

Accessible Taxi Qualitative Research

Report – November 2017

Prepared for The City of Calgary by:



Contact:

Ian Large
Vice President
Leger

780-423-0708
ilarge@leger360.com

808 4 Avenue, Suite 1000
Calgary, AB
T2P 3E8

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Context and Objectives



The Livery Transport Advisory Committee (LTAC) has been assessing taxi user satisfaction via a telephone survey for several years, however, the general public survey does not focus on satisfaction with accessible taxi services in Calgary. While many Calgarians have used accessible taxis in Calgary, the vast majority of these users do not require the services of an accessible taxi (i.e. do not have mobility challenges that require accessible vans).

In 2017, LTAC decided to understand the experiences of on-demand accessible taxi users in Calgary who use accessible taxis for accommodation of a mobility device, such as a power chair, wheel chair, scooter or service dog.

Leger was contracted to conduct this research. A qualitative approach was taken to gain a deep understanding of user experiences. Specifically, the objectives of this research were to understand the:

- Overall satisfaction with accessible taxis
- User experience to obtain accessible taxis
- Ride experiences
- Satisfaction with drivers and payment process
- Challenges experienced by users
- Suggestions or advice from the users

Methodology



Data collection: One-on-one phone interviews (n=11) were conducted by Leger from late October to mid-November 2017. Two of these interviews were conducted in-person in Calgary and the remaining were conducted over the phone.

Sample: Participants were recruited from a list put together by The City and from the survey respondents of 2017 Annual Citizen Satisfaction survey. The respondents were screened for using on-demand accessible taxi services in Calgary for the accommodation of a mobility device.

Respondents: A mix of respondents in terms of:

- Accommodation of different mobility devices (manual wheel chair, power chair, scooter)
- Accommodation of the service dog
- Users and caregivers
- Lapsed users

Conclusions



Accessible taxi users use accessible taxis for a variety of reasons.

Some key insights from the study:

- Most users use dispatch to book a taxi and are satisfied with the process
- Some work needs to be done to improve the user experience in terms of getting the taxi, i.e., availability of taxis and low (or appropriately communicated) wait time
- This is a very vulnerable population and the fact has to be reiterated in all aspects of the process, so users feel they are being respected and understood

Detailed Analysis



Taxi Usage

Modes of Transit

Accessible needs passengers use all types of modes of transit:

- Calgary Transit Access
- On-demand accessible taxis
- Public transit
- Ride with a family member

Taxi Companies

They also use a range of taxi companies – Checkers, Associated, Mayfair.

- Some users prefer one company over the other due to previous positive experience with the company and comfort level with the drivers.
- Usage varies from at least once a week to couple to a times a month.

Trip Purpose

They are using accessible taxis for a variety of reasons:

- Medical appointments
- Meetings
- Social gatherings
- Airport
- Bad weather
- Late evening or early morning rides

Overall Satisfaction

Overall Satisfaction

Most users are **dissatisfied** with the on-demand accessible taxi services in Calgary.

The reasons for dissatisfaction are:

- Not being told the expected wait time
- Not enough taxis available
- Being refused a ride
- Not accommodating to the service dog
- Safety issues

"My friend had to wait overnight in the hospital as the dispatch told him that everyone was off duty and he can only get a taxi at 7 am in the morning."

"They do not give the estimated wait time for pick up even though I book online – they say it could be from 45 minutes to an hour."

"Driver was defensive when my caregiver told him that he can not start the meter when I am still getting in the taxi. I felt unsafe and vulnerable. What if he drops me off in the middle of no where."

"I had a bad experience the last time I called for an accessible cab. A regular taxi showed up and took all my friends to the party. The driver did not even call dispatch to ask for a cab for me. I had to call dispatch again to ask for an accessible taxi. I ended up not going."

"I recommend a taxi over handy bus as the taxi drivers are reliable and bring patients inside our clinic. I have never experienced any issues with wait time but that may be because we have an account with them and always pre-book."

"The longest I waited was 1 hour but that is fine as it was rush hour and the dispatch had told me that it would be more than half an hour."

A few passengers are **satisfied** with the accessible taxis in Calgary.

They mention not being satisfied with the wait time but that they understand and have not experienced problems if they pre-book a taxi.

Obtaining a Taxi

Obtaining a Taxi

Most accessible taxi users obtain their taxis by calling dispatch, with the exception of a few who like booking the taxi online as they can write clear instructions rather than risk being misunderstood on the phone.

A few taxi users also hail a taxi if they see one on the road or the taxi stand. A few users use “code 8” when they need a ride. They feel that comfort level with the driver and driver’s understanding of their needs tempts them to call that driver again.

While some feel the taxis are reliable to pre-book for a timely appointment, others do not trust they will make it to a meeting if they call a taxi.

“There is some discrepancy on the availability of the accessible taxis among users”

- A few users think that the taxis are not available if they need one in the middle of the night.
- Some users think they are only available on the spot and can’t be pre-booked at all
- Some think that they can not pre-book a few days in advance and can only do same day time calls.

“A mix in satisfaction for the wait time ”

- A few users are satisfied with the waiting time if they are pre-booking but would like this improved as they are planning ahead and wasting a lot of time waiting for their appointment at the destination.
- Others are not satisfied with the wait time for pre-booked trips as they still end up missing appointments.
- Satisfaction with the waiting time for on the spot trips is low. Passengers have to wait from half an hour to 3 hours to be picked up.

Refused a Ride

None of the users have been refused a ride from dispatch.

However, some of the passengers have been refused a ride when the driver arrived at the location to pick up or when they were hailing an accessible cab.

“He told me he was off duty but then agreed to take an able-bodied person a few minutes later.”

“I already told dispatch about the service dog but when the driver arrived, he said he can’t take the dog and drove off. I had to call dispatch again for a bigger van and had to wait half an hour more.”

Failure of arrival of a booked taxi

For most users, they have had no instance where the taxi failed to show up.

But in occasions of failed taxi arrivals for some users, they either ended up not going or calling other companies in an attempt to get a taxi.

“There was a time when I was waiting for so long, a couple of hours. I cancelled the taxi and ended up not going as I had already missed the appointment.”

“I was waiting to go to a friend’s house. I called dispatch for a taxi and waited for 2 hours. I followed-up with dispatch but they did not know when it was coming. I called up another cab company and waited again for 45 minutes. I called up the third taxi company and finally a taxi arrived.”

“Ordered a taxi for airport early morning and it never showed up. So, I called another and both arrived at the same time.”

Almost all taxi users are **satisfied** with dispatch and their operations.

Though they have some complaints, the users feel that this may not be in the hands of dispatch to solve the problem at hand.

A few users are **not satisfied** with the service they get from dispatch:

- Rude
- Not pro- active about asking the details
- Don't care

" They are good, they get you one if it is available within 10-15 minutes."

" We always pre-book 2 -3 weeks in advance. I never had a bad experience with dispatch."

"They are generally courteous. We are always pro-active in giving details."

"Dispatch is nice. They do not give concrete answers or wait times but it is not their fault."

"Dispatch is not courteous. They tell you to wait from 30 minutes to an hour but it always takes more time. When we call back because we are tired of waiting, there is recorded message that asks you to press 1 if you want to keep waiting. Dispatch apologizes but they always seem indifferent to the fact that we have to wait for so long."

" I booked a taxi for the airport a week in advance and confirmed the availability a night before. In the morning they told me they don't have one available."

A few users mentioned that they would like to receive a notification when their taxi is near or on its way to them.

Ride Experiences

Most users **feel safe and comfortable** inside an accessible taxi. They feel secure in regards to their wheelchair being fastened and drivers driving carefully.

Some users experienced some safety issues—

Physical Challenges:

- Less room for a service dog
- Less safe as sitting in the back (rear end collision)

“The dog was sitting on top of a folded seat, so I had to hold him in a certain position. It was very uncomfortable and physically challenging for me. There is no harness to secure my service dog.”

“I don’t like to use taxis any more as don’t feel safe in the back – what if the car is rear- ended. I prefer something where I am in the middle of the cab. I participated in Checker’s cab pilot program once where I was sitting in the middle of the van.”

Emotional Challenges:

- Feel vulnerable
- Feel isolated in the cab
- Harassment from the driver

“I feel isolated inside the cab. I am sitting at the far back , it is a weird feeling, and some drivers do not talk.”

“They think they can take advantage of me because I am disabled. Some drivers wink/smirk in the mirror.”

Almost all passengers prefer to be seated facing the front. They feel that facing backwards does not feel safe as they don't know where they are going.

Side Entry vs. Rear Entry

Some users prefer side entry as :

- It is comfortable: driver can drop off at curb instead of on the road
- It does not feel like they are sitting in the trunk
- It feels closer to the driver
- Safe and comfortable

Some users prefer rear entry as :

- It has more space to maneuver the chair
- It is easy to get in

For some users, the entrance does not matter as long as they can have a safe ride.

Most accessible taxi users have not taken taxis outside Calgary.

Some of those who have, feel that they felt the same in other urban centers in Canada. They faced the same challenges of less availability, more waiting time, and drivers refusing an accessible trip as in Calgary.

A few users experienced better services in other cities, in Canada as well as internationally– less wait time and better drivers. They believe better training and the ability to rate the drivers after the trip may help improve services.

London (England) was highlighted as an outstanding example of how an accessible taxi system should work i.e., all cabs are accessible.

A few users also feel that accessible taxis in Calgary are better than in other cities.

Transport Network Companies' accessible cabs are rated slightly better.

Drivers

A mix of good and bad accessible taxi drivers in Calgary

Taxi users feel that there are a variety of accessible taxi drivers in Calgary. As with the regular taxi drivers, some drivers are good and some are bad.

Good Drivers

- ✓ Competent in handling mobility device
- ✓ Helping with bags
- ✓ Helping to and from door (in bad weather)
- ✓ Making sure passenger is comfortable (temperature inside cab, water etc.)
- ✓ Friendly
- ✓ Know the route (or use GPS)

Bad Drivers

- Not welcoming to the service dog
- Need training for securing mobility device
- Drop off at curb (in bad weather)
- Not helpful with luggage
- Rude/defensive
- Prefer an able-bodied customer
- Start the meter when users are still getting into the taxi

There is some confusion around whether drivers should start the meter when they begin driving or when they arrive. A few users believe that the drivers are not aware of the rules around this.

Most taxi users are satisfied with the drivers except for situations where they felt they were not treated with respect or the driver was not accommodating.

Reasons for satisfaction with drivers

- ✓ Friendly and courteous
- ✓ Accommodating with the mobility device
- ✓ Respect the taxi user

Reasons for dissatisfaction with drivers

- Refuse ride because of service dog or mobility device
- Not accommodating to users' requests
- Defensive
- Harassment (comments/remarks)

"Drivers are very courteous and helpful. They open the door for me and escort me to the door without me even asking."

"Drivers are very helpful. They come to the door sometimes. They help me to put my bags on my chair."

"Drivers are so unwelcoming, positively hostile when they see the dog."

Payment

Payment

Passengers are paying for their taxi rides by different means:

- Cash
- Credit card
- Debit card
- ACE card

Users are generally satisfied with the payment method. There is some inconsistency in the comfort level of paying with a debit/credit card machine. A few passengers have to get out of the taxi on the side to pay as the machine cord does not reach at the back; most were able to pay from inside.

Satisfaction level with payment is low when the cord was not able to reach the passengers at the back, as they find it unsafe to pay from outside.

Challenges and Suggestions

The biggest challenges accessible taxi users are facing are:

Availability

“Regular people should not be taking accessible cabs.”

“They are available when planning ahead, but if I need one right at the moment – nothing.”

Reliability

“Once I was 30 minutes late for my class because the accessible taxi showed up late.”

“Once I called for an accessible taxi but a regular one showed up.”

Respect

“They don’t want my service. Subcontractors are concerned about cost because of high maintenance of accessible taxis”

“Once a driver told me that he started the meter because he is loading me in the taxi. I felt like I was a luggage.”

Only a few passengers have complained in the past. If the taxi users have an issue, they take it to the driver and/or the taxi company. They are satisfied by the taxi company’s response to the complaint but find the drivers defensive.

Some taxi users are not aware that they can reach out to 311 in case they have a complaint.

Users gave a variety of suggestions to overcome the challenges:

- Better tracking system – keeping customers informed at where the cab is
- Better training for drivers – sensitivity training
- Prioritizing the accessible trip for accessible cabs – Having separate queue for accessible taxis with dispatch
- Less wait time – at least better information
- Consistent ability to pre-book
- Extended hours – some believe they can not get an accessible taxi after midnight

“There needs to more sensitivity training for drivers – on how to talk to an accessible customer.”

“Drivers need more training on securing the mobility device and the rules.”

“We need a better tracking system so that we know where they are and when they are going to arrive – especially in cold.”

“They should prioritize accessible trips. We should not be in the same queue as regular customers. We only have a certain amount of cabs available.”