

Dial-a-Ride provides a lifeline for older and disabled Londoners, but significant improvements are needed

- The Dial-a-Ride bus service is essential to quality of life for older and disabled Londoners
- The service has helped reduce social isolation
- It is an essential service but the Dial-a-Ride booking system needs to improve

Research published today by campaigning charities Age UK London (AUKL) and Transport for All (TfA), has highlighted a number of improvements needed to enhance the Dial-a-Ride service. The research has shown that the door-to-door service has a vital role in enriching the quality of life of its users and reduces social isolation and loneliness. However, the lack of flexibility in the way the service is run is limiting the potential it has to truly transform lives and reach those Londoners that would benefit the most.

The free, bookable bus service for disabled Londoners of all ages allows them to shop, meet with friends and family, and attend health, wellbeing and social groups and classes. The service can make the difference between being stuck at home and living the lives that people want to live. Yet many of the users find the booking service causes stress and frustration with one saying: *“They tend to disappoint and it raises my anxiety which is not very good for my health.”*

While celebrating the huge difference Dial-a-Ride makes to the lives of those using the service, the two organisations are making recommendations to enhance the experience of users. These include changes to the booking system, in particular to avoid situations where users give up on calls to the telephone booking line, due to long waiting times.

They are also calling for longer operating hours, fewer restrictions on the length of journeys and much better communication, particularly when it relates to service changes.

Commenting on the fact that the service finishes at 10pm, one of the interviewees, quipped: *“I forgot I’m disabled and I’m not allowed to have a social life after 10 o clock.”*

Speaking of frustrations with the telephone booking line another interviewee, said: *“They keep telling you that your call is important to them and they will get back to you. You’re sitting there glued to the phone waiting and waiting.”*

Caroline Stickland, CEO at Transport for All, said: *“The Dial-a-Ride service is life-changing for its users. It provides a lifeline for many people and we’ve heard time and time again from our interviewees that without the bus they would not go out – to shop, meet friends and family or to go to social events. But, there are many flaws in the service that let it down and can easily be improved.”*

Despite this, the overwhelming majority of interviewees were very happy with the Dial-a-Ride drivers who are much liked by users and who described them as helpful, courteous and often willing to go the extra mile.

Abigail Wood, CEO, Age UK London, said: *“When Dial-a-Ride works well, it changes lives for the better, but when it does not, it can be a cause of stress and frustration to Londoners who are already facing challenges. Our report highlights aspects of the service which can be improved and must be addressed by TfL, especially as numbers of passengers increase post-pandemic.”*

Users are slowly returning to the service following the pandemic, between April 2021 and March 2022 the number of weekly trips started to increase to between 5,000 and 10,000 trips per week. This is a vast drop since pre-pandemic when there were up to 20,000 trips per week.

The report, entitled **Dial-a-Ride: From Door to More** can be downloaded [here](#). Further information is available from campaigns@ageuklondon.org.uk.

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Editors Notes:

Dial-a-Ride was established forty years ago this year, in 1982, to provide free door-to-door transport for people with permanent or long-term disability or health problems because other forms of public transport such as buses and trains are not an option. There are currently 256 buses in Dial-a-Ride's fleet and approximately 60 vehicles contracted through Community Transport organisations used solely for the service.

Research

The qualitative research was carried out in January 2022 with 14 participants who had a range of impairments and were from a variety of age groups. The interviews were semi-structured, which means that all participants were asked a set of core questions but the conversation was allowed to flow freely beyond the core questions.