

Disability Transport Regulations

***View From The Chair Business Newsletter 19 January 2010
Bob Collins, Chief Commissioner, The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.***

Although the Disability Discrimination Act was introduced in 1995, the key area of transport has been exempted from many of its provisions for the past fifteen years. That meant that disabled people did not have full legal protection against discrimination when using buses, trains or taxis, for example.

From next week that changes and transport providers may not refuse service or provide service of a lower standard or on worse terms to a disabled person because of their disability. They will also be under a legal duty to make alterations to their existing services to make them accessible to disabled people. The new regulations [*the Disability Discrimination (Transport Vehicles) Regulations (Northern Ireland)*] apply to trains, buses and coaches, taxis, vehicle rental and breakdown services.

Of course, most businesses will be familiar with the requirements now placed on transport providers, for they will have been operating under the Disability Discrimination Act for some years now. Making sure that their services can be accessed by everyone, and making reasonable adjustments for people with disabilities, is a part of business life for everyone providing services to the public.

This extension of rights is one which carries great potential to improve the lives of many people – individuals with disabilities, their families and their communities. Access to transport enhances the independence, employment potential and quality of life of any person, and limitations on that right for disabled people can have a severe impact on them.

Often, what those providing transport need to do will involve, not only equipment, but also the knowledge and readiness of their frontline staff to deal with people with disabilities seeking to use their service. As with all businesses, this means that staff should be trained in their responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act to help them recognise and deal with disabled customers. If there are practices or procedures in place which prevent or deter disabled people from using the service, these should be changed.

The Equality Commission has produced a range of short guides to the transport regulations which have been widely distributed and are available on our website, as is the draft Code of Practice.

The Commission is also providing training across Northern Ireland during January 2010 to explain these legislative changes to transport providers. Details can be obtained by contacting the Equality Commission at 028 90 890 890, or by email to equalityprojectsadmin@equalityni.org, or see our website www.equalityni.org