

**GMB Professional Drivers Branch – G56 London and Home Counties**

# **Submission to London Assembly**

**Taxi and Private Hire Services**



**2014**

## **London Assembly Transport Committee Submission**

### **GMB Professional Driver's Branch**

Our membership is made up of both private hire, Hackney drivers as well as delivery, ambulance drivers and those who drive professionally for a living. We also have a number of small private hire operators within our membership.

We have a close working relationship with TFL and have been responsible for working to help create and work on the legislation in place today from work on sight and diabetes for drivers to the bus lane signs available for Private hire vehicles in London.

Our membership is substantial and growing.

We have links with many safety groups and other trade bodies.

Our branch maintains cordial relations with many licencing authorities.

We meet with both enforcement and ground transportation officials on a frequent basis at TFL.

The GMB has had recent contact with most assembly members and the Mayor in relation to the needs of both Passengers and drivers in London and its environs and this submission is a further clarification of our concerns and suggestions.

### **Apps and Websites**

There is no doubt that technology is moving at a fast pace and that in legislation must be robust enough to give protection to the vulnerable.

Drivers who chose to joining applications or companies not necessarily licensed in London may be doing so without the knowledge of the fact that they are not operators not only does this raise data protection issues I also potentially has taxation issues for both the initiator and the driver(operator.)

There are additionally revenue issues for those evading congestion charging a well as income tax or corporation tax where journeys are charged overseas.

Drivers may hold information about individuals travel movements or other vulnerabilities of travellers.

Unless websites and applications can be monitored there can be no surety of safety.

We have demonstrated that anyone can create an app and even with bogus information an individual can sign up without formal credentials.

E-hailing is acceptable where checks are carried out on the provider and appropriate regard is given to both taxi and private hire.

Naturally the public want a fast service in relation to provision of service but service and appropriate checks must be made periodically on drivers as well as operators in terms of knowledge and service levels.

Electronic mediums for booking are becoming more prevalent.

GMB are concerned on multiple basis as to how enforcement takes place.

We believe that not only should those who take bookings via websites and applications have appropriate licenses but where the journeys originate in London or the licencing area appropriate licenses should be in place.

We need to be sure that the companies are using legitimate drivers where the website or application is run by an operator or only licensed operators where the site or application is not UK based.

As advised previously we have conclusive proof that an individual can add fake information to an app or company website and then drive without appropriate documentation and it is our belief that enforcement should be monitoring for such sites or applications.

This clearly allows bogus drivers to work.

Additionally it allows tax evasion by all involved.

We believe if a journey takes place in London then payments must reach a UK entity to stop tax avoidance.

Sites for London Based companies should have the license number displayed to prove the company is legitimate.

If a particular logo is created with this in mind it will add to better public perceptions of the work we do and will of course add to the legitimacy of the company.

A simple Roundel logo with an electronic watermark would help prove the legitimacy of a company being from London thus adding dimensions of safety and legitimacy against those who do not.

In essence it would be a badge of honour.

## Pricing

Whilst Passengers have commented on pricing being high or excessive the real truth is that rates for the work that both Taxi and Private Hire Drivers undertake are artificially low and do not reflect the costs that drivers face.

The average cost per mile of a family saloon costing £22,000 is around .55 pence per mile based on AA figures. On this basis with higher maintenance, Higher Insurance, drivers rent or Commission, or other expenses such as MOT's and accountants fees the rate is therefore higher than the AA's to carry out work as a professional driver .

At this stage a minimum fare for Private hire based on similar rates for minimum living wage is a must.

Where most drivers are self-employed you can find there is a major disparity over the hour's driver's work and the income they derive.

Parts of the reason drivers are forced from the profession are low rates and the inability to keep well maintained modern vehicles on the road.

There is an ongoing churn of drivers as many cannot make ends meet.

If a company is charging £3.50 minimum fares and a driver can only accomplish 2 journeys if they are lucky in an hour it stands to reason after all the expenses the driver faces they are out of pocket and earning less than most on minimum wages let alone living wages.

A minimum living fare needs to be implemented.

When fares are lower than a bus fares for a luxury service door to door there is something wrong.

Operators may feel they're doing right for the public but they are penalising the driver badly.

In many cases drivers are trapped in a never ending circle.

Many drivers because of their low cleared income have little choice but to claim housing and other government benefits to help survive even though many work long unsocial hours.

Part of this problem we feel is encouraged via job centres. We have seen and received mention of adverts that offer private hire driver positions stating income of £1000 per Week.

We are concerned about consistent misrepresentation as the majority of drivers do not earn anything like this.

New drivers just entering the market take time to learn and therefore frequently do not attain these income levels. Additionally these adverts do not mention the actual start up and ongoing running costs of becoming a licensed private hire driver.

Could this be another reason for the high churn of drivers and we are seen as a short term fix on reducing unemployment figures?

The profession cannot retain drivers due to the artificially low rates and the other expenses drivers face.

With the cost and lack of choice for taxis similar issues abound.

There are only Two vehicle choices and costs in London are substantially higher than elsewhere in the UK due to an increased cost of living in London and its environs.

Perhaps it is time to allow other choices to London taxi drivers as they exist elsewhere in the UK.

It now should be mandatory for taxis and private hire to offer payment options to passengers.

Signs of cash only in Taxis can sometimes be viewed as an attempt to evade taxation even if this is not the case.

To make hire accessible payments need to be accessible payment options including text / PayPal and Oyster as well as conventional payments such as cards and cash .

Clearly security needs to be place for such transactions to protect both the client and the driver.

Additionally drivers require reasonable rates for banking transactions so that they are not left out of pocket by way of provision of the suggested services.

Whilst discussing security we believe that an alert system should be fitted to all private hire taxi vehicles in London so that drivers can be protected in the event of distress or attack.

Both taxi driver and private hire driver's jobs are difficult enough but the extra stress of waiting when collecting passengers could be resolved with a little thought.

It is always on the drivers mind that whilst they wait for their pre-booked fares enforcement officers, smart cars with cameras and fixed CCTV are being used to ticket them for being in place to do their job.

This daily situation further impedes their income from what is already at a fragile state of affairs as a result of having to pay for the PCN. Especially in the early hours there is no earthly reason for ticketing to take place.

Would it not be sensible for all authorities to allow a minimum grace period for drivers waiting to collect passengers and in the case of hospitals this period should be extended to 20 minutes to allow a sufficient time for the driver to locate and assist their passengers.

We hear constantly for members who are moved on from many establishments as a result of intimidation or aggression from enforcement officers whilst waiting for their people job.

Many drivers have name boards on their window proving that the drivers are in the location for legitimate purposes. In many areas around London public hire vehicles are left alone without a driver in sight or perhaps carrying out a journey and indeed sometimes not a on a taxi rank but the same yellow line that a private hire driver is on.

Surely it is time to have a reversible sign for Taxi and Private hire confirming collection with a time dial and on the reverse a sign confirming collection of those with infirmities with an enhanced time so that advantage could not be taken by drivers?

There are often cases where the taxi drivers waiting for their booking are ignored or allowed to stand however they do not seem to face the same level of intimidation or requests to move on as private hire drivers.

Clearly both services are licensed by TFL London however when authorities give consideration to public transport this is often ignored a prime example is Camden Council who when considering plans Tottenham Court Road made arrangements for taxis but none for private hire this is pure discrimination.

The GMB understandably asking transport committee what the differences between private hire taxi when it is licensed by TFL and why such discrimination takes place.

Instances where drivers are moved on make a driver look inefficient, tardy, unprofessional and in frequent cases late in the passengers eyes as a result of having to circle until customer is in place not only does this have an economic affect it also has an ecological effect.

There are further issues where passengers have disabilities or infirmities this is why we believe a special sign should be created and taxi driver's situations where they're collecting those with these issues.

Clearly when drivers are waiting for a disabled person and there is no easy location stop in matters become difficult for those we are trying to assist.

Returning to the ecological effect the cost of drivers consistently circle perfection not only creates further gases but also creates further congestion in many locations

whilst it is the Mayors goal to reduce emissions this cannot happen answers arbitrary rules are in place.

GMB also believe there needs to be a zero tolerance position on failure to pay a driver the fare they are due. Consistently drivers are ignored by the police when making a request for assistance in such matters.

Where the police are called to situations such as petty theft they are more than happy to invest their time and resources in attempting to gain a conviction.

Why is it that drivers do not face the same assistance where many cases the financial loss is much greater than the costs and losses of organisations such as supermarkets are concerned?

Could it be that private hire taxi drivers are seen as second-class citizens by those paid to enforce the law?

It is our view that stricter laws need to be brought in for the protection of private hire and taxi drivers.

Until the general public are educated to know that drivers are professionals and deserve the same dignity as other workers there will be a continued stigma and ignorance to our needs.

## **Parking issues**

Collecting passengers at most mainline train stations is a problem. With the exception of Paddington private hire drivers have no allocated space for the benefit of our customers.

As an example at Euston drivers have to parking Lancing Street worked on arrival the customer has no choice but to negotiate a busy junction often with baggage and children where age or disability coming to light this problem is magnified.

St Pancras station similarly has an issue with the parking being some distance away with a minimum charge of six pounds. Access for severely disabled passengers or those with high baggage levels is difficult and is further hindered by the need to cross the coach forecourt.

In view of the fact that space will be available for 5000 electric cars I will be here in 2015 this again seems to be the case of one more for one group a different rule for others.

Many hotels in London have restricted access especially where they may be a regular practical and pragmatic approach needs to be made for private hire drivers to

ease have parity or at least some spaces to avoid a PCN notice from the relevant authority.

London's hospitals are now ticketing drivers collecting where they are on the grounds more than 5 minutes.

This is a major problem it has come to our notice via branch members that advise us that they are being ticketed whilst waiting for their often ill/disabled passengers.

It is abominable that the infirm have to struggle to then find their driver especially when drivers are forced for fear of being ticketed to move away and have been advised they may not return within one hour to the same location.

Not only does it have an economic effect on the driver but it is symptomatic of the issues drivers face on a daily basis.

Customer service is also the job of the hospital and NHS trusts seem more frequently to have forgotten the public are their customers.

At all major London airports parking fees are extortionate and run by monopolies. In the case of Terminal 4 at Heathrow the airport has created a peak and off-peak fare structure which seems to be based on cultural usage of the facility so that flights arriving from the Middle East and Asia where most families come to meet those arriving and show their respects rates are higher.

The airport claims this is because the terminal becomes more congested however most will agree who read this admission that most individuals do not check the parking costs before collecting friends or family.

We parking costs based on segmented time rather than by the minute or by smaller units costs become £10 for parking once you reach 59 minutes.

Minimum parking costs at city airport are just as exorbitant and a 1 minutes stay costs six pounds minimum.

London Stansted airport claims to be a London airport however it charges local private hire and taxi no fee to drop however London drivers are charged a two pound fee to drop passengers off.

In our view if both Stansted and Luton airports are choosing to prefix their name with London then they should exempt London private hire and taxis from these fees.

Should they not be prepared to show their assination with London for this purpose then clearly they should forfeit the right to call themselves London airports.

To make private hire a taxi services more efficient and cheaper for clients in relation to parking charges why cannot appropriate spaces be made available for drivers serving the public?



One of the greatest problems drivers face is passengers being unaware or unwilling to pay the cost of parking this can sometimes result in arguments and resentment causing further stress and financial loss to driver.

Space seems to be readily available for bike rental schemes, bus rest areas as well as taxi rest areas why are Private hire not afforded the same courtesy?

Toilet facilities are paid for by TFL for bus drivers to enjoy public hire have access to toilet facilities and rest areas. We under the same umbrella as the other two have none of the above even though we pay similar amounts of money for licensing purposes.

Surely toilet facilities are needed for the health and wellbeing of drivers?

Drivers spend a significant time of the day in their vehicles however they frequently go without breaks and have one of the poorest diets and highest stress levels of any worker in London.

### **Weekend Bookings**

One of the biggest issues in relation to availability for weekend work is the cost of insurance.

Prior to full legislation many saw Private Hire as a second income for weekends and took a Policy for those periods only.

However with insurance rules changing and rates for cars as High as £2600 Per annum or more in some cases this makes it impossible to tempt individuals in to driving as the costs outweigh the profits.

Drivers need to expect to pay the following:

Rent or Commission

Insurance

Maintenance

Fuel

Tax

Nutrition / Beverages

Car Payments

Licensing costs.

Losses in some cases as a result of fare theft.

Once you look at this the benefits of then just making money on 1 night becomes pointless for many.

Theoretically insurers would need to be asked in to the market to offer private hire cover which has basic Social Domestic and Pleasure or Business coverage for other times.

This may assist in adding numbers.

Messages could be sent to late night revellers via their mobile phone along the same lines as the current know what you getting into campaign.

We have addressed the issue of non-payment for journeys earlier this is also tempered by a haggling culture that has begun due to availability of touts.

The perception of illegality provokes the public in to believing rates should be lower.

No one haggles at the supermarket so why should this be allowed to occur on legitimate transfers sometimes at the drivers expense because the operator wants to move drivers on for the sake of looking busy.

The issue of touts is further exasperated by the fact that once a potential client leaves premises the company who may have a license cannot approach them on the street and if they do leave clubs they may not always obtain re-admittance. This then leaves them prey to the touts who almost certainly operate in these areas.

Where economic touts operate sexual predators normally operate too as they work on the basis that the illegality of the touts will hide their own agenda.

To attract more drivers be they Private Hire or Taxi minimum rates must be established.

Set locations in busy areas for pick up zones where marshals can establish the credentials of travellers and the drivers they have booked creating a greater level of safety so that individuals know they can stand with a marshal until their pre-booked transport arrives.

To satisfy all parts of the profession Private hire bookings from office/app/club should have a five min break before being dispatched to stop touting e.g. no immediate hiring of a mini cab.

## Touting

GMB feel that the Mayor, TfL, Police and the Benefits Agency should be doing much more in regard to touting.

Private hire and licensing enforcement should have greater police involvement including bringing this back on to the syllabus at Hendon unless neighbourhood teams understand what is illegal they will miss what is often under their nose.

Education of police specials / community police with regard to touting i.e. what they should be on the lookout for while they are on their regular beat is a must and we hope this will be acted upon.

Our members have encountered such officers who ignore tout behaviour and because of their lack of knowledge in this area do not intervene.

This is wholly unacceptable as criminality is being ignored on a daily basis.

An example of concern is locations such as Edgware Road W2 where drivers act with impunity.

It is not uncommon to find drivers parked waiting for individuals to take them.

Added to this is an annual issue of individuals renting in the latest Mercedes from Germany and driving clients from the Middle East totally without insurance or licenses.

Similarly around Knightsbridge the illegality can be witnessed.

Not only does this have an economic effect on local legitimate business it also means those uninsured and unlicensed individuals avoid tax and are normally involved in other criminality.

Many nightclubs have a second tier of drivers who are basing their lower rates on the fact they pay no fees in many cases they may have a licensed vehicle but no supporting personal license.

There appears to be very little tout prevention at most London airports. It has come to our attention that certain flights that come in at Heathrow are targeted by touts and their unsuspecting victims are approached by in some instances by sign language which is understood in various cultures. This appears to happen from flights coming in from Eastern Europe, Africa and the Middle East.

These travellers are clearly not aware of the pitfalls of using an unlicensed vehicle and uninsured driver.

Perhaps at the very least some form of advertising campaign in the passport control area. This would be a relatively cheap method of getting the message across in the same way as carrying illegal firearms or drugs into the country is advertised.

In the case of flight arriving in to the private aviation area very few checks are made on the drivers.

There is also an issue with film unit drivers not being licensed with no DBS checks being made. We have good intelligence to advise many of these drivers have past issues with criminality.

We would request that a condition of permits to film in London that only licensed and legitimate operators and drivers who are under the auspices of an operator can do this work for the prevention of tax avoidance and to ensure the economic benefits of legitimacy for London.

We believe that a licencing team should have a police officer seconded to them and always present this way they can enforce anytime, this can put an end to touts as police presence will have an incentive to make bogus cabs become legitimate of face capture.

A roving team looking for criminality such as touting and vehicle illegality acting as they see potential criminality this would assist in addition to fixed operations.

We would also suggest encouragement of taxi drivers to ply for hire in known tout black spots.

Additionally Instant ranks for evenings or special events may stop touts gaining a foothold.

We have personally witnessed the touting outside Ronnie Scott's after the late show in Soho where other clubs finish at a similar time, Taxi drivers have told us they don't like working in this area due to the high traffic volume, nuisance Padi cabs and camera enforcement.

Taxi drivers and Private Hire could be encouraged to report a tout via a rewards scheme. Should a conviction be secured on their evidence then a financial reward similar to Crimestoppers should be granted.

This can be easily affected as most drivers have camera phones which makes for a safer and more accurate burden of proof than confrontation on the streets as occurs on a frequent basis.

We need to ensure that customers are transported in a safe way especially those who are vulnerable and who maybe inebriated after a night out. We feel that efforts on touting must be increased dramatically to avoid unprovoked attacks of both a sexual and a financial nature.

Any attack normally has financial consequences for those attacked and where involved by those individuals the authorities and those associated with them through relationships or work.

Don't forget touting also causes loss of earnings to all licensed drivers and that touts also cause increased traffic in any given area and that it is likely that many of these unlicensed drivers are claiming benefits of some form. Perhaps if this was prevented it would then help them into legitimate occupations.

We have offered a plate system to TFL which would assist in detecting unlicensed vehicles and drivers at a distance based on a license that clips over the location (Blue on most plates) used for overseas travel (GB with EU Star Roundel.) In our case we have substituted this for a Blue T or P. The plate when the vehicle licensed would have a red sticker to prove the vehicle is licensed. The red license would show when the vehicle is not in use.

A NFC chip would confirm both driver and vehicle legitimacy and could be checked on any smart phone.

The mock-ups are in the appendix please note the Taxi Car is written just to underline the fact the plates could be used on both vehicle types. A normal plate with the appropriate surround would still be used. E.g. (P) HM 14 GHY or (T) HM 14 GYY these would be on the front and rear of vehicles. Depictions are on page 15.

This would also stop those who rent licensed vehicles without personal licenses from the deception of appearing to be licensed.

Finally we believe criminal record checks should be carried out on licensed operators their forward facing staff and controllers to prevent those who are not sound from involvement in the professional driving arena.

In our opinion enforcement and licencing team numbers need to double to make a real dent on illegal activity and best practice.

### **Road Space issues and delays in London**

It is our contention that as it's becoming increasingly difficult to move around our great city through constant road closures etc. and removal of road space through refashioning of junctions.

It is our belief that the physical road space we have lost in the last 5 years is now strangling traffic flow.

Surely this idea of removing road space to keep turning into pavement space, green spaces etc. does not actually help with emissions or flow of traffic this matter must be readdressed.

## **Green Fleet**

To move towards a greener fleet we need to be realistic in allowing Green Vehicles to have longer licencing lifespans and for grants for Electric and Hydrogen Vehicles that may allow drivers to improve emissions.

There is of course a clear issue in relation to lack of plug points and facilities for Hydrogen.

When looking at the Toilet facilities issue it may be prudent to consider the suggestions being made by the Institute of Professional drivers to provide combined facilities.

They have already researched this and the facilities will be required based on the Mayors and no doubt future Mayors initiatives.

## **Disability**

More incentives for larger companies to offer facilities for Handicapped individuals are needed.

Not all need adapted taxis some need a saloon for access and in the case of the blind accessibility has other requirements.

GMB believe a separate investigation featuring organisations dealing with handicapped issues need a separate consultation.

## **Gay and Transgender and Female recruitment**

The profession of Taxi and Private hire is still predominantly a male based trade and it is not only pragmatic for the need to make the change but important that the Assembly helps in this instance to promote recruitment in these groups.

Only if we have a good mix will many feel safer travelling.

## **Training and exams**

Refresher Training for drivers should take place every five years to be sure that professional levels of service are kept up.

At present there is still a clear issue over linguistic and navigational skills in the private hire base.

This needs urgent attention along with improved exams and removal of testing by private entities.

We have proof that in one case a company sold exam passes to them allow licencing by TFL.

Not only to exams need to become more substantive but under the prevue of TFL just as Knowledge of London testing takes place we can be assured of unbiased results.

The revenue stream will be no different from the private operators but will allow greater attention to detail and professionalism.

We feel improvement of cycle awareness would also be a pragmatic idea to solve daily interdictions between drivers and cyclists.

### **Relationship between taxis and private hire**

Over the years some taxi drivers and private hire drivers have attacked each other verbally or physically as well as on line via social media.

For things to stop real education need to take place and attacks that are bigoted and outdated need to be stopped.

Attacks on social media have an effect on public perceptions.

If the professions continue to be seen attacking one and other this does not help the public.

We believe a code of conduct need to be created to stop such activity and would request the assembly give this their consideration.

### **Conclusion**

We hope these observations and suggestions will assist the committee and London in finding solutions to the ongoing requirements of the UK's Capital.

There are many ongoing daily issues for the community and only with continued frequent refinement can we reach towards a better and more accessible infrastructure for those who travel.

## Suggested Plate Layout

Images for suggested plate layout:

Red Denotes Vehicle Licensed by the TFL.

The plate would be tamper proof



The Blue insert would be provided with drivers licenses (Both Private Hire and Taxi)

It would be visible to enforcement from a distance and feature NFC.





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