

INFORMATION DOCUMENT ON SERVICE DOGS

*Direction du transport terrestre des personnes
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This information document has been prepared by the Direction du transport terrestre des personnes of the ministère des Transports with the collaboration of the Association du transport urbain du Québec and the Office des personnes handicapées du Québec. It responds to the needs expressed by adapted transportation organizations for an information document on the question of service dogs.

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INTRODUCTION

Everyone knows about guide dogs and how they help the visually impaired. Guide dogs help them move about more easily and safely in public places, since they help make up for their limitations, in the same way as a mobility aid such as a white cane.

For some years now, another type of dog has been trained to provide assistance for handicapped persons with non-visual limitations. These are service dogs which, like a guide dog, accompany handicapped persons to help compensate for certain incapacities or limitations.

While many handicapped persons already use regular public transit and school buses with a service dog, this is a relatively new phenomenon on adapted transportation. This information document is accordingly intended to provide carriers with assistance in managing the movements of handicapped persons accompanied by a service dog.

1. GENERAL INFORMATION

Currently, more than 70 handicapped persons use a service dog trained by the Fondation Mira, the only recognized centre for the training of guide dogs and service dogs in Québec. However, some handicapped persons make use of a service dog trained outside Québec, in particular in Ontario or the United States. There is a waiting list of 80 people for a service dog trained by Mira, which can train an average of 40 a year.

The information currently available to us indicates that use of adapted transportation by handicapped persons with a service dog is still very rare. For instance, of nine public transit organizations, only four transport people with a service dog, for a total of ten handicapped persons.

2. HANDICAPPED PERSONS WHO MAY NEED A SERVICE DOG

Under the Québec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms, it can be assumed that a service dog, just like a guide dog, is considered as a means to compensate for a handicap. As such, carriers should allow handicapped persons to use adapted transportation with them, subject to certain requirements (see Chapter 4). While guide dogs are trained for people with impaired vision, service dogs are trained to assist young people and adults who suffer from a motor or organic impairment, or multiple impairments. In particular, a service dog can be very useful for persons suffering from muscular dystrophy, such as Duchenne dystrophy, amyotrophy, paraplegia or quadriplegia, or multiple sclerosis.

Most handicapped persons who have a service dog are confined to either a manual or motorized wheelchair, though some ambulatory individuals also make use of a service dog.

3. CHARACTERISTICS AND FUNCTIONS OF A SERVICE DOG

3.1 Definition of a service dog

A service dog is a dog that has undergone specific training in a training centre to work for handicapped persons at a physical level by extending their motor capabilities. A service dog always wears a harness while it is working.

3.2 Characteristics of a service dog

Service dogs trained in Québec are Labradors, Bouviers or Bouvier-Labradors. These breeds are known for their gentleness, their physical endurance and their intelligence. Training centres outside Québec may also train other breeds, in particular the German shepherd.

However, breed alone is not enough to determine whether a dog is a suitable subject for training. The Fondation Mira undertakes a rigorous selection during the first year of a puppy's life. Those that are too timid, too aggressive, or which fail to show enough attachment to human beings are excluded. In addition, a dog that has been selected may fail to perform as expected during training, and is then withdrawn.

3.3 Functions of a service dog

A service dog helps a person become more self-sufficient, because he or she no longer requires the constant assistance of another person. Service dogs are trained to safely carry out three specific functions for handicapped persons: prehension, support and traction.

Prehension consists in picking up objects for the handicapped person. For example, the dog will pick up keys or change which the person has dropped. This ability is particularly important for persons who, because of significant muscular weakness, are constantly dropping objects and are unable to bend to pick them up.

The support function is important particularly for persons in a wheelchair. They can notably lean on the dog to move from the bed to their wheelchair, or from their wheelchair to a seat in a car. The dog can also help a person whose wheelchair has tipped over to get up.

Finally, traction is also very important. The dog can pull a manual wheelchair to assist the person to get over a curb or climb an access ramp. The dog pulls from the left side of the wheelchair.

To carry out these functions adequately and safely for the handicapped person, the dog undergoes rigorous training in three stages :

- ◆ training as such to fulfill these duties;
- ◆ Abonding@ with the handicapped person and training in his environment, namely within his home and in his regular activities, in particular to move about in the neighborhood, on regular public transit or in adapted transportation, etc.;
- ◆ follow-up, to ensure that the dog carries out its duties adequately and that the handicapped person can control it.

The training program given by the Fondation Mira for service dogs is summarized in Appendix 1.

4. CERTIFICATION AND OTHER REQUIREMENTS FOR ADAPTED TRANSPORTATION

In view of the service dog's specific duties, and the particular context of adapted transportation, a carrier is entitled to set certain requirements for the transportation of a handicapped person accompanied by a service dog.

Accordingly, a carrier can require that the handicapped person provide a certificate confirming that the dog has been trained in a recognized school, in Québec or elsewhere, as a service dog for a handicapped person and that this training includes training in a transportation situation. A sample certificate is shown in Appendix 2.

In addition, to ensure that a handicapped person and his or her dog can travel in adapted transportation without jeopardizing the safety and comfort of other passengers, and without hindering the driver, the dog is expected to behave as follows:

- ◆ it is working and accordingly must be in harness;
- ◆ it must wait on the sidewalk until the person is in place in the vehicle and calls it before boarding. It must not get on the hydraulic platform, but instead use the steps and place itself immediately to its master's left, or at his or her feet if space is insufficient. When leaving the vehicle, the dog must remain in its place inside the vehicle until the person has reached the sidewalk and calls it; the dog then leaves the vehicle using the steps;
- ◆ within the vehicle, the dog must not bark or inconvenience the other passengers or the driver, and must not respond aggressively to their behavior toward it. The master must have authority over the dog so that it behaves adequately.

If you consider that the dog's presence compromises the safety or comfort of the passengers, or hampers the driver's work, you can ask the handicapped person to correct the situation so that he or she can use adapted transportation with dog once again at a later date. The correction may be a minor one which the handicapped person can carry out, or the problem may be more significant, requiring the attention of a trainer from the training centre.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Training for service dogs by the Fondation Mira

1. Puppy selection

A dog's training begins at about one year of age and lasts about three months. However, the puppies are selected when they have reached seven weeks. The puppies are taken from selected litters and undergo 21 selection tests designed to eliminate those which are too timid or aggressive, or which show little attachment to humans. Three other tests are subsequently carried out before the puppies reach one year. Six out of ten puppies qualify for training.

2. Training

Training lasts about three months. The trainer teaches the dog to obey various commands so that it can safely perform its prehension, support and traction functions. The dog learns to walk with a person in a wheelchair, and becomes familiar with various situations: sidewalk curbs, road crossings, shopping centres, regular public transit, etc.

ABonding@ is then carried out with a handicapped person, who lives at the Fondation Mira for two weeks to become familiar with the dog. The dog then learns to assist the person in his environment, through day-to-day activities. If the handicapped person uses adapted transportation, a Mira's trainer will show him or her how to use this service accompanied by his or her dog.

Follow-up is provided after training to ensure that the dog has retained the training, that its master has the required authority over it, etc.

Overall, it costs the Fondation Mira an average of \$7 500 to train a dog.

APPENDIX 2

Sample certificate required for a service dog

Québec City, January 31, 1996

Dear Sir or Madam,

This is to certify that is the owner of a service dog from :

Name of training centre

The dog has been trained for use on adapted transportation.

The above-mentioned person is authorized to use the dog

Director General

