

LAW COMMISSION AND GUIDE DOGS UK ROUNDTABLE

- 1.1 On 14 January 2020, we met with seven people from Guide Dogs UK. Two were fully-sighted staff members, while five were visually impaired members of Guide Dogs UK who own guide dogs.
- 1.2 All members agreed that HARPS may dramatically improve their mobility. Recognised potential benefits included the ability to travel spontaneously, increased independence, decreased reliance on family members and less of a need to plan journeys in advance.
- 1.3 However, all members expressed great concern over the safety risks from other passengers that would be posed to visually impaired people in shared vehicles. They emphasised that this risk would be higher than with existing passenger services, in which the driver can intervene and there is often less proximity between passengers than there may be in HARPS vehicles. They said the risk would be so great that it may prevent people with visual impairments from using shared HARPS. Members also expressed concern that other passengers may not want to share a vehicle with their dog.
- 1.4 Additionally, members emphasised the potential difficulty of locating the vehicle and their end-destination upon alighting the vehicle without driver assistance. Innovative suggestions were made to address this, such as remote visual assistance and vehicles playing personalised songs to help the passenger locate it. Another concern raised was the potential difficulty of hearing HARPS if they were to run on electricity.
- 1.5 The importance of voice control and voice over to enable communication with the vehicle was also stressed, along with the need for accessible communication of divergence and disruptions and accessible booking platforms.