

# Public transport with an assistance dog

Instructions for travelling  
with an assistance dog



**TRAFICOM**  
Finnish Transport and Communications Agency

**This guide provides information on travelling with an assistance dog for both passengers and transport personnel.**

## **An assistance dog is an aid for independent mobility – not a pet**

An assistance or service dog is an aid that has been trained to assist its handler in different environments. The dog is an important prerequisite for independent living and mobility, and it accompanies its handler everywhere. The reasons for using an assistance dog may not always be apparent to others.

There are approximately 400 assistance dogs working in Finland. Most of them are guide dogs for people with visual impairments. Others include dogs assisting people with physical disabilities, hearing dogs for people with hearing impairments, support dogs for people with various long-term illnesses, and medical alert dogs trained to identify seizures or changes in blood sugar levels, such as diabetic alert dogs.

Assistance dogs are allowed on public transport vehicles even if there

is no need for the dog during the journey itself and much of the dog's work takes place before and after the transport event.

Assistance dogs must be allowed access to public areas where pets are not allowed. Dogs that assist in transportation are not included in possible pet quotas. It is usually possible for an allergic person and a person travelling with an assistance dog to choose seats in a way that allows sufficient distance to avoid contact with animals.

## **Assistance dogs can be recognized from a vest and harness**

Assistance dogs always wear an identification vest, harness or backpack while working. When a dog is in its uniform, it must not be approached by other people or animals. The assistance dog's handler has an identification card with which they can verify their handler status if necessary.

## Transport staff are required knowledge and expertise

It is important for those who encounter passengers at work to know how to provide a non-discriminatory service in an appropriate and respectful manner to persons travelling with an assistance dog.

The dog's handler should be met like any other customer. It is important that the assistance dog is not disturbed and can give its handler its undivided attention. This helps avoid dangerous situations and misunderstandings. Talking to, touching, or bending over toward the dog directs its attention away from its handler.

**” When you encounter an assistance dog, do not pay any attention to it.**

Transport operators are responsible for ensuring that instructions for travelling with an assistance dog can be easily found on their websites and comply with current accessibility requirements. It is also important to ensure that staff are familiar with the instructions.



## Travelling with an assistance dog on different means of transport

### Advance notification

It is a good idea to notify that you are travelling with an assistance dog when booking a trip to ensure a suitable seat. No prior notification is required for local public transport. This guide indicates the statutory time limits for advance notification. Even if no advance notification has been given, transport operators must take reasonable efforts to allow you access to your trip. Check the operator's instructions for advance notification.

To facilitate travel, some operators accept advance notice of an assistance dog with a shorter time limit, or require no advance notification at all.

On international journeys, the dog handler is responsible for ensuring that the assistance dog has the travel documents and certificates required for the country of destination and returning to Finland, as well as vaccinations and parasite treatment, for example.

**” Assistance dogs travel free of charge.**

### Assistance dog's place

If necessary, a space is reserved for the assistance dog in the means of transport, but there is no need to buy a separate seat for it (e.g. the adjacent seat). Assistance dogs travel free of charge.

Assistance dogs usually travel in front of or next to their handlers or between the handler's legs. An assistance dog must not obstruct corridors or emergency exits. It is the responsibility of the handler to keep the dog under control and take care of it at all times.

### Taxis

When booking a taxi, it is good to mention that you will be travelling with an assistance dog and tell what kind of a car you will need.

#### Passengers with an assistance dog should note:

Pre-booking helps the dispatch centre to assign the journey to a taxi that is as suitable as possible for transporting a dog.

#### It is good for the staff and operator to know:

It is a good idea to ask the dog's handler where it is best for the dog to travel.

The driver must not let the dog out of the car until authorized by the dog's handler.

## Local public transport

Local public transport is mainly operated with low-floor vehicles, which makes it easier to board the vehicle with an assistance dog.

Means of transport should have a place reserved for those travelling with an assistance dog. For example, in a bus, the place is in the front near the driver. In the area reserved for wheelchairs and prams, the dog may not have sufficient protection and cannot work undisturbed. However, passengers using a wheelchair should travel in the section of the bus reserved for wheelchairs and prams.

On a tram, commuter train and metro, you can travel with an assistance dog in all carriages and compartments. On local ferries, assistance dogs can travel in all public areas of the ferry.

### **Passengers with an assistance dog should note:**

Vehicles often have a separate exit button for a longer exit, so that the doors stay open longer than usual and there is more time to leave with the dog.

When travelling by demand-responsive service buses, it is advisable to tell that you will be travelling with an assistance dog when booking the service.

### **It is good for the staff and operator to know:**

If a person is waiting on a bus or tram stop with a guide dog and a white cane, the bus or tram driver must stop where the person stands whenever possible, and tell them what the line is.

Sufficient time should be allowed for passengers with disabilities or reduced mobility to sit down safely with the assistance dog.

With an assistance dog, passengers are allowed to enter and exit the vehicle through the front door.



## Long-distance coaches

### Passengers with an assistance dog should note:

It is a good idea to give advance notice of an assistance dog on long-distance routes so that you can ensure a suitable seat.

If you leave from a terminal designated to provide assistance (Kamppi), notify of the assistance dog no later than 36 hours before the trip. Be also prepared to provide a certificate of your dog's training, if required.

It is recommended to travel at the front of the bus. This makes it easier to communicate with the driver and receive instructions to get off at the right stop.

### It is good for the staff and operator to know:

If a person is waiting on a stop with a guide dog and a white cane, the bus driver must stop where the person stands whenever possible, and tell them what the line is.

## Long-distance trains

You can travel with an assistance dog in all passenger compartments, in the restaurant car and in the sleeping cabin of the night train.

### Passengers with an assistance dog should note:

Notify the use of an assistance dog when booking your trip or no later than 24 hours before the trip.

If you need the assistance of a conductor during the journey, it is a good idea to choose a seat from the service carriage of the train.

### It is good for the staff and operator to know:

Passengers with an assistance dog do not have to travel in the pet carriage because other animals can distract the assistance dog.

## **Ships**

Assistance dogs are allowed in all public areas of the ship.

### **Passengers with an assistance dog should note:**

Notify the use of an assistance dog when booking your trip or no later than 48 hours before the trip.

If required, be prepared provide a certificate of your dog's training.

### **It is good for the staff and operator to know:**

Assistance dogs are allowed in the public areas of the ship, such as restaurants and other service points.

Assistance dogs are also allowed to stay in other cabins than those reserved for passengers with pets, but not in allergy cabins.

It is good to have a walking area for assistance dogs in an accessible place.

## **Air travel**

During security screenings, assistance dogs are checked by hand, as are passengers who use other aids in addition to the dog, such as a wheelchair. Assistance dogs are allowed in all the public areas, restaurants and shops of the airport.

Helsinki Airport has an accessible security check line for passengers who travel with assistance dogs and need assistance. There are also, among other things, water points and dog toilets for dogs.

### **Passengers with an assistance dog should note:**

Notify the airline of the assistance dog at the time of booking or no later than 48 hours before your departure.

Make sure the dog has the travel documents and certificates required for the country of destination and returning to Finland, as well as vaccinations and parasite treatment, for example.

If required, be prepared provide a certificate of your dog's training.

### **It is good for the staff and operator to know:**

It is a good idea to discuss with an assistance dog's handler about how the security screening of the dog will be carried out.

Assistance dogs must be transported free of charge in the cabin of the aircraft.

Make sure that assistance dogs have enough space during the trip.

Additional information:

[www.traficom.fi/en/traficom/accessibility](http://www.traficom.fi/en/traficom/accessibility)

[www.traficom.fi/en/transport/passengerrights](http://www.traficom.fi/en/transport/passengerrights)

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