borrow money to buy a vehicle – and sometimes to buy a license as well – you'll have a monthly lease or hire purchase payment to make, plus your vehicle fuel, running and repair costs and specialist taxi insurance. You may or may not want to pay a separate fee to get business from a local taxi booking system.

Borrowing money to buy your own cab will mean having to pass a credit check with a finance company or you may be able to put together the money in partnership with close friends and family. Running your own vehicle brings a greater element of risk but, overall, you're outgoings will usually be substantially less than if you rent a car from a taxi company. Most people who can get their own vehicle chose to do so, sooner or later, which is why there's tens of thousands of taxi owner-drivers across the UK and Ireland.

- **Start your own taxi company.** This may sound like a distant dream but actually the taxi industry gives a much better chance of starting your own business than most other walks of life. Perhaps you start out simply as a self-employed taxi owner with one vehicle. You build up a regular customer base and maybe start to get 'in' with some local companies or organisations that will use your services regularly. Perhaps you take on a part-time driver to keep the vehicle working when you're off duty. Then you manage to afford a second vehicle and employ a couple of people to keep it on the road, earning money.

Next thing you know, you have three or four people, as well as yourself, out there bringing in profits for your small business. As things build up you're able advertise your business locally and win some healthy contract work. Now you can justify funding a few more vehicles. You might employ more drivers for these or even rent these out to people who want to get into the

trade. Then you have other people covering your purchase costs, as well as delivering increased profits for your company. You're well on your way!

5. Entry Requirements & Training

As you might imagine, one thing you will need is a driving license. This needs to be either a UK or EU license which is valid for at least the next 12 months. Whether or not it needs to be 'clean' may depend on your prospective employer or local licensing authority but nine points probably isn't the best advert for your driving technique. Your local authority or taxi employer is also entitled to ask for an enhanced criminal record check before offering you a job or granting a taxi driver license.

Some authorities and companies currently do this as a matter of course, others don't. Some local councils also require new entrants to the trade to pass some form of initial test. This could include your awareness of local streets and requirements for a good grasp of English language are becoming more common. You may also be asked to undergo a DVLA level 2 medical check or equivalent.

Your local licensing authority won't help with driving lessons or language skills (although there may be local courses to help with the latter). However local authorities are increasingly offering training in topics like customer care. Popular tourism areas may offer training in local places of interest, so that cabbies are better equipped to pass information about local attractions on to visitors.

One thing which is becoming widely provided by local authorities is disability awareness training. In many cases this is now becoming mandatory. You'll probably be asked to go on a one or two day course which explains how best to assess barriers faced by people with different types of disability and how best to address their needs. If you have a wheelchair accessible taxi, this should include instruction on the correct way to load and secure a wheelchair passenger.

Nowadays you can even attend a course leading to a [National Vocational Qualification \(NVQ\) in Road Passenger Vehicle Driving](#) (Taxi and Private Hire). These courses are available through a variety of colleges and private training providers around the country. Even this level of study is, however, likely to be as nothing compared with the famous 'Knowledge Test', which all new hackney taxi drivers in London have to pass.

It's probably fair to say '[The Knowledge](#)' is loved by those who've successfully completed it and hated by those struggling through it. It's not just about being able to find your way from anywhere to everywhere across the whole of London - you also have to know alternative routes in case the traffic is bad *and* be able to recall the names of all the streets and landmarks you would pass on the way. The fabled

'Blue Book' sets out more than 300 key routes, 25,000 streets and 20,000 'landmarks' for the would-be London cabbie to get to know like the back of his hand.

Many people get hold of a push bike or scooter and spend hundreds of hours out practising in their spare time, trying to build up their mind-map of the city. Typically The Knowledge takes about three years to complete – but you can make top money in the busy London hackney trade once you're in. London private hire drivers do not need to 'do' The Knowledge and are much more likely to rely on Sat Nav nowadays.

6. Taxi Vehicles

Many different types of vehicle are used as taxis. This is partly because of market choice but can also be a result of vehicle specifications required by local authorities. Most councils will accept most types of car as private hire vehicles, though there are usually some stipulations about engine size and seat width. Some borough and city councils have quite detailed specifications for hackney or public hire taxis. Known as 'conditions of fitness', these regulations often call for vehicles to be wheelchair accessible and may require additional features such as a safety partition or bulkhead.

One very important decision for taxi owners is whether to buy a new or used cab. Naturally you can save money buying a used vehicle but there's more risk involved, should anything go wrong. A brand new vehicle may seem more expensive initially but keep in mind that fuel economy is continuously improving and the latest model will save you time and money by going further on every tank of fuel. If buying used, make sure you get a decent warranty – reputable dealers should offer 12 months cover.

A new vehicle means added peace of mind and will protect you against costly repair bills by giving you a longer and more comprehensive warranty. Typically manufacturers offer three years or 60,000 miles, whichever comes first. As taxi cabs are working vehicles, that means you'll reach the mileage limit first but 60,000 miles of hassle free driving is well worth having. Some marques, like Toyota for example, will cover you for a whopping 100,000 miles. If you're buying a purpose-built taxi you may be able to get extended warranty cover for key items like your engine and gearbox. The Peugeot E7 black cab is a good example of this.

The type of vehicles in the hackney taxi fleet in any given area is likely to be influenced by the local conditions of fitness. London and a couple of smaller towns in England still require a particular turning circle, based on a horse and carriage turning outside the Savoy Hotel in London. It used to be believed that this magic turning circle was essential for busy urban areas but over the 2000s almost every major town and city in the UK and Ireland has dispensed with this antiquated rule, without any adverse effect on the operation of local taxi services.

The upside of this change, for the taxi trade, has been a wider choice of vehicles, including more economical modern cars, for use as hackney cabs. Taxi passengers have also benefitted from more comfortable and reliable cabs. Quicker and safer access for wheelchair passengers has been another advantage. Unfortunately London still hangs on to the old regulations, meaning that cab owners there have a very limited choice of very expensive vehicle types.

Taxi fleets still vary hugely around the country, largely as a result of different local authority cab specifications. Some local council's require all cabs to be wheelchair accessible, whereas in other areas new cab licenses, issued from a certain date, must be wheelchair accessible. Taxi ranks in these areas therefore have a mixture of new-license vehicles, which are wheelchair accessible vehicles and old-licenses – known as 'grandfather rights' – which can be any approved vehicle and so are often standard saloon or estate cars.

Another local difference with hackney taxis is the type of certification that local council's require to show that a cab is constructed safely. 'Type Approval' means having technical documents to back up the way a purpose-built taxi – like most wheelchair accessible cabs – has been designed and built. Different councils set different standards for this, with the highest being EC Whole Vehicle Type Approval. Specialist taxi suppliers should be able to guide you on what is needed in your area, so you don't end up with a new or [used taxi](#) you can't get licensed.

Some vehicle types popular with the cab trade today are:

Saloon & Estate Taxis

- Auris (Toyota)
- Avensis (Toyota)
- E-Class (Mercedes)
- Insignia (Vauxhall)
- i40 (Hyundai)
- Mondeo (Ford)
- Prius (Toyota)
- Superb (Skoda)
- 308 SW (Peugeot)

MPV Taxis

- Galaxy (Ford)
- Sharan (Volkswagen)
- Transporter (Volkswagen)

Purpose-Built Wheelchair Accessible Taxis

- Eurobus (Peugeot)
- Premier (Peugeot)
- Trafic (Renault)
- Vito (Mercedes)

Taxis with Partitioned Passenger Compartment

- EuroTaxi (Peugeot)
- E7 (Peugeot)
- M8 (Mercedes)
- TX4 (LTC)

You can also get in-depth advice on meeting local licensing vehicle specifications from specialist taxi suppliers like [Cab Direct](#).

7. Taxi Licensing

Taxi and private hire matters certainly help keep most local licensing officials busy. 'Licensing boards', which also deal with pub, gambling and sex stores, among their other work, are in fact sub-committees of each local authority.

With almost 400 of these local taxi licensing authorities across the UK there are almost as many different approaches to taxi licensing! Many of these differences are relatively minor while others – particularly conditions of fitness for vehicles (see section 6, above) have a huge impact on the nature of the local taxi trade. There are three main types of license that relate to taxiing.

- **Taxi driver license.** Every public and private hire driver must have a license issue by the relevant licensing authority. This results in some form of badge, usually worn on a lanyard around your neck, which lets passengers see that you are an approved person. Clearly if you incur a road traffic conviction or otherwise breach the local taxi driver licensing regulations, you may be in danger of losing your cab driver license – and, with it, your livelihood. Some local authorities operate their own version of a 'points system', whereby minor breaches of their rules result in penalty points; if you reach the maximum, then your license is revoked. This said, more serious offences can always result in immediate loss of your taxi driver license.
- **Taxi vehicle license.** As mentioned above (section 6), local authorities can impose their own 'conditions of fitness' for public hire or hackney taxis. Your local licensing officer should be able to provide a list of vehicle types which have been approved for use in your area. Generally speaking, you have to choose one of the cabs included on this approved list. However, if you are interested in a different vehicle you are entitled to apply to license one. Your local authority will then be obliged to consider your request and to give a reasonable explanation as to why that vehicle is not accepted, unless they decide that it should be included.

Some local authorities maintain a 'cap' on the number of vehicles that can be licensed as hackney cabs in their area. Councils have to justify regulation of the market in this way, which they can do by commissioning independent

research to establish whether there is any 'unmet' demand for cabs in the area. This research has to be repeated at least every three years and aims to find out whether there are enough cabs to cope with passenger demand at peak times. If the survey shows that there are enough taxis the council can, if it wishes, continue to cap the number of licensed cabs. If, on the other hand, the findings show that there is a significant shortage of cabs at certain times, then the authority is obliged to remove or alter the cap limit.

Many authorities have moved away from regulating the number of taxi vehicle licenses in recent years. There is evidence, however, from numerous towns and cities to suggest that where the market is regulated, the overall quality of the taxi fleet is better. This is a direct result of higher earnings among local taxi operators and a more stable market. Where more and more cabs have flooded a local market, following 'de-regulation', it has often been the case that there is too little work to go round, meaning that cab owners have to cut the amount they invest in updating and maintaining their vehicle.

Local authorities also have powers to require cabs to be a certain colour – sometimes a particular colour of their own, as is this case with 'Bristol Blue', for example. Sometimes hackney or private hire vehicles have to be different colours, to help the public identify which is which. Another fairly common matter is taxi age limits. This may say that hackney vehicles can operate to a maximum age of, say, 12 years. Private hire vehicles may also have an age restriction, which is sometimes lower than that for hackney vehicles.

All taxi and private hire vehicles are subject to a specific inspection or 'taxi test', both on first being licensed and at regular intervals thereafter. The first time your vehicle goes for 'test' will mean it gets checked out to see that it meets your councils conditions of fitness – meaning that your vehicle is on their approved list of cabs. Once approved, you're cab can be fitted with an official taxi 'plate' – hence the term 'plated taxi' – which carries the name of the local authority and the number of the vehicle's taxi license. There's usually an expiry date and some brief information about the vehicle and how many passengers it's allowed to carry.

Thereafter you may have to go for a further taxi tests every year or possibly more frequently than that. Random spot checks can also be undertaken and certain local authorities carry out occasional roadside inspections, sometimes in partnership with the police and DVLA. If your cab fails any test item, either at a scheduled or random inspection, you will usually be given a period of time in which to return, having had the issue fixed. Normally you won't be able to operate the vehicle as a taxi until this has been resolved.

Some areas – especially London – experience lots of trouble with people who have no taxi driver or taxi vehicle license trying to earn a fast buck by picking up people and charging fares. Often they lurk outside pubs and night clubs at closing time, when customers may be less fussy than they should be about how they get home. This practice of trying to operate as an unlicensed cab is known as 'taxi touting'. It's a criminal offense and something which local licensing enforcement officers should actively address, by getting out and about at peak times to catch touts and deter others. Many taxi drivers and associations feel that the police and taxi licensing enforcement officers should do more to crack down on taxi touting.

- **Vehicle operator license.** In addition to their drivers and vehicles being licensed, private hire taxi companies must hold a Vehicle Operator License. Lasting for up to five years (it can also be less), this is a bit like football club owner rules, whereby the local licensing committee has to decide whether the owner of a local taxi firm is a 'fit and proper' person.

As with other aspects of taxi licensing aggrieved parties can appeal, in the first instance, to the local magistrates court.

8. Taxi Insurance

When your vehicle covers 30 to 40,000 miles a year, or more you might expect insurance to be higher than for a family car doing perhaps a quarter of that at most. In fact, motor insurance for hire and reward is one of the biggest outlays both for taxi and private hire drivers.

If you own or lease your own cab, you will need specialist commercial insurance. Fortunately there are many specialist taxi insurance packages available. Search online for 'taxi insurance' or look in your local phone book for brokers that will be jostling to help you. Some insurance packages include additional legal assistance or accident management support. Make sure you know what excess charge applies and especially what your policy offers in terms of a replacement vehicle and/or loss of earnings cover if yours is off the road for a period of time, due to a bump. This could be hugely important when your vehicle is your livelihood and you still have monthly finance payments to make. Remember too that you may need a specialist vehicle in order to meet your council's local conditions of fitness.

You'll find separate insurance packages for public hire taxi and for private hire minicabs. There are also schemes designed for minibuses. If you're starting a private hire taxi company or own several hackney taxis, you'll need to look into taxi fleet insurance.

Unfortunately bogus claims have driven up taxi insurance prices in recent years. These even include scams where passengers get in a taxi, then a pal drives in front of it in a car. Next thing the car slams on the brakes, the taxi driver comes to a controlled stop – then finds the passengers have thrown themselves on the floor of the cab. Their goal is to make a personal injury claim, which can become hugely expensive for the insurer. Thankfully the insurance industry and the government are now working together to try to reduce insurance fraud, which is helping bring taxi insurance premiums under control.

Nevertheless, commercial insurance remains a significant cost of business. With annual premiums amounting to many hundreds or into the thousands of pounds, you'll be relieved to know that many taxi insurance brokers do instalment plans, so that you can spread you premium over monthly payments.

9. Taxi Finance

Compared with renting or working for someone else, owning your own cab offers you the best earning potential, with weekly car payments being substantially lower than paying someone else for the use of their vehicle. Unless your fairy godmother has left you a pile of cash, you'll need to find the best way to fund the cost of your cab.

Sometimes close friends and family will get together to help someone into business by clubbing together to meet the cost of buying a vehicle. This is great, especially if you have a religious objection to paying interest.

Most people do need to borrow money commercially. To arrange this, you're probably best sourcing specialist [taxi finance](#). Leading taxi suppliers like Cab Direct are set up to get you the best finance deal from a range of specialist brokers. You'll understand that if you've missed payments in the past – hire purchase goods from shops or bank loans, for example – your credit score will be affected. Official County Court Judgements (CCJs) certainly don't help. A poor credit history doesn't necessarily mean you won't get a loan to buy a taxi and your specialist taxi suppliers will explore a range of brokers to try to get you accepted. Sometimes this may come at a cost, in terms of a higher rate than will be the case if you're lucky enough to have a perfect credit history.

10. Taxi Ranks & Radio Circuits

Right, you've got your taxi driver's license, your new cab's been inspected and 'plated', you've got the right taxi insurance and you're raring to go. Now where does the business come from?

If you have a hackney license – otherwise a public hire or simply taxi license – you can work the ranks and accept hires from customers who flag you down on the street. Rank business can vary hugely in different locations and at different times of day. A main rank in a busy town centre on a Friday or Saturday night may be almost constantly moving, so as soon as you return from dropping off one fare there's another one waiting to be collected. Some busy town and city ranks even have taxi marshals at peak periods, who help maintain order among people waiting at the rank. Some taxi marshals may even get people waiting in ones and twos together with people heading to a similar part of town, in order to avoid over-lengthy queues at the rank.

Taxi ranks in towns and cities are the responsibility of your local authority. Airports are another story entirely, with taxi ranks governed by the private company that operates the airport. In some cases, they contract the service to one private hire company, such as Checker Cabs, at Bristol Airport. At others airport owners operate a barrier system, whereby taxi owner-drivers pay a fee in order to access the airport rank (take John Lennon Liverpool Airport, for example).

As a hackney driver, you can decide to make your living entirely by the fares you can pick up at the ranks or on street. In some areas these are known as 'street cars'. The alternative is 'radio cars', whereby hackney taxi owners opt to pay a fee in order to also receive bookings from a radio network. In the hackney taxi business, these radio circuits tend to be found in larger cities and are often operated as a consortium, owned by the city hackney association. Central Taxis and City Cabs in Edinburgh are leading examples. These consortiums advertise their service widely and may operate a contact centre with a radio or computerised despatch system.

In the private hire world, every fare *must* be pre-booked, so it's all about advertising your number. Actually, nowadays, it may be more about promoting your website or smartphone 'app'. If you're renting a vehicle from a local taxi company, the cost of being part of their network will normally be included with your weekly payment to the company. If you own your own private hire car (as many people also do) in a large town or city, you'll almost certainly need to join a leading radio circuit in order to get business. Clearly the fee for this will be less than the combined fee for the circuit plus cab rental. In some smaller towns and rural areas, it may be enough to

advertise your number and get your name known locally, if there's no competition from a major private hire operator.

11. Taxis for All

Taxis provide a uniquely flexible transport service. They are available any time of the day or night and take passengers direct from their desired pick-up point to any (reasonable!) destination. This personalised service can be handy for all of us and is also particularly important for many disabled people.

More than ten million people in the UK have reported some form of disability. This includes around 1.2 million wheelchair users.³ People living with a disability – particularly something which affects their mobility – often find taxi services particularly important. This also includes an ever-growing number of people who are living longer and who experience reduced mobility in their later years.

While there are 'dial-a-ride' type schemes in many areas, often you have to ring to book a lift several days in advance. Passengers may then need to wait 'till a large minibus makes it way to them and then goes round various other pick-ups and drop-offs, before they finally get where they need to go.

Taxis and private hire cars, by comparison, can be ordered at short notice and will take a disabled person right to the shops, doctor, a friend or relative or wherever it is they want to get to. It's the ultimate 'door-to-door' service, if you like. In fact, research has shown that disabled people rely on taxis 67% more than able bodied people.⁴

The Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee states that:

“ . . . for a large number of elderly and disabled people, [taxis] are quite literally a lifeline. Often taxis provide the only means of accessible local transport, or

³ Source: National Health Service.

⁴ Source: Attitudes of Disabled People to Public Transport, DPTAC (2001)

the only accessible link to long distance transport, for example by rail or air. In fact, they are the most flexible form of public transport there is.”

What does this all mean for taxi and private hire car operators and drivers? On one hand, there is an obligation to provide equality of service to all customers, wherever possible. Hackney taxi drivers, for example, are legally required to stop when hailed by a wheelchair user. In many areas the local authority requires some or all public hire taxis to be wheelchair accessible.

It's not just all about additional obligations for the taxi trade, however. Looked at positively, older and disabled people offer a large part of your potential income. Older people, for example, often like to go back to using someone they know and trust. So, if you get one fare with an older person and get on well with them, they may well take a note of your number and 'adopt' you as their 'go-to' taxi driver. Good for them having someone they can rely on and good business for you.

Especially if you have a wheelchair accessible cab, you should be able to benefit from contract work with local schools, colleges, social care or medical services. This might be something your local taxi association or radio circuit has won through a tender. This can result in a nice, steady income which can keep you going during the week. It's quite common to see taxis sitting about on slow ranks in the early afternoon, then several of them heading off for the 'school run' at half past three. Knowing you have a firm booking every morning and/or afternoon certainly adds welcome stability to what can otherwise be an up-and-down kind of business.

There are differences between wheelchair accessible taxis too. Some of the larger cities insist that cabs must offer side-loading wheelchair access (i.e. from the pavement) and often demand a bulkhead – a built-in screen which separates the driver, in the front of the vehicle, from the passenger compartment in the rear. This in turn leads to vehicles with facing passenger seats and an intercom system, so the passengers can speak to the driver when they need to. Usually the rear facing passenger seats are of the 'tip-up' type, which means they fold out of the way when not needed and when a wheelchair is to be accommodated. Some of these 'full-specification' taxis even offer a pull-out, under-floor wheelchair ramp. Where taxi buyers have a choice of vehicles, the [Peugeot E7](#) is the best-selling full specification taxi in the UK.

Many other local councils require taxis to be wheelchair accessible but do not specify 'side-loading' ramps and separated passenger compartments. In these areas, wheelchair accessible taxis with ramps at the rear of the vehicle are often more popular. Some of these, like the [Peugeot Premier](#), are cleverly designed and are more or less the same as a standard car.

When not in use for a wheelchair passenger, the cab offers normal seating for the driver and four passengers. Because the wheelchair ramp folds away flat there's also a large, unobstructed boot space for luggage as well. The cab can be turned into a wheelchair accessible vehicle in a minute or so, whenever that's needed, then switched back to a standard car, just as easily. Because of their flexibility and relatively low price tag, cabs like the Premier and [Volkswagen Kudos](#) have become hugely popular wherever general wheelchair access is required.

12. Taxi Associations

When you're starting out in something new, it's always good to look for tips and pointers from people who've got more experience for you. This might just be from someone you already know in the taxi trade. Once you start, you'll also get to meet other cabbies on the ranks or at your private hire booking office. Another useful point of contact could be a local cab trade association.

There are literally hundreds of local taxi and private hire associations across the UK. Some are just a few of the more experienced or interested people in the trade, who get together from time to time to put the views of local cabbies across to the local council and media. Others are well developed organisations with subscription fees and regular meetings. In the larger cities, taxi associations can be highly developed, operating local booking services or lobbying on a wide range of issues. The Licensed Taxi Drivers Association, in London, is the biggest in the UK and is a well-resourced consortium which provides a host of benefits, including fighting legal cases on behalf of individual member drivers.

In addition to local association there are national representative bodies for both hackney taxis and private hire services. The [National Taxi Association](#) (NTA) is the leading organisation for the public hire taxi trade. It operates as an umbrella organisation for local taxi associations and campaigns nationally on important issues that affect the taxi industry. It holds a national conference once a year, which moves to different parts of the country. If you're keen to get involved in taxi issues and learn from other areas, this could be a good event to go to.

The National Taxi Association is a successor to earlier bodies dating back to 1960. Its website provides lots of news and information about taxi issues. The NTA's activities include:

- Encouraging good relations and mutual support among all taxi drivers
- Supporting the development of new ideas and a good and efficient service for passengers
- Celebrating achievements by taxi drivers.
- To lobby to protect taxi drivers' interests, notably through relevant legislation and in Parliament.
- To help younger people make a success of the taxi trade.
- To share useful research and information about the taxi industry.

The private hire sector also has an active representative body, called the [National Private Hire Association](#) (NPHA). Founded in 1992, its magazine – Private Hire & Taxi Monthly – is the most read taxi paper in the UK and serves hackney taxi as well as private hire readers. In fact, the association also updates and publishes current fare tariffs, every month, as set by every local authority around the UK.

The National Private Hire Association has placed particular emphasis on supporting individuals and local private hire associations in fighting legal matters affecting their livelihood. Its website includes lots of useful information on previous private hire related legislation and previous legal cases. The NPHA is very active in lobbying MPs, government Ministers and the Department for Transport on taxi topics and has conducted a number of useful research surveys.

13. More Information

In addition to other cab drivers you get to know and your local taxi association representatives, some useful sources for expert advice on taxi issues include:

Cab Direct

Advice on taxi models, taxi finance and local vehicle licensing specifications.

Tel:

Email: info@cabdirect.com

Web: www.cabdirect.com

Department for Transport

Taxi and vehicle legislation, enquiries, research and reports.

Web: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-transport

Driver & Vehicle Standards Agency

Regulations concerning driving licenses and penalties and vehicle licensing regulations.

Web: <http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/driver-and-vehicle-licensing-agency>

National Private Hire Association

Business advice and legal support for private hire drivers and operators.

Tel: 0161 280 2800

Email: enquiries@npha.org.uk

Web: www.npha.org.uk

National Taxi Association

News updates, trade information and advice on hackney / public hire taxi matters.

Tel: 01228 598740

Email: secretary@national-taxi-association.co.uk

Web: www.national-taxi-association.co.uk