

Taxi Drivers



Occupational Brief Title Codes:

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Occupational Subtitles:

- Chauffeurs

Work Classification Based Related

D.O.T. Occupations:

- Ambulance Drivers
- Bus Dispatchers
- Cab Supervisors

Interests Based Related

G.O.E. Occupations:

- Bus Drivers
- Driving Instructors
- Road Supervisors

Skills Based Related

O*NET Occupations:

- Bus Drivers, School
- Couriers and Messengers
- Subway and Streetcar Operators
- Tour Guides and Escorts
- Train Crew Members

Noteworthy Quote:

"I enjoy being a taxi driver because every day is new, exciting, and different. I have flexible hours that allow me to do other things I want to do. I like meeting people and I have the opportunity to meet local and national celebrities, plus I take cash home at the end of the day."

Natalie Pen~ Palmer
Taxi Driver
Brooklyn, New York

Taxi drivers (ˈtaxi ˈdriv-ers) drive taxicabs, and other modified conventional automobiles, to pick up passengers and transport them, for a fee, to their destinations.

Taxi drivers perform a vital service for their passengers. Many people cannot afford to own their own vehicle and, for those who can, sometimes it is more convenient and safer to take a taxi. In large cities, driving in heavy traffic can be stressful. Parking spaces are also hard to find and expensive. Bus routes and scheduling can be extremely inconvenient to someone in a hurry. Out-of-town visitors, such as business people and tourists, use taxis for city travel and sight-seeing. Travelers often need a cab to get to a hotel, a friend or relatives home, or other lodging. Travelers with their own vehicles will often use taxis to get to the airport, ship port, or bus or train station so they can leave their car at home. This helps them avoid storing their vehicle which can be both costly and risky. The elderly and those with disabilities may not be able to drive themselves to grocery stores, medical appointments, or work. The needs are as varied and as limitless as the passengers.

Work Performed

To begin work, taxi drivers (also called **cab drivers**) report to an office or garage. Some go to the office or garage to pick up a cab. Others take their cab home on lease and call the office or garage when they begin their shift. They use a trip sheet to record their name, work date, and cab identification number. Before beginning their shift, taxi drivers check the fuel and oil, and make sure the lights, brakes, horn, and windshield wipers are in working order. They report any equipment that is not in working order to the dispatcher. If cab drivers own their own cab, they are responsible for the upkeep and cleanliness of the cab, as well as the gas.

Taxi drivers may get their passengers in several ways. Most cabs have a two-way radio system, cellular telephone, or on-board computer. A dispatcher in a central office communicates with the drivers to tell them where to pick up passengers. After they pick up the passengers, they call the dispatcher to give the destination. After delivering the passengers and taking payment, the drivers tell the dispatcher they are free to take another call. Taxi drivers may station their cab outside of buildings where there are many prospective passengers. These places may be railroad stations, bus terminals, airports, hotels, sports complexes, or theaters. Drivers may also cruise the streets to pick up passengers who signal (hail) them.

Once the driver reaches the destination requested by the passenger, they collect the fare (payment) due. There are several methods for calculating passenger fares. Taxi drivers may use a taximeter which measures the amount of the fare based on the length of the trip and the amount of time the trip took. Sometimes there is a flat fee based on pick-up location and destination. Sometimes the fare is determined by a system of zones. Each jurisdiction determines the rate and structure of the fare system. Fares may also include a surcharge for more than

one passenger or for handling luggage. In addition to the fare, passengers generally give a gratuity (tip). The amount of the gratuity depends on the passengers' satisfaction with the quality, efficiency, and courtesy of the driver.

Taxi drivers keep records of their activities. They issue receipts when passengers request them. They usually have a trip sheet or a log in which they record where they picked up and delivered each passenger. They keep track of the amount of money they collect each day. If an accident occurs, drivers must make out a detailed report.

Some drivers transport people with special needs, such as the elderly and those with disabilities, in nonemergency situations. These drivers are called *paratransit drivers*. They drive specially modified vehicles equipped to meet a variety of physical needs. Most work for private sedan, van, and minibus fleets that provide transportation service under contract to public or non-profit agencies. They take their passengers to and from medical appointments, the grocery store, or religious services.

Some drivers operate limousines, vans, and private cars for limousine companies, private businesses, government agencies, and wealthy individuals. These drivers are called *chauffeurs*. Their work is much like a taxi drivers, however, their service is generally prearranged and they are not paid fares. They are usually paid an hourly wage by their employer, but do receive tips from passengers. Chauffeurs may transport customers in large vans between hotels and airports, bus, or train terminals; drive luxury automobiles to business events, entertainment venues, and social events; or provide full-time personal transportation for wealthy individuals, families, and private companies. Many chauffeurs offer conveniences and luxuries in their vehicles such as newspapers, magazines, music, drinks, a television, and a telephone.

The work of paratransit drivers and chauffeurs requires them to pay special attention to the passengers. They help riders into and out of the vehicle, help load and unload packages, and may hold umbrellas when raining. Chauffeurs who work for private businesses or families may also run errands, such as delivering packages or picking up clients. An increasing number work as executive assistants, acting as driver, secretary, and itinerary-planner.

At all times, drivers must pay attention to the traffic and their driving. They must obey traffic laws and signs, and speed limits. Drivers should be familiar with streets in the areas they serve. They should be familiar with the locations of airports, bus and railroad terminals, convention centers, hotels, points of interest, and other frequently requested destinations. They should also know the location of hospitals and police stations in case there is an emergency. Their goal is to always try to get to their destination by the safest, most direct route in the shortest time possible.

Working Conditions

Taxi drivers, paratransit drivers, and chauffeurs drive in all seasons and in all weather. They drive in rain and snow,

on icy roads, day and night. Driving in bad weather or in heavy traffic can be stressful. Sitting for long hours can be tiring. Drivers may load and unload heavy luggage. They must always drive defensively while attending to passengers and keeping in touch with the dispatcher. Sometimes drivers must deal with rude passengers. Because taxi drivers carry cash and work alone, they also face the risk of robbery.

This work is not routine. No two days are alike. Many drivers enjoy the variety of this job. Drivers have little direct supervision. They may break for a meal or a rest whenever they do not have a passenger. Drivers who own their own vehicle can set their own hours and decide where they want to work. They must, however, pick up enough passengers to make a living.

Design improvements in newer vehicles have reduced stress and increased the efficiency of drivers. Satellites and other tracking systems link many taxis with company headquarters. The system allows dispatchers to track the vehicles and records fuel consumption and engine performance. Drivers can communicate with the dispatchers to discuss problems or schedules. They can receive directions, traffic advisories, weather reports, and other important information in a matter of seconds.

Hours and Earnings

There are taxi driver, paratransit driver, and chauffeur positions to accommodate all work schedules. Some jobs offer full-time employment; others are part-time. Hours can be set on a regular schedule or change from day to day. Most cab and limousine companies operate 24 hours a day, year round. Many drivers work evenings and weekends. Drivers are also needed to work long hours during the holidays and for special events like concerts or sports games when travel is heaviest. Paratransit drivers, however, generally have a more regular schedule and work mainly during the day.

Paratransit drivers are paid a regular hourly salary. The earnings of taxi drivers and chauffeurs, on the other hand, vary widely and depend on customer tips, and the number of hours worked. Taxi drivers get their earnings entirely from their receipts plus tips. Their earnings depend much more on the number of passengers they have in a day than other types of drivers. Most drivers working for a cab company get from 40 to 50 percent of the fares they bring in plus their tips. Tips generally amount to 15 to 20 percent or more of total fares. Taxi drivers do not receive overtime pay. Other drivers work for a salary plus commission and tips. A few drivers are guaranteed minimum daily or weekly wages.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2000, taxi drivers and chauffeurs earned an average of \$18,920 a year. Earnings ranged from a low of \$12,000 a year to a high of \$30,000 a year. Most earnings fell between \$14,000 and \$20,000 a year. Independent taxi drivers

generally earn between \$20,000 and \$30,000 a year. Drivers with a regular clientele may earn more.

Independent taxi and limousine drivers must consider overhead, insurance, and other driving costs. In New York City, for instance, drivers must obtain a costly medallion issued by the city before they can operate a taxi. Earnings for taxi drivers also vary with the season and the weather. Snowy and rainy days usually mean more business.

Drivers for large companies may get fringe benefits such as health insurance, sick leave, and paid vacations. Those who are self-employed must provide for their own health insurance.

Education and Training

Those interested in this work should take a driver education course to learn motor vehicle laws and safe driving practices. They should also take English courses to help develop communication skills. Courses in business mathematics and automotive shop will also prove helpful. Employers prefer to hire applicants with a high school diploma, several years of driving experience, and a good driving record. Background checks are also common. These may cover medical, credit, criminal, and driver's record checks.

Job seekers must have a driver's licence, and must obtain a chauffeur's or taxi driver's license (called a hack license). Some companies help their applicants prepare for these examinations. Other drivers study specially prepared booklets. Some states require prospective drivers to take a training course offered by a community college or a state agency. Training programs may include up to 80 hours of classroom instruction. Applicants should know traffic regulations, local geography, insurance regulations, safe driving practices, and taxicab regulations. Applicants must also show some ability in customer service relations. Some training programs and exams for the hack license require a test on English proficiency, usually in the form of listening comprehension. Some also include instruction in map reading, route management, and service for passengers with disabilities.

Some companies give new drivers on-the-job training. They show drivers how to complete paperwork and how to operate the taximeter, two-way radio, cellular phone, or on-board computer. Instructors point out popular sightseeing and entertainment destinations, hospitals, police stations, and firehouses. New drivers at paratransit service companies also receive training in how to handle wheelchair lifts and other mechanical devices.

Licensing, Unions, and Professional Societies

License standards and requirements for taxi drivers, paratransit drivers, and chauffeurs are set by local governments. All require minimum qualifications for driving experience and training. All drivers must first have a regular automobile driver's license. Taxi drivers and chauffeurs must, in addition to a regular license, have a

hack license. To get this special license applicants must pass a written examination or complete a training program.

In large cities many taxi drivers belong to a labor union. The principal union to which most belong is the International Brotherhood of Teamsters. The union works to guarantee fair wages and good working conditions.

Taxi drivers may also belong to the Taxicab, Limousine & Paratransit Association (TLPA). TLPA is the largest non-profit trade organization in the private passenger transportation industry. It consists of about 1,100 member companies that operate fleets of taxicabs, executive sedans and limousines, airport shuttles, and non-emergency medical transportation, as well as paratransit services. TLPA works to enhance their members' ability to effectively and profitably serve local public transportation needs. It provides a network of educational and professional programs, services, and support. They represent the industry in government relations; collect, interpret, and share industry information; and promote the industry to the media and general public.

Personal Qualifications

Drivers must have a good driving record and no criminal record. Many employers prefer to hire drivers over twenty-five because the insurance rates for these older drivers are lower.

Drivers should be personable and friendly. They must be able to get along with all kinds of people. They must have patience to deal with difficult or rude passengers as well as driving in heavy traffic and in all kinds of weather. Drivers must also have the self-discipline to work steadily and dependably without direct supervision.

Occupations can be adapted for workers with disabilities. Persons should contact their school or employment counselors, their state office of vocational rehabilitation, or their state department of labor to explore fully their individual needs and requirements as well as the requirements of the occupation.

Where Employed

In 2000 there were more than 176,000 full-time taxi drivers and chauffeurs in the United States. There were also many part-time drivers. Taxicab companies are the main employers of taxi drivers. Other drivers are employed by government agencies and companies that operate luxury car and limousine services. Private individuals also hire drivers to drive their cars. About 27 percent of all drivers are self-employed. According to TLPA, there are about 6,300 taxicab companies in the United States. They operate over 171,000 cabs. There are around 10,200 limousine companies which operate 57,000 luxury vehicles; and there are approximately 2,100 paratransit and contract service fleets which operate 26,000 modified vehicles.

Employment Outlook

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, through the year 2010, the number of openings for drivers will grow faster

than the average rate for other occupations. The high turnover rate for this occupation will cause many of the openings. Other factors include an increase in suburban travel due to population growth, and more Federal legislation requiring an increase in transportation services for persons with disabilities. For this reason, the best opportunities for drivers should be in rapidly growing localities and paratransit services. Drivers with good driving records and the ability to work flexible schedules will also have better employment opportunities.

Entry Methods

Job seekers should apply to local companies who offer taxi, limousine, and paratransit services. Newspaper want ads often list job openings. State employment offices may also offer job leads. Individuals interested in this type of work can ride in a taxi and ask the driver questions about the occupation. They should also check with the local motor vehicle office for the requirements in the region. They may be able to start as part-time drivers.

Those with enough money may enter this work by buying a vehicle, provided they can get a municipal permit to operate it. It may take some time to pass the examination required to get a special license to drive a taxi, limousine, or paratransit vehicle.

Advancement

Advancement in this field is limited. Some drivers become managers or dispatchers. Others become garage supervisors in charge of cab maintenance. Others may save enough money to buy their own cab. They then can keep all their receipts, but they also take on overhead such as insurance and upkeep. Some cab companies expand by offering a limousine service.

Many drivers consider higher earnings advancement. With experience taxi drivers learn the best places to pick up fares. Many taxi and limousine drivers establish a clientele who have standing calls. That is, they have an arrangement whereby the driver picks them up daily to take them to work or to some other place.

For Further Research

Taxicab, Limousine & Paratransit Association, 3849 Farragut Avenue, Kensington, MD 20895. Web site: www.tlpa.org

Taxicab Services Fact Book. Book.

Members: \$15. Non-members: \$72.

Chronicle Books, 85 Second Street, San Francisco, CA 94105.

Taxi Driver Wisdom. Risa Mickenberg and Joanne Dugan. 176 pages. \$14.95.

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