

HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE FORUM MEETING

Venue: Virtual via Zoom

Agenda: 21 July 2022

Attendees and who they represent:

Councillor Christine Townsend (CT) (Chair) representing Bristol City Council

Jonathan Martin (**JM**) representing Bristol City Council

Dakota Ferrara (**DF**) representing Bristol City Council

Patrick Quinton (**PQ**) representing Police, Taxi Compliance Officer

Saif Hussain (**SH**) - BBLTA

Trevor Deadmean (**TD**) representing Bristol City Council Transport Team

Lauren Price (**LP**) representing Bristol City Council Transport Team

Elise Feider (**EF**) representing Bolt

Ryan Owen (**RO**) representing Veezu

Desmond Broster (**DB**) representing Veezu

Mahad Jama (**MJ**) representing Magans Taxis

Jasmine Dodd (**JD**) representing Magans Taxis

Shammi Raichura (**SR**) representing Uber

Steven Lohia (**SL**) – representing BDriven

Gary O’neill (**GO**) Private Hire Driver

Imran Ali (**IAL**) Private Hire Driver

Ismail Arab (**IAR**) Private Hire Driver

1. Welcome, Introductions, Apologies

- Apologies

2. Agree minutes from last meeting

Minutes from 22 April 2022

Actions:

- Provide details of charging points for electric vehicles has been carried over.

3. Hackney Carriage Tariff Change (JM)

The proposed tariff change has been accepted by cabinet; we are now starting the public consultation. The statutory minimum advertising time is two weeks, we will be advertising for three to ensure the public have a chance to comment. We have sent the proposed tariff to local disability groups in advance of the consultation starting, as we are aware that a large percentage of people with disabilities are reliant on Hackney Carriages. If there are no objections the change will take effect immediately, and we will be arranging for the meters to be amended. If there are objections there is a formal process that needs to be followed. Saif, do you have any questions?

SH No, it's just the normal process.

4. Clean Air Zone

CT As you will be aware the CAZ will be coming in this winter, to confirm, there are grants available for taxi and private hire vehicles, however, these are only available to vehicles licensed by BCC.

JM The CAZ launch has now been announced as 28 November, we've given you information about what CAZ is, and what grants are available but as reminder grants are available to drivers whose vehicles aren't compliant, these grants will be backdated to November 2021 when the CAZ was officially announced.

SL How much is the charge to enter the CAZ, and what times will the charge run from.

LP The charge is £9

JM It runs from midnight until 23:59, you must absorb the cost, this cannot be passed on to the passenger

IA Will there be any exemptions? I have a Euro 5 vehicle that won't comply

JM No, this has been talked about for a long time. It's a business decision on whether you want to drive a lower emission vehicle, and pay the fee, or you want to utilise the grants available to upgrade and drive a lower emission vehicle which will comply with the CAZ.

CT Does anyone have any comments or questions?

SH The LEVC (London Electric Vehicle Company) is only partly electric, and only does 40-45 miles per charge. I know it's Euro 6, there aren't many drivers with them, but the ones who do are running them on petrol

rather than electric. Could we have a mixed fleet where half of the fleet are fully electric saloons and half are the existing wheelchair accessible vehicles?

JM We moved to a 100% wheelchair accessible fleet around 15 years ago. It would be extremely challenging for a local authority to backtrack from that. Whenever we make policy changes, we go through an equalities impact assessment, and I can't see how it would be approved. Currently if you're a wheelchair user you can use any Hackney Carriage, changing the proportion of wheelchair accessible vehicles would leave it to luck whether one will be available. Taxis are a fundamental part of the public transport service.

MJ I am against changing the fleet from 100% wheelchair accessible vehicles. We have invested a huge amount into these vehicles and feel others should have too. Having 100% accessible benefits school transport work. We have been told for the last seven years that we should be upgrading our vehicles and making sure they're compliant with CAZ. The only criticism I have is that the council have been very slow on giving out grants.

JM Mahad is right, I can't argue with his comments on issuing the grants, the finance team have only just been appointed. We have a record of all the renewals eligible for grants, and they will be processed in due course.

SH I know we need to make changes to improve air quality, but it's about balancing this and ensuring we have the right amount of wheelchair accessible vehicles. All the main dealers are saying there's no wheelchair accessible vehicles available. There are lots of vehicles available which are over three and a half years old, could we licence a new hackney which is up to five years old rather than three and half years old?

JM There are less vehicles available, and they are more expensive, but when we've made enquiries, there have been vehicles that comply with our policy available.

SH Mahad, have you had any issues finding vehicles?

MJ I only buy new vehicles so haven't had the same issues. We've known about this for two years, there's been plenty of time to upgrade your vehicle.

SH Most people can't afford new Mercedes or LEVC. I don't see the issue with licensing a 5-year-old car.

MJ I don't see why getting a 5 year old car is any easier than a three and a half year old.

IAR I have spoken to the three main companies and all of them have told me they don't have cars. I don't know where to get a car.

CT Three out of four cars in Bristol across the board will be compliant with the CAZ.

5. Electric Taxi Trials

We understand the current pressure on trade and are trying to balance air quality and having a fleet with high standards whilst supporting the industry. We want to support the Hackney trade as they are a vital part of the public service provision within Bristol.

I know that the outright cost of £60,000 is a huge amount of money, but over a long-term period this can be more cost-effective option.

We've purchased two LEVC vehicles which will be licensed as Hackney Carriage. We will be launching a "try before you buy scheme" to make these available to the trade under a short-term lease of two week. We're hoping this scheme will allow drivers to see if this is a viable option, and you will be able to see the saving on fuel. We've outlined that if you swap to Electric there are around £15,000 in CAZ grants. The lead time for a LEVC is around 8 weeks which is significantly quicker than other vehicles.

MJ When will they be available? Will you be charging a fee for them to be hired?

JM They've already arrived, and are in the process of being licensed, livery will be added and then they'll be available. There will be information in the newsletter. We won't be charging a fee, but a nominal deposit will be payable.

DB I don't see any other council doing what Bristol is doing with this initiative and the hackney trade should be grateful for it

CT Charging point infrastructure for electric vehicles is only going to get better. WECA as a regional area is also interested in supporting this. There will be specific and protected charging areas just for taxis.

PQ I know the council are keen on drivers using superrank Colston avenue, I think it would be excellent if there was charging facilities installed there

CT We will ask for feedback closer to the time on which locations would be best.

GO Can I check that this is for private hire too?

CT Charging points on ranks won't be for obvious reasons, but we will ask for feedback on potential locations for Private Hire vehicles.

SH I don't feel that the Hackney drivers are being heard. The people making comments are faces behind business. We've only got one independent driver who has a LEVC. We can't afford it, £60,000 is a huge amount of money. I don't know why these are being trialled. We can only go electric if you give us saloon cars.

JM Our policy is written so that we are not forcing people down an electric route, however the grants are prescribed in a way that benefit you if you choose an electric. We are strongly encouraging electric replacements for obvious reasons. Inevitably there will come a time when the manufacturers will no longer be making diesel vehicles.

SH If drivers are forced to buy LEVC, at least half would leave. A taxi drivers limit to buying a vehicle would be £45000.

JM Saif, I've gone through the reasons this wouldn't be viable, and you know the importance of ensuring we have an accessible fleet.

MJ Saif, I've got about ten compliant vehicles which I'm looking at selling, I'm happy for you to contact me to discuss.

6. Cancellations

JM We've discussed this multiple times, drivers are accepting a booking on one app, then cancelling to accept a second more lucrative booking. Not only is it brand damaging for operators, but it's also not OK to leave passengers who've made a booking on the side of the road. We've been working with operators to see who these offenders are, and we've been speaking to these individuals about their actions, if we don't see an improvement, we will be looking at referral to PSP. We have interviewed around 13 drivers so far.

MJ Why aren't the operators whose bookings have been cancelled acted?

JM We're working with the operators on this issue.

MJ If one of my drivers were repeatedly cancelling bookings, I would get rid of them, I'm not sure why it's a licensing problem.

JM It's everyone's problem, we're working collaboratively due to the amount, it's a national problem.

MJ It's not fair on the customers. The feedback I've had is that the fares aren't enough, but if that is the case why did they accept it in the first place.

JM My focus is on customer safety and compliance. I can't comment on Private Hire fares.

SL Drivers should be of fit and proper character. If they're picking and choosing who to pick up, I don't think they should hold a licence. What if they cancel the booking of someone who is vulnerable? How many times do you speak to them? Is it three strikes and they're out?

I also think that whilst it's happening in Bristol it is sometimes South Gloucester Drivers

CT We can't act on drivers who aren't licensed by us, but I will speak to my counterparts in South Gloucester to see how they're dealing with this issue.

JM We are the first authority who are trying to tackle this if it's successful we're sharing with other authorities.

DB Operators have no control over driver partners, if we act, all they'll do is move to another app-based operator. Asking the public to contact the council directly would be overwhelming. The thought of a young woman, or a vulnerable passenger being left on the side of the road is unacceptable. There are clear offenders, and it is integral that the council intervenes. The consequence on the public is massive.

GO There are several reasons why drivers cancel, a better job isn't the biggest one. Some of the operators aren't providing any information until you accept, not even an address. With the app companies it's easy to accidentally accept a job. It's alright picking on the drivers when they're not here, but it's the company that's the issue not the driver.

CT We're looking at patterns of offending behaviour.

SH I was working on the Hippodrome this weekend and from 23:00-06:00 there was a constant line of passengers, and we were picking them up all night long. All the passengers were saying Private Hire Operators weren't picking them up, and they'd been waiting for hours. They said they were charging three times the price; the fares were extortionate. I believe a lot of the problem has come from the rank being moved. Why can't the hippodrome be a rank after 21:00? The passengers are looking for us but can't find us. We used to have 800 taxis and now we don't even have 300.

GO I've not had a response.

JM The evidence I've had shown that these jobs are not being picked up accidentally.

7. Taxicop Update (PQ)

As part of project Scorpion, I worked with a drug dog, and we checked 180 vehicles. We arrested one driver for possession of cannabis and suspected of drug driving. That was the only incident of note, and I was pleased to not have found anything else.

Recently, several drivers have nominated other people as having driven when they have been caught speeding. We are looking at prosecuting three drivers for perverting the course of justice. We are also looking at prosecuting other drivers who have lent their vehicles to others even when only used for social, domestic and pleasure.

If you're aware of other drivers who have lied, they should seek legal advice. Perverting course of justice carries an immediate custodial sentence.

In the last three months I haven't found a single taxi with defective tyre. It's a serious matter, and really pleased that the message seems to have got through.

At the last meeting I mentioned I was trying to arrange first aid and CPR training. We're running a course soon, and if that goes well we will be putting more courses on, I'm really pleased that these initial courses are fully booked. Whilst it's not a police matter but it could save lives.

8. Issues from BBLTA and issues from PH

SH We were told Uber would be geofenced, but that doesn't seem to have happened. We did leave the Hippodrome rank, but now PHV are there we've gone back.

JM Geofencing is in place, you cannot go there, or enforcement will take place

PQ There is an issue with PHV stopping on the rank. I have made suggestions on how we can deal with this, I've asked for late night enforcement with parking services, they came out with me a few weeks ago, but unless they're out regularly I don't think it will have much of an impact.

MJ What's the time limit for stopping?

JM There's no specific time limit. If a driver is flagged down, they can stop. We're not trying to penalise drivers or passengers.

GO Do Private Hire Operators have to take a destination at the time of booking?

JM The operator has to take all booking details and pass on to driver.

GO There are operators not doing that.

JM If you send me the details, I can look into it.

GO Is there any way of changing the Pickup point at Temple Meads?

JM We don't have statutory control over the land, you would need to speak to network rail

PQ If you visit the BCC website you can see exactly the records that are required at the time of booking. In terms of Temple meads, the short stay car park is tricky, but the whole station is, with the redevelopment it would be worth us feeding back on planning. I haven't seen the plans, but it would feed in really nicely.

MJ When will drivers be able to do their medical through Occupational Health? Lots of drivers are only being issued with six-month licences as their GPs aren't doing medicals.

JM We can't do anything – medicals are a statutory requirement. I would recommend complaining to the GP practice. They must have patients who require these, they will have complaints procedures and I would urge them to use that.

MJ So, they can't use other practices?

JM Only if they were to fully move.

MJ What about occupation health medicals?

JM I've not heard anything further, I will look into it and let you know.

9. Licensing Team update (JM)

JM We're still receiving a large number of emails, in terms of backlogs of issuing licences we're still working in expiry date order, we're still experiencing a number of issues whether that's not providing documents, or not attending mandatory training.

Tax conditionality If a driver is applying for a Hackney and Private Hire licence, we're now able to accept one tax conditionality code for both.

So far 500 drivers out of 1700 have completed their mandatory training.

Patrick has made me aware that an Inspector was strongly complimenting the training. There was an incident where a driver who had received that training, was suspicious and had the confidence to speak to Patrick which resulted in a number of arrests. This is a real success and shows how

important this training is, this is just one incident that we know of. We've also had a lot of compliments from drivers. The training is really fulfilling what we want it to achieve.

PQ That incident resulted in two adults being arrested and five children being taken into protective care. It's not an isolated incident, there are also a couple of other matters that have come to light as a result of this training.

JM Fees for licences will be increasing this year. It's been a long time coming, some fees are going up more than others. Licences under 12 months will be going up significantly, with any licences issued for a duration of less than 12 months costing £89.

10. AOB and Date of next meeting

Action Point	Matters arising	By Whom	Completed?
1	Send CAZ information out in the next newsletter	DF	Yes
2	Look at availability of compliant vehicles	DF	Yes
3	Can Occupational Health medicals be used when GP practices are not offering them	JM	Yes
5	Send out fee changes	DF	Yes
6			
7			
8			

Next meeting: Thursday 29th September 11:00-13:00