

Hello:

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to provide feedback on accessible transportation issues for Canadians with disabilities. There are two main issues I would like to highlight.

I am a blind woman living in a suburb of Vancouver. I am currently working with my second guide dog from GDB, Guide Dogs for the Blind, an accredited guide dog training school in San Rafael, CA. My guide dog is a handsome well behaved almost 4 year old male yellow lab. We graduated from GDB as a certified trained guide dog team in May/2014.

My first concern is regarding extra service charges directly related to an individual's disability. No extra fee should be charged under the following circumstances.

1. On-Line Ticket Purchase: Most transportation companies will charge extra for ticket purchase made through a live agent. There are 2 barriers which may prevent me from purchasing tickets on-line.

A) I use assistive technology to use my computer, a screen reading software program, JAWS, Job Access With Speech, to read the print on the computer. Others with low vision could use a screen enlargement program to use his/her computer. Technology is improving, but not all websites are compatible with this assistive technology. If the website isn't compatible with my screen reading software, I am not able to purchase tickets on line.

B) I generally travel with my guide dog. On the on-line ticket purchase option, there is no field to enter in the information about my guide dog or to request sighted assistance. I must speak directly with an agent to relay this information.

2. Extra Seat: For the comfort of myself, my guide dog, and other passengers, it makes the most sense to keep the seat next to me open to allow my guide dog ample room to lie down.

3. Baggage charge: On a longer trip, I require an extra bag for my guide dog equipment and supplies, a dog bed, food/water bowls, toys, and dog food...I could potentially have to bring a week or more worth of dog food. Our dogs are on a strict diet to ensure bodily function regularity and to maintain a healthy weight. It's not always practical or possible to purchase the same food at my destination.

4. Travel Attendant: Many transportation companies will allow an attendant to travel free with a disabled passenger, but he/she must still pay the taxes and service charges.

My second concern is regarding the acceptance of standardized identification for a service dog.

As a graduate from an IGDF accredited guide dog school, I am issued photo Id, with a photo of myself with my guide dog, from my school as proof of my certification as a legitimate guide dog team. This ID card has been sufficient proof of our legitimate guide dog team status for the purposes of being granted access to public conveyances for as long as guide dog teams have been working in public, both in Canada and the United States.

Our IGDF accredited guide dog school issued ID card will no longer be accepted in BC as proof of our legitimate guide dog team status. In January, the BC Liberal Government passed a new service dog access law, Bill 17, which will require all guide dog teams in BC to apply for a special government ID card if we wish to have access rights in public as a guide dog team. Application for this government issued ID card is voluntary, but if we don't apply for this card, we will not be protected under this new access law, and a business is permitted to deny access to a guide dog team, with our only recourse for denial of

access being filing an expensive lengthy Human Rights complaint. I can't think of any other jurisdiction where it is necessary for a group of citizens to register to be covered under a law.

An outcry from the guide dog community against this discriminatory law have not encouraged our government to reconsider this part of the law which makes protection under the access law contingent on applying for the government issued ID card. Any visitor to BC who would like the access protection under Bill 17 during their visit to our province must also apply for this government issued ID card. This government issued ID card will only have a photo of the handler, but not the guide dog.

At this time, our guide dog community will be waiting to find out if there will be a change in the government after our provincial election in May/2017. We're hoping for a new government who will be more open to receiving feedback from the disabled community, and who will value the rights of those with disabilities, without forcing a special group to register to receive the same rights as any other citizen.

As this ID card issue pertains to accessible transportation in Canada, all companies providing services nationally must have the same standard for proof of service dog legitimacy. With the introduction of Bill 17 in BC, our school issued ID cards are sufficient proof of training and legitimacy as a guide dog team in all other provinces and the United States, except for in BC. It will be confusing and impractical to require a different guide dog team ID card for one province.

Any updates to the regulations for accessible transportation must encompass all companies operating in Canada, not just Canadian companies. I hope the development of these new regulations will allow easier and less stressful travel for those of us with a disability.

Regards,

Linda Weber