



# The impact of Covid-19

**It is hard to know what to write in these awful times, as I recognise what a devastating impact the Coronavirus has had on taxi drivers and operators. Although, as a council, we tried to do what we could to honour various existing contracts with operators, bring in the new ranks at the BRI and Motion (although obviously not much use at the moment). We also raised concerns with MPs about the impact on the Trade and the lack of financial support, but there was not a lot more we could do.**

The Government also frustratingly failed to issue detailed safety guidance for taxi drivers, which I felt was negligent, and again the Licensing Team kept chasing this, and the Mayor's office and I raised with MPs etc. It seemed so unfair that they issued clear safety instructions for other forms of transport, yet figures by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) showed male taxi cab drivers and chauffeurs had higher rates of deaths involving coronavirus in England and Wales than even doctors, nurses and care workers.

It seems that scientists believe private-hire drivers are particularly at risk due to the layout of their cabs, and say the longer the journey, the bigger the risk, particularly if people are close together and if the windows aren't open, as the air can be quite stagnant.

Hopefully you are all already following our safety guidance ([www.bristol.gov.uk/licences-permits/taxis-and-private-hire-licensing](http://www.bristol.gov.uk/licences-permits/taxis-and-private-hire-licensing)) and are not allowing passengers to

travel without face coverings to protect you from the virus and are always wearing one yourselves, and also refusing to take anyone with any symptoms or from different households. I am sure in the economic climate it is really tempting to take any fares, but your health is paramount.

This crisis has also highlighted the need for national minimum standards for licensing, which will mean that neighbouring authorities will not be able to have lower standards to attract applicants, and will certainly make cross border working less of a challenge. The Mayor, Jonathan Martin and I recently met with our South Gloucestershire equivalents to talk about this and the rapid increase in their private hire fleet, and the impact that has Bristol. As a result, we will be looking together at how far we can align our policies and still meet the national requirements, which is a first step in trying to resolve this longstanding concern that Bristol drivers have.



I do hope that trade starts to pick up very soon, and we will do all we can to champion the importance of the trade in all strategic discussions about public transport.

**Cllr. Ruth Pickersgill**  
**Chair Public Safety Cttee**

## Social Distancing and Covid-19 Guidelines

All of our guidance for drivers on how to be as safe as possible is available on our website:

[www.bristol.gov.uk/licences-permits/covid-19-safety-guidelines-for-taxi-and-private-hire-drivers](http://www.bristol.gov.uk/licences-permits/covid-19-safety-guidelines-for-taxi-and-private-hire-drivers)

You must wear a face covering when carrying passengers, and make sure you are cleaning your vehicle before and after each journey. You should also require passengers to wear face coverings and offer them if they are not available. This keeps you safe as well as them.

- If you are returning from another country you must ensure that you are following the rules for self-isolating. You must self-isolate for 14 days when you return unless the country you are travelling from is on the 'travel corridor' list.

More details and the full list can be found on the Government's website:

[www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-travel-corridors](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-travel-corridors)

# PC Quinton update

**The last few months have been a terrible time for many, especially taxi drivers. Your work has disappeared, and you are in one of the highest risk groups. I've heard your stories of the pressures you face and the challenges in keeping you and your families safe. Thankfully, I'm not aware of any of our drivers who have died from this virus. The timing and changing advice from the Government has also caused difficulties for you and the Police and council too.**

This has also meant a reduction in my incoming workload, and I've used the opportunity to clear the large backlog of work that had built up and to progress some projects to assist drivers and the public. I've also been able to help colleagues with their work too. So far this year I have assisted my colleagues with 38 of their investigations ranging from road accidents to rape. I've also been involved in enforcing Covid regulations and policing protests.

I have had to adapt to new ways of working too. My focus has shifted to being more intelligence led, and identifying vehicles and drivers of concern – but it's still really important that I carry on my general patrol and random checks too. As those of you on my *WhatsApp* group will know, issues such as defective tyres, plying for hire and traffic/parking still continue. That's why since 1st July I have caught 6 "plyers" and issued 41 Advisory/Warning/Suspension Notices. This year I have issued 31 tickets so far.

I have had to discontinue the pre-booked vehicle and driver inspections I was doing at Sandy Park to try and reduce the risk to myself and drivers, but am hoping to restart them in the autumn.



Hopefully, your work will continue to come back over the next few months and although there will be changes, something that will not change is my determination and dedication to support the vast majority of drivers who are honest and professional – and hold those to account who break the rules, whether they be passengers or drivers.

Keep well!

**PC Quinton, Taxi Compliance Officer,  
Bridewell Police Station**

## Update to DBS Identity Document Checking

**As we continue to adapt to Covid-19, we are having to make some changes to the way we check identity documents for DBS checks. This is to ensure integrity of the DBS process.**

As we need to actually see you, you'll now need to have a video chat with one of the licensing officers to verify your identity. The process will be as follows:

1. If you're due a DBS check you'll receive this form in the normal way, complete it and return it by post.
2. You'll take copies or photos of your ID documents and send them by email to [licensing@bristol.gov.uk](mailto:licensing@bristol.gov.uk)
3. An officer will check your ID when we receive it, and send you an appointment for a video chat. You'll need to have your ID with you for the video chat so the officer can verify it against the ones you have sent in by email.
4. The DBS form will then be completed and sent off.

If you're not able to make the appointment you should email us as soon as possible to arrange a different date or time. We won't be able to send the form off until we have verified your ID on this video chat.

The calls will take place on *Zoom* and you'll need to have downloaded it before the appointment.

To download and install the *Zoom* application, go to:

**[www.zoom.us/download](https://www.zoom.us/download)**

From the *Download Center*, click on the *Download* button under "*Zoom Client For Meetings*". The application will automatically download when you start your first *Zoom* meeting.



# Update on ranks and enforcement

Ranking outside the Hippodrome has been happening for a long time, although unauthorised. Recognising the importance of the location, a new rank was installed a short distance away on St Augustine Parade. This has the benefit of large signage and a shelter for customers.

Ranking outside the Hippodrome is not permitted and enforcement of this restriction restarted on 1st September 2020 meaning if you park, or rank up, there you will get a ticket whether you are a Hackney Carriage, Private Hire, or private vehicle, and wherever you are licensed. For Hackney Carriages please make sure you are using the new rank further up St Augustine's Parade instead and also the 'Super Rank' on Colston Avenue, which also benefits a shelter and clear advertising for passengers.

A rank has now been installed outside the BRI. This has long been called for by the Trade. It is important that the Trade start using this rank to help generate business, so please make use of this new rank.

**Steve Pick has also provided the following updates on ranks across the city:**

- The new ranks are installed on Avon Street, Baldwin Street and outside the BRI and we have extended the times of the rank on St Augustine's Parade.



- We are progressing a project to trial an enhanced piece of infrastructure at selected taxi ranks to assist with wayfinding and to improve the quality of the overall taxi offer. We are currently in the design stage.
- We will be speaking to the BRI to discuss how to promote the new rank on Upper Maudlin Street (sorry this hasn't happened yet).
- We continue to respond to reports of damage and general maintenance issues, and we are looking to improve our processes and procedures so that we can respond to defects at ranks more efficiently.

- The *City Centre Movement Strategy* was approved by Cabinet in July (see agenda item 10), and AIM 7 on page 18 in Section 3 of the framework document discussing improvements to taxi ranks. It can be found [here](#).

## Bus lanes and bus gate restrictions

The current situation in Bristol permits hackneys and private hires licensed from outside of Bristol to use bus lanes and bus gates where taxis are permitted to do so. It was requested as the *Taxi Conference* in 2018 that the council consider allowing only taxis licensed in Bristol to use these facilities, however it considered that the dis-benefits outweigh the benefits and the cost of making this legally enforceable would be excessive. As such the council is not progressing this idea at present.

Finally a reminder that taxis should not be ranking up in the bus stop preceding the Union Street rank. This spill-over causes issues for the buses and consequently other traffic. Please be considerate, and if the rank is full, move on to the next one.



## Fleet Services

**Fleet services have provided an update on the requirements for booking tests and the measures they are taking to keep you and the testers safe.**

Please make sure that when you book a test, you take the following steps to make sure your vehicle is ready for inspection:

- All booked test slots must be paid for the day before by card payment only.
- Vehicles must arrive 10 minutes before test starts.
- Vehicles must be clean inside and outside.
- All rubbish is to be removed from the vehicle.
- Windows should be lowered to air the vehicle before exiting.

The vehicle will be sanitised by the testers before and after your test to reduce the risk of spreading Covid, please advise the tester beforehand if you wish for this not to be done. We will sanitise the following areas of the vehicle, using wipes/sanitising spray:

- Keys ● handles ● grab rails ● steering wheels ●
- gearstick ● handbrake lever/button ●
- switches and stalks ●

When presenting the vehicle for test, please come alone. Do not bring pets, children or another person with you. You may need to remain outside for the duration of the test and that there may not be shelter available so please make sure you bring suitable clothing/umbrella. Where 2m social distancing cannot be maintained, then you'll need to wear a face covering unless you are exempt.

If you aren't able to exit the vehicle for your test please call us on **0117 903 6319** before your test takes place so that we can make suitable alternative arrangements.

**If you don't follow the guidelines, we may not be able to carry out your test.**



## Taxi Fares

The review of taxi fares for Hackney Carriages is progressing and officers are awaiting a revised submission from trade representatives.



## Fees increase

The taxi application and renewal fees will be increasing shortly. Driver fees will increase from 1 October, with vehicles and operators increasing after a 28 day consultation. The new fees will be updated on our website when they change.

## National Standards

On 21 July the Department for Transport introduced the Statutory Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Standard. This is a national document which all local authorities must have regard to when making decisions and considering applications.

This will impact on everyone, including the council, and we are currently reviewing what steps we may need to take in respect of these standards, but inevitably some changes will be necessary.

The guidance can be found on the Government website:

**[www.gov.uk/government/publications/statutory-taxi-and-private-hire-vehicle-standards](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/statutory-taxi-and-private-hire-vehicle-standards)**

## UNITE Union

**Tazim Ladhu from Unite Union recently spoke to the Taxi Forum about the opportunities for free training courses, and member benefits of joining the union.**



There are a number of courses which can be completed for free across topics like maths and English, as well as customer service and ICT. It can be difficult to fit learning in around other commitments; however some of the courses can be done over the phone or online, making them more flexible to fit around work and home life. More information about the courses and joining can be found on the Unite website:

**[www.unitetheunion.org/why-join/member-offers-and-benefits](https://www.unitetheunion.org/why-join/member-offers-and-benefits)**

Join here: **[www.join.unitetheunion.org](https://www.join.unitetheunion.org)**



# Survey of disabled people's taxi use

In partnership with the council, the West of England Centre for Inclusive Living (WECIL) have just conducted a survey of disabled people to see what use they made of taxis, and how they felt the service could be improved. There is national evidence that a higher percentage of disabled people rely on taxis than the rest of the population, so this is a group of customers who are particularly important to the Trade.

77% of the people they surveyed did use taxis, and they had a range of needs (wheelchair users, other mobility issues, visual or hearing impairment, mental health etc.), but the largest number just needed help getting in or out of the taxi (which is not hard to accommodate).

- Of the 15% who had used them in the past, the reasons given for why they no longer did were preferring alternative transport, access or prohibitive cost.

"I am a full-time wheelchair user and cannot self-transfer, this means I need to sit in my wheelchair in the taxi. I have booked accessible taxis days in advance, given wheelchair specification and yet when taxi arrives it's a saloon car which is not wheelchair accessible. I am a disabled mom to a 3-month-old baby, booking a taxi that can accommodate the both of us has become a nightmare."

"I no longer use taxis on ranks, especially those at Temple Meads because, although they are obliged to do so, they are very reluctant to take me on short journeys (my home is 2 miles away and too far to walk) and when doing so are vocal in grumbling. It was so distressing that I decided to use the (very inadequate) bus service instead."

- **Journey refusal:** The survey looked separately at HC and PH vehicles, but the answers were similar. 33% of HC users and 34% of PH users said they had been refused a journey. Reasons given to disabled people included lack of wheelchair access, ramp not working, unwilling to take a guide dog or other reasons.

"They were at the front of the rank and just drove off when they saw I was next in the queue. I have also been refused because they didn't have ramps and because they didn't know how to use them."

"No reason. Just drive off."

"Because the wrong car was sent out to me by a taxi company and one of the drivers did not think I should have been in a saloon car. He asked me to get out of his vehicle halfway through my journey to work even though the driver knew I was disabled. I have Multiple Sclerosis."



"No reason – just didn't turn up when I used the chat feature to ask if the wheelchair would fit in the boot. Had happened five or more times with UBER."

"Unknown reason. I returned from a football match by train arriving in Bristol Temple Meads. I went to get inside a taxi and he told me that he would not let me into the cab. I limp and as no-one could see my football shirt and I was the only supporter coming out of the station, the only reason I can think of was that he noticed my disability. I got in the taxi behind him. The driver was happy to drive me."

"I had my guide dog with me and I was told that the cab was too small to take him."

- **Attitudes of drivers:** There was generally a positive response when disabled people were asked about driver attitudes. 64% said they thought the drivers' attitudes were positive, 9% said negative, and the rest said it varied. There were some very positive comments like:

"I am always treated very well, they are friendly and always talk to me."

"Good! Our usual taxi driver is always smiling, friendly and polite and makes us laugh. He tries to get to know you, which is really nice. He goes over and above to make sure we are all safe! He makes us feel safe and secure."

"99% of the time I have been treated really well"

The problems seem to be from a few drivers:

"On the whole most have been good, but some have not been very helpful, some drivers have remained in their taxi and have left me to struggle with my luggage despite seeing me with my walking stick"

"I feel like a lot of disabled people feel upset because taxi drivers don't seem very keen to pick you up. It's a huge worry. Sometimes they drive past you and you just want to be treated by everyone else"

**Improving the Service:** When asked how they would like to see the service improved there were a number of ideas:

- I would like to see card payment possible.
- More support – they didn't support me to get in/out whilst I was using my crutch which took me longer and made things more difficult.
- Teach the drivers how to put their seats down to take wheelchairs, and make it the same rate per journey as 'normal' passengers
- More availability – very difficult to get ones at certain times of day
- More waiting points to pick them up. More wheelchair accessible taxis
- Better training on using the ramps and straps (don't often secure wheelchair once in) and training on the law and what happens if they don't comply.
- The larger taxi companies can't guarantee an accessible taxi is available as they are not sure who will be on the rota. Things need to change so that disabled people can plan in advance.

- Clearer way of communication if someone needs assistance eg we wouldn't be able to easily/safely cross the road if the taxi was on the wrong side of the road.
- More wheelchair accessible taxis and the few there are, are tied up providing school transport etc.
- Better ways of communicating access needs from operators to the drivers
- App that asks about access needs before booking a journey
- Some drivers could be more talkative and turn the radio down
- More training for drivers on customer service and supporting disabled people

Many of the findings of this survey are positive, but there is clearly work to be done to improve the service for disabled people so they feel happier about using taxis more. The next stage is to arrange a meeting with key drivers and operators and disabled people.

If anyone would like to be involved please contact the licensing team at [licensing@bristol.gov.uk](mailto:licensing@bristol.gov.uk)

## DVLA Medical Guidance updated

If you are a taxi or private hire driver you'll know that you have to do a medical check regularly, and notify the council if your medical status changes, or if you are diagnosed with anything new. The council consider your medical information against the Group 2 requirements in the DVLA's *Assessing Fitness to Drive: a Guide for Medical Professionals*. This is updated on a regular basis, and the most recent update was in March.

There were a number of changes in the neurological, cardiovascular, Diabetes, psychiatric, and visual sections. The updated guidance can be found [here](#).



## What would you like to see?

**The Licensing Team aim to improve communication between the council and the trade.**

Remember, this is your newsletter!

If you have something you think would be useful, or would like to see included in future issues, or you have a good news story or information you want to share, please get in touch at [licensing@bristol.gov.uk](mailto:licensing@bristol.gov.uk) with the subject 'Newsletter'.

## Previous Newsletters:

The Taxi Newsletter is a good way for the Licensing Team to communicate with the Private Hire and Hackney Carriage trade.

Past issues of the newsletter are available on our website:

[bristol.gov.uk/licences-and-permits/taxi-forum](http://bristol.gov.uk/licences-and-permits/taxi-forum)