



**Community  
Transport  
Association**

**Response to the  
Department for Transport's**

**Consultation on**

**EC Whole Vehicle Type Approval – National  
Approval Schemes, Technical Requirements and  
Fees**

Closing Date: 22nd August 2008

The Community Transport Association

The CTA is a rapidly growing national charity giving voice and providing leadership, learning and enterprise support to member organisations, which are delivering innovative transport solutions to achieve social change. CTA UK promotes excellence through providing training, publications, advice and information on voluntary, accessible and community transport.

Voluntary and community transport exists to meet the travel and social needs of people to whom these would otherwise be denied, providing accessible and affordable transport to achieve social inclusion.

The CTA is the representative body for third sector passenger transport operators in the UK. CTA Member organisations are involved in the provision of transport, especially accessible services.

The CTA is the UK's largest provider of training, advice and information on accessible, voluntary and community transport provision. The CTA is part-funded by the Department for Transport, the Welsh Assembly Government and the Department for Regional Development (Northern Ireland).

## **CTA's Response to Consultation**

The CTA welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Department for Transport's consultation process on the impact of EC Whole Vehicle Type Approval (ECWVTA). After reading through the consultation we have decided to respond on one specific area that we believe would have a marked effect on our sector. We have provided our response in the form of a narrative rather than completing the questionnaire because our main concern is with the impact and operational aspects of the proposed legislation.

## **Contact Details**

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**The CTA supports the strategic direction of the proposed legislation and notes that the aims quoted at the beginning of the document states that it intends to deliver transport that works for everyone. We are concerned that the possible impact of the legislation as currently drafted may achieve less than this for many disabled people.**

The concern being expressed in this response is provided on behalf of CTA's member organisations. However, we suggest that numerous other minibus operators within the not-for-profit and statutory sectors would have similar views.

Large numbers of minibuses are used in the UK. This fact is created by the extensive use of the D1 licence category which does not have widespread use in some other EC countries. Additionally, the UK uses minibuses extensively for the carriage of wheelchair users who are unable to transfer to a seated position. This particular usage of minibuses in the UK is probably unique within all other EC member states. Typically, minibuses are used by community transport, local authorities (social services and education fleets), hospitals (patient transport), and charities, to provide transport for multiple numbers of wheelchair users. Virtually all these services are not available to the 'general public' and, although technically some are operated for 'hire and reward' under permit legislation, none of the transport providers mentioned operate with a view to profit.

**The CTA believes that the proposed legislation is flawed because it does not take into account the use of minibuses as described above**

The legislation appears to work satisfactorily for buses that are operated commercially under the PSV regime and used to transport the general public. The CTA understands the reasoning that when buses are used on services available to the general public, there is a need to stipulate a minimum sized space because the size of a passenger's wheelchair cannot be known until they actually board the bus.

The impact the ECWVTA technical requirements will have on wheelchair accessible minibuses will be to reduce the number of wheelchairs that can be carried in all minibuses used by the operators listed above.

There are two types of minibuses used. Firstly, van derived, high floor, conversions either by using the original van body shell or coach building a new body on to a chassis. The interior space available in these vehicles is at a premium. The attached drawing<sup>1</sup> (provided with the kind permission of

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<sup>1</sup> Nothing in the attached drawing should be taken as implying CTA support for any particular design or make of vehicle.

Minibus Options Ltd, an established vehicle converter) shows the effect of the proposed requirement for wheelchair spaces compared with earlier standards. Specifically, the proposed requirement to increase the space available for each wheelchair to 1300 x 750mm causes this drastic reduction in occupancy rate for this type of vehicle when it is used to carry passengers seated in wheelchairs.

In the case of low floor coach built low floor minibuses buses, the body shell tends to be a little wider and, in this case, it may be possible depending on the specific wheelchair design to secure one passenger in a wheelchair towards each side of the vehicle and leave a gangway between them. Thus, a slightly larger vehicle could carry more wheelchair users but this is very dependant on the particular designs of wheelchairs used by individual passengers.

### **Wheelchair Available Space**

The CTA believes that the available space for a wheelchair should be sufficient to ensure the safety and comfort of the wheelchair user. Most importantly the space required should also allow for the correct use of the appropriate wheelchair and tie down and occupant restraint systems (wtors). The CTA accepts that in many instances a wheelchair space of 1300 x 750mm or larger will be required in order to do this, but there will also be instances when the space required will be less, and that this needs to be considered when determining the wheelchair carrying capacity of a minibus.

On the vast majority of services operated by the community transport and local authority sectors, the wheelchair passenger's requirements are known in advance and the vehicle can be configured according to the space needed. VSE 87/1 recognised this situation, recommending a wheelchair space of 1200mm x 700mm, with subsequent spaces of 900mm x 500mm. The Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC) have produced an 'Accessibility Specification for Small Buses designed to carry 9 – 22 passengers (inclusive)', section 6 of which deals with wheelchair spaces. This recommends one wheelchair space of 1300 x 750mm, but they also recognise that where a small bus provides space for more than one wheelchair, that *"the amount of space set aside for each additional wheelchair may be varied to accommodate particular wheelchairs and their restraint systems"*.

## **Wheelchair ‘gangway’**

When wheelchair passengers are boarded on to a minibus, it is not possible due to the width constraints of most minibuses, to provide individual wheelchair gangway access from all available occupied wheelchair spaces, when more than one wheelchair is being carried. Only the last wheelchair to be boarded will be guaranteed adequate access to the vehicle’s wheelchair entrance/exit. For the sectors mentioned, this does not cause a problem because the vehicle’s space configuration and the passenger boarding and alighting schedule will be pre determined in such a way as to prevent the need for a passenger using a wheelchair to be manoeuvred past another wheelchair user. This situation is recognised in the DPTAC’s Accessibility Specification for Small Buses. The CTA would like confirmation that the ECWVTA requirement to provide a gangway of >750mm for wheelchair access to each occupied wheelchair location and also allow for a wheelchair user to be moved in a forward direction to from the entrance/exit does not apply when multiple wheelchair passengers are carried. The CTA believes that within ECE Regulation 107 class B buses will be allowed to board wheelchair passengers on a first in, last out basis and that the gangway width requirement of 750mm will not need to be adhered to, other than for the first wheelchair position and the wheelchair entrance and exit.

## **Conclusions**

If the available space requirements of ECWVTA are implemented the type approved wheelchair carrying capacity of minibuses will be drastically reduced, possibly to one wheelchair passenger per minibus for slightly smaller vehicles than our example shows. This will result in one or more of the following outcomes;

- An increase in costs; very likely leading to a reduction in service availability for wheelchair passengers.
- Significantly larger vehicles to maintain the current carrying capacity, requiring a shift from drivers currently able to drive with an ordinary driving licence to PCV drivers with a consequential increase in employment costs (recruitment, training and wages). In many instances larger vehicles will not be easily be able to access passengers’ homes on parking congested side streets. Larger minibuses will also be significantly more expensive to purchase and operate.
- An increase in the number of minibuses or smaller wheelchair accessible vehicles with a consequential impact on both congestion and emissions.

## **Recommendations**

**The CTA urges the DfT to determine ways in which the negative impacts described in this document can be avoided. A special exemption from the wheelchair space requirements is required for minibuses that will not be used on public transport services.**

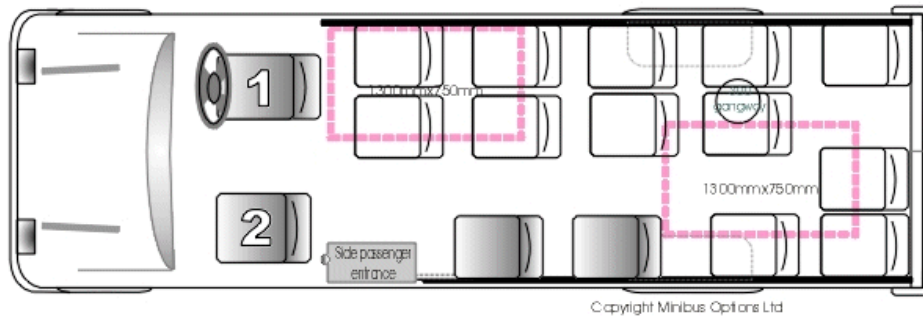
**The CTA recommends that the following specific points are included in a derogation from the standards in the consultation document for minibuses constructed with the ability to carry more than one passenger using a wheelchair and where the vehicle is not used or operated as regulated public service vehicles;**

- **A ‘flexible’ wheelchair space requirement, similar to the principles contained in VSE 87/1, should be introduced with the following dimensions:**
  - **At least one space for a wheelchair passenger should be 1300 x 750mm and,**
  - **For the purposes of calculating approved maximum wheelchair capacity, reduced dimensions should be determined for any additional spaces for wheelchair passengers. (E.g. 1000 x 600mm)**
- **Confirmation that the ECWVTA requirement to provide a gangway of at least 750mm for wheelchair access to and from the wheelchair entrance/exit does not apply.**
- **The requirement for a wheelchair user to be able to move in a forward facing direction to and from the entrance / exit should not apply.**
- **When the required gangway of 300mm is measured, it should apply between the edges of the actual wheelchairs not the edges of the space allocated to passengers in wheelchairs.**
- **The requirement for a priority seat including space for a dog should not be a requirement when the vehicle is only used for the carriage of passengers in wheelchairs and crew members. The requirement can also be met by utilising a space otherwise intended for a passenger in a wheelchair and in this case the requirement for additional handrails may be ignored.**

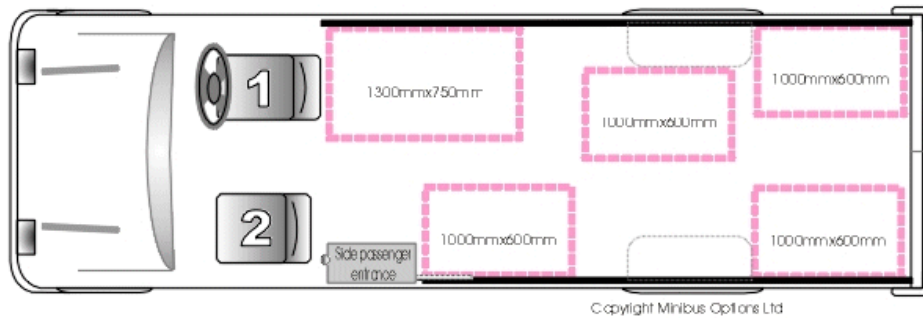
### Ford Transit wheelchair accessible Minibus

Base vehicle: Ford Transit Jumbo 430, 3750mm wheelbase

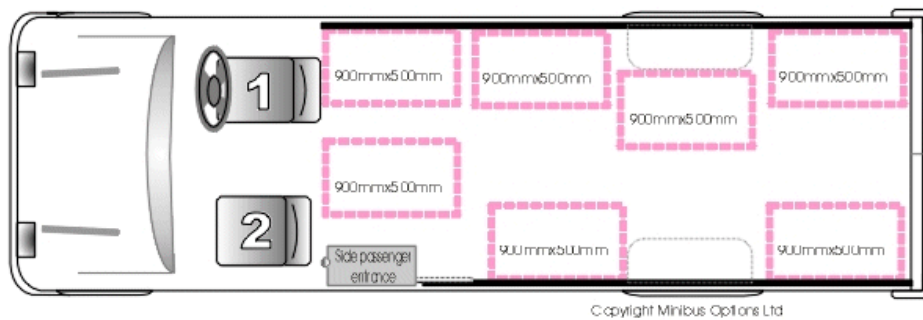
Whole Vehicle Approval - with first in last out  
 remove twelve seats to accommodate maximum two wheelchairs



### DPTAC



### VSE 87/1



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