



Safe Transport

Wheelchair Users

This guidance leaflet is intended to assist transport providers who deliver transport on behalf of Suffolk County Council. It is important that owners of companies understand this guidance and ensure that it is passed on to all operational staff who deliver the transport.

Why send this?

As you will be aware Suffolk County Council officers carry out regular checks at school premises and we also work closely with schools to identify risks.

In recent months we have had several concerns raised about the standard of safety restraints used when passengers are transported in their wheelchair.

This update is intended to set out the standards that are required and have been drawn from several sources.

Who does this apply to?

This guidance applies only to vehicle classes M1 and M2 as defined by the International Road Vehicle Construction Regulations which are based on the number of passengers a vehicle can carry and its mass.

What class is my vehicle?

M1	Passenger vehicles with up to 8 seats in addition to the driver's seat, e.g. private cars and taxis
M2	Vehicles with more than 8 seats in addition to the driver's seat. Mass up to 5 tonnes. e.g. minibuses, non-emergency ambulances.

Different rules apply to vehicles with a mass exceeding 5 tonnes such as large buses and coaches.

Must operators comply?

Put simply – **YES**.

As services are operated under contract to Suffolk County Council the terms and Conditions of contract apply

In the section relating to Specialised Transport clause 1.5 states –

"It is a condition of all contracts that operators will be familiar and adopt working practices consistent with current best practice with respect to the safe carriage of passengers and, in particular, passengers who require specialist equipment. "

Clause 2.4 then states –

"Contractors should note that the requirements and information concerning seat-belts and/or specialist seating set out in this appendix apply to all specialist seating and/or restraints. Such equipment must be fitted to the same standard as that required for other seat-belts. Where passengers are conveyed in a wheelchair the Contractor must ensure that the wheelchair and passenger are secured in an appropriate way which meets current advice, guidance and legislative requirements."

So following the guidance is about complying with the contract terms. It is also a serious Health and Safety issue so failing to follow the guidance will be viewed extremely seriously.



What is the guidance?

In effect the guidance is quite simple. A passenger who does not use a wheelchair expects that the seat they sit on is secured to the vehicle and they then wear a three-point seat belt to secure them to the seat and the vehicle.

We all accept this now as the norm and it should be no different for the passenger who makes the journey in their wheelchair.



Wheelchair secured to the vehicle, the passenger is also protected by three-point belt.

This means that in the event of an impact the passenger, whether they are a wheelchair user or sitting in a seat are given the same level of protection.

Securing a wheelchair to the vehicle and relying on the lap belt that is part of the wheelchair itself will **not** protect the passenger in the event of an impact.

Some systems that clamp the wheelchair to the floor rail system also incorporate a three-point belt system.

The Specifics

At least a 1200mm x 700mm space must be available for each location designated for a wheelchair user. Appropriate wheelchair and occupant securing fixtures must be situated centrally in the transverse plane of the wheelchair space (i.e. the space cannot be offset from the anchorage points).

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Doorways which are to be used by passengers in wheelchairs must be at least 800mm wide up to a height of 800mm. The height of the door must be a minimum of 1300mm. There should be a minimum height of 1400mm for any part of the vehicle to be occupied by passengers in wheelchairs.

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There must be a minimum gangway width of 330 mm to at least 2 exits from every seat or wheelchair position whilst the maximum number of wheelchairs to be carried (as defined in 16 above) are fixed in position.

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For every designated space for a wheelchair user, suitable independent restraint systems, incorporating webbing, must be fitted for both wheelchair and occupant, adjustable to suit a range of wheelchairs and occupant sizes. The restraint systems must be installed and operated in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. The wheelchair restraint system must incorporate four point webbing or be of a kind that is integral with a seat or back rest – clamps alone will not be accepted.

Each wheelchair and occupant restraint system should be capable of meeting the dynamic test criteria set out in ISO 10542 (50 kph/20g with an 85g surrogate wheelchair and 75kg dummy) (Operators should be aware that some older equipment does not meet this test. They should make enquiries from the manufacturer to confirm that the equipment that they propose to deploy meets the standards required for restraint in an M1 vehicle. A copy of such confirmation must be provided to the Council on request.)

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The wheelchair occupant restraint system shall comprise a minimum of a three-point anchorage system (lap and diagonal). This can either be integral with the wheelchair tie down equipment or provided separately.

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Passengers must not be carried in wheelchairs facing sideways.

Reminder – this guidance is provided as part of the terms and conditions of contract under which the vehicle operates.

It is the responsibility of the employer to ensure that all staff are informed of this guidance and where necessary trained to ensure complete compliance.

Failure to follow this guidance will lead to appropriate action being taken to ensure the safety of the passengers involved. This may include termination of the contract.