

Video transcript

Get to the Point Podcast - Assistance Animals

Marcus: Welcome to Get to the Point, a podcast series by the NSW Point to Point Transport Commissioner.

The Commissioner is the independent regulator for point to point transport in NSW, which includes taxi, hire vehicles and rideshare as well as tourist operators.

In this series, you'll hear from industry representatives and from subject matter experts as we explore topics relevant to point to point transport and work together to ensure a safer point to point industry.

Hi, I'm your host, Marcus Binet.

Today we're speaking about passengers who travel with assistance animals, the role that point to point transport plays and the responsibilities of service providers and their drivers.

Today I'm joined by Nick Abraham from the NSW Taxi Council. He's also a representative of the Disability Reference Group.

Nick: G'day, Marcus. G'day everyone. Good to be here. And thanks for the opportunity to talk and assist with all things Assistance Animals.

Marcus: I'm also joined by Fran Diogo from Assistance Dogs Australia.

Fran: Yes. G'day. And thank you so much for inviting us to be here. Thank you Marcus.

Marcus: It's great to have you.

Fran: Thank you Kate. Thank you Nick.

Marcus: And Kate Murdoch, who is a massage therapist, a former Paralympian, and regularly travels on point to point transport with her guide dog, Wiley.

Kate: Hi. Thank you so much for having us here today. We're thrilled.

Marcus: Kate, the first question is to you. What do you think some of the main issues are being someone who travels with an Assistance Animal?

Kate: For a blind person travelling with an Assistance Animal, and I guess the experience is going to differ for every individual, but some of the common issues that I come across as a blind traveller is things like difficulty trying to identify the actual vehicle you're going to.

Being charged incorrectly, being asked very personal information at times.

Being left in unfamiliar situations at the end of the journey.

And then up to also being refused a service or having to wait for a driver that's willing to take you in the vehicle.

Probably the most common issue that comes across, is being denied access into the vehicle or having to wait for a driver that's willing, and also then just locating where the actual vehicle is at the pickup point.

Marcus: So, what do you mean by that? Locating the vehicle?

Kate: It's a matter of trying to identify, which is the pickup car or the taxi amongst all the other cars, and being vision impaired, I do rely on my dog to guide me to the cars.

But at the end of the day, they are an animal. They're not going to know exactly which car is for me and which car isn't for me.

Being able to be very clear which car is picking me up can be difficult.

And also, with the cars being so quiet these days, you can't always tell that there is a car waiting for you.

Marcus: Yeah, and I remember you saying that, when we were talking before, that sometimes a car will pull up and you don't actually know that the car's there, or the driver doesn't realise that you are the person that they are there to pick up, because you don't know they're there or you don't know how to let them know that you are there.

Is that something, Nick, that you see as well? Do you hear that from drivers, that's one of the challenges with picking people up?

Nick: Yeah, definitely.

Firstly, as we see changes in the landscape that we operate in, particularly around the Sydney CBD and other areas where unfortunately curb side space is quite a challenge.

Trying to have a legal and safe location to be able to pick up and drop off a passenger is one challenge. But then when you have a person with a disability, particularly a person who may be also using an Assistance Animal, makes it even more of a challenge, because drivers obviously always want to go that extra mile to make sure that they drop them off or pick them up from the point which is most convenient for that passenger.

So that can sometimes be a bit of a challenge.

Also, obviously when it comes to booked services, it might be a bit easier. However, the convenience of rank and hail, (which is great and serves a great purpose), but from that perspective, taxis play an even more important role with identification, particularly for the person with the Assistance Animal.

And this is where tactile numbers and raised numbers play a vital role helping a person, particularly a person who may have vision impairment, in trying to identify the vehicle.

And this is why we are very proud of the compliance rate that we've had with taxis displaying tactile and raised numbers to make it easier for that person to be able to identify the vehicle.

Marcus: Yeah. Thanks Nick and some of the points that you raise, Kate, things like, you don't know the cars there, you don't know how to find it. You can't hear it. What are the consequences if you miss the car, or you don't find the car, or the driver drives away without identifying you?

Kate: The consequences are often that then you're obviously running late to, whether it's another connecting transport whether it's an appointment or going to work, it's a delay in that transport which can have that ongoing effect the same as any other person.

Marcus: Yeah.

Nick: Just to add to that as well. As part of the Disability Reference Group that we have running, we have a range of different people with different types of needs.

And just to add to Kate's point, that's a critical one. There are appointments that can get missed. These may be doctors appointments that are scheduled weeks out. These could be specialist appointments that are scheduled six months or sometimes up to 12 months in advance.

So if a person misses that appointment, that's vital, and that has a longer term effect. To get back in and see that specialist again can be [difficult].

There are impacts of other types of disabilities [to be aware of as well].

For example, a person may be suffering from PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder).

We understand there are knock on effects that they have, including feeling disorientated, anxious, stressed... particularly around the fact that they're not getting a vehicle that they require or not getting the transport that they need.

Marcus: Yeah. So Fran, being with Assistance Animals, why is it good? How do they help people?

Fran: There's a range of Assistance Dogs. In Assistance Dogs Australia programs, for example, we've got Assistance Dogs supporting clients living with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, like Nick has mentioned.

These are policemen or ex-service men that maybe couldn't leave the house for over two years, couldn't go to places that they were used to going to before they acquired the trauma through their workplace.

Getting the dog means they can actually go to places. They can focus on the dog more so than what's going on in their heads.

They've got the dog there to help them regulate their emotions if they're feeling anxious about leaving the house.

We've got dogs for autism.

These are parent handlers, helping their children regulate more, being able to get out of the house more as well, getting them involved in day to day activities and to do them independently.

We've got a range of programs, but we've got dementia dogs (like Nick has mentioned). We've had some assisting people so that they rely less on their carers and can go to certain places more independently.

But there are also other types of Assistance Dogs that we are aware of, for example, medical alert dogs. There could be someone that suffers from a seizure. The dog is there to prevent them knocking their head on somewhere. They can anticipate up to 40 minutes before a seizure, and alert.

There are diabetes alert dogs. There are a range of Assistance Animals these days that I think people should be aware of.

The disability might not necessarily be a hundred percent visible. We have physically diverse clients. Of course they might need to ask for a point to point vehicle that's suitable for a wheelchair.

But again, it is just a matter of understanding there's a variety of disabilities and people might need the dog to be able to do those activities.

Yeah.

Marcus: Yeah. And so one of the challenges then that it raises is [identification]. Kate's dog is obviously a Guide Dog. And Kate, it has a particular type of a harness so that it's identifiable as a Guide Dog?

Kate: Yes it is. Yeah. It's quite clearly distinguished as a Guide Dog with a particular harness type. Carries a medallion with him as well.

So it shows his registration as a Guide Dog.

Marcus: But not all Assistance Animals do that, do they?

Fran: Yeah. The other range of Assistance Dogs would have an identifiable jacket. So if they're learning in Assistance Dogs Australia program, we have an 'L' jacket, where they're a learner. They're learning how to perform that task.

So they essentially would need to perform that task in different environments, different vehicles, so they can get used to that exposure and they can then service the client.

If they're qualified they would have a 'qualified jacket'. So would have just the company logo that is supporting that client and they would have their licence, which is renewed annually.

So there's always an expiry date, and they've got an ID tag that goes into their collar, (same as Kate has mentioned, as well).

Marcus: So they should be recognisable as Assistance Animals?

Fran: Yes, they should.

Nick: From personal experience, not all Assistance Animals do wear a harness or a coat, or an identifier, or may not be as clearly obvious as some of the other ones. I have personal experiences as a former driver myself.

Unfortunately, I did learn the hard way in my early days of driving. One of the big lessons that I have learnt is not to make any assumptions, I think it is really important, asking questions.

These passengers, have had a lot of experiences and are there to assist us also in helping us with our awareness and understanding.

By asking the right questions, and Fran mentioned the licence, which as I understand is called the Public Access Licence, that they must carry, a driver does have a right and is entitled to ask the passenger if they could show the Public Access Licence if there is ever any doubt.

We always encourage drivers, obviously, to be respectful and sensitive as to how and when they ask the passenger for that.

Marcus: Yep.

Nick: There is their support and assistance. I think, if you're ever in doubt, just ask. Asking the passenger goes a long way. Passengers totally understand about why a question may be asked and are there to help and assist.

Marcus: Yeah, that's right. So Kate, how can drivers help you? What can they do to make your life easier or to make any life easier for people travelling with Assistance Animals?

Kate: Sure.

Personally, I've had some absolutely wonderful experiences with drivers and I've made some very good friends as well through the whole point to point travel program.

The most positive experiences have been with drivers that just do genuinely care about the wellbeing of me and the animal and being aware of different programs that are in place to support people with disabilities. The Taxi Transport Subsidy Scheme is one example.

So just having a knowledge about what the best practice is there, but also just being friendly and being yourself.

A hundred percent agree. If you're not sure, ask questions, usually the person is very happy to talk openly about what would help them.

But definitely just caring, asking, 'is there anything I can do when you get to the destination?' 'Is there anything I can do to make sure you're in a comfortable position for the next part of your journey?'

Very simple steps that have made a huge difference.

Like what Nick is saying, just asking questions, finding out how they can help.

And with the dog etiquette, just ignoring the dog as much as possible, because some drivers are absolutely huge dog lovers and they get very excited. It's quite comforting to come into a space where you do feel very welcomed. But it's also then helping us to keep the dog very professional as well, so that when there's other people that aren't as keen in having a dog in the vehicle, that the dog will behave as professionally as possible.

So it is a bit of teamwork there, where we are working together so that everyone wins. Yeah.

Marcus: Nick, you were going to say something?

Nick: I was just going to ask Kate... and it's great to know that obviously the Assistance Animal, and the dog in this case, has a role to play...we talk about drivers assisting the passenger...Is there a point where... and I know drivers love to help, which is fantastic... but is there a point where drivers can probably try too hard or too much to help? Where we've got to be very careful with that so that, it doesn't impede on the personal space of the passenger or the role or the function that the dog may play in this particular case?

Kate: There's no harm in being too helpful.

I think the main thing is though, if someone says, 'no thanks, I'm okay' just to respect that and listen to that, and then trust them when they're saying, 'I'm actually ok for the moment and you don't need to do anything more' and to not take it personally, but I think offering help is wonderful.

I'd rather be offered too much help than not enough help in that case. So it's, I think, yeah, just listening and being respectful for what the person is saying in that moment. Cause there can be lots of different scenarios that we could be talking about here, but on the whole, people do want to help.

Keep that going, absolutely.

Marcus: And Fran, you were going to say something?

Fran: Yeah, I'm with you Kate, and from what I've heard over the years from our clients and from, I guess understanding the mental health aspects of the support of the animal, getting to a vehicle, could be a trigger for a client that was involved in a number of accidents or rescuing people from vehicles.

So I think if the drivers understand that a person might be going through a tough time, just getting in a vehicle, [trying to] relax during the journey, and the dog might be doing Animal Assisted Intervention Contact (skills that we teach to help the client calm down). So if they're focused on their dog and they're just taking a minute, I guess it's a visual cue. So yes, they need a moment.

Or if it's a child on the [Autism] spectrum who struggles a lot with the noises of the vehicle and the traffic noises, and he needs a dog to intervene, sit in their lap or do something like that...if the dog is climbing up on the seat...I guess it's understanding that is a skill that we have trained [the animal to do] to settle the child.

So if the parent is directing the dog to do it, or if the dog's initiating it, it's picking up on the emotional needs of the client, and I guess, that's a moment where the driver can respect that. They're having a moment there. Let's let the animal do what it's trained to do.

And then of course after whatever is needed, it'll be able to, I guess, convey the message, 'oh, we're okay, thank you.' Or, it's understanding subtle communication aspects.

Marcus: You've touched on there, what some misconceptions or misunderstandings that people have about Assistance Animals. What other ones are there? When people see someone with an Assistance Animal, what are some of the things that they misunderstand? And I know one of them, they're pets, when actually they're not pets, or that they're not trained properly or...

Fran: One of the misconceptions is a dog is trained, and it should be like a robot, so it would respond in a very mechanical way to different situations.

But no, they are emotional beings like we are. They experience emotions, so we train them to be emotionally solid when they're travelling through different contexts in the world, and that includes travelling in the vehicle.

So they are trained, they're socialised very early on, from six weeks of age we might be already doing things with the litter. And then from eight weeks of age, we train them into going into different vehicles, just being able to board under control and exit under control, travel safely, stay calm.

But they are essentially emotional beings. So if they're having a hard time and they are somewhat misbehaving the handler is trained as well to respond and to help the animal calm itself down.

They are emotional beings like us. We might be having a tough day. One day we're not performing our jobs exceptionally.

I guess having that understanding, but knowing that the handler gets the training as well. Our clients are trained to respond and support the dog as much as the dogs are trained to respond and support the clients.

So yeah, there's a lot of exposure and repetition involved in training them.

And then with the clients, we do extensive training when we're placing the dog with the client.

But if it's a new team, they might be slightly more nervous when they're encountering these situations. And then of course they get into that relationship, that bond, and they get more comfortable as they navigate the world.

And we support them with yearly training, yearly check-ins, and ongoing support for the lifetime they've got the dog.

So I guess understanding that, we're always learning and evolving.

The assistance teams, what we call them, [that is the] client and dog, are evolving and learning and developing their relationship further.

Marcus: And Nick, you are champing at the bit there..

Nick: It's an important point, Marcus, the question that you ask around some of the views, and I think Fran touched on most of them, but there's a few other common ones unfortunately, that drivers may carry, in relation to misperceptions around them being pets.

They are not pets. Let's make that very clear. There's an important role and function that Assistance Animals play, particularly for their handlers.

There's also the fact [that some people think] the dogs can dirty or soil the taxi, that is definitely an incorrect thing.

And actual fact, I would go out to say, that an Assistance Animal would be cleaner than a lot of other passengers that drivers carry.

Let me tell you, they are meticulous, [compared to some passengers], particularly on a Friday, Saturday night, I guarantee you. You're not going to get an intoxicated Assistance Animal making a mess in your car, let me assure you that.

Marcus: A lot of animals you pick up on a Saturday night that don't have four legs? Hahaha

Nick: On a serious note, in relation to beliefs and religious beliefs, or, 'I don't like pets', or 'it's against my belief', or any of those views... the bit that Fran talked about the dog getting out of control and so forth...all incorrect.

And Fran, as I understand it, is it a couple of years that a dog goes through training?

It's quite an intense [program], I'll let Fran maybe talk to that, but [they] ensure that Assistance Animals are well behaved and are actually are cleaner and performing a very vital role.

Fran: Accredited Assistance Dog Schools and Guide Dog Schools will have very, very clear protocols about the welfare, the care of the dog.

The training, like I said, starts from eight weeks of age, and they might be around 18 to 24 months old when they get placed. So there's a lot that goes into that.

At ADA for example, they are in puppy education for 12 to 13 months, and then they have 21 weeks of advanced training before they're assessed for the different roles.

But we are constantly assessing the dog's behaviour, how they interact, how they respond in different environments.

And then, like I said, we do extensive training with our clients and that dog will go on to work with the client for all the way up to when they're nine years old.

They're trained to toilet on queue, they're trained to hop on and hop off vehicles under control. They are exceptionally well trained for the work that they do. So I guess, in a way, a driver would possibly identify a dog that's not genuinely an Assistance Dog, and unfortunately that does happen out there.

It's important to say this, like I said, [there are] identification points that a registered accredited Assistance Dog will have that are important, and I guess, part of our industry advocacy is to get more regulation and more support.

The genuine clients that are navigating the world with the Assistance Dogs are welcome and treated with respect and dignity because they're deserving of being able to live their lives and do things on their own and have the animal support them.

Marcus: Yeah. And just a quick question, not all Assistance Animals are Labradors. That's right isn't it?

Fran: Yeah, in our program itself, we've got a diverse amount of breeds. Majority are Labradors or Golden Retrievers, or the crosses between Marcus. But we have placed Cavoodle, a Groodle, an Australian Shepherd.

We have a Bernese Mountain dog in our program servicing a client with PTSD in Victoria.

Marcus: Isn't that a big dog?

Fran: It's a big dog, yeah. Yeah. Bernie's his name.

So in America, they've used a lot of Bernese Mountain dogs to help clients that transfer from the wheelchair onto another surface, because of course, they're sturdy enough, they can hold a stand position, they can be used to be transferred to and from their wheelchair to the seat.

Bernie ended up getting to the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder career because of many things.

A lot of our clients do rely on point to point transport because they don't like driving or they're unable to drive. You might have to accommodate a Bernese Mountain dog depending on the client's needs.

But I guess as a whole, the dog has been trained and will be behaving according to the accreditation standards that we identified as suitable.

And like I said, we do re-accreditation every year as well as the Guide Dog schools will do. So the dog is obviously always working to the optimal performance.

And if there's things to address, like I said, dogs are not robots, we might have to do retraining or support, but organisations that are working according to the guidelines we're given, are doing that constantly to improve the welfare of the dog and the client at the same time.

Marcus: Yeah. Kate, what's your Dog Wiley? It's Wiley, isn't it?

Kate: Yes.

Marcus: So what's he trained to do when he gets into a point to point vehicle?

Kate: He is trained to get me to the door, usually it's the front door of the vehicle. And then, either depending on where the preference is to sit for me, often it's to sit in the front of the vehicle and have the dog then sit in the footwell.

So I'll get in the car first, move the seat back, and then Wiley will come and curl up at my feet and just sits very quietly.

Sometimes, as the dogs do age, mobility of the dog can differ a bit, so getting into the car can be a little bit different or it might be easier for the dog to sit in the front than in the back footwell.

But, generally it's a pretty easy and smooth transition. The point is that they don't get in, jump around, make a mess. They're very specifically trained to get in, to sit, to be still and stay quietly until the end of the journey.

And then they're trained to get out first and then take us on our merry way.

They won't interact with the driver unless the driver is obviously doing things to distract. Then yeah, that's when it can be a little bit more vocal.

Marcus: Is there any preferred location or position that you prefer, or a person with Assistance Animal prefers to sit in? In the vehicle?

Kate: Front is preferable because there's just a bit more space than in the back.

And then, if you're carrying a bag or whatever, then that can go into the back as well. The front is preferred, but you can certainly move. You can sit in the back, but the driver would

need to assist in moving the seat forward, as it can be both the base of the seat and the back of the seat [that needs] to be moved forward to give as much space as possible.

Obviously the preference sits with the passenger and where they are comfortable and like to sit.

Marcus: If a driver is ever unsure, just ask. Would that be right? Just ask the question.

Kate: Yep. Please ask. Please ask. Yep.

Marcus: One issue that you mentioned when we were talking before, was you might be waiting on the side of the road for a car, and when the car comes, because you don't move towards the car, the driver is not sure that you are the right person, and they might drive away without realising that you are there, because you don't obviously know that they're there.

How could they help in that situation? What would a driver be best to do if that was the case?

It would be wonderful if a driver could acknowledge that they're there. So whether it's coming out of the taxi and approaching you and saying, 'I'm here. Hello.' Or whether it's winding down the window and calling out my name.

That, that's just some of the most basic things that can be done, which just really helps a lot for me to be able to identify that this is the right vehicle and it's safe for me to go forward, and that will then also prompt the dog to go into gear and to guide me to the vehicle as well.

Marcus: Nick, you were going to say something?

Nick: Yeah.

Just to help facilitate that better connection between the driver, the passenger and the Assistance Animal, I think there are two key roles here, that I think if done properly, can actually help deliver better outcomes.

One, from a passenger perspective, ensuring at the time of the booking that you state that you do have an Assistance Animal, which can be easily identified.

But I also encourage drivers. Make sure you check all the details, whether it be on your screen or on your app, making sure that you understand all the details of the booking, to see if the person may have an Assistance Animal or may have a mobility device, or some other form of assistance that they need.

This also means that you need to make sure that you're prepared to go out and provide a level of assistance for that passenger.

A little bit of information can go a long way in helping that facilitation.

Marcus: Yeah, that's a very good point actually, Nick.

So Fran, when training, you're obviously training Assistance Animals. Do you have to train the people to use the Assistance Animals? Cause I'm thinking of the kind of things like Nick says, if I'm ringing up to book a cab, tell them, 'I have an Assistance Animal,' which is fairly obvious.

Fran: Yeah.

Marcus: But do you have training for the people who have the animals?

Fran: Yeah. So we run a 10 day class when the clients first get their dog.

And of course we go through an intensive interview process matching the right dog to the right client.

And then we do pre-training and then 10 days of a class where the client's learn how to use the dog in the different life scenarios that they would need to.

So we do encourage them to communicate that, if they're making a booking. There are also circumstances where they might just have to present themselves in some situations and ask for help or support.

And I guess this is where they expect that there's the understanding that they might need the support as well.

Kate: Just on that note too, and I agree with you, Fran and Nick, but sometimes there are avenues where you can't actually notify when you're making a booking that you do have an assistant Guide Dog or assistant dog.

Often with the automated bookings, the taxis, if your calling a taxi, it's a press one if you want to be picked up from this destination or two if you're ready to go now. So there's just not that option to do it unless you go through and actually speak to an operator.

But I think it is a bit better for the shared cars.

Marcus: Is it's slightly different for the rideshare providers, is that what you're saying?

Kate: Yes.

Nick: I can confirm, the passenger does have the option.

If you don't like using the automated system, you can go through to the option of talking to an operator. So please, I want to make sure that passengers aren't discouraged from this. If there's a need for additional instructions or information to choose the option to actually talk to an operator because it's important that they do have that information.

Kate: Just on that point too, Nick, there has been experiences where you talk to an operator and you disclose 'I've got a Guide Dog,' and they will say, 'that's okay, they're allowed. We don't need to tell the driver.' So there are mixed messages, I think there. It'd be good for drivers to be aware that sometimes that information won't come across.

So there might be a scenario where they're picking up a person with an Assistance Animal and not knowing beforehand that was going to be the case.

Nick: That's good insight and feedback, Kate, because what we do need to have is consistency across the industry.

So if there's further training and education we need to have with call centres and service providers, I think it's a good call out and something I think, again, we always look at continual improvement in this space and if that's something that we need to work on to get right, then we're committed to make that happen.

So thanks for the feedback.

Marcus: Agreed. Good call Nick.

Fran: Yeah. If I may add something as well.

I think a lot of people do recognise Guide Dogs as an Assistance Animal more so than an Assistance Dog because of the misconceptions and the lack of education sometimes available to people about these other disabilities, how they impact someone, and how they impair them and how they really need the assistance to be able to do things.

We appreciate the opportunity to continue educating everyone.

There's different types of disabilities, there's different types of needs, and the clients, if they're asking to have the animal there supporting them, and they've gone to the extent of getting an Assistance Dog, getting trained, waiting sometimes, in our case, waiting sometimes a little while to get the animal accredited and trained with them.

Yeah, it goes a long way for them that they're recognised and they're accepted and they're included.

Yeah. And that's one of the important points to make that Assistance Animals are not just Guide Dogs and they're not just Labradors. They can be any number.

Different breeds.

Yeah. Different breeds. Yeah. That's right.

Marcus: Just in closing, Nick, do you have any last thing you want to say? Any particular points that are relevant?

Nick: Thanks, Marcus. It's been a great conversation. Just a couple of key points I'd like to finish up on. One is right on the outset.

Fran noted the wonderful benefits that Assistance Animals provide for the handlers and the passengers, which is great, but that's all pointless and meaningless if they can't use and access the transport modes to get them to enjoy that better quality of life.

So the role that point to point services, including taxis, play in helping facilitate that connection between the passenger and enjoying that better quality of life is absolutely vital.

So the big message for drivers, particularly when you sign up to drive in the point to point industry, is you don't just sign up to drive a taxi. There's a commitment that you're making to follow the rules, the laws, and the regulations that come with providing that service.

Now we know driving point to point service, in this case a taxi, has many rewards and benefits in doing so. And fulfilling your obligations, particularly around ensuring that you love every fare, and that's the point, particularly with a person with a disability, particularly with a person who relies on an Assistance Animal to get around, it is an important role that you need to play.

And if you are not prepared to fulfill that obligation, I'll ask you to think twice about joining this industry because there are laws and there are regulations.

And this is one of the consequences we probably haven't discussed around refusing a fare for a person with Assistance Animal. We're talking about fines of up to \$1,100 for a driver who may refuse service.

We've heard about the knock on effects that it has on the passenger, but there's also other consequences around potentially being dismissed from being able to provide further services or dismissed from the industry. So there are serious consequences for those that do choose to not do the right thing.

On a positive note, we do provide a wonderful service for people with a disability, and we are proud of that, and it is a very rewarding industry.

And I encourage drivers to come in, do the right thing, but most importantly, help those passengers with a disability. Make a difference to their life and help them fulfill that role of getting out and enjoying that good quality of life.

Marcus: Thanks for that Nick. And that is a point that I did skip over. Yeah, there's that statement about the legislation that point to point drivers are not allowed to refuse to carry a passenger who has an Assistance Animal.

Nick: Absolutely. It's under the Point to Point Transport Regulation.

But it also sits under the Disability Discrimination Act.

So there are a number of laws there to protect the passengers and we need to make sure we are aware of those and we fulfill our obligations.

Marcus: Absolutely. Good. Thanks Nick. Any final closing comments? Fran?

Fran: We just appreciate the opportunity of educating society further and it's any chance we get to speak, and we are very passionate about the human animal bonds, how our dogs are transforming the lives of so many clients.

We just wanted to say thanks for including us in this conversation.

Marcus: Thanks. It's be good to have you. And Kate?

Yes, I agree. Thank you so much for this discussion. It's been absolutely wonderful and I mirror Nick in what he's saying.

The role that drivers have in the lives of people with a disability is just so important. I personally wouldn't have been able to work or train or do the things that I need to do in order to get through my day to day activities without the support of these wonderful drivers.

So please don't underestimate the value that what you offer us has on our lives and our community. It's the most efficient and safest way for us to travel, and we truly do thank you for considering our needs and for looking to grow as well as a driver.

Marcus: Thank you again, Kate, Fran, and Nick for being here today to talk about this important topic.

And I hope the session has been informative for our listeners.

If you want more information, we've developed a toolkit and a series of shareable videos on Assistance Animals, which are available on our website.

A video version of this podcast and transcript is also available, so visit us at pointtopoint.nsw.gov.au. If you've found this information useful, please feel free to share this recording.

My name's Marcus Binet, and this podcast is brought to you by the Point to Point Transport Commissioner, thanks for joining us.