

Taxi Consultation with SCC Licensing

Notes of Main Points

10am Wednesday 5h October 2022

Conference held via Microsoft Teams

Attendees SCC: Cllr Matt Bunday, Cllr Sally Goodfellow, Cllr Graham Galton, Cllr Sue Blatchford, Cllr John Noon, Cllr Spiros Vassiliou, Cllr Sarah Vaughan, Cllr Gordon Cooper.

Phil Bates, Russell Hawkins, Stephen Elliott - SCC - Transforming Cities Project Lead for City Centre Scheme - Transforming Cities Fund (TCF), David Ormerod (TCF)

Attendees Trade - Private Hire Rep, Gino Piccinino, Hackney Rep, Ali Haydor, GMB Union Uber Driver Rep, Anwar Sumra, Hackney Rep, Syed Rahman, Hackney Rep,

Apologies:

Rosie Zambra, Perry McMillan

1) Introductions.

Cllr Matt Bunday introduces himself chair of the meeting. Announced Simon May and Mo Sumra have stepped down as trade reps – thanked for their contributions over the years.

Also asked attendees to have a quiet moment to remember Cllr Terry Streets who recently passed away and was a member of the committee.

2) Central Station – TCF Steve Elliot and David Ormerod

Update on the project. The entrance and exit is being changed. Looking to introduce bus stops on Western Esplanade both East and West bound close to project. The exit for most traffic is being moved to just behind the taxi rank, the rank will retain its own exit. Use of priority parking bays questioned, advised it was a requirement for the scheme to have this number of these spaces.

Work will be in two phases. The first phase is the forecourt area and will run from February to July/August. The 2nd phase is Western Esplanade due to start July/August and run to November 2023. The intention is to keep a small provision for taxis but it will be severely limited. Working with Network rail and partners to push as much as possible to North side of station. Communications will be sent out as and when the finer detail is known.

The whole project has been assessed by traffic management and passed as safe. Access to the head of the rank will be by entering the station and driving around the parking area and bus stops.

3) Actions arising from previous meeting

Use of social media to get out messages on taxi trades – communications have been spoken to and there are issues with this around availability to respond to messages. This is not currently a high priority, in the meantime we are looking to use emails a lot more and will continue to use the taxi noticeboard.

Brief discussion on bringing meetings back to in person. Online meetings get good attendance. In person meetings are difficult to accommodate as there are only two rooms big

enough and these are already heavily used. Chair is happy to review this if there is a strong need to do so.

(Note from the Chair – We also need to consider Covid case rates as winter approaches)
Officers are currently dealing with procurement to find other camera providers.

4) Consultation meetings

Report has been prepared for committee to consider and adopt the process. After the consultation responses very minor changes have been made to the proposal, one being to call it a Forum to avoid confusion with formal consultation processes. Expect hearing date to be in November. This will be a public meeting when, with chairs agreement attendees can express their views.

5) Fees

Officers have been reviewing fees. Fees will be increasing. Vehicle fees are likely to return to a level similar to where they were pre covid times. Driver fees have been much more challenging and we continue to work on these. They are likely to go up by quite a lot. It has to be remembered fees were reduced to reduce the excess held in the accounts. This has now been achieved in drivers accounts. We have gone from two to seven checks for each driver that staff need to undertake. The additional checks often require different systems and so not a straightforward process. Council overheads have also increased, this is utility bills and staff costs as well as other factors. Work is continuing to get this as low as possible and it is intended new fees will come in in the new year.

There was then a discussion on operator fees. Fees can only cover the cost of administering the licence. Currently we find we spend a similar time on a licence for a large operator as we do for a one man operator. The larger companies have the necessary support to meet the application process whereas the small operator needs more help and guidance from officers. To set different fees for size of operator we need to demonstrate we spend longer dealing with them.

6) Door signage

Officers are concerned DfT will not now publish the Best Practice Guidance this year. Officers will consult with trade reps and then Councillors. Consideration will then be given to carrying out a full consultation on the matter and brought back before the committee to decide.

7) Disciplinary measures against operators

Reps concerned some larger operators are failing to meet bookings and giving the whole trade a bad name, suggesting a warning system is imposed. Officers advise they already do this and operators have been warned in the past. Each case has to be dealt with on its own merits. We cannot say they get a warning after so many cancelled jobs, we have to look at the circumstances in each case. There is case law on this.

8) Safeguarding

Question was raised about the need to repeat the safeguarding course every three years. Officers explained subject matter does change with time, Child Sexual exploitation was key then County lines and now violence against women. A refresher every three years is a good reminder. Also explained course availability should be easier after November as that is the last month the council will cover any costs. Drivers will have a straight choice between two approved providers.

9) Support the taxi trades

Trade seeking something similar to publicising for bus use. Can council do something to promote the taxi trades. Officers explain fees cannot be used to cover any costs of this. Phil Bates to speak to communications team to see if we can do something around taxis at Christmas which members can assist with by sharing on social media.

10) Abolish white hackney carriages

As there are a number of white vehicle licensed elsewhere coming into the city to work it is suggested it is pointless continuing with the white colour scheme, it costs drivers an extra £1500 to buy a white car or make it white. Officers point out it is in current DfT best practice and the draft copy that there needs to be a clear difference between the two type of vehicle. It is accepted there are some cars from outside areas working in the city but the large roof sign together with the colour white does follow the guidance and provide a clear difference between the two types of vehicle. Councillor Bunday advised he had heard the points raised and will feed back to his cabinet member.

There was also a brief discussion on lack of hackney drivers. Suggestion there were no hackneys available for drivers, officers advise there are proprietors unable to find drivers to rent their vehicles to. It was suggested if the limit was taken off so drivers could be proprietors there would be no shortage.

11) Change of vehicle conditions regarding age

Reps question why we have Euro standards when we have left the EU. Also request to remove age limits on electric vehicles to make them more attractive.

The Euro 6 element of the conditions are imposed on us by central government to combat air quality. The trade was consulted at the time and the option was this restriction or a charging option. The charging option had a lot of opposition.

Electric vehicles still have suspension, steering, brakes etc. that need maintaining. Earlier discussion highlighted older vehicles more likely to fail vehicle examinations.

12) Reduction of Dock permit fee

Originally was a request to reduce the fee but there is now an understanding of how the fee is used, the question now is what would happen if the permit scheme was stopped, would there be a fee?.

Officers advised there would not be an administration fee but as that fee also covers costs of officers attending the docks and investigating docks complaints, these will continue so the cost will probably need to be recovered through fees, so it is likely to result in an increase in vehicle and driver fees.

It was acknowledged officers had managed to get a reduction in the fee this year and the reps were grateful.

Also noted was ABP always have the option of contracting a private hire company to service the docks.

Discussion on support from council to assist in funding the taxi trade. From a licensing perspective the role is to licence the trade, not provide the taxi service. The taxi trade is a business, if the authority is asked to subsidise the taxi trade then there will be calls from the hospitality trades who are all suffering. This is at a time when the council is having to find savings. The fees cover the cost of the service provided.

13) Toilet provision

Drivers have a lack of facilities at night, sometimes needed for medical reasons. Can council apply some pressure to premises to assist.
Officers will approach premises and seek support.

14) Itchen Bridge

First issue is can trade have access to bus gate to avoid queuing to pay. Happy to pay using the Smart cities card, is there a way this can be done?

Officers will make enquiries but are concerned this would require substantial infrastructure changes.

Some drivers have been refused a Smart Cities card as they live outside of the city. Can they be allowed a Smart Cities card? Officers will make enquiries and feedback.