

DEPARTMENT: ENVIRONMENT AND LEISURE

ORIGINATING SECTION : PUBLIC PROTECTION SERVICE

REPORT TO : LICENSING COMMITTEE

30:10:18

TITLE : Petition on behalf of the Private Hire Trade

1. PURPOSE

.For members to consider the petition and requests contained within it

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That members note the report

3. KEY ISSUES

A petition, attached as appendix 1, was received from a number of the private hire trade who work from 5 operator bases primarily sited in Blackburn town centre. The date of the covering letter states 4th September 2017, however it did not reach the Council until this year. The lead petitioner was asked if he wished it still to be considered given the time lapse. He stated that he did.

The petitioners are requesting to use bus lanes, pick up and drop off points for private hire vehicles, independent testing stations and wanting to work more with the Council and Police to improve safety, security and the image of the taxi trade within the Borough

Responses have been sought from the Transport Team for the Pennine reach bus lanes, from Highways for the pick/drop off points in town centres and Licensing for the testing station and final query.

4. RATIONALE

USE OF PENNINE REACH BUS LANES

The Council considered carefully the restrictions relating to the Borough's Bus Lanes as part of the Pennine Reach £40m major transport scheme (funded by the Council and the Department for Transport). The bus lanes can currently be used by local buses, hackney carriages and cyclists. In terms of bus lane effectiveness there has to be a balance drawn between allowing additional vehicles to use the bus lanes and the benefits derived for the purpose they were intended for. The larger the number of vehicles allowed in, the lower the lane's effectiveness for buses, which can carry significantly higher numbers of passengers per vehicle than motor cars.

The usage of bus lanes does vary according to peak demands, time of day and geographic location, but are not underused as suggested. The following information has been compiled from inter-peak bus departures:

- Furthergate: 16 buses per hour - a bus every 3/4 minutes
- Ewood and Earcroft: 8 buses per hour - a bus every 7/8 minutes

There is also an issue relating to the design of traffic light signals systems where virtual "bus gates" are in operation. The signals system at these lights look at the length of vehicles and will not fire traffic lights where

there is a "bus gate", which would present problems if a larger number of motor cars were to use particular bus lanes in Blackburn with Darwen.

Finally, as a Department for Transport major transport scheme, a period of 10 years is in place where material changes to the implemented scheme cannot be made. The Council cannot therefore widen the use of bus lanes to Private Hire Taxis.

PRIVATE HIRE DROP OFF / PICK UP POINTS AROUND TOWN CENTRES

This issue has been raised at the Blackburn with Darwen Taxi Forum previously.

Private hire vehicles are only permitted to pick up via pre-arranged bookings and are not permitted to pick people up from the side of the road or designated taxi ranks. They can have an arrangement with a private land owner but not a Highway Authority. Only hackney carriages are allowed to pick up passengers direct from the highway.

Traffic Regulation Orders cannot be made exclusively for private hire vehicles and so every vehicle would be able to use any pick up/drop off area and therefore negate any benefit for the private hire trade.

The existing arrangement of calling and agreeing where to be picked up / dropped off at will be at the discretion of the Private Hire vehicles and the restrictions in force at that location.

INDEPENDENT TESTING STATIONS

The latest review of MOT testing facilities for the taxi trade within Blackburn with Darwen was reported on in February 2018. The decision was made to keep vehicle testing in-house. The trade have been informed of the decision through the Taxi Forum for Blackburn with Darwen. A copy of the decision paper can be found on the Council's website.

CLOSER WORKING WITH COUNCIL

The request from the petitioners to work more closely with the Council and the Police is welcomed. The taxi forum is the arena where all these ideas can be discussed. The forum is an active, consultative group where the Council, representatives of the taxi trade and the Police meet.

In response to the requests made in the petition, safeguarding awareness training is currently provided to all new drivers and was delivered to all existing drivers last year.

We are awaiting national guidance that is being drafted in relation to Council run in-car CCTV systems. Once this is issued it will be brought back to the taxi forum for discussion. Most operators in the borough are using GPS tracking systems.

The Council run health and wellbeing programmes for all residents in the Borough and those in the taxi trade are able to access. Full details of what is on offer can be found on the Re:fresh website at:

<https://www.refreshbwd.com/>

All licensed drivers attend training and undertake knowledge and driving tests

and so have reached a threshold for language skills. However aspiring drivers may benefit from support in improving English and Maths skills. Details of training can be found at <http://www.blackburn.gov.uk/Pages/Help-finding-jobs-funding-training.aspx>

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

N/A.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

N/A

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

This petition has been dealt with in accordance with Part 7 of the constitution which outlines the mechanism for petitions of this nature. This report and response is one such type of valid response

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

None.

9. CONSULTATIONS

As detailed in Key Issues.

10 . CONTACT OFFICER

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