

Hiring a limo service: A checklist for consumers

To make your event extra special by using one of Michigan's quality limo or bus services, the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) advises consumers to do their homework and ask questions. Here's a checklist to help:

1. The lowest price may not be the best price. Cost shouldn't be the deciding factor. Find out if the price is really "too good to be true."
2. Know the people you are doing business with and get references. If possible, visit the office, talk to the staff, and look at the specific vehicle you will be using to determine if it fits your needs. Ask about the company's policy on breakdowns, missed or late pickups and cancellations.
3. Know the vehicles and drivers. The driver must make available a current copy of his or her driving record upon request. Find out about the vehicle you are using: ask to see the current annual inspection form, and look for the current year MDOT decal that is on the driver's side window. Check the seating capacity for the vehicle you are using. Any vehicle that can hold more than 16 passengers (including the driver) is a bus; a vehicle with a capacity less than 15 (including the driver) is considered a limousine. Each vehicle type has a separate MDOT Operating Authority license, which holds the company, vehicles, and drivers to higher regulatory standards for insurance, inspections and driver qualifications.
4. Check the invoice carefully. When you receive your bill, check it over thoroughly and make sure the prices quoted match the invoice.
5. Most important, go to the MDOT Web site to see if the company is licensed. To find out if the limousine or bus service you plan to use is licensed with the state, visit the MDOT Web site at www.michigan.gov/mdot. On the home page, go to "Rail and Public Transit," click on "Bus and Limo Licensing," then select "Current List of Carriers." If you do not see the limousine or bus service listed, it is likely that the operator is providing service illegally and should not be hired. To help find a company close to you, there is an online option to search by county. (Note that carriers are certified statewide.)

Licensing info also can be obtained by calling MDOT's Office of Passenger Transportation at 517-241-0679 or 517-241-0680 from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday through Friday.