

The value of companion transport services



Report prepared for Driving Miss Daisy by Bridget Doran

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Cover photo description: A Driving Miss Daisy van with a ramp deployed is parked outside a large stone church. Two people are next to the ramp. A woman stands behind a man seated in a wheelchair. The female driver is partially obscured by the van.

Glossary

Companion transport service	An example of a place-to-place service, where a passenger is accompanied for as much of their trip is necessary to provide comfort, dignity, and convenience.
Door-to-door	A transport service where the driver or other person meets the passenger at or close to the front door of the place where their trip begins, for example their home, and delivers them to the door, or close to the door, of their destination. An example is a regular taxi service.
Paratransit	Subsidised transport services that exist specifically to meet the needs of disabled people who cannot otherwise easily use public transport such as buses and trains.
Place-to-place	A transport service where the driver or other person meets the passenger wherever it best suits them, for example inside the building where their trip begins, and delivers them to wherever it best suits them to be taken, including inside the building where they are going, if necessary for their comfort, dignity, and convenience. An example is a companion transport service such as Driving Miss Daisy
Public transport	Publicly subsidised buses, trains, and ferries where passengers typically pay a fare, with the remainder of the service funded through a combination of local and regional rates, and national consolidated funds (taxes).
Stop-to-stop	A transport service where the driver stops to let passengers in and out at pre-defined stops along a defined route, such as a public bus service.
Station-to-station	A transport service where the driver stops to let passengers in and out at stations along a defined route, such as a train service.
Total Mobility	A New Zealand government-funded subsidy for disabled people to use some taxi and companion driver services, with eligibility criteria related to a passenger's ability, or inability, to use public transport.

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Bridget Doran, September 2025

Summary

Companion transport services involve a driver who accompanies their passenger as much as needed, to make their trip comfortable and successful. In this report these trips are referred to as place-to-place trips. Passengers benefit from companion transport services. There are also benefits to society when people are supported to make trips safely and on-time, that would otherwise not have happened.

This report describes evidence for the benefits of companion transport services. They include gains and avoided costs. There are benefits related to the nature of companion transport as an accompanied trip. There are also trip benefits that happen because of the trust inherent in companion transport. A trip that is made by any transport mode accrues benefits, many of which cannot be gained through remote (online) access. Unlocking those benefits for people with no other trusted options is important.

Benefits specific to companion transport include individual mental and physical health gains from social interactions with a driver, and a reduction in injury risk getting to and from the vehicle. No other public transport mode delivers these benefits because even in the case of regular taxi services, people typically meet the vehicle outside of their home or at the trip origin. Companion transport also reduces the risk of trauma or stress during the journey, compared with taxi and public transport journeys.

Benefits that companion transport unlock for people without other trusted transport options include improvements to mental and physical health related to the outing itself. There are also benefits from attending health appointments, recreation, employment and social opportunities that would not otherwise be accessed.

When someone foregoes a trip due to a transport barrier, there are direct and indirect costs to society. For example, missing a medical appointment results in immediate costs to medical practices and hospitals, as well as future costs due to avoided health support when it matters. Social isolation results in costs to society due to chronic disease and the broader impacts of loneliness, including for example links with dementia.

There is little evidence of the financial return on investment in companion transport services. However, evidence suggests that this return is very large indeed. In New Zealand, missed visits to General Practitioners due solely to a lack of transport cost an estimated \$8 million annually, based only on the wasted time of medical centre staff. The true opportunity costs of 'trips not made' are far greater than this.

In sum, the benefits of companion transport services are significant. Companion transport provides place-to-place transport that is a worthwhile component of an inclusive and efficient transport system.

Introduction

Purpose of this report

This report describes the nature and benefits of companion transport services, focusing on commercial (for-profit) services such as Driving Miss Daisy. There are unique characteristics of a companion transport service that make it different from other forms of transport. These characteristics result in direct and indirect benefits, and avoided costs. This report collates, analyses and discusses the benefits to an individual and broader society of companion transport, so that policy makers, government authorities, and transport providers can make policy and investment decisions with this evidence in mind.

Why companion transport is unique

Companion transport is different from other forms of public and private transport, such as buses and regular taxis, because it is place-to-place as opposed to door-to-door or stop-to-stop (*Figure 1*). A driver is the passenger's companion, meeting them where it suits the passenger. Often this means the passenger is met and greeted inside the building where the trip starts, and farewelled when they are in the building where the trip ends: they are accompanied from place to place. For many passengers, including disabled people, being accompanied makes a trip accessible that may not have been possible otherwise.

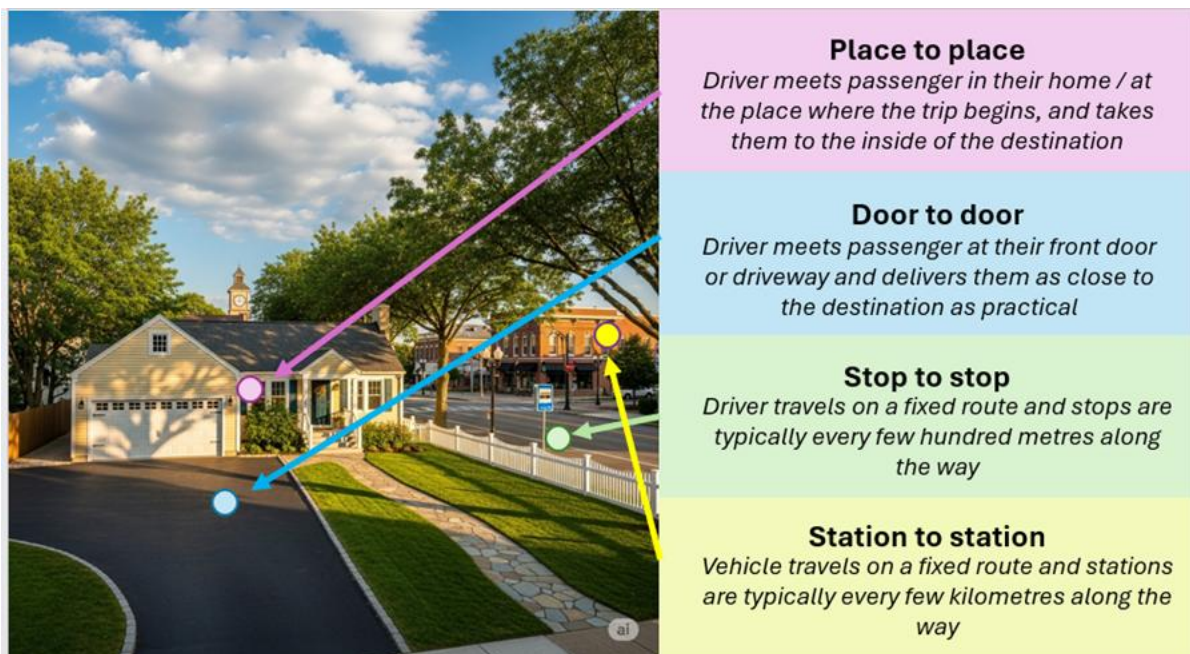


Figure 1 Trip categories related to their typical proximity from a trip's origin and destination

Passengers who use a companion transport service are more likely to know their driver than are passengers for regular taxi services, or for public transport. Therefore as well as the practical advantages of a place-to-place trip, there are social benefits because the driver is a trusted companion. For a variety of reasons, trust in drivers of

taxis, buses, and other forms of transport is typically lower than for drivers of companion transport services. Evidence of harm from drivers as reported in this report is stark. It includes for example bus drivers refusing to lower a bus for someone to get on, or refusing to intervene when people are harassed or abused, through to rare but horrific reports of taxi or rideshare drivers abusing, attacking and assaulting their passenger. For people who hear about or experience these things, anxiety related to meeting an unknown driver is understandably significant.

In summary, companion transport is unique because it is a place-to-place trip, with a trusted driver. These characteristics make trips practically and socially superior to other forms of transport, for the many people who use them.

Companion transport in New Zealand and overseas

In New Zealand, there are many transport services in the different categories described in Figure 1. For example, community transport describes volunteer-based companion transport where the drivers are typically volunteers, and a donation is encouraged but not required. Community transport operators usually receive funding from a mix of government (e.g. health sector or regional councils) and private sector (e.g. philanthropic trusts as well as local company sponsorship) sources. For-profit transport includes taxis, rideshare such as uber, and companion services such as Driving Miss Daisy. Publicly subsidised transport includes trains, buses, ferries, and some on-demand vans that operate in a similar way to Uber.

In addition to these different funding mechanisms, the New Zealand government funds the Total Mobility scheme. It provides discounts for eligible passengers to use taxi and companion transport services that sign up to be part of the scheme. In some regions, Total Mobility eligibility can also be used to receive a public transport fare concession. There are also other government-funded (or subsidised) transport services that have their own specific eligibility criteria and policy. They include for example some Ministry of Education-funded transport to schools; some Ministry of Health-subsidised transport to specialist medical appointments, and some Accident Compensation Corporation-funded travel for people injured by accident.

Overseas examples of subsidised and private mobility are even more diverse than the situation in New Zealand. A review of subsidised mobility services internationally (Doran et al., 2024) showed that as well as companion transport and subsidised taxis, in some countries these services are operated by government departments themselves. All methods come with benefits and costs both to individuals using them, and to government. Research concluded that there is no one-size-fits-all, and transport is best designed and operated to meet people's needs for access, where they are. There is no known tally of the amount each country spends on companion transport services, relative to other forms of transport. Each situation is unique;

funding is often a complex mix of national and local decision-making; and the extent of user-pays varies considerably.

Why a passenger might choose a companion transport service

At their heart, companion transport services enable a trip that may otherwise not have happened – or would have happened, but with risk. Many people do not have independent means to travel in Aotearoa New Zealand. For example, they do not drive or have access to a car, they cannot walk or cycle easily, or they cannot access scheduled public transport services. Some people rely on a partner, someone else in their household, neighbours, or nearby family to give them a ride or travel with them on public transport. Not everybody has access to those options either, for a wide variety of reasons. So these people are *dependent* on other services to access what they need.

In choosing whether to make a trip, and what service to use, there are a variety of needs people have. Some needs that are central to a decision to travel are shown in Figure 2. They are:

1. **Opportunity:** a transport service must be available at suitable times (Waikato Regional Council, 2012), the potential passenger must know about it, and that information must be accessible (Luoma-Halkola & Jolanki, 2021; Park & Chowdhury, 2021).
2. **Accessibility:** the travel experience must accommodate the passenger's physical, emotional, cultural, and mental traits, and momentary states; how they tend to be, and how they may be feeling on a particular day. The driver must have accessible attitudes and behaviours (Doran et al., 2022; Park & Chowdhury, 2021). The vehicle, journey, and destination must accommodate a person's mental and physical needs for comfort and access (Doran et al., 2022). The accessibility of a vehicle is significant for many, with a lack of wheelchair accessibility in particular a major barrier to rideshare services (Heeb et al., 2022).
3. **Trust:** the passenger must trust that a service will meet all of their needs, with dignity, from the origin to destination (Brewer & Kameswaran, 2019). The passenger must have confidence to complete the journey, which is a particularly important consideration for people with mental and cognitive impairments (Mackett, 2016), and for people with mental health challenges (Wild et al., 2021).

Many people cannot access public transport, or other transport services such as typical taxis or rideshare, because they do not meet all of the needs listed above. Central to the decision about whether or not to book or make a trip is trust: they must trust that the service will get them where they need to go, on time, safely and in comfort. There is a difference here between the theoretical service quality

offered by alternatives, and the reality as experienced by people who use it (Doran et al., 2022).

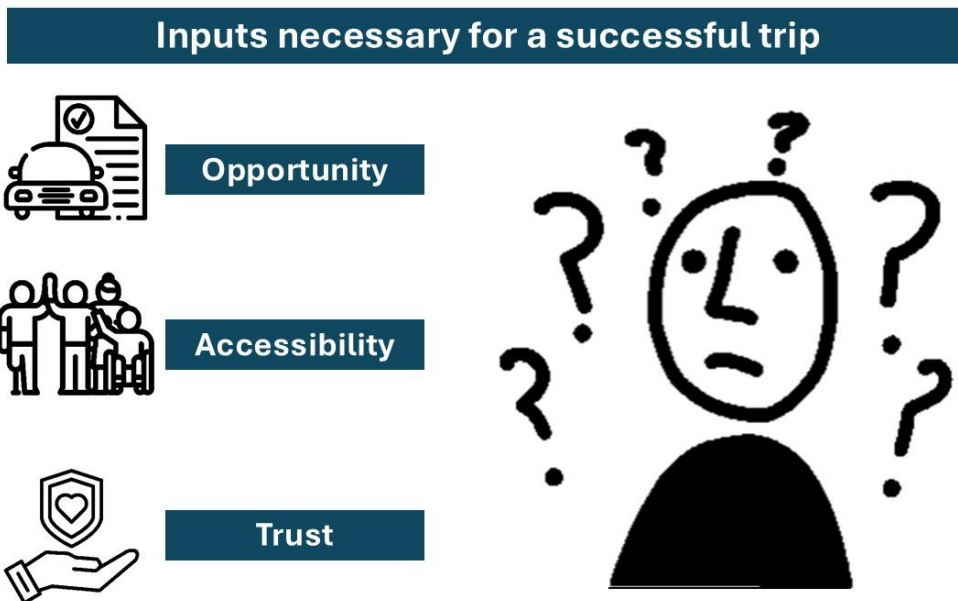


Figure 2 Key inputs for a successful trip for someone without independent access to transport

So companion transport services exist to meet some people’s practical and social needs. They enable trips that would otherwise not have happened, or that could have incurred extra financial and other costs. In the next section of this report, the benefits of these services to an individual and to broader society are explored.

Research methods

Academic and other literature was found through a literature search. The range of benefits and avoided costs investigated in this report are:

- Social connectedness benefits
- Mental health benefits
- Aging in place benefits
- Reduction in injury risk during the journey
- Reduction in pain, trauma and abuse during the journey
- Costs to individuals of trips not made
- Costs to healthcare providers of appointments missed due to transport barriers

The research included an online conversation with a researcher in the United Kingdom concerning monetised benefits of companion transport services. Two recent research reports are central to this topic. While these reports have the phrase 'disabled people' in their titles, they encompass the full range of passengers for companion services, not just those who identify as disabled people.

- Doran, B. et al (2022). Transport experiences of disabled people in Aotearoa New Zealand (Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency research report 690). <https://www.nzta.govt.nz/resources/research/reports/690>
- Doran, B. et al (2024). The characteristics of subsidised mobility services for disabled people (Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency research report 690). <https://www.nzta.govt.nz/resources/research/reports/721>

Doran et al. (2022) included a large database of survey responses from people who use companion and other transport services. Those insights, with formerly unpublished quotations from research participants, have also informed this research.

Results: the benefits and avoided costs of companion transport services

Benefits of companion transport services for individuals have been reported in two main ways. First, people who use the services report their experiences and describe how it benefits them. Second, researchers have analysed social connectedness, health and other benefits to individuals and broader society, based on the access that companion transport services enable.

Direct reports from passengers on the benefits of companion transport

Many participants in a survey of disabled people's experiences of transport in Aotearoa (Doran et al., 2022) noted the benefits of companion transport services, including a for-profit service (Driving Miss Daisy), and community transport services run by volunteers (such as community health shuttles).

Some examples of the benefits passengers reported included the following. Note that these quotes are from the author's own work and are otherwise unpublished:

- The trust resulting from an accompanied trip:
 - *“My daughter can independently go with Driving Miss Daisy so that I am not transporting her saving me 12 hours a week - she has a physical and mental disability. She cannot travel by herself.”*
 - *“Driving Miss Daisy are courteous and consider the mobility needs of an older person which our local taxi companies did not. Mum suffered a leg wound from having the door closed too soon and was left at the back of the car without her walker to get to the seat a couple of times... This really put her off getting out and about for a while... so [she] only uses Miss Daisy now.”*
 - *“My daughter requires transport to and from [the hospital] for regular treatments, she is unable to go by herself due to neurological aspects so the discount with Driving Miss Daisy helps but it is still expensive, we have tried ambulance transfer service but the timings are limited and make the days too tiring for her.”*
- Benefits of the extra help to make the trip physically accessible:
 - *“Trips with Miss Daisy... I don't use a [regular] taxi because I would not get the help I need because of my bad sight”*
 - *“I prefer using Miss Daisy to a taxi as the people understand better how to help you than a taxi driver.”*

- Support to make the whole place-to-place journey beyond the travel component:
 - *“Driving Miss Daisy... ..they will take you inside make sure you are where you need to be.”*
 - *“My mother uses Driving Miss Daisy for getting to appointments at the hospital as it offers a room to room service getting her where needed within the hospital campus... ..My mother will not use a 'normal' taxi service as she feels unsafe with a male driver and it only drops off at the front door of the hospital not escorted to required clinic.”*

These quotes highlight that companion transport services can enable trips that would not otherwise have happened, or that would have risked pain, discomfort, or injury for the passenger.

Recent research from New Zealand continues to describe the multiple challenges that some people face trading off comfort, cost, and personal security, resulting in a taxi or companion transport service:

For some participants who were blind or physically disabled, the safety of the environment was not enough – or not predictable enough – to make all their desired trips realistic. More pedestrian walkways and easier access onto public transport would make a big difference. Several participants did not feel that taking buses would be safe for them, so they had to budget for taxis to get to appointments.

Gray and Stratton, 2024, p51

Social connectedness benefits

Many subsidised services around the world are known as ‘paratransit’, a term which covers a variety of car, van, and bus services that meet some disabled people’s needs for access where regular, scheduled public services are not available, or not suitable. Research into the benefits of paratransit reveals insights into the value of companion transport. People with limited opportunities for social interaction are more likely to use companion transport services, and they benefit from the social interaction with the driver (Durand & Zijlstra, 2023; Nelson et al., 2017).

Much of the literature on the benefits of access does not separate door-to-door and place-to-place services. While it is unclear whether the trips referenced in this section were made with companion transport specifically, for some people the benefits are only accrued when accompanied place-to-place.

Connecting with friends, family and the wider community is one of the clearest benefits from the ability to make a trip, and door-to-door or place-to-place services make these trips possible for some people with no other options. This is supported by research in Michigan, USA (Samuel et al., 2013). American users of a taxi voucher, similar to New Zealand’s Total Mobility reported using their trips to access

their communities, either for medical appointments (n=11), visiting friends and family (n=10), or running errands (n=10). Participants reported being able to make more social trips than they otherwise would have been able to do and linked this to improved relationships with their family/friends (Samuel et al., 2013). Similarly, Australian research highlights the importance of trip making for social participation. Social isolation is linked with poor mental health and wellbeing outcomes and can lower overall quality of life (Christie et al., 2017).

Mental health benefits

Access to transport is linked with improved mental health. In the case of the Michigan transport vouchers described above, the majority of participants reported mental health and wellbeing improvements, for a range of reasons (Samuel et al. 2013):

- Reduced stress (61.2%)
- Increased feelings of being in control of their life (55.4%)
- More time to relax (50.0%)
- Increased feeling like a respected and equal member of society (47.7%)

These self-reported benefits are likely to equate to reduced health costs to society. Rowe and Kahn (1997) identified 'engagement with life' as a primary component of successful ageing. A Canadian study demonstrated links between subjective wellbeing, mobility, and quality of life (Spinney et al., 2009). They found that increasing life satisfaction was generally associated with increased mobility – that is, more outings equated with more life satisfaction. However, these results are correlational, which means that the specific benefit of an outing on a person's subjective wellbeing (not to mention the link between that and mental and physical health outcomes) has not been defined.

More broadly, researchers have linked the ability to get out and about to quality of life and wellbeing indicators. Particularly in places where car travel is common and access to other transport modes is limited, access to a car has been shown to improve quality of life (Mouratidis, 2025). Further, a lack of access to a car in these places, particularly for disabled people, has been associated with social exclusion (Delbosc & Currie, 2011). These conclusions support the mental health benefits of providing accessible, sustainable transport for people with fewest choices.

Aging in place benefits

Aging in place means that people can grow older in a community of their choice that is not necessarily a separate retirement village, aged residential care facility or rest home. There are clear social, emotional and financial benefits to older adults from aging in place (Ahn, 2017). Poor access to transport has been identified as a key barrier preventing people from being able to age in place (Ratnayake et al. 2022).

While adaptations to reduce barriers to aging in place can seem costly, it is likely that aging in place is still more cost effective than the alternative of a retirement village or care home – particularly in a community where people can access what they need close to home (Meda, 2021). This reduces costs for individuals and is linked with other health benefits which come from remaining connected to community (Ratnayake et al. 2022).

Reduction in injury risk and pain

One of the advantages of place-to-place transport compared with door-to-door or stop-to-stop services is that alternatives require a person to travel unaccompanied for at least part of their journey - either a small distance to a waiting taxi, or a longer distance to a bus stop or train station. Injuries can and do happen during these components of a journey.

Falls in the home are an important consideration in the difference between place-to-place and other transport modes, because an accompanied trip may reduce the risk of a fall. For the ten years from 2012/13 to 2021/22, fall-related injuries at people's homes in New Zealand cost New Zealand's accident compensation system an estimated sum greater than \$4 billion (Simpkins et al., 2024).

Watkins et al. (2021) reported on the locations of falls in New Zealand street environments. They found that older people are more likely than other pedestrians to fall on a street very close to their home. While not a study of companion transport, this finding explains why there are falls risks associated with stop-to-stop services such as public transport, as well as door-to-door services requiring a passenger to leave their home unaccompanied, to meet a taxi in a driveway or on a street.

While some people are fearful of injury risk from falls (Curl et al., 2020), many choose companion transport services because of pain and discomfort experienced with other transport modes. Many negative experiences of taxi trips have been reported by disabled people (Doran et al., 2020). Several studies of disabled people's experiences highlight how different aspects of a taxi journey come with the risk of pain or injury (Bylund et al. 2007; Comeau et al. 2025; Fredericks et al. 2024; Olatona, 2024; Remillard et al. 2022; Wrestrand et al. 2010). Ineffective wheelchair restraint has even resulted in passengers' deaths (Worksafe Victoria, 2023).

Disability is a broad term and there are many reasons why a disabled person would prefer a companion transport service, but the specific advantages for people who use wheelchairs are clear. In one South African study, wheelchair users highlighted difficulties in using taxis because of the weather (Fredericks et al. 2024). Travelling from home to the taxi rank in winter presents a risk as the cold and wet weather could lead to illnesses. One study participant was concerned about what this could mean for her because of pre-existing health concerns: "*And especially we with comorbidities it is not a good idea to get sick because of getting wet.*" (Fredericks et al. 2024, pg.10). Other participants pointed out that the danger does not disappear in

summer. One described a friend's experience of travelling to the taxi stand on a hot day. The person tipped from their wheelchair and had to wait a long time for assistance and was burned on the hot tarseal (Fredericks et al. 2024). These experiences highlight the importance of having both a place-to-place service, and well-trained staff able to assist people during their journey as necessary.

The specific benefits of place-to-place services have been researched in the context of avoiding injury between a building and a vehicle. Injury during the boarding and alighting process has been noted in several studies (Bylund et al. 2007; Fredericks et al. 2024; Wrestrand et al. 2004). Studies of taxi as well as companion transport services have reported injury rates of between 3.2 and 10 injuries per 100,000 trips (Bylund et al. 2007; Wrestrand et al. 2010). While some injuries happened during the journey (a road crash), the most commonly reported injury context was older women who were injured entering or exiting a vehicle (Bylund et al. 2007), or injuries related to wheelchair users boarding a vehicle using a ramp and falling off the ramp or tipping (Wrestrand et al 2004; Wrestrand et al. 2010). Injuries could also occur once a passenger had boarded a van but were still finding a seat if the driver pulled out before they were seated (Fredericks et al. 2024). These results suggest that specific driver training to provide trusted place-to-place transport has benefits beyond a more basic door-to-door service.

Injuries were also reported by wheelchair users while a vehicle was in motion (Wrestrand et al. 2010). These injuries tended to occur when people fell or slid out of their wheelchair when the vehicle braked, accelerated or drove over speed bumps. In the majority of these cases, the passenger was not properly secured, despite the requirement for wheelchair taxis to be properly equipped. Another Swedish study reported that of wheelchair users who were injured in a taxi, 58% received hospital care, and some people also required additional support or housing adaptations after the injury (Wrestrand et al. 2004). Some wheelchair users described the importance of a known, trusted driver who understands how to support them using the taxi service:

"I know a lot of drivers. Most of them know the way I want the procedure to be. If I have it my way, nothing will happen with either the wheelchair or me. But sometimes a driver comes, whom I don't recognise, and then I'll have to repeat it all over again." (Wrestrand et al. 2004, pg.11).

Overall, the research highlights the risks to some older and disabled people associated with using a taxi service. Together the studies highlight the importance of a place-to-place service involving drivers who understand the unique needs of the passengers they transport.

Avoiding trauma and abuse

Negative experiences using taxis, rideshare, and public transport are not only limited to pain or injury. Other studies into the experiences of disabled people using taxis

and rideshare highlight concerns around discrimination and harassment (Fileborn et al 2022; Fredericks et al 2024; Olatona 2024). Fear of negative experiences can also contribute to disabled people feeling anxious and vulnerable during their journey (Olatona 2024). For some wheelchair users, sustaining an injury during a trip was a traumatic experience with long-term effects (Wrestrand et al 2004).

A story from Bridgette, a disabled woman living in Australia highlights the particular challenges disabled women face when using taxis. She reported a perception of hailed taxis as being *“the most risky, because no one knows you’ve got it, I don’t have any record of ... who the person is”* (Fileborne et al. 2022). She preferred to book taxis with drivers who she has used before and formed a relationship with, describing it as being like a personal car service. This is supported by an elderly woman from New Zealand who prefers to use personalised driving services as she does not like to travel with a man who she does not know (Doran et al., 2022). These testimonies show the benefits of a personalised service for people who feel vulnerable while travelling in taxis.

There is also evidence that rideshare services come with increased risk to passengers’ personal security, compared with other door-to-door services. Reasons include the disconnect between an overarching company and the driver (Chaudhry et al., 2018) and a relative lack of driver training for rideshare operators (Jaydarifard et al., 2025).

A study of hate crimes on British railways showed an increase in reported incidents involving disabled people. Between 2015/16 and 2016/17 the known disability hate crimes on railways increased by 23% (Wilkin, 2019). This increase in hate crime was linked to aversions by disabled people to use public transport and increasing social isolation.

Costs to individuals of trips not made

Disabled people report a wide range of activities which they miss out on due to transport problems (Doran et al. 2022; Stafford & Tye 2023). This includes missing work, loss of social connections, missing out on leisure and recreation opportunities, and missed health appointments. A New Zealand study reported that transport difficulties or costs means some people missed out on grocery shopping, seeing a doctor, or meeting a friend when they may have wanted or needed to (Fitt et al., 2022).

Overall, not being able to drive or not having affordable access to a car contributes to feelings of ‘can’t do anything’ or coerced immobility. This has knock-on effects for health outcomes and economic and social participation (Doran et al. 2022; Stafford & Tye 2023).

A study from the USA reported by Litman (2016) found that non-drivers make fewer trips than people who drive. This suggests that in places suited to car travel, access to travel by car is important – particularly for people who cannot readily walk or cycle

the long distances needed to access what they need. A study from the Netherlands investigated the extent to which paratransit could be replaced by public transport. They concluded that between zero and 16% of trips could theoretically be replaced with public transport, if those services were accessible and convenient (Durand & Zijlstra, 2023). In other words, there will always be a role for companion transport services because of their unique benefits, enabling trips that would otherwise not have happened.

Monetised benefits of companion transport services

There have been a small number of attempts to monetise the benefits of companion transport services. As a precursor, Nguyen-Hoang and Yeung (2010) calculated a benefit-cost ratio for paratransit (specific transport services for disabled people, known as Total Mobility in New Zealand). They based their calculation on the 'consumer surplus', which is the difference between the average of what a passenger would be willing to pay for a service, and what they actually pay. Nguyen-Hoang and Yeung (2010) concluded a very high Benefit/Cost ratio for paratransit, implying that its benefits to passengers far outweigh what they pay. An important finding from this study was that demand for paratransit was not significantly affected by proximity to accessible public transport (measured through accessibility to stations). This suggests that for people with the fewest transport options, such as those that are most likely to use a companion transport service, their needs cannot always be met with public transport.

A toolkit developed in the United Kingdom provides an estimate of avoided costs due to a reduction in missed General Practitioner (medical) appointments. Researchers captured the opportunity cost of a doctor or nurse's time as well as the administrative cost of scheduling appointments. The social value of a passenger trip to a GP appointment is £21.53 or NZ\$49.54 (ECT Charity, personal communication, August 2025). This estimate does not include benefits to the individual or National Health Service of the appointment, such as earlier diagnosis and treatment which would lead to reduction in care costs.

A systematic review of missed General Practitioner appointments in the USA, United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and Malaysia found that 15% of appointments were missed on average, with a lack of transport being one of the most-cited reasons for missing the appointment (Parsons et al., 2021).

In New Zealand, a recent report concluded that 159,000 New Zealanders missed out on an appointment with their GP in the previous 12 months (Environmental Health Intelligence. 2025). Disabled adults were *nearly three times more likely* than non-disabled adults to miss a GP appointment for transport reasons. These data suggest a huge barrier in accessible transport, resulting in significant direct and indirect costs to health and wellbeing.

Applying the same social cost to New Zealand as used by UK researchers, the 159,000 missed trips cost our society (159,000 x \$49.54) approximately M\$8 every year, solely based on costs to the medical practice such as staff time. A report into the costs of missed specialist health appointments (not General Practitioners) in New Zealand put the annual cost (based on wasted specialist time) at M\$29.1 (NZ Taxpayers Union, 2019). These costs *exclude* the benefits of the appointment itself. In reality, the costs of missed GP appointments due to transport barriers alone are much higher.

Benefits for which there is no published evidence

As detailed above, there is a wealth of data from passengers of the benefits they perceive from companion transport services. The main gaps in published literature relate to quantitative data, including monetized evidence of the value of trips enabled through companion transport. Beyond individual anecdotes from surveys, there was no evidence found for the following, specifically in terms of companion transport benefits:

- Social interaction value of a trip's purpose (beyond the travel)
- Physical health benefit of a companion transport trip
- Benefits of trips enabled for education or employment
- Health-specific benefit of attendance at a primary healthcare appointment
- Local economic gains due to increased economic participation
- Population mental and physical health benefits of improved equity of access

Despite the lack of specific evidence, literature presented elsewhere in this report provides a clear case for the important role companion transport plays in providing access for many people. It has links to wellbeing and a healthy economy because without it, many important trips are foregone.

Summary of benefits and avoided costs of companion transport services

The overarching conclusion of this research is that companion transport services have a wide range of benefits to individuals and to the public that are not delivered by regular taxis or by public transport. The benefits of the trip itself stem from people's trust in a companion service and its value in providing a place-to-place accompanied trip. Many of these trips would not otherwise happen, or would involve pain or discomfort if a person were to attempt them in another way.

Many of the benefits of companion transport services are due to the reasons that we all travel: people's immediate and longer-term wellbeing is dependent on access to the things that make a good life. However, for people without other choices, place-to-

place services with a trusted companion enable this access in ways that other forms of transport cannot.

It is also evident that some of the benefits of companion transport services are accrued whether or not people *need* a place-to-place service. Examples include a reduction in injury risk when walking from indoors to a driveway or street, and the mental wellbeing benefits of the trust people report in being accompanied.

Other benefits stem from a trip being enabled that would not otherwise have happened. Understanding 'trips not made' due to transport barriers is a relatively new area of investigation by researchers, but insights to date are stark. Sometimes, people stay at home because there are no accessible transport options for them; they do not know about or trust those options; or they cannot afford them. Companion transport services can overcome all these barriers in ways that other transport modes cannot. Transport planners can use this framing and the insights in this report to investigate the differences between actual and theoretical accessibility (Curl et al., 2011).

When companion transport services are well-funded and well-advertised, society stands to gain from the trips enabled, and broad range of resultant benefits that the resultant access enables.

Recommendations

It is recommended that these findings are reviewed by companion transport providers so that they can share them internally and in applications for funding and other support. It is also recommended that the report is shared with public transport authorities so that the nature and value of companion transport services can be better understood, and therefore, better integrated into transport policy and planning.

It is *not* recommended that autonomous vehicles or other technological solutions are investigated as potential replacement for companion transport services. Such technology potentially has a minor role at best in future transport systems (Currie, 2018) – but the value of a human driver is intrinsic to the trusted, supported nature of companion transport. By definition, an autonomous vehicle can never provide a place-to-place service as there is no human accompaniment involved.

Beyond the transport sector, the evidence reveals significant costs to society of 'trips not made' due to transport barriers. It falls on all communities and decision-makers to plan places where everyone can access what they need, for the benefit of the community as a whole. The first step towards this vision of inclusion is to make unmet needs known by identifying and measuring them, and by developing more ways to monetise the benefits and costs of inclusion. Companion transport is clearly much appreciated by its direct beneficiaries, but everyone in society gains when everyone can access what they need, with dignity.

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