

Driver safety guide for Hackney Carriage and private hire drivers

Welcome to the Bury Council Taxi Driver Safety Guide. This is your comprehensive resource for ensuring a secure and confident journey for drivers.

This guide will explore essential tips, practices, and precautions to empower taxi and private hire drivers with the knowledge and skills needed to navigate the roads safely, handle various situations, and help to minimise the risk of violence and aggression.

The guide is for experienced drivers and those just starting in the profession. This guide aims to equip you with valuable insights to enhance your safety awareness and create a secure working environment.

Section 1: Top tips

We have worked in partnership with Greater Manchester Police Crime Reduction advisors to devise some simple but proven tips that can help reduce the risk, likelihood and consequence of violence to taxi and private hire drivers licensed in Bury.

- You should always trust your instincts
- You can refuse a fare if you have any doubts about your safety
- You should minimise or reduce the amount of cash you carry. Modern mobile card chip payment machines can help with this
- Always make sure your operator or controller knows where you are via a radio or digital device. A lone worker device or even app on your phone can now be used to allow others to always locate you quickly and accurately
- You should try to deescalate any confrontational situations if you can by using appropriate verbal skills and defusing body language
- You should call the Police immediately on 999 if you feel in imminent danger.
- You must report all non-urgent incidents to police. This helps the police to monitor and collate intelligence which supports the trade
 - Report online at gmp.police.uk or
 - Phone 101
- You should always ensure your vehicle is in good condition so it won't let you down in an emergency. This is especially important if you share a vehicle

As a taxi driver you are working alone with strangers, often in isolated places and you carry cash. Collecting customers from public places or from ranks with no knowledge of their home address or telephone number means that if they cause trouble, you are especially vulnerable.

If you work at night, you are likely to have to deal with people who are intoxicated. You may be at risk of violence. This guide is to help you to think of things that you can do in advance and when you are out working.

Section 2: Things to carry with you

- A spare key in case an assailant throws your keys away.
- A mobile phone.
- A note pad and pen to record incidents.
- An emergency card with your name, date of birth, blood group, allergies and a contact number for emergencies.
- An explanation of the fare structure, so that you can explain it to a passenger who feels that you are over-charging them.

Section 3: Cash management

- Never say to a customer that you have had a busy shift or that business is good. This will alert them to the fact that you may have a lot of cash in the vehicle. If asked, you could say that you have recently started your shift.
- If you can, drop off cash during your shift so that you carry as little in your car as you can. Always keep your cash hidden from view in a secure box and try to hide the cash in several places around the vehicle until you can deposit it securely.
- Consider pre-payment where possible.

Section 4: Stay in control

- Trust your instinct – you have the right to refuse a passenger if you think they may present a risk
- The way a person speaks or dresses may not reflect their behaviour, so always be alert
- You know that working at night carries most risks of violence, especially as many passengers will have been drinking. Make sure you are not tired – you need to be alert at all times
- Control passenger access to the front. Keep the doors locked until you are ready to accept a fare
- Only open the windows enough to speak to people without them being able to reach in. Only let them sit in the front if you wish
- Communication with the passenger is important. Be polite and pleasant
- Make eye contact with the passenger when they get in the car. This helps to establish a relationship with the passenger. It also gives them the message that you could identify them
- When you travel outside your licensing area, agreeing the fare before you set off can reduce the risks of violence over a fare dispute later, when you may be in an isolated place
- Be ready to explain the fare structure to a passenger. Many violent incidents arise from fare disputes
- Explain the route you plan to take if you are going a long way around (for example to avoid road works) so as to prevent a dispute over the fare

Section 5: What to do if you are linked to an operator or control centre

- Use your radio to tell them where you are going. This will mean the controller has the information, and the passenger will know they do. Alert the controller of any changes along the way

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- Have a pre-arranged code word that you can use if a passenger becomes threatening, so that you can call for help without making the passenger suspicious
- Most control rooms will have GPS and can track the progress of all vehicles. Drivers have a silent button which they can activate in an emergency, which flags up their vehicle on the controller's screen

Section 6: What to do if you feel threatened

- Try to stay calm. Take slow, deep breaths – this may help to lessen your anxiety
- Be aware of your own actions and how they may be seen. Non-confrontational verbal and body language may be enough to diffuse a situation
- Use your verbal and body language skills to reduce a confrontational situation. For example, choose your words carefully, speak in a kind, calm voice plus remain relaxed and maintain good eye contact for a few seconds at a time
- If you can, drive to a brightly lit, busy place. These are often covered by CCTV
- If you have a purpose-built taxi or a car with a screen you are likely to be safer staying in your cab than getting out. However, never risk your safety to protect your vehicle
- Do not attempt to run after a passenger who owes you their fare. Your safety is more important than the money

Section 7: What to do if you are attacked

- Do not try to fight back. This could most likely increase the risk of further or greater violence to you

When it is safe to do so

- Use your horn and lights to attract attention
- Contact your operator or control room or call 999 to get urgent help
- Gather as much information about the person as you can, for example, what they are wearing and their accent
- As soon as possible write down a first account of what happened including descriptions of the offender(s) which can be helpful to the Police

Section 8: What to do after any incident

- Write down everything about the incident. Include a detailed description of the passenger(s). Try to recall what they were wearing, what they looked like, and any distinguishing features. Also record what they said and did
- If you did not call the Police at the time of the incident, you should report all violent incidents to the Police phoning 101 or at the GMP website
- Be prepared to make a witness statement if asked to do so by the Police. It may take time, but it may help to prevent violence and incidents in the future for you and other drivers
- Share your experience with other drivers so that they can avoid the same situation
- When sentencing offenders, courts have been advised to take particularly seriously assaults against people who are providing a public service, especially those who are vulnerable because they work alone at night

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- Bilking (making off without payment) is a criminal offence. Report incidents to the police and be prepared to make a statement
- You may be able to recover the costs of damage to your vehicle through the small claims system

Section 9: Getting home safely after work

- Remain alert after you finish work
- If you travel home after finishing a shift, if possible, try to travel with someone else

If you have to walk

- Avoid any shortcuts, especially through alleyways or parks
- Try to stick to busy, well-lit areas
- Avoid talking on the phone or having headphones in as you are less likely to hear someone approaching

Section 10: Securing your vehicle

- Never leave any cash or electronic equipment in your unattended vehicle at any time
- Always lock all doors and ensure all windows are fully closed
- Activate your alarm and, or immobiliser if fitted
- Physically check the door is locked and that the alarm has set

Section 11: Summary

We are proud of the Trade licensed in Bury. The purpose of this Taxi Driver Safety Guide is to provide drivers with practical help and support through established crime prevention measures.

Driver safety is paramount. If you choose to implement the strategies and tips outlined in this document you not only protect yourself from potential threats but also contribute to creating a safer environment for other drivers in Bury.

You should stay vigilant, trust your instincts, and proactively engage in safety measures. Always prioritise your wellbeing, and, in doing so, you will continue to provide a secure and essential service to your passengers and the public of Bury.

We are committed to driver safety and are committed to promoting the following messages to the public to treat taxi drivers and their vehicles with the respect they deserve.