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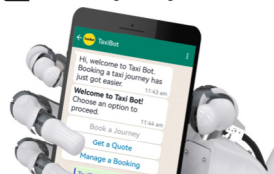
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CONTENTS

EDITORIAL FEATURES

5 BUSINESS STRATEGIES FOR 2024	34
ALL THINGS LICENSING	46-49
BRIGHTON CAB TRADE VIEW	70-71
CABFUSION NETWORK STORY	24
DE/REHUMANISATION PART 2	52-55
KNOW YOUR RIGHTS	66-67
NEW YEAR – NEW WEBSITE	44
NPHTA: BEST PRACTICE GUIDANCE	30-31
REFLECTIONS OF A TRADE EXPERT	6-8
TECH PREDICTIONS FOR 2024	22
VAT ON PRIVATE HIRE FARES	18-19
WHATSAPP TAXI BOOKINGS	32

NEWS FEATURES

BERNIE THE BOOK	77
CLASSIFIEDS	76
FIT AND PROPER	40-41
HACKNEY FARES LEAGUE TABLE	72-73
JUST DESERTS	20
MOBILITY MATTERS	58
ROUND THE COUNCILS	60-63
SCHOOL TRANSPORT	36-37
SHAME SHAME	26-27
TERROR TIMES	56
UNJUST DESERTS	21
UNSUNG HEROES	10-11
WHAT'S IN YOUR CAB?	42
WORLDWIDE TAXI FOCUS	74-75

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Article by Dr Michael S. Galvin
mobilityserviceslimited.com



UP GOES THE BAR AGAIN

As 2023 closes I guess any reprise of the industry during the last year would feature the points below:

- Lower levels of business than expected.
- More regulation/guidance than you could shake a stick at.
- Less hot air about passing fads in mobility.
- More obfuscation about agent/principal and VAT.

I guess what has dropped off the list to an extent is worker status (improved fares have largely seen off that threat); driver shortages (higher fares have solved that one too); electric vehicles (no one is buying them so there are less problems to raise) and cross-border hiring.

Some new issues have started to bubble up: special licences for Special Educational Needs (SEN) and chauffeurs. All in all, a confusing year of little progress and for many much anxiety.

Our elders used to start sentences with sayings such as: "In the good old days" or: "Before the war...." I now know how they feel. Our industry used to be a simple one – get the drivers, get the customers, make money, enjoy. It's now consultation after consultation, I dotting and T crossing, check this, check that etc. etc. whilst the big issues continue to languish.

Given the state of politics in Britain, a new cab act seems destined to be sitting on the drawing board for a long time yet. Whilst 2023 may have been good in some ways for many at a personal level, it has certainly been a great deal less remarkable at an industry level.

So, what do we have to look forward to in 2024?



MORE OF THE SAME?

Let's start with business levels, a lame duck government, an uninspiring opposition, a likely hung parliament and the whole year dominated by crisis after crisis leading to will they/won't they call an election and if so when. That is not the stuff that provides consumers or businesses with the confidence to invest, to spend or to expand. Strikes, wars and international upheaval are not the mood music needed to inspire more business travel, stimulate innovation, takeovers, mergers or generate the fuel needed to give the country the confidence that consumers or businesses can spend money, afford to enjoy themselves and take a few more cabs.

There could be the odd exception, but I strongly suspect a flat 2024 will probably turn out to be the best outcome we can expect whilst the likelihood I suggest is a continuation of the gentle decline experienced since mid-2022. This will be shielded slightly by inflation continuing to bubble along pushing up fares and prices and providing an illusion of some growth or more likely a lower rate of decline.

The asphyxiation of the industry through constantly raising the regulatory bar, whether it achieves anything or not, seems likely to continue. We still have the implementation of the **Good Practice Guidance** and the **New Statutory Guidance** to cope with as the 285 licensing authorities across the UK do their idiosyncratic best to generate 285 different versions of the same guidance within their local regulations - well the ones who can be bothered to do anything to address the new guidance that is.

INDUSTRY EXPERT

MaaS, eBikes, eScooters and car clubs, the hitherto wonderkids of mobility, appear to have been found out and will in my view continue to drop off of their erstwhile enthusiasts' slides and out of their speeches that tell us how we will all travel in the future.

Autonomous cars (AC) have been reduced to the odd infrequent press release trying to create interest prior to the latest fundraising attempt.....no business case for 5G = no at scale ACs. It's not the technology that's stopping ACs, it's money. Talking of money, it seems as though the recent years of defying gravity with lots of meaningless chitter chatter from many bright young things (and some old things who should know a great deal better), together with cool new ways to 'reorganise cities' and the rest of the hot air, has finally lost altitude not to mention credibility.

Buses, trams, taxis, private hire, trains and metros are back in vogue.....in truth they were never out in the real world of transport. The flash in the pan silver bullets that appeared to provide a new mobility utopia have quickly lost their appeal as misuse, littering and the lack of the actual problem that many sought to solve were found to be a fallacy. That's to ignore the fact that appetite for risk amongst high wealth individuals has reduced significantly now that low risk interest rates are climbing back up and consequently the availability of venture capital is now shrinking fast.

The 2030 now 2035 deadline for ceasing petrol and diesel car sales will I believe move back further, as the chronically inadequate charging infrastructure creaks still further while a few hundred thousand more EVs are sold between now and then. The whole wishful thinking approach to EVs has come apart at the seams and, unless someone can get hold of it and the money needed, is likely to grind to a halt. Ask yourself, would you buy one? The government hype of EV sales up by 70% blah, blah was always statistically meaningless and only ever intended to persuade people that everyone else was buying one so you should. The facts are that with a total fleet of 33m cars in the UK, less than a million are EVs and that's after how many years?

What about VAT? The government will review it. If reviews are ever privatised, I'm buying shares – the



answer to every problem is a review. Money appears no object, they take forever and who can remember an outcome?

ARE WE ALL DOOMED?

As an eternal optimist I can say that I don't think so, but even I think it's going to be a close call. Prices rising faster than wages, interest not quite at peak, tax at an all-time high and costs rising faster than sales is not a good landscape for success, is it? So, what do we do as an industry? How do we break this spiral and get back to profitable growth? How do drivers once again view this as a great industry that they want to stay in and feel they have a great job?

I'm afraid in an industry where there is no tangible growth and where over recent years the business model has changed to compete with new entrants, the industry has moved from providing services that were based on some level of differentiation to a service based on being largely commodity based and consequently competition has been reduced to being all about price. Therefore, as things stand, the only route to higher sales is displacement of customers from your competitors to you. In a commodity-based industry the only tool in your bag to achieve displacement is price; that means cutting prices which in an economic downturn is likely to have two effects, one short term: you will see more demand and the other a reduction in supply as drivers decide they can't work for lower fares even if there are marginally more of them. And the longer-term effect could be less drivers in the industry. Short term you are stuck with loads of work and no coverage – good luck with that!

INDUSTRY EXPERT REFLECTIONS

The classic playbook approach might well be to look at two strategies: diversification and/or differentiation. Both require some level of bravery in a downturn. But both must be worth a look. As bus services become less frequent, more expensive and in many cases of less use, maybe a move to augmentation or replacement is worth investigating. Demand-responsive transport has not been a sudden success, but perhaps there are opportunities to run some services, especially if local authorities or government could provide some seed funding.

Differentiation – better cars, EVs, free Wi-Fi in cars, better trained drivers and the like, could have an effect but the cost, not only financial costs, could be greater than any return. But there is a third – is the future of independent operators coming to an end? Are the costs, regulatory overheads and sheer energy required to continue in business, reaching a point where soldiering on for the next couple of years in the hope that after a new government has been in power for a year or two things will turn around, or wars will stop, and business travel will miraculously recover. Its hardly a slam dunk certainty, is it?

PART OF SOMETHING BIGGER

We are following as an industry in the footsteps of supermarkets, coffee and sandwich bars, undertakers and much of the hospitality industry; moving from small independents struggling to keep up with increasing levels of regulation, contending with well-funded competitors, trying to react to customer fashions, dealing with growing costs together with reducing margins, and generational change where the kids don't want to take over what was until a few years ago an attractive business. I foresee mergers and acquisitions gaining more traction in the years ahead and ending up in a situation where a few large organisations deliver services locally. So, is that a good thing for the industry?

My response to that question is probably. Current owners can check out with a decent pay-off and realise a reward for their years of service with many being retained to manage their former businesses under new ownership. Gone will be the day-to-day one-man band struggle. Overall, the industry will



benefit from more professionalism and having the skills and necessary investment, together with the strategies needed to take the industry forward.

Our industry's current model struggles to cope with the increasing demands of constantly changing regulation and a lack of strategic representation where government, policy makers and other important stakeholders are engaged early in the decision-making process. We lack a vision for the industry, we lack policies on important subjects and when others make the decisions our normal response is angry letters in the trade press coupled with bellyaching about the fairness of it all at trade shows. No introspection is evident that maybe if we had taken more (even some) notice of the external environment earlier perhaps we would have seen what was coming and been able to steer it, if not stop it all together. No, instead we are happy to muse about judicial reviews funded by bucket collections.

Maybe being part of something bigger will be a lot more satisfying and ultimately rewarding than struggling along alone in an increasingly hostile environment. If this sounds attractive, then the time to act is now whilst your business could be described broadly as thriving. That way you can leverage on its value with confidence and agree the type of deal that works for you.

Lastly, whether you agree or disagree with my thoughts on the current state of our industry, I wish you a successful 2024 blessed with good health, happiness, and joy.

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UNSUNG HEROES

FOR THE LAST NINE YEARS WIRRAL CABBIE COLLECTED TOYS FOR LESS FORTUNATE KIDS

For the last nine years Wirral cabbie Alan Gilfoyle has bought and collected toys to give to less fortunate kids on Christmas Day. He told **PHTM**: "I've collected toys and gifts each Christmas for the last nine years. I ask fellow taxi drivers, friends and family for donations and toys. I also buy lots of toys myself.

"A big thank you to EV trade suppliers Car and Cab Care who made a massive donation to enable me to buy lots of gifts.

"Today I am dropping all the toys off at Mission Christmas in Birkenhead for them to be given to local children who wouldn't normally get a present. There are



so many gifts this year I am taking them in a van instead of my cab!

"Without people's support it wouldn't be possible to help and give back to the local community.



"It's nice to be able to help the less fortunate, no child should wake up on Christmas Day with no present off Santa."

MUM'S PLEA TO FIND LIVERPOOL CABBIE WHO GAVE SON "THREE EXTRA DAYS" BEFORE HE DIED

A mum wants to find the taxi driver who gave her son "three extra days" before he died.

David Clarke was staying at a hotel in Liverpool on Friday, November 17 for two nights with a friend. In the early hours of the Sunday morning the 32-year-old, from Stoke-on-Trent, collapsed and suffered a cardiac arrest.

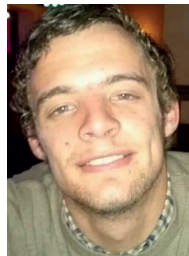
He was rushed to the Royal Liverpool Hospital and placed on the critical care unit. But on November 22, David's mum - said he died in her arms. Pamela Williams said a taxi driver saw David "in distress" at around 6am on Sunday, November 19 and stopped and started CPR.

She told the Liverpool Echo: "I would love to thank him for his

quick thinking and initiating CPR."

Pamela described David as popular and caring, and the mum and son even worked together. "On the previous Thursday and Friday, he dressed as Pudsey for Children In Need and raised over £150 with his friend Dan."

Pamela said: "Dave and his friend booked into the Adelphi Hotel for two nights. His friend left on the Saturday morning but Dave stayed on. He was last seen on CCTV standing in a doorway at 4am on Sunday morning talking to a



passers-by. When they left, Dave sat down in the doorway where 6am a taxi driver saw Dave in distress and started CPR.

"He rang the emergency services who swiftly arrived and continued CPR. Sadly, it was 20 minutes before they got any response.

"We were contacted by police on Sunday afternoon and rushed to the hospital. Within this time, lots of friends and family visited Dave to offer us love and support." Pamela had to make the heartbreaking decision to turn off David's life support. The 55-year-old said she would like to find the taxi driver who found David, adding: "I would love to thank him for allowing us three extra days to say goodbye to Dave."

UNSUNG HEROES

TRURO TAXI DRIVER PUNCHED WHILST TRYING TO SAVE HOMELESS MAN FROM GANG OF YOUTHS

A taxi driver has described how she was attacked whilst coming to the aid of a homeless man who was set upon by a group of youths.

Suzie Brookes was herself punched during the incident in Truro on the evening of Sunday 17 December.

Suzie, who lives in Truro and works for Ekspres Cars, said: "On Sunday afternoon at around 5.30pm I had a taxi booking from a parent to pick up her child, from Truro Bus Station to go to Newquay.

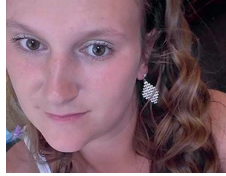
"While doing this the girl was attacked by 15-year-olds and after getting the female in the car, the group of 15 or so teens attacked a homeless man called Danny.

"I called the police and did my best to protect Danny. The youths ran off but came

back with more people. Two of the boys attacked Danny, I stood in front of him and one of the boys punched me in the side of my head.

"I ended up putting Danny in the taxi and took him up to Truro Police Station."

Mum-of-four Suzie, 30, said the youths also booted her taxi and pulled off a wiper as they tried to get to Danny and the teenage girl



as she drove off.

She added: "I had to do something to protect a man that was just walking through town. I wouldn't forgive myself if I drove away and he got serious injuries.

"I'm still anxious and jumpy whilst working and I've had ringing in my ear and keep getting pains in my temple."

A Devon and Cornwall Police spokesman said: "Police were called to reports of a fight between on Back Quay in Truro. Officers attended the scene where a man in his 30s was found to have minor hand and facial injuries. A woman who tried to help was also punched in the incident."

HERO REDCAR CABBIE RACED VICTIM TO HOSPITAL AFTER SUBSTANCE LEFT MULTIPLE BURNS

A cabbie has come to the aid of a young woman who had an unknown substance thrown in her face. David Reidy has been called a hero after bouncers at Redcar's Aruba nightclub hailed him down and asked if he would get the stricken woman to hospital as soon as possible as they didn't know how long the ambulance was going to be.

Knowing time was of the essence with injuries like this, David drove the terrified woman, who he says was in agony, to James Cook Hospital as fast as he could.

Cleveland Police made an appeal for witnesses to the attack, which they say involved an unknown substance, to come forward.

Red-Car Taxis, where David has worked for 4 months, hailed the driver a hero on social media for helping the woman. David said: "She was in a terrible state. She was in agony. I

just got her in the car and drove as quickly as I could to hospital. I was really worried that she might have got some of the substance in her mouth."

He said the victim told her another woman had thrown something in her face, he said it had hit the side of her mouth and down her chin and neck.

David added: "It was terrible, it



looked like someone had set her on fire, she looked like a burns victim. I felt so sorry for her. She was just a young lass."

On its Facebook page Red-Car Taxis said: "Not all heroes wear capes but a well done to Reidy. It's a shame this has happened to her, we all wish her a speedy recovery."

David Reidy replied on Facebook: "I wouldn't call myself a hero, I just like to make sure people in our community are safe and get to where they need to be. I have done what any other of our Red-Car taxi drivers would have done.

"We are ALL heroes in some sort of way as us drivers do like to go the extra mile. I'm just happy I was able to help when I could."

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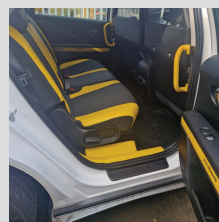
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IN THE NEWS

POLICE REVEAL 10 OUT OF 14 LEEDS HOTELS AND PHVS FAIL TO REPORT CSE RED FLAGS

A multi-agency operation has taken place to test the level of training and awareness in the hotel and taxi sector. The collaboration with Leeds Safeguarding Child Exploitation Team worked with police and staff from Leeds City Council Taxi and Private Hire.

During the operation, a female officer, with the appearance of a girl aged under 18, and an older male colleague played the roles of a victim, with a child sexual exploitation offender. The pair visited seven hotels using seven PH companies, engaging in "red flag behaviour", including talking about having condoms, lying about being over 18, agreeing not to tell parents where they were, talking about gifts bought and

referring to buying alcohol.

Det. Sup. Heather Whoriskey, explained that behaviour should have raised significant concerns with those who witnessed it.

Out of the seven hotels and PH companies, only two of seven companies raised concerns about their behaviour and alerted police, as did only two of the hotels.

The drivers in the operation were also subject to "routine" checks by police and licensing staff shortly after the test journey to give them chance to raise concerns about the behaviour of their passengers.

Now follow-up work is being conducted to strengthen existing CSE awareness activity in the hotel and private hire companies.

DS Whoriskey said: "Those working

in the hotel and private hire economies have a vital role to play in identifying suspicious behaviour and helping us to protect children from sexual exploitation."

"The more we can do to improve people's awareness and vigilance around the signs to look for, the more we can reduce opportunities for children to be victimised.

"We are not looking to catch people in these operations, our aim is to improve how we work together to prevent and disrupt this type of offending.

"We are keen to work constructively to support local businesses around this issue and have given suitable advice and will be continuing to offer awareness training for staff in these areas."

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IN THE NEWS

BRECKLAND COUNCIL JOINS PHTM CAMPAIGN FIGHTING AGAINST THE ABUSE OF TAXI/PHV DRIVERS

Taxi users around Breckland will soon be greeted with car stickers warning them racial discrimination, violence and other forms of abuse will not be tolerated.

Breckland Council has joined PHTM's national campaign to stop abuse against taxi drivers called 'No Excuse for Abuse', and will soon be distributing the stickers to local cabbies.

Cllr Helen Crane, Breckland's executive member, said: "The 'No Excuse for Abuse' campaign is a crucial step in safeguarding our licensed drivers from unwarranted aggression and disrespect.

"While most passengers are respectful, there exists a very small minority who engage in abusive behaviour, especially whilst under



the influence of alcohol.

"This behaviour is utterly unacceptable and will not be tolerated."

The job of a taxi driver is considerably more challenging

during the festive period because there are far more passengers in town centres many of which are adversely affected by alcohol.

Ms Crane said taxi drivers deserved to be treated with respect.

She said: "Drivers have been strongly encouraged to report any incidents of violence, verbal abuse, racial discrimination, or vehicle damage to the police.

"It is the fundamental right of every individual to feel secure in their workplace, and our drivers deserve nothing less."

If any other councils wish to join the campaign and obtain some **No Excuse for Abuse** stickers for licensed drivers then please contact PHTM on 0161 688 7777 or info@phtm.co.uk.

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From May 2021 the new Civil Liability Bill will come into effect. This will change the way drivers claim for whiplash injury and further increases the need to ensure you have pre-purchased a motor legal expenses insurance policy. As a result of the Civil Liability Bill, you will be liable for any legal costs for pursuing claims of up to £5,000 in respect of whiplash injuries following a motor accident. However, if you have pre-purchased motor legal expenses cover then this will cover your legal fees so you can pay for a solicitor to pursue the claim on your behalf. A standard motor legal expenses could cover up to £100,000 in legal fees and typically cost around £3 a month in premiums. *This option is exclusive for Multi-Vehicle/Fleet policies. Terms and conditions apply. South Essex House, North Road, South Ockendon Essex RM15 5BE. SEIB Insurance Brokers Ltd are authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.

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Representative APR

12.4%

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Fuel Consumption figures for the Toyota Corolla 1.8 Hybrid Icon 5dr CVT MPG (l/100km): WLTP Combined 61. CO2 emissions: 103 (g/km). Kia Niro 1.6 GDI Hybrid 2 5dr DCT MPG (l/100km): WLTP Combined 64. CO2 emissions: 100 (g/km). SKODA Octavia 1.0 TSI e-TEC SE 5dr DSG MPG (l/100km): WLTP Combined 55. CO2 emissions: 116 (g/km). Figures shown are for comparability purposes; only compare fuel consumption and CO2 figures with other cars tested to the same technical procedures. These figures may not reflect real life driving results, which will depend upon a number of factors including accessories fitted (post-registration), variations in weather, driving styles and vehicle load.

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IN STOCK

Cash Price	Customer Deposit	60 Monthly Payments	Amount of Credit	Total Amount Payable	Fixed Rate of Interest	Representative APR
£24,995	£1,000	£529.89	£23,995	£32,793.38	6.5%	12.4%

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HYBRID

Cash Price	Customer Deposit	60 Monthly Payments	Amount of Credit	Total Amount Payable	Fixed Rate of Interest	Representative APR
£20,995	£1,000	£441.56	£19,995	£27,493.38	6.5%	12.4%

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SKODA



WHAT DOES THE BOLT SERVICES LTD VAT WIN MEAN FOR ME?

Article by Jonathan Main
VAT and Indirect Taxes Partner
MHA Moore and Smalley



Why should I read this?

This article deals with the latest development in the ongoing saga of VAT in the private hire market. **PHTM** kindly agreed to publish two previous articles by me which summarised the implications of the Uber v Sefton Council decision in July and the announcement of a consultation by HM Treasury ("HMT") on the VAT treatment of private hire income in early 2024. The consultation by HMT is prompted by the VAT implications of the Sefton judgment.

This article brings us up to date with the implications of Bolt's success at the First-tier Tribunal on the VAT treatment of its private hire revenue, which was detailed in a decision published on 15 December.

For those of you old enough to remember Soap, the iconic TV series from the late 1970's, I hope I can live up to the opening line from each episode, "Confused? You won't be, after this week's episode of ... Soap."

A short summary of the journey to this point

1. Uber lost its appeal to the Supreme Court on worker status (Uber v Aslam and others). The decision was released in February 2021.
2. Uber lost its appeal to the High Court on licensing requirements in London (Uber v TfL and others). The decision was released in December 2021.
3. Uber won its appeal to the High Court on licensing requirements in England and Wales (Uber Britannia Ltd v Sefton MBC and others). The decision was released in July 2023.
4. HM Treasury announced a forthcoming consultation on the impacts of the July 2023 High Court ruling in Uber v Sefton. This announcement was part of the Autumn Statement in November 2023.
5. Bolt won its appeal to the First-tier Tribunal on the VAT treatment of private hire revenue. The decision was released in December 2023.

How does this fit together /why does it matter to me?

London

The TfL case is concerned with the licensing requirements governed by the Private Hire Vehicles (London) Act 1998 ("the 1998 Act"). The final statement in the decision published in December 2021 was as follows:

"To operate lawfully under the 1998 Act a licensed operator who accepts a booking from a passenger is required to enter as principal into a contractual obligation with the passenger to provide the journey which is the subject of the booking."

Key points:

1. The decision only relates only to London.
2. The decision explicitly followed Uber v Aslam, taking comfort from the Supreme Court analysis of the presence or absence of the contractual relationship between Uber, the driver, and the passenger.
3. It means all licensed operators ("PHOs") covered by the 1998 Act operate as principal with the clear implication that they are required to pay VAT on the full fare paid by the passenger.

England and Wales (apart from Plymouth)

PHOs in the rest of England and Wales were not affected by the TfL decision. They had to wait for the decision in Uber v Sefton Council in July 2023. This case is concerned with the licensing requirements governed by Part II Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 ("the 1976 Act").

The High Court agreed with Uber's submission in this case that *"to operate lawfully under the 1976 Act a PHO who accepts a booking from a passenger is required to enter as principal into a contractual obligation with the passenger to provide the journey which is the subject of the booking."*

Key points:

1. The losing parties in this case have sought leave to appeal and an injunction against local authorities changing their licensing requirements until the case is finally resolved.
2. The judge was happy to take Uber's request to be

VAT AND PRIVATE HIRE

guided by the earlier decision in the TfL case. Two judges agreeing with each other on very similar facts may increase the likelihood of the same decision at a higher court.

3. It means all PHOs covered by the 1976 Act operate as principal with the clear implication that they are required to pay VAT on the full fare paid by the passenger.
4. There has so far been no wholesale change to licensing requirements and therefore no need for an immediate change to the payment of VAT by PHOs.
5. The announcement of a forthcoming HMT consultation is a direct reaction to the Sefton decision.

Pending the change in licensing requirements and perhaps also the conclusion of the HMT consultation, there is certainly no need to change the basis on which PHOs pay VAT outside London.

Bolt

In the decision published in December, it was made clear that Bolt accepts it is acting as principal, that its ride hailing services are subject to VAT, and that it is liable to account for VAT by reference to the full fare paid by the passenger. The only question for the court was the basis on which it should calculate its VAT liability.

The case was decided by Judge Greg Sinfield, the President of the First-tier Tax Tribunal. Judge Sinfield agreed with Bolt, that it should pay VAT using the Tour Operators' Margin Scheme ("TOMS").

This means Bolt pays VAT on its gross margin, being the margin between the fare paid by the passenger and the amount retained by the driver. This is a significant victory for Bolt.

A few months prior to the Bolt decision, Judge Sinfield heard a case (Sonder Europe) concerning the supply of serviced accommodation and reached the same decision, that TOMS should apply to the calculation of the VAT due.

Key points:

1. HMRC intend to appeal.
2. HMRC has already appealed Sonder Europe and the appeal will be heard in December 2024.
3. The President of the Tribunal has made two high profile decisions, which may increase the chances of success by the taxpayer on appeal.
4. Unless a PHO is based in London or is already acting as principal, the Bolt decision has no immediate impact. The PHO should continue to act as agent and pay VAT in accordance with HMRC guidance.

What about Uber?

I understand that Uber is due to take a VAT case to the Tribunal in the first half of 2024 and that it will also argue that it should pay VAT using TOMS.

I am not foolish enough to guess the outcome of a case without being involved in it and certainly not before the hearing. It's much easier to read the decision and then decide whether I agree with it! There are though a few interesting points to bear in mind:

1. Bolt and Uber are being heard separately. The courts are keen to save time and resource either by joining similar appeals together or agreeing a lead case. I assume that did not happen here, because they are not similar enough.
2. Judge Sinfield accepted that the Bolt drivers were "independent contractors".
3. Following Uber v Aslam, Uber's drivers are workers.
4. It is well established that an employee cannot provide services separate to their employer whereas a self-employed person is subject to VAT in their own right.
5. There is no established UK case law or HMRC guidance on the VAT status of a worker and whether they are akin to an employee. This may be a key issue to decide at the Uber hearing.

These points may not be sufficient for the Tribunal to reach a different conclusion. They are at least sufficient not to just assume Uber wins, because Bolt won.

In conclusion

- If you operate in London, Bolt is good news if your drivers are "independent contractors". Far from settled, as HMRC will appeal but at least a step in the right direction. You might like to think about a protective claim for overpaid VAT which will be paid out if Bolt succeeds at a higher court and your facts are sufficiently similar.
- If you operate in the rest of England & Wales, carry on acting as agent if you can and it suits your business.
- Keep the pressure on to secure the zero or a reduced rate of VAT for private hire, as it is a better option compared to the uncertainty of litigation involving Bolt and Uber.

For more information, contact Jonathan Main on 07760 166 802 or email jonathan.main@mooreandsmalley.co.uk



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KEIGHLEY MAN WHO DODGED £9.80 FARE ENDS UP HAVING TO **PAY 70 TIMES** THE PRICE

A man who avoided paying a £9.80 taxi fare outside a hotel has been forced to pay 70 times the price. Paul Rose, from Keighley, made off from the taxi at the Rendezvous Hotel in Skipton on May 26. Court documents say he did this

knowing that payment on the spot for the service was expected. The 61-year-old was found guilty of the make off without making payment offence when he appeared at Skipton Magistrates' Court on December 5.

Rose, who had pleaded not guilty in October, has been forced to pay £620 in court costs, a £60 fine, £9.80 in compensation, and a £24 victim surcharge. The £713.80 total will be paid in £50 instalments from January 2, 2024.

11 MONTHS' PRISON FOR THIEF WHO STOLE FROM CHURCH AND CHEATED CABBIE OF HIS £55 FARE

A thief who failed to pay her £55 fare and then stole from a church shop wept when she received a prison sentence.

Donna Gray, 35, appeared from custody at Falkirk Sheriff Court on Thursday 21 December, having pleaded guilty to failing to pay her taxi fare in King Street, Stenhousemuir and stealing from St Francis Xavier Church in June 2022. Procurator fiscal depute Christie

MacColl said: "The cabbie picked up the accused who attended an address before requesting to be taken to two further addresses.

"The fare was £55.90 and the accused attempted to pay with a bank card, but this was declined. She said she would pay with another bank card and went into an address, but failed to return." Later that month Gray stole two greetings cards from a church shop.

Sheriff Alison Michie noted Gray, had been placed on a community payback order for these offences, which she subsequently breached. She said: "There is no alternative but to impose a period in custody – a theft from a church is not a low level offence."

Sheriff Michie revoked Grays community payback order and sentenced her to 11 months in prison back dated to November 22.

COMMUNITY ORDER FOR ACCRINGTON BLIND MAN WHO SPAT IN CABBIE'S FACE AND URINATED IN CAB

A blind man spat in a taxi driver's face, kicked and punched him and then urinated in his cab.

Blackburn magistrates heard Anthony Maughan had drunk 14 or 15 pints prior to the incident. Maughan, 25, from Accrington, admitted to criminal damage to an iPhone and car seats belonging to Akmal Shahzad and assault.

Susheela Regala, prosecuting, said the incident happened around 12.20am outside Burnley Rugby Club. Maughan was getting a taxi

back to Accrington but had a drink in his hand and was told he couldn't take it in the taxi. The drink was taken off Maughan by a friend and there was then a dispute over paying the fare up front.

"They eventually got to the destination at which point the defendant refused to get out of the vehicle," said Miss Regala.

"As he was getting him out of the car Maughan spat in the driver's face and then punched him to the chest. As the struggle continued

Maughan punched the driver again and then kicked him to the stomach. Before the driver could stop him he started to urinate into the vehicle."

District Judge Alexandra Preston described his behaviour as "disgusting."

He was given an 18-month community order with a 30-day rehab activity requirement. He was ordered to pay £500 compensation to Mr Shahzad with £85 costs.

UNJUST DESERTS

MAN WHO KILLED CABBIE AFTER SAT NAV TAKES HIM WRONG WAY ON A505 IN HITCHIN **AVOIDS JAIL**

A man who killed a cabbie after he mistakenly followed his sat-nav the wrong way along a road has been spared an immediate jail sentence. Perry Johnson passed oncoming traffic on the A505 between Luton and Hitchin, and crashed head-on into Raja Waheed Khan's Toyota Prius.

Both cars were travelling at about 60mph when they collided in 2021. Johnson, from Sandwich, Kent, was given a one-year prison sentence, suspended for 18 months. The 31-year-old had been convicted of causing death by careless driving at St Albans Crown Court. Judge Michael Grieve KC said the case highlighted "too much reliance on sat-nav systems". Mr Khan, 46, a father-of-three,



died at the scene of the crash at 11.30pm on 10 September that year. His passenger was seriously injured and spent a week in hospital, while Johnson and his partner were treated for minor wounds.

The court heard that Johnson turned right from Carter's Lane, formerly known as Wibbly Wobbly Lane, after a night out with his partner and drove at the oncoming traffic. His sat-nav had indicated a right turn and he failed

to notice the no-entry sign.

"It was an over-reliance on a sat-nav. He was in unfamiliar territory," Charles Durrant, mitigating, said.

Mr Durrant said a surveyor had made 12 recommendations to improve safety at the junction the previous year, but only one had been enacted.

But Stefan Weidmann, prosecuting, said Johnson's mistake was either "incompetence or inattention" and added: "There were clear indicators that he was going the wrong way. There were huge road signs."

Johnson was ordered to complete 120 hours of unpaid work and pay £500 costs.

He was banned from driving for two and a half years.



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TECH PREDICTIONS FOR 2024

By Amer Hasan, CEO of minicabit
minicabit.com

minicabit
The UK's largest cab comparison service



A happy 2024 to you, which the Chinese Zodiac describes as the Year of the Dragon. Indeed, things should get a bit hotter this year, not just with ongoing climate change but the fact that a third of the world's population will be voting their current governments in or out across over 40 national elections!

I always add a caveat as to how difficult it is to predict the tech changes in our sector. This year, I'm at least comforted by minicabit, Britain's largest cab aggregator, of which I'm CEO, recently winning two awards at the Travolution travel industry awards for 'Best Ground Transport' company and 'Best Technology team', so at least our tech credentials have been validated. More importantly, my predictions for last year spotlighted how the just-launched ChatGPT was being hailed as the next wave of technology – I certainly got that one right!

Whilst there's been a lot of noise about ChatGPT and the type of Artificial Intelligence (AI) behind it, Generative AI, I expect its presence day to day will be relatively incremental this year but much more impactful over, say, a five-year time horizon, at a business and indeed societal level.

For instance, you can now see the likes of Amazon using Generative AI to display a useful three line summary of all the user reviews about a product, saving the user the time and hassle of analysing pages of reviews. Hence, you may start to see the back office tools you use for your business gradually integrate AI to help the tool and hence your business work smarter, such as your accountancy software or banking service.

For its part, minicabit has launched 'Top Routes', a powerful (and free!) tool for any size cab operator on its platform to get a live feed of the most popular routes and prices being booked in its area. Over time, this can be further scaled by AI to support the surge in the number of cab fleets that have joined minicabit post-pandemic, as it closes in on a record 1,000 cab operator partners UK-wide on its platform.

Elsewhere, the cab aggregator landscape is evolving. Uber shut down its Local Cab aggregator offering in smaller cities around the UK at the end of last year



though still leaving its sizeable presence in the larger UK cities. However, Uber has been following through on its mission to be the 'Amazon of transport', offering a diverse range of transport options beyond cabs, e-scooters, bikes and delivery to now car rental and train tickets.

Uber has also been trialling offering hotels and flights which could signal two outcomes – first, that Uber is transforming into a customer travel/transport data platform that happens to offer cabs, increasingly bolstered by in-house advertising revenues (as Amazon is) from third party brands running ads in the Uber app relevant to the time of day and location the customer is in; second, that as Uber competes for the spend traditionally placed with travel platforms and agencies, the latter will step up to retain their customers and their data.

At the same time, there will be more collaboration with cab aggregators particularly by the largest fleets and private hire operator groups which recognise that the best aggregators can bring revenues from sources they can't easily reach, in minicabit's case, focusing on high value bookings with average £70+ fares. I also expect the smallest fleets will increasingly adopt dispatch systems that can help digitise the management of their cab bookings, a valuable efficiency.

Finally, whilst early local trials of autonomous cabs and flying taxis means wider adoption is still a decade away, the increased rollout of electric vehicle models and charging points will continue despite the current uncertainty over green motoring policies and cost of living conditions. But what is always certain is Britain's demand for cabs, given we spend more on cabs than flights, hotels, trains, buses and car rental put together.

Here's to a great 2024!

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*Source: British Retail Consortium (BRC) 2022 Payment Survey

THE CABFUSION NETWORK STORY

CREATED BY OPERATORS FOR OPERATORS

PHTM recently caught up with Phil Bailey, CEO of CabFusion and owner/founder of ABBA Cars. Here's what he had to say:



We are excited to announce that, from January 2024, Cab Guru will have a new name and a new logo, becoming The CabFusion Network.

There will be no impact on current workflows for either our valued clients and customers or our prized partner fleets.

This new name is an evolution, building on the strong foundations laid by Cab Guru over recent years. Our new identity is designed to align better with our expanding services and vision.

The name of our new identity is inspired naturally by the dictionary definition of the word itself: fusion.

Fusion (noun) process or result of joining two or more things together to form a single entity

As we embrace this change, The CabFusion Network and Cordic Technology will continue to stand at the forefront of the industry.

The CabFusion Network is set to become the nucleus of work sharing, to power the success of independent operators in our industry.

Banks allow customers to get cash from any machine, no matter who they bank with. The CabFusion Network aims to create, and is working hard to achieve, this same, simple, solution to give your customers what they want, and for you to provide your service to them.

We are committed to integrating with every single software provider in our sector, both to make job-sharing more straightforward and to help you protect your work from the app disruptors.

Our new identity is part of our clear story to the industry and the market of who we are, where we're headed, and how we aim to help independent operators become stronger by working together.

The CabFusion Network commitment to you is simply this:

CabFusion was formed by operators – for operators – driven by the common goals of working in partnership and succeeding together.

The CabFusion Network will allow operators to accept bookings from other operators who may have a job that they cannot cover because they are at capacity or possibly the booking is in an area outside their preferred operating area.

We will also be offering work directly from our current and future valued clients that hold a national/international account with the Network.

CabFusion will allow you to say yes, even when you cannot cover this work yourself. This is infinitely better than refusing the job and giving the customer a good reason to try an app “disruptor”, only to never see that precious customer again.

We want passengers to have the same best-in-breed booking experience they have become used to, even if the booking has been shared with another operator who uses different despatch software.

We are currently building the deepest API integrations to pull back reliable GPS data for accurate ETAs, vehicle status and precise location no matter what software is used.

There are many ground transport platforms that can put a job into the system of an operator but the idea of an operator putting a job seamlessly into the despatch system of another operator, regardless of their native choice of system is a truly trailblazing innovation.

We firmly believe that forward-thinking operators appreciate that tomorrow's industry needs to interact with fellow operators who may have been your competitors but are increasingly becoming your friends because of the effects of the app disruptors.

We also want smaller operators to be aware that there is a place for them on this network even if they don't currently use software within their business. We already have the capability to allow them to be a vital cog in the wheel.

We are creating local networks where operators can choose who and how to work with other operators. We are offering the ability to share work without revealing sensitive data, which will always be secure, protected and always remain in the ownership of the individual operator.

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THE CABFUSION NETWORK

SHAME SHAME

FORMER **DEVON** CABBIE WHO TRIED TO INCITE TEEN INTO SEXUAL ACT GIVEN SUSPENDED SENTENCE

A Plymouth man who attempted to incite a teenager into a sexual act when she was a passenger in his taxi has been given a ten-year Sexual Harm Prevention Order.

Dale Purchase, 29, appeared before Plymouth Magistrates' Court on Monday December 4, after having been found guilty of harassment on Friday 3 November.

Purchase was given an 18-week prison sentence, suspended for 24 months, and received a restraining order banning him from contacting the victim.

Sergeant Tom Ottley of Devon and Cornwall Police said: "We take the fear of violence against women and girls very seriously and work tirelessly to ensure we are bringing people to justice while safeguarding victims.

"Despite this case not being a typical incident of harassment, the importance of women and girls feeling safe in our society cannot,



and should not, be understated. "I would like to commend the victim for her engagement with our officers, who have been tenacious in their pursuit of justice. "The Sexual Harm Protection Order comes with a number of stringent prohibitions, which are aimed to prevent further offending and protect vulnerable people from harm.

"This is further proof that Devon and Cornwall Police will use all available measures to safeguard our communities and protect the vulnerable."

BURTON CABBIE STRIPPED OF LICENCE FOR FINANCIALLY GROOMING ELDERLY PASSENGER

A taxi driver who preyed on a vulnerable 70-year-old passenger and extorted thousands of pounds from her has had his licence stripped by a council, magistrates and a crown court judge.

Tariq Mahmood, from Burton on Trent, appeared at Leicester Crown Court on 30 November after appealing a 2022 decision by North West Leicestershire District Council (NWLDC) to remove his licence.

The 50-year-old was reported to the council in 2022 for grooming a passenger, Lorna, and defrauding her of £5,000.

NWLDC's Licensing Sub-Committee agreed on 15 March 2022 to remove Mahmood's licence, but this decision was appealed to Leicester Magistrates' Court and upheld.

Mahmood appealed again, taking the decision to crown court.

Judges at the court heard that before NWLDC received a complaint from the passenger's daughter, Mahmood had over nine years committed a large number of low-level offences including being banned from driving and road rage.

Mahmood befriended Lorna after she used his taxi and over six months accepted up to 23 payments from her totalling £5,000.

Despite claiming to judges that the payments were loans, Mahmood could not demonstrate to NWLDC, magistrates or judges that he would be able to repay the money.

Councillor Michael Wyatt, NWLDC Portfolio Holder for Communities

and Climate Change, said: "We are committed to keeping the travelling public safe, our continued defence of our 2022 decision to remove a licence because the danger the driver posed to the public is evidence of this.

"Taxi drivers are trusted to make sure the vulnerable get home safely. Everybody will have an experience of going out at night, someone getting into a bad state, the call is always "put them in a taxi, get them home safe" – taxi drivers should be trusted to do that."

David Lawrie, Director of **NPHTA** said: "Shocking, another idiot trying to bring down our industry. Well done North West Leicestershire DC and of course the victim for coming forward."

SHAME SHAME

EDINBURGH CABBIE CAUGHT WITH £200K OF HIGH GRADE COCAINE IN GLOVEBOX

A cabbie was caught with a kilo of high purity cocaine with a potential street value of over £200k in the glove compartment of his car when he was stopped by police.

Ibrahim Oguz told uniformed officers: "The key opens the glovebox. I don't know what's in there. The glovebox might have been interfered with in London."

Oguz, 43, was stopped driving his Mercedes Vito on the A1, near Haddington in East Lothian, in the early hours of September 28 in 2021 as he returned to Edinburgh from London.

The High Court in Edinburgh heard that Police Scotland received intelligence the previous day that the driver of the vehicle had met another individual and a drugs

offence transaction took place.

Oguz, from Edinburgh, admitted being concerned in the supply of the Class A drug, when he appeared at the High Court in the city.

Advocate depute John Macpherson told the court on 18 December that on September 26 Oguz drove from Edinburgh to London. The prosecutor said: "He took what he thought was £20k cash to an address there."

Oguz later told police that he was asked by a man to collect a bag from an unknown male in Edinburgh and when he turned up at the address a bag was put in the vehicle.

He was told to drive the bag to London and was provided with an address. When he arrived, he was met by men he did not know who

took the bag.

Mr Macpherson said: "He went for a cigarette and on his return was informed that there was a package in the glove box.

"He said that he thought the package was something valuable, duly locked the glove box and drove back to Edinburgh."

He told police that he was due to deliver the package to the same area of Edinburgh where he previously collected the cash.

The prosecutor said that the cocaine recovered was a recognised kilo deal with a value of £40k but with the potential to be worth pounds £201k at street level purity for one gram deals.

Judge, John Morris KC, deferred sentence on Oguz until February 1.

WINSFORD CABBIE CHARGED WITH DRINK DRIVING ON WAY TO SCHOOL RUN

A female cabbie on her way to do a school run has been arrested on suspicion of drink-driving.

A police officer saw Lacramioara

Giurgea, 46, driving a Kia Sportage, erratically in Winsford at 8.50am on Thursday December 14.

Posting on social media, Winsford

Police said: "A police officer on the way to work noticed a white Kia hitting kerbs and being driven at approximately 10mph.

"It was noted that the Kia was displaying taxi registration plates." The officer followed the vehicle to a house in Winsford. Uniformed officers arrived and conducted a roadside breath test with the driver, who blew 130 at the roadside," the post continued.

"The legal limit being 35.

"She was arrested and we gave her a free lift to Middlewich custody."

The woman has been charged and bailed to appear at Crewe Magistrates Court on Thursday January 11.

CABBIE ARRESTED IN BURNLEY FOR DRINK DRIVING ON NEW YEAR'S EVE

Police officers carried out drink and drug drive checks in Colne Road, Burnley on New Year's Eve.

While the police said that 99 per cent of the drivers they stopped blew zero at the roadside, one driver did not.

A spokesperson for the police said:

"Team 5 road police unit officers have been conducting drink/drug drive checks on Colne Road Burnley.

"99% blew zero but surprisingly a taxi driver provided a positive sample of 56 against the legal limit of 35 and was duly arrested."

£8 BILLION BOOST TO REPAIR ROADS ACROSS THE COUNTRY AND BACK DRIVERS

Transport Secretary Mark Harper recently set out the allocations of an £8.3b long-term plan, enough to resurface over 5,000 miles of road across the country over the next 11 years. It's one of the key cornerstones of Network North to improve journeys for all.

Across England, local highway authorities will receive £150m this financial year, followed by a further £150m for 2024/2025, with the rest of the funding allocated through to 2034. Each council can use its funds to identify what local roads are in most need of repair and deliver immediate improvements. The £8.3b is divided as follows:

- **£3.3b for the North West, North East and Yorkshire & Humber;**
- **£2.2b for the West Midlands and East Midlands;**
- **£2.8b the East of England, South East, South West and London.**

The government has already confirmed £5.5b up until 2024/25, which includes £200m announced by the Chancellor at the Budget in March. The £8.3b nationwide boost comes on top of that and extends until 2034, providing long-term certainty to local authorities and helping to prevent potholes from coming back in the future.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said: "For too long politicians have shied away from taking the right long-term decisions to make life easier for hardworking families - tackling the scourge of potholes being a prime example. Well-maintained road surfaces could save drivers up to £440 each in vehicle repairs.

"This unprecedented £8.3b investment will pave the road for better and safer journeys and put an end



to the blight of nuisance potholes. Transport Secretary Mark Harper said: "Today's biggest ever funding uplift for local road improvements is a victory for all road users, who will enjoy smoother, faster and safer trips - as we use redirected HS2 funding to make the right decisions for a brighter future."

This £8.3b boost is particularly important when considering that, according to a survey from the AA, fixing potholes and investing in roads maintenance is a priority for 96% of drivers.

RAC head of policy Simon Williams said: "Drivers' biggest bugbear of all is the poor condition of local roads, so the fact the Government has found significant additional revenue should give councils the certainty of funding they need to plan proper long-term road maintenance, something we have been calling for many years.

"We hope local authorities will use the money in the most effective way possible by resurfacing the very worst roads, keeping those in reasonable condition in better states for longer through surface dressing, and filling potholes as permanently as possible.

"This should in time go a

considerable way to bringing our roads back to a fit-for-purpose state and save drivers hundreds of pounds by not having to fork out for frustrating vehicle repairs."

To increase transparency and ensure the £8.3b leads to an increase in the number of roads being resurfaced, local authorities will be required to publish information on their websites on a regular basis explaining how they are spending the funding.

The measure builds on tough regulations announced in April this year to crack down on utility companies causing pothole pain with botched streetworks, through stricter inspections and costs for the worst offenders - backed by further measures in the Plan for Drivers announced in October.

These include £70m to keep traffic flowing, updating 20mph zone guidance for England to help prevent inappropriate blanket use, and measures to speed up the rollout of electric vehicle charging. Edmund King OBE, AA president, said: "So far this year The AA has attended over 450,000 pothole related breakdowns. The damage caused can be a huge financial burden for drivers but is also a major safety risk for those on two wheels.

"The £8.3b plan can make a considerable difference in bringing our roads back to the standards which road users expect, especially if councils use the cash efficiently to resurface our streets."

Network North will see £36b invested in hundreds of transport projects and initiatives across the country.

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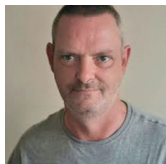
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NEW GOVERNMENT BEST PRACTICE GUIDANCE

Article by Dave Lawrie,
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On 17 November 2023, the Government published the long-awaited updated **Best Practice Guidance for Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Licensing** to help local licensing authorities to carry out their taxi and private hire vehicle licensing functions.

Last month we finished part one at **section 8.14**, seatbelts and children being on seats, not on laps, moving on to **section 8.15, Personal Security**:

Protection screens

"Authorities should ensure that security adaptations do not prevent drivers from fulfilling their legal obligations towards disabled passengers. Whilst front seats may not be included in occupancy numbers or generally used by passengers where security screens are fitted, some disabled people may require access to the front seat to complete a journey comfortably and safely".

Many local authorities stipulated that where a protection screen is installed in a private hire vehicle, the front seats may not be used. The new guidance addresses this issue, highlighting that people with disabilities may need to travel in the front, so such a licensing condition should be avoided.

However, there's an entire section on protection screens which states the complete opposite, where it now says:

"The front passenger seat should not be included in the seating capacity of the vehicle licence where a partition is fitted."

A little confusing to say the least, in our view, the use of front seats should not be excluded by licensing conditions, if a driver's risk assessment means the front seat be excluded for any reason, this should be supported by their local authority.

The guidance on such screens can be found here:

<https://shorturl.at/cBEM9>

which we at **NPHTA** worked on with the DfT and research laboratory to develop.

CCTV in vehicles

"The department's view is that CCTV in vehicles can enhance both drivers' and passengers' safety and consideration of the merits of CCTV by licensing authorities must include both aspects."

Inclusion of the trade within community safety partnerships, is a very welcome suggestion, in fact many local authorities already have very good links where the police are included, providing advice and updates regarding ongoing investigations and reports, the guidance then refers to the statutory standards element of CCTV in vehicles.

"An extra indicator is required to show when audio recording has been activated."

This suggests the inclusion of ICO compliant audio recording.

Fire extinguishers and first aid kits

"The National Fire Chiefs Council's advice is that vehicles should not be required to carry fire extinguishers and drivers advised to get out and stay out of the vehicle and call 999, rather than attempting to firefight."

Finally, although paraphrasing to emphasise the point, fire extinguishers should NOT be in licensed vehicles.

In the interest of clarity, the wording skipped makes suggestions of even more training courses. The industry already has enough courses to undertake, it does not need more as "a little knowledge can be a dangerous thing." In this case it could lead to a false sense of confidence and be extremely dangerous. The same applies in our view to first aid kits which should also be removed.

Vehicle testing

MOT standards are seen as being the test for roadworthiness, and reference is made to checking the vehicle's overall condition as well as understanding of maintenance regimes used by vehicle owners using:

<https://www.gov.uk/check-mot-history>

This of course is not possible for councils that do not perform an actual roadworthiness test, merely a compliance test.

“The requirements of the test normally include those in an MOT test but may include another inspection by a licensing officer to ensure the vehicle meets local requirements for a vehicle licence e.g. cleanliness of the vehicle, correct plates displayed etc.”

It is great to see the DfT echo our feelings about compliance tests.

To simplify this:

- an MOT = roadworthiness and safety
- a compliance test = local requirements only

The guidance goes on to address waiting times and delays for vehicle owners here:

“It should be accepted that any DVSA testing centre is able to conduct this assessment and that any recent MOT will evidence the fact the vehicle is roadworthy. This maximises testing capacity available to proprietors and allows licensing authorities to focus their testing capacity on any additional criteria.”

Skipping past setting of taxi fares, and unmet demand surveys for limiting the number of plates, although quite important, nothing has really changed within the guidance on these two topics, so let's move swiftly on to a section which is important to taxi drivers and of course travelling public.

11. Taxi ranks and roadside infrastructure

“Taxi ranks can provide a useful interchange between modes of transport and a focal point for taxis and passengers at peak periods. There are a number of aspects that should be considered when assessing the number and location of taxi ranks, including how ranks contribute to a wider transport policy and its success in delivering accessible transport as disabled users are less able to seek alternatives.”

“When providing new ranks or redesigning areas of the built environment where existing ones are located, authorities should seek to locate ranks as close as possible to transport interchanges and other key destinations they serve in order to minimise walking distances for passengers and follow the DfT's Inclusive Mobility guidance and other sources of best practice in accessible street design.”

We have stated several times that ranks should be inclusive, visible and accessible for the travelling public, so this new guidance echoes our views extremely well.

It goes on to state the importance of active engagement with interested parties, including drivers and service users, to suggest that location and provision of ranks should be reviewed every five years, recommends taxi marshals and there are even suggestions of public toilets and waiting areas for both drivers and passengers.

We have seen with most, if not all local authorities, that rather than reviewing and expanding on the provision of ranks, there is a huge reduction in rank spaces, no facilities at all, and in many regions vehicles are excluded entirely from busy town centres.

13. Flexible transport services

“The department encourages licensing authorities, as a matter of best practice, to play their part in promoting flexible services to increase the availability of transport to the travelling public.”

This is very much welcomed, for many years we have known that taxi and private hire vehicles may provide additional services as set out within the guidance here, namely The Transport Act 1985 sections 10, Shared taxis – immediate hiring but at separate fares (taxi only); section 11, Shared taxis and private hire vehicles – advance bookings; and section 12, Taxi and private hire vehicle buses (taxi-bus services) including timetables and bus stops along a set route. This section is placing a burden on local authorities to make it better known within their licensed trade.

We welcome this being highlighted and look forward to seeing how local authorities will make these options better known; we aim to focus on this topic in coming months.

Local transport plans have been covered in the November issue; section 15 of the BPG deals with the new tax conditionality check codes which were introduced for England and Wales in April 2022, and for Scotland in April 2023.

We've pretty much covered everything, and will now wait to see how new policies and conditions around the UK are adopted or amended to include the new guidance, which we welcome from our DfT colleagues.

All that is left to say is we wish you a happy, healthy and profitable 2024 from all of us at here at the NPHTA.

WHATSAPP TAXI BOOKINGS

TAXIBOT IS BEING HAILED AS THE NEXT BIG THING IN AUTOMATED TAXI BOOKINGS BY TAXI COMPANIES

Article by M2M TaxiBot
www.m2mtaxibot.com



Hailing a taxi has always been a part of everyday life for many people. Taxi companies have been constantly looking for ways to improve their services and make the booking process more efficient for their customers.

In this digital age, automation has become the key to streamlining processes and providing a better experience for both taxi companies and their customers. One such innovation that is currently revolutionising the taxi booking industry is the WhatsApp TaxiBot by M2M.

What is the Whatsapp Taxibot and how does it work?

WhatsApp TaxiBot is a cutting-edge automation tool that allows users to book taxis through the popular messaging app, WhatsApp. It functions as a conversational interface, enabling users to interact with the TaxiBot just like they would with a real person. Through natural language processing and machine learning, the TaxiBot understands user requests, locates the nearest available taxi and swiftly confirms the booking.

Understanding the functionality of Whatsapp Taxibot

The functionality of WhatsApp TaxiBot is designed to be user-friendly and intuitive. Users can simply send a message to the TaxiBot with their pickup location, destination and preferred time. The TaxiBot then processes this information and quickly responds with the details of the assigned taxi, including the estimated time of arrival and fare. This seamless interaction offers a hassle-free booking experience for the customers.

How taxi firms can benefit from Whatsapp Taxibot

For taxi companies, integrating WhatsApp TaxiBot into their operations brings a myriad of advantages. Not only does it enhance customer satisfaction by providing a convenient and modern booking platform, but it also

enables companies to manage bookings more efficiently, leading to increased revenue and cost savings.

Feedback from Whatsapp Taxibot customers

The response from customers has been overwhelmingly positive, with numerous individuals expressing their satisfaction with how simple it is to book a taxi through the WhatsApp TaxiBot. Customers value the convenience and speed of the service, and the smooth communication with the TaxiBot has enhanced their booking experience. Here are some of examples of the feedback we have received.

Eddie Measey from 001 Taxis stated:

"We came across the WhatsApp Chatbot for taxi bookings and have had a fantastic experience with the brand. The M2M TaxiBot Team has been extremely supportive and made sure to promptly address all of our inquiries."

Steven Andrews from Mayday Cars expressed his gratitude for the customised projects carried out by our internal development team:

"The TaxiBot team has been incredibly helpful in developing a tailor-made WhatsApp Cab chatbot that aligns with our business requirements and supplying a WhatsApp Chat Widget for our website."

Alex from Cab Co Canterbury said:

"The M2M TaxiBot Automation tool has had a huge impact on our ability to manage numerous taxi bookings via WhatsApp. The automation capabilities provided by Autocab are remarkable and have greatly improved our productivity, ultimately saving us precious time. Our customers are delighted with the improved service they receive when booking taxis through our new Cabco TaxiBot."

In 2024, one of the best methods to boost profits for your taxi business is to take advantage of M2M TaxiBot for automated taxi reservations. By using M2M TaxiBot, you can simplify your business processes and provide customers with a quick and efficient service, resulting in higher customer satisfaction and loyalty.

INTRODUCING THE **NEW** FORD HACKNEY TAXI



A Cab Direct Exclusive

5 BUSINESS STRATEGIES FOR 2024

Article by Phil Holloway
Marketing Director
www.hollogram.com



2023 has been a transformative year in the taxi industry. Despite economic challenges, hard-working taxi companies prevail. Listening to customer needs proved beneficial for our marketing efforts. In 2024, innovation is key for taxi businesses to excel in customer acquisition, driver retention and recruitment challenges.

Here are top tips for success:

1. Embrace technology for enhanced customer experience

In the digital age, technology plays a pivotal role in shaping customer preferences. Invest in user-friendly mobile apps that offer seamless booking experiences, real-time tracking, and secure payment options.

Implement AI-driven algorithms to optimise route planning, reducing waiting times for customers and increasing driver efficiency. Moreover, integrate customer feedback mechanisms within the app to gather insights for continual service improvements.

2. Prioritise driver well-being and incentives

To retain and attract skilled drivers, prioritise their well-being and offer attractive incentives. Incentivise safe driving practices, punctuality, and excellent customer service through performance-based bonuses.

Consider offering flexible work schedules, health benefits, and access to driver support programmes. Additionally, provide ongoing training sessions to keep drivers updated on industry trends, safety protocols and customer service skills, fostering a sense of professionalism and loyalty.

3. Implement marketing strategies to attract customers

Craft targeted marketing campaigns to attract more customers. Utilise social media platforms, geo-targeted advertisements, and partnerships with local businesses to increase brand visibility. Offer promotional discounts, referral programmes, and loyalty rewards to incentivise repeat bookings.

Leverage customer testimonials and positive reviews as powerful marketing tools to build trust and credibility among potential customers.

4. Foster a positive company culture

A positive company culture significantly impacts driver satisfaction and retention. Cultivate an inclusive and supportive environment where drivers feel valued and respected.

Encourage open communication channels to address their concerns promptly. Organise social events, recognition programmes, and initiatives that celebrate driver achievements. A strong company culture not only retains current drivers but also attracts new ones through word-of-mouth referrals.

5. Streamline driver recruitment processes

Revamp your driver recruitment strategies to attract top talent. Leverage digital platforms, such as job portals and social media, to reach a wider pool of prospective drivers.

Simplify the application and onboarding processes to minimise bureaucratic hurdles. Highlight the benefits of working with your company, such as competitive pay structures, advancement opportunities, and a supportive work environment, to entice potential candidates.

Next Steps for your taxi business....

In 2024, taxi businesses will thrive by prioritising customer satisfaction, driver welfare and recruitment. Embracing technology, effective marketing, positive culture and streamlined hiring will ensure success in the competitive market.

Adaptation and innovation will attract customers, retain top drivers and foster growth for a prosperous future in the taxi industry.

If you need any help with marketing for your taxi business, get in touch with Phil Holloway via email: phil@hollogram.com or call 01509 398 002 for a chat.

Have a great 2024!

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CASH-STRAPPED **KIRKLEES** COUNCIL SPENDING £54,000 A DAY ON SCHOOL TAXIS

Cash-strapped Kirklees Council has spent almost £5.5m on taxi fares for school children between April and October this year.

Around 3,000 Kirklees pupils qualify for free school transport.

Between the start of the financial year in April and October 31, there have been 101 days of school term.

A total of £5.45m was spent on school taxis in this time, a Fol request has shown. This works out at an average cost to the council of just over £54k each day of term.

Fifty taxi firms are on the council's books for the same period, with some earning as much as £10,500 a day during term-time to take children to and from school. In the last five years, the local authority's

total bill for school taxi fares has exceeded £36.9m.

In addition to this, 300 pupils of sixth-form age are eligible to have their costs covered by the council, resulting in a further £2.6m being spent on transport costs in the previous financial year. This equates to an average of £8.6k per student, and with costs rapidly rising, the council says this will eventually become unsustainable. The council also stated that the cost of school transport has seen a significant increase on a national scale, with councils up and down the country facing the same pressures. They also wanted to assure the public that they use a competitive tendering process to

seek the best value for money.

A spokesperson said: "We're looking to make savings across all school transport options. One change we're considering is the way young people of sixth-form age are helped to access education if they qualify for travel assistance.

"All councils have to produce a 'Transport Statement' setting out these arrangements for eligible pupils. Other councils have changed their Transport Statement and we have sought views on a similar process for Kirklees.

The results will be collated and any changes made as a result of the consultation will be presented to elected members in March 2024.

FORMER **KENT** COUNTY COUNCIL HIGHWAYS BOSS CALLS FOR AUDIT OF TAXI TRIPS FOR SEN CHILDREN

Kent County Council's former highways boss has called for an internal audit of costly taxi journeys provided to SEN children". This transport will cost the council £60m in 2023/24. More than 6,000 SEN children in the county are given free taxis to classes.

Cllr David Brazier (Con) spoke at the council's scrutiny committee meeting on 6 December, in a debate about home to school transport (HST).

Cllr Brazier hoped an audit would identify savings to help KCC find tens of millions of pounds of efficiencies in the face of soaring prices and squeezed budgets.

He told members: "It is common parlance outside this authority

that we overpay for transport market services because there is very little capacity that we have not already taken up. So when further journeys are required, they are provided at a cost well above the market rate.

"I'm not truly satisfied that we are paying market rates and that we are not being taken for a ride."

He suggested an internal audit could make "selective samples" of journeys and how the costs are arrived at and if they're "fair and in accordance with the market rates". Last year a review into KCC's handling of school transport for SEN children identified a number of "serious flaws".

Earlier this year Cllr Antony Hook

called on the authority to introduce an in-house school taxi service to save cash. At the time, KCC reported HST costs for SEN pupils between July 2022-23 soared by £15m and that spend was driven by a near 11% (668) rise in the number of SEN children being carried by cab.

Cllr Rory Love said: "We know the answer on HST. It's the number of children who have in the past been identified as meeting the threshold of additional, very costly transport support."

He said the KCC costs were also driven by the "extraordinarily and unexpectedly high" number of children with educational health care plans (EHCP).

SCHOOL TRANSPORT

CORNWALL COUNCIL ADMITS THAT IT PAYS SCHOOL TAXI DRIVERS TOO MUCH

One of Cornwall Council's most senior officers has admitted that the authority is paying school-run taxi drivers too much money.

The matter arose during a discussion about the council's finances which have been hit by a £16m overspend so far this year.

HST for pupils in Cornwall is one of the council's biggest expenditures and has led to a £5m overspend during the first half of the financial year. By the end of Quarter 2 (Sep

2023) the council's total overspend was £14.9m, which a meeting of the customer and support services overview and scrutiny committee on 5 December, heard has now increased to £16m.

The council's chief operating officer, Tracie Langley, told the scrutiny committee that HST for SEN children is particularly expensive.

Cllr Mike McLening said: "I get the feeling that we're not as harsh as we should be when negotiating

prices. You say about the taxi drivers ... 'do we let them get away with a bit on pricing?'"

Ms Langley responded that he was correct, adding: "We will do our best to negotiate the right price and put the right caps on our dynamic purchasing systems."

It came to light earlier this year that taxi drivers from as far away as Essex and Shropshire were driving to Cornwall to carry out school runs for Cornish pupils.

BANKRUPT BIRMINGHAM COUNCIL SHOULD EXPLAIN £116M BLACK HOLE IN SCHOOL TAXI SPENDING

Questions continue to be raised over the £116m spending black hole in Birmingham City Council's school taxi bills. Council records show the values for all 163 four-year school transport contracts are exactly £64,938.27, around £10.5m in total (plus £1.5m for recently published contracts), around ten times less than the £128m the council paid out from 2020 to July this year, according to MailOnline analysis of invoices data.

The £64,938.27 figure was just low enough to avoid publishing transparency data, raising renewed questions over awarding millions of pounds of school transport contracts to Green Destinations Ltd (GDL) - owned by Jameel Malik - which charged more than £200 a day to take a child three miles to school and back.

This comes as opposition Tories at the troubled Labour-run council renewed calls for an investigation and the publication of internal

audits, after education director Sue Harrison promised the committee their release on 25 October.

Conservative deputy leader Ewan Mackey said MailOnline raised 'very serious questions', adding: "Labour should publish the audit reports in full, as well as answer the discrepancies highlighted".

The council has since added that a comprehensive spend report is being produced but it is yet to be released.

The council has previously refused FoI requests from MailOnline for the investigation report, saying the 'information was given in confidence'. The Information Commissioner is now deciding if the audits should be released.

When asked by audit scrutiny committee chairman, Labour's Cllr Fred Grindrod, to explain why all 163 school contracts were the same value, procurement head Mike Smith said 'for the purposes of our transparency requirements' he

effectively took the total estimated cost and divided it by 163 to get an average contract value.

Tory Cllr Meirion Jenkins blasted the explanation, telling Mr Smith: "In terms of understanding the point of the transparency, an averaging across the whole thing is pretty meaningless."

Referencing the MailOnline investigation into GDL, Cllr Jenkins asked internal audit boss Sarah Dunlavy: "Does £200 a day to take a child three miles a day to school seem like a reasonable taxi fare?"

"It hasn't been considered to be fraudulent, no," she replied.

Cllr Jenkins also asked her for any investigations into the service to be made available to the audit committee. Ms Dunlavy replied: "We have been in and looked at accusations against various providers and concluded that, as far as we can tell there was no systematic or deliberate over-charging."

The Gamechang

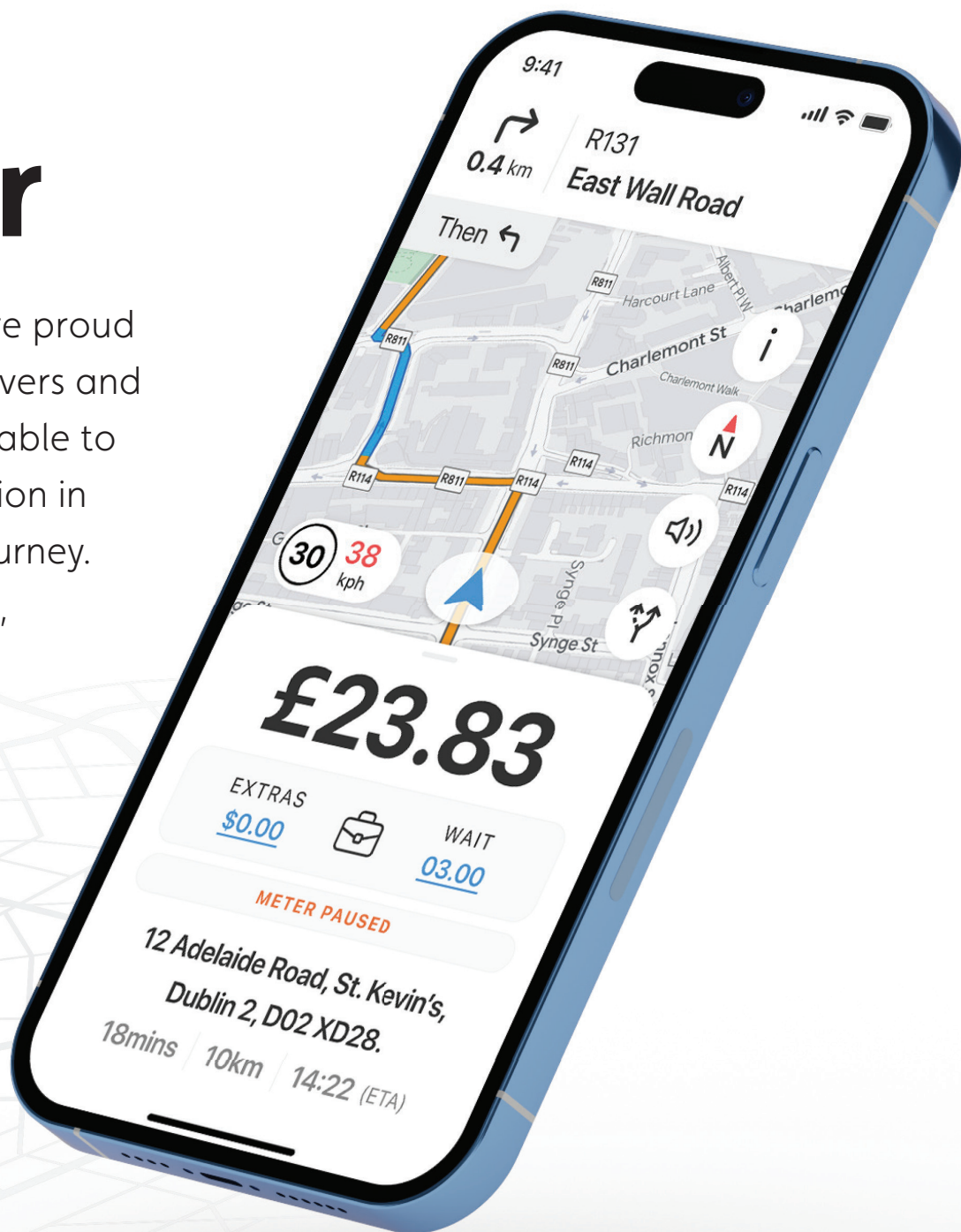
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TAXI ALLIANCE

FIT AND PROPER

READING POLICE CATCH UNLICENSED PH DRIVER WHO IS FINED HUNDREDS AND GIVEN 8 POINTS

An unlicensed private hire driver, who was found to be illegally plying for hire in Reading, has been hit with financial penalties and penalty points on his licence. Adeel Soomro, 40, from Reading, was found to be operating a private hire vehicle without a licence, in a controlled district, and without the correct insurance.

On 8 April 2023, Mr Soomro parked in a disabled bay on Oxford Road, an area known to council licensing officers for drivers illegally plying for hire. He was approached by officers and agreed to take them to Tilehurst for £15 without a prior booking.

At Reading Magistrates Court on 10 November 2023, Mr Soomro was

found guilty of plying for hire, and driving without insurance.

He was ordered to pay a total of £960 in financial penalties and eight penalty points added to Mr Soomro's driving licence.

Lead Councillor for Transport, Cllr John Ennis, said: "Our licensing team will continue to maintain its vigilant enforcement activities."

HEAVY FINES FOR TWO READING PH DRIVERS CONVICTED OF ILLEGALLY PLYING AT HENLEY REGATTA

Two private hire drivers illegally plying for trade have been fined following undercover checks at Henley Regatta last year.

On Friday, December 15 at Oxford Magistrates' Court, Mumtaz Ahmed Ismail, 55, from Reading, was ordered to pay more than £4,500 after being convicted of two counts of illegally plying for hire and two counts of driving without insurance.

He also had 14 points added to his DVLA driving licence, meaning he is now banned from driving for six months.

Mr Ismail was caught during a 'test purchase' operation in Henley when plain-clothed licensing officers from South Oxfordshire DC and neighbouring authorities checked to ensure that out of area drivers were not picking up passengers illegally at the Regatta and taking them on unbooked, uninsured and often untraceable journeys.

Mr Ismail was stopped on June 29 2023 when he erroneously agreed to take an undercover officer to

Reading for a flat rate without having a booking in place. Mr Ismail was then caught again under the same circumstances just two days later.

Mr Ismail failed to attend court on November 17 2023 and was convicted in his absence of all four offences. Sentencing was then adjourned until December 15 to allow him to attend and provide any mitigating circumstances before sentencing.

In a separate case on Friday, November 17 2023 at Oxford Magistrates' Court, Harish Surendralal, 63, from Reading, was also convicted of illegally plying for hire at Henley Regatta and of driving without insurance. Mr Surendralal was caught during 'test purchase' operations at the Regatta on June 30 2023.

He had also erroneously agreed to drive an undercover licensing officer to Reading for a flat rate. There was no booking in place and making this agreement immediately invalidated Mr Surendralal's insurance.

As a result of his actions, Mr Surendralal was ordered to pay £1,186 and had six points added to his DVLA driving licence.

Councillor David Rouane, leader of South Oxfordshire District Council, said: "Henley has repeatedly been targeted by drivers from outside the district attempting to operate illegally at the Regatta.

"These individuals put people's safety at risk and take work away from those who play by the rules. Our officers have been very successful in stopping those involved and we won't hesitate to prosecute anyone who is caught in the act."

Mr Ismail and Mr Surendralal were the first private hire drivers to be prosecuted following the 2023 Henley Regatta with cases against six more individuals pending.

Following the 2022 event, five people were convicted for illegally plying for hire and associated offences, such as having no insurance.

FIT AND PROPER

BLACKBURN CABBIE WITH POINTS LOSES COUNCIL APPEAL OVER LICENCE BAN

A Blackburn cabbie with points on his driving record has lost his appeal against losing his taxi licence.

Blackburn with Darwen Council defended an appeal by licensed taxi driver Iqbal Master, who lost his licence due to speeding and traffic offences.

Blackburn Magistrates' Court heard Master currently has 11

points on his driving licence, which he had failed to notify the council about, and also had previous complaints on his record.

The magistrates told him: "You have a number of recent traffic offences and in particular five points in 2022 for speeding on the motorway. This occurred within the two-year period before your

licence was reviewed and revoked. "We find the council's decision was in line with its policy."

Cllr Jim Smith, said: "The council has a duty of care to protect local people who travel by taxi, something we take very seriously. Blackburn Magistrates' Court also awarded the council costs of £689.50 which Master must pay.

BATH CABBIE HAS LICENCE REVOKED FOR MAKING THREAT THAT LEFT SEN CHILD IN TEARS

A Bath and NE Somerset Council licensed taxi driver who made a threat to a child with special needs has been stripped of his licence.

The driver had been doing school runs for the child, and said that he made the threat in the summer to stop the "agitated" child kicking the doors and windows in the car. He stopped the car on the journey home from school, opened the child's car door and said: "Please stop. If you don't stop, you stay

here in the middle of the forest with the wolves."

The minutes of the meeting in November have been published.

The taxi driver said he had been trying to calm an unsafe situation and that the child had also kicked her school escort and he thought it would be unsafe to drive.

But the SEN co-ordinator at the school said the child - who has "complex emotional needs" - had been "visibly scared" to get in the

taxi because the driver had been shouting at her from the window.

The driver said he had to raise his voice because the child was far away, but said he did not yell.

The SEN co-ordinator added that the child had mentioned several times she felt the taxi driver was not kind to her. The driver accepted that he had also threatened to leave the child on a previous occasion when the child had also been "agitated," but said that the escort and mother had approved of his actions on that occasion.

But he accepted that the child and her school escort had been upset by the incident in the summer.

The driver had attended a safeguarding course after the incident, but said he hadn't understood it all due to a language barrier and didn't remember much. BANES Council's licensing sub-committee ruled the driver "does not have the appropriate judgement of how to deal with children he is responsible for transporting" and stripped him of his HC driver and PH licence.

LIVERPOOL ENFORCEMENT ISSUED 98 FPNs TO SMOKING CABBIES LAST YEAR

Last year Liverpool City Council Licensing Enforcement issued 98 fixed penalty notices (FPNs) to cabbies smoking in their vehicles. It's an offence to smoke in a licensed vehicle at any time - including when the driver isn't working and using the vehicle personally. Most of the drivers who have received FPNs, either directly or by post, paid within 15 days in order to

take advantage of the reduction in cost from £50 to £30.

If the penalty is not paid within 29 days of the offence, then a court summons is issued.

Two Sefton private hire drivers who chose to ignore the FPNs were recently summonsed to court.

Both were fined £200, with £150 costs and £80 victim surcharge - totalling £430 for each driver..

WHAT'S IN YOUR CAB?

COLWYN BAY MAN WHO PASSED OUT IN TAXI HAD MORE THAN HALF A KILO OF CANNABIS IN BAG

A man who passed out in the back of a taxi was found with more than half a kilo of cannabis and over £1,000 in cash in a bag.

Police and paramedics were called after Lee Ainsworth, 30, became unresponsive.

Medics found he was not having a medical episode but was intoxicated. The bag was found, and he was arrested before admitting possession with intent to supply cannabis.

On Wednesday 6 December, a judge heard he has been diagnosed with schizophrenia but is being treated and is turning his life around.

He said he could be rehabilitated and gave him a 12-month jail term, suspended for 18 months.

Prosecutor Oliver King told Mold Crown Court taxi driver Peter James had gone to pick up the defendant from an address in Colwyn Bay on October 25 last year at 9.15am.

When he arrived he found Ainsworth in the garden smoking

a cigarette. He smelt cannabis and was "chatting quite normally".

Ainsworth got into the taxi with a black rucksack but said he didn't feel well. He asked to go to Rhos-on-Sea but changed his mind and asked for Llandudno Junction.

"He appeared to fall asleep and there was no drop off point," said Mr King. The taxi driver pulled over but couldn't rouse Ainsworth who was completely unresponsive, the court heard.

Mr King said: "He was sufficiently concerned to call an ambulance and a first aider from Boots came out to assist."

An ambulance duly arrived and paramedic Dafydd Williams also found the passenger to be unresponsive but he then became agitated and kicked and lashed out.

Mr Williams asked for police to attend. It was established it wasn't a medical emergency and Ainsworth was probably intoxicated. He was put onto a trolley to get him into an

ambulance.

But when the paramedic looked into his black rucksack for any identification he saw a large amount of what appeared to be cannabis and handed the bag to a police officer, PC Tom Williams. The police found 631.74 grams of cannabis and £1,041.02 in cash.

The defendant was arrested and handcuffed but became aggressive.

He said he had bought the cannabis in bulk over a long period and the cash was payment for work for a friend. But he would not provide the friend's name.

Matthew Dunford, defending, said his client had struggled with his mental health, drugs and alcohol. He had been released from custody and was self-medicating when the offence took place.

He has been diagnosed with schizophrenia but is receiving treatment. He has moved to County Down in Northern Ireland where his mother lives and has joined a barber's club and a church.

The judge His Honour Niclas Parry told the defendant: "A lot of drugs, a lot of money, a lot of potential harm." But he added: "It's not an exaggeration to say I can find you have transformed your life...with the support of your local community."

"There's a realistic prospect of you being rehabilitated. I believe you are on the way."

He gave Ainsworth a 12-month jail term, suspended for 18 months. He must wear an electronic tag during a four-month curfew between 6pm and 6am.

STOKE-ON-TRENT MEN CAUGHT WITH CLASS A DRUGS IN CAB

Cheshire Police have charged two Stoke-on-Trent men with Class A drug offences and possession of criminal property, following a stop check near Crewe.

On 13 December, officers stopped a taxi near to the Junction 16 of the M6 (Crewe Barthomley).

At around 6.30pm, two passengers were arrested on suspicion of drugs offences. Both men have

since been charged with two counts of being concerned in the supply of class A drugs (heroin and crack cocaine) and possession of criminal property.

Saeed Malik, 35, of Middleport, and Tahir Darr, 29, of Burslem, were both remanded in custody.

The pair appeared at Chester Magistrates' Court on Friday 15 December.

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NEW YEAR - NEW WEBSITE

WHY YOU SHOULD INVEST IN A NEW WEBSITE IN 2024

taxisolutions With upcoming changes to how Google will work in 2024, the need for a cutting-edge website for your taxi firm has never been more crucial. Embracing the tech advancements of 2024 is not just a trend but a necessity for staying competitive in the taxi industry. TaxiSolutions, the leading digital marketing agency specialising in taxi-focused marketing is your go-to partner for building websites tailored to the specific needs of taxi businesses.

Importance of an updated website

As we step into a new year, passenger expectations continue to evolve, demanding more and more from taxi services to compete with the seamless and efficient services of larger companies. A modern, user-friendly website serves as the face of your taxi firm online. This is where TaxiSolutions excels, providing not just websites but a foundational SEO-crafted framework to help keep you relevant as one of the best in your local area and enhance your online presence.

Why a new website in 2024?

We spoke in an earlier article back in October about how changes to Google will affect the way in which people interact with your firm. A new website at this stage isn't just a luxury; it's a strategic move to keep you relevant and secure a competitive edge.

Benefits of a new website

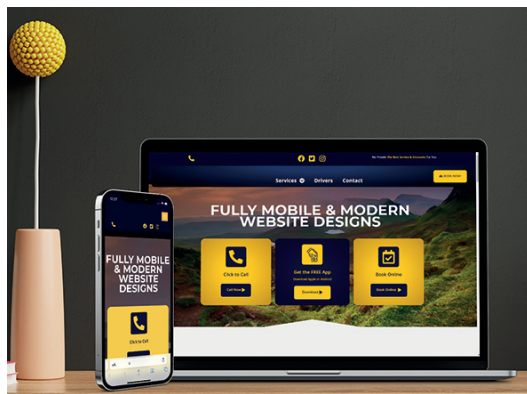
Investing in a new website brings a host of benefits: an improved user experience for mobile devices, online booking system integration, content crafted to help support your SEO and geofencing to help you rank higher in Google searches. Your taxi firm stands to gain significantly in operational efficiency and customer satisfaction.

Local SEO and geofencing

Visibility is key in the taxi business if your business is top in Google you'll be certain of getting all the bookings and the best drivers. TaxiSolutions understands the importance of local SEO and geofencing. Our website content and design ensure your business is seen when potential customers search for taxi services in your area.

TaxiSolutions: The expertise

What sets TaxiSolutions apart is our track record of marketing and website development. We tailor our



websites to meet the unique needs of your industry, with a focus on online and app booking promotion, accounts and driver recruitment, ensuring your business stands out in the crowded digital landscape.

FAQs

How long does it take to get a new website from TaxiSolutions?

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Can I update my website in the future to reflect changing business needs?

Absolutely. TaxiSolutions understands the dynamic nature of the taxi industry. We offer flexible solutions that can be updated to meet business requirements.

What measurable benefits can I expect from a new website?

Enhanced user engagement, increased online bookings and improved visibility in local searches are just a few of the benefits we can achieve for your firm.

New Year - New website

As we usher in the new year, don't overlook the transformative power of a new website for your taxi firm. TaxiSolutions stands ready to partner with you on this journey, providing expertise, tailored solutions and a track record of success.

Secure your competitive edge and embrace the opportunities of 2024 by investing in a new website today!

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ALL THINGS LICENSING

Article by Mike Smith, Senior Specialist for Licensing and Community Safety at Guildford Borough Council and Vice-Chair of the Institute of Licensing South East Region.

Please note that this article represents my own views which are not presented as the views of the Institute of Licensing or Guildford BC.

BEST PRACTICE GUIDANCE

The much anticipated and long-awaited update to the 'Best Practice Guidance' issued to local authorities has been published by the Department for Transport following consultation on the draft between March and June last year. **PHTM** readers will recall my article in the June 2022 edition about the draft version of the BPG and the changes from the 2010 version in place at the time.

The DfT has issued best practice guidance on taxi and private hire vehicle licensing since 2006. The guidance is non-statutory (unlike the **Statutory Standards** published in July 2021) but aims to assist local authorities that have responsibility for the regulation of this sector with their policy and standard setting by laying out what the DfT considers to be best practice.

I have noted previously that it is unsurprising that the differences between the 2010 and 2022 draft versions are stark; and that there are some differences between the consultation draft and the final version, indicating that the DfT has listened to the feedback it received.

Starting with the feedback; the consultation attracted 573 responses, which when considering there are hundreds of licensing authorities, many thousands of drivers, proprietors and operators, used by millions of customers and numerous organisations representing each, that number could have been much higher.

However, as the Government has not responded to the **Law Commission Report** from 2014 and only committed to bringing three (although we are still waiting for **National Standards and Enforcement Powers**) of the 34 recommendations from the **Task and Finish Group** from 2018, potential responders may have been apathetic.

However, of those that responded, the Government confirms that it did consider, and, "*where deemed*

appropriate", amendments were made to the Guidance. But this does perhaps beg the question as to why it was not deemed appropriate to consider points raised about the draft relating to out of area working and inconsistency between authorities which could be addressed by comprehensive guidance.

Clearly the consideration of consultation responses to a subject such as taxi licensing, where the regulators, trade and passengers have different and often incompatible views is likely to be a challenging task.

The Guidance itself sets this tone about the balance, it is intended to be considered in conjunction with the Statutory taxi and private hire vehicle standards. Whereas the **Statutory Standards** specify that: **the safety of the public is paramount**; the Best Practice Guidance sets out that licensing authorities, as regulators, also have a duty to ensure they carry out their activities in a way that supports the people and businesses they regulate; setting proportionate requirements avoiding unnecessary burdens, focusing on how licensing authorities can best use their existing powers to ensure that the licensed trade provides a **"safe, inclusive, accessible and attractive service to all passengers they may carry"**.

So here we have a contrast between the two sets of guidance: **Statutory guidance**, which licensing authorities must have regard to, effectively says that the taxi sector is a high-risk environment and regulators must do everything they can to keep the public safe; whereas the non-statutory **Best Practice Guidance** says that councils have the objective of enabling the trade to provide a safe, accessible, available and affordable range of services.

There then follows a summary of the responses and the Government's conclusion, and I will explore some of the more noteworthy topics:

ACCESSIBILITY:

Inclusive service plans (ISPs)

The consultation draft BPG proposed that all licensing authorities develop and maintain an ISP. Most local authority respondents agreed with this proposal, although noting that the creation of transport plans was the function of a local transport authority, not the licensing authority.

ALL THINGS LICENSING



points-based enforcement systems whereas others were supportive of such schemes.

The DfT now recommends that: **where such systems are used, points should remain on the record for three years for drivers and five**

years for private hire vehicle operators. The consultation version of the Guidance did not recommend that all licensing authorities should adopt a points-based enforcement system, although this was not clear to me in the initial draft. Where points-based systems are not recommended as best practice, this obviously creates potential for inconsistency between authorities that do have systems and those that don't.

There was some concern from the majority of trade responses about the impact of ISPs on drivers by having to purchase accessible vehicles. Clearly disability should be no barrier to accessing the licensed service and the Government has maintained the recommendation that: **licensing authorities' ISP-like documents are maintained by councils, in collaboration with disabled users, and reviewed every five years.**

Accessibility measures

The draft BPG version explored the different barriers disabled people may face when using licensed vehicles and measures licensing authorities could take to ensure the service remained inclusive.

There were a number of responses expressing concern about the additional costs of accessible vehicles which the Government recognised, maintaining the recommendation that: **the provision of accessible vehicles would need to be considered as part of licensing authorities' policies to increase the number of WAVs,** with examples provided as to how authorities can incentivise the uptake of WAVs; and assess whether the required standard of service has been provided.

Other common issues raised were the need for driver disability awareness training and WAV policies, with some welcoming further guidance on options to ensure enough WAVs are available. The DfT confirms: **it continues to support the use of a mixed fleet of vehicles including the use of vehicles that support wheelchair users and other disabled people.** Councils are also encouraged to: **consider both the number of taxis and PHVs that are wheelchair accessible and whether there are sufficient to meet demand within its area as the availability of WAVs varies.**

DURATION OF TAXI AND PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLE LICENSING ENFORCEMENT POINTS

Responses on points-based systems were mixed. Many respondents set out their opposition to such

DRIVER PROFICIENCY

The draft recommended that licensing authorities should require drivers to demonstrate a higher level of competence due to their position as professional drivers. Again, there was a variation in responses with some supporting the position that professional drivers should show a higher ability compared to other motorists; whereas others suggested that as professional drivers the trade already demonstrated a higher standard, and to require such a measure would increase costs and form a barrier to entry.

Whilst the government acknowledged different views, the DfT view maintained the stance that: **taxi and private hire vehicle drivers should be held to a higher standard than non-vocational car drivers.**

The guidance also now recommends that: **drivers should be required to undertake training/assessment focusing on attitudes and behaviours which contribute to accidents, and that such training/assessment should be undertaken at first application and subsequent renewal.**

There were views expressed by some licensed drivers that as they cover more miles it is to be expected that they will incur more points on their DVLA driving licence. However, in response the Government confirmed that this view is not shared, and as: **taxi and private hire drivers are trusted to transport the public, it is imperative to the safety of passengers and other road users that drivers obey road laws at all times.**

ALL THINGS LICENSING

VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

The merits of requiring vocational qualifications were discussed in the draft BPG which suggested that licensing authorities should not require these, as they cannot reflect evolving training requirements, such as new accessibility duties and safeguarding awareness.

Whilst a slight majority of respondents disagreed with this approach and supported vocational qualifications, the final version of the BPG maintains that: **vocational qualifications should not be required as these are considered burdensome**. Driver requirements should be limited to the skills that all drivers might reasonably be expected to obtain and evidence, with the Government's recommended training being: **safeguarding and disability awareness**.

TOPOGRAPHICAL ASSESSMENTS FOR PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLE DRIVERS

Turning to the issue of geographical knowledge testing for private hire drivers, the draft suggested licensing authorities may set private hire vehicle drivers a topographical test but are not required to do so.

Whilst most respondents supported some form of topographical knowledge test, others also favoured testing an applicant's ability to plan a route or safely use satnav. However, despite this, the final version of the Guidance now suggests that: **licensing authorities should not require private hire drivers to pass a topographical assessment**.

VEHICLE CHECKS BY DRIVERS

The draft introduced a recommendation that drivers should complete a daily walkaround roadworthiness check of their vehicles prior to transporting members of the public. This recommendation comes from the existing legal responsibility that all drivers have to make sure their vehicle is safe, and it attracted a range of views.

The final version maintains the position that: **vehicle checks should be undertaken daily by drivers as part of their duty of care, with the completion, retention and presentation of checks evidencing good due diligence**; with further guidance that licensing authorities should: **consider whether those drivers that fail to do these checks remain 'fit and proper'**.

WINDOW TINTS

The draft Guidance suggested that licensing authorities should not require the removal of 'window tints' as part of vehicle specifications, unless they could evidence that it was necessary and proportionate to do so.

Many responses agreed with this approach, indicating that factory fitted rear glazing already complies with legal specification and to require its removal is costly and disproportionate. Some responses disagreed, indicating tinted windows posed a safeguarding risk and may affect the ability of partially sighted passengers to see out of a vehicle.

The final version recommends: **a minimum light transmission of 30% or more in the rear windows**, as this level is considered to be in the interest of passenger confidence which ultimately benefits the trade. However, it continues that licensing authorities: **may allow exemptions for executive hire vehicles if this is deemed appropriate**.

VEHICLE TESTING

The draft version asked whether licensed vehicles with internal combustion engines should be the subject of testing more frequently than an annual MOT due to their increased mileage and predominate use in urban areas contributing to poor air quality.

Having considered responses, the DfT recognises that it may be overly burdensome to require vehicles to be submitted for checks specifically on emissions and has therefore: **removed the recommendation on emissions testing** from the final version.

However there remains considerable variation between councils on testing. Some authorities have a testing regime that reflects the increased likelihood of vehicle failures as they become older, others do not and the final version **does not offer a consistent position**.

VEHICLE AGE LIMITS

The draft Guidance suggested that licensing authorities should not impose age limits for the licensing of vehicles, but instead should consider more targeted requirements to meet the policy objective on emissions, safety rating and increasing wheelchair accessible provision where required.

ALL THINGS LICENSING



be booked and to show that the vehicle is licensed.

The final version of the BPG maintains that the government believes high levels of signage draw attention to PHVs leading the public to mistake them as a taxi, posing a

potential risk to passengers and PHV driver safety. Therefore, reducing the relative visibility of PHVs in comparison to taxis should help to increase the public's awareness of the differences between the two elements of the sector, concluding that: **limited signage on private hire vehicles will assist this objective and build on the earlier recommendations on roof signs and vehicle livery.**

This is perhaps an area of considerable deviation between authorities in some areas and unsurprisingly there were many responses to this question, including other measures proposed to assess vehicle suitability, such as emissions levels, safety ratings or mileage.

Overall, most were in agreement that this would significantly benefit vehicle proprietors and the government has set out in the final version of the Guidance that: **licensing authorities should not refuse to license a vehicle due it reaching a specified age.**

VEHICLE SIGNAGE

Finally, considering the variable and controversial issue of vehicle signage, the Best Practice Guidance sets out that: **private hire vehicles should not be permitted to have roof signs to provide greater distinction between PHVs and taxis.**

Moving onto the more controversial issues of PHV livery and operator signage, these proposals elucidated different views, with some suggesting increased signage helped distinguish the fact that PHVs were not available for immediate hire, whereas other views expressed that more signage may confuse customers.

Having considered the many responses on this topic, the government view remains that: **a distinctive livery requirement would perpetuate the current confusion between taxis and PHVs and complicate the message needed to raise public awareness of the differences between taxis and PHVs.**

The issue of operator signage is described as divisive, with little consensus as to what signage should and should not be on PHVs. However there remains a consensus that it is beneficial for the public to be able to better differentiate between taxis, PHVs and those vehicles which are not licensed. The consultation proposals looked to achieve this by limiting vehicle signage on private hire vehicles; with the pre-booked sign acting to inform the public that the vehicle must

TO CONCLUDE:

Clearly, now the final version of the Guidance is available there are likely to be significant changes for both local authorities and the licensed trade.

However, whilst the Guidance is much improved and much welcomed, it does not perhaps offer definitive guidance on some areas which cause such inconsistency between authorities and thus potential tension between regulators and the trade. It also does not tackle some of the more controversial and difficult aspects of the trade, such as out of area working, which will potentially only be addressed by much needed legislative reform.

Nonetheless, the Government has committed to continue to engage with the sector to ensure that the Best Practice Guidance keeps pace with the ever-changing nature of the taxi and private hire vehicle trade, as it adapts to changes in society and technology. As there was a considerable gap between versions of the Guidance in a time where the sector underwent considerable changes, this is to be welcomed.

Yet again, there's no more important time to be *'in the know'* about licensing issues affecting the industry and I would encourage members of the trade to join the Institute of Licensing where the guidance is likely to be subject of many events and publications this year.

Full details are available at:
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Article by Steven Toy
NPHTA Vice Chair and Trade
leader of Cannock Chase
Hackney Carriage and Private
Hire Liaison Group



My first ever article in these hallowed pages, back in early 2020, raised the issue of often (although not always) poor public perception of the human beings working in the taxi and private hire industry and how this is often mirrored by licensing authorities, perhaps unconsciously.

In recent times, James Button in his presentations at Institute of Licensing conferences has gone to considerable lengths to remind everyone that we are human beings, and not some “subspecies” (his choice of word) and that, if it is the role of regulatory authorities to protect the public first and foremost, then we in this trade should fall squarely under this umbrella of protection, as we are also members of the public, along with our passengers, other road users and everyone else.

I have attempted to remind our Jim that his *“Safe and Suitable”* recommendations to revoke driver licences for five years for those of us unfortunate enough to accrue seven or more points on our DVLA licences undermines that message somewhat, especially when you consider that bus and lorry drivers are not relieved of their livelihoods until they reach 12 points, and even then, it is only for one year.

His response was that these drivers should be subject to the same draconian regime. He did also suggest that it was a matter of opinion, and one on which we could agree to disagree. I ended by stating that proportionality is a relative thing...

In recent years, according to Steve McNamara of the London Taxi Drivers Association, around 400 black cab drivers have had their driver licences suspended for as little as three points, or revoked for having accrued six or more points on their DVLA licences by TfL for as little as driving at 24 mph on 20 mph-limit sections of major arterial routes (A2, A40, A41 A501 etc.), where the limit used to be 30, 40, 50 or even 60 mph. Some of these drivers had over 30 years’ experience, and all had ‘The Knowledge,’ which, as we know, takes two to three

years to complete. They wonder why there is a shortage of black cab drivers in London!

Over the last few years I have read of, and personally experienced, instances where we have indeed been treated as some kind of ‘subspecies.’ Many years ago, in my first year as a hackney carriage driver, I was waiting in a small car park for a passenger. A middle-aged driver, in one of those cars that thinks it’s a truck, pulled into the car park briefly before demanding that I move out of his way. I suggested that he could leave the same way as he entered, in reverse.

“But I want to drive out!”

It was implicit that if I did not obey my elder and very-much better, I would be ‘reported.’ I was young at the time, did not question my place in the pecking order, and duly obliged.

The older version of me would probably now suggest that he should run along - in reverse!

On another more recent occasion, I was driving through a housing estate along a meandering road with chicanes and parked cars on the opposite side of the road. A car came the other way and made no attempt to squeeze into the gap between the cars on his side of the road to let me pass. He wound down his window as I did mine.

“You are the ‘professional driver,’ so you should move out of my way!”

This would have meant me having to reverse through a chicane and around a bend. I did not move.

“It doesn’t work like that, Sunshine! We all drive to the same set of rules.”

He moved.

About a month ago I was dropping off a female passenger, who attended the same primary school as me all those years ago, and pulled up directly behind another parked car. I opened my door in order to assist her with her bags in the boot. Another car came the other way and stopped. The driver was shouting aggressively that I had opened my door into his path. Bear in mind that at this point, I was standing between my car and his, and there was clearly enough room for



him to pass, else it would have been a bit of a squeeze for me to be standing there. I also reminded him that it was his responsibility to ensure he left enough room for a door to open as he passed parked cars. Remember that he was also approaching from the opposite direction. He continued shouting before continuing on his way.

I turned away and muttered an expletive, a single word which did not form part of a sentence. He heard it because he had left his window open, despite the cold. He stopped further up the road and opened his door before bounding towards me on foot.

*"You call me a **** again and you'll be picking your ***** teeth off the floor!"*

You are lucky I don't report you!"

For what exactly?

My passenger was standing by the side of the road. I apologised to her as I handed her bags to her.

The point I'm making here is that we seem to become targets of other road users who have perhaps had a bad day, and want to release their pent-up frustrations on the first licensed driver they encounter on their way home, on the presumption that we just have to 'take it on the chin,' lest we be reported to our licensing authority and potentially face a period of uncertainty regarding our livelihoods.

I should remind all licensing authorities that officers should be mindful of not being instrumental in the process of making us targets for such gratuitous abuse, because our safety and wellbeing is every bit as important as that of anyone else.

I mentioned this incident at a recent trade meeting with our own licensing team and the chair of the licensing committee. They were supportive, partly because we have fairly regular contact and they do generally regard us as human beings. I know I am lucky in this respect, and also that many of us are not so fortunate.

I picked up the same former classmate again last week and dropped her off at the same place. I told her that I had brought up the incident at a recent council meeting. She said "good for you!" She also told me that the driver of the other vehicle had frightened her.

There you have it, licensing authorities! When you unwittingly make us targets in your regulatory approaches by potentially upholding spurious complaints, you put our passengers at risk too! After all, members of the public only threaten to report us out of an expectation that this automatically puts a driver into trouble.

A recent early Sunday evening in November, I attended a booking at a town centre pub. A barmaid came out to explain that my passenger was "a bit upset," and she would be bringing him out shortly. A couple of minutes later my passenger, somewhat worse for wear, was flanked by her and another gentleman. The passenger was clearly incapable of walking without assistance from two people. He wasn't "upset" at all, he was blind drunk! I refused to take him and explained my reasons.

"I can and I will refuse in this instance."

The gentleman offered to accompany the passenger. I still refused. The risk of soiling was high, and not from vomiting. He is known by the local taxi trade to have a bit of a drink problem and to have bladder control issues when he is much less intoxicated than he appeared to be on this day. I reminded the barmaid that serving someone unfit through drink was actually an offence. Therefore this was a problem of her own creation for her to deal with, not me.

She threatened to report me. This was either an idle threat or she was incredibly stupid, take your pick. I also mentioned this incident to one of our licensing officers at a recent meeting. He agreed that I could refuse, and that serving someone already in such a state was indeed an offence.

Public perception seems to be that it is very much our jobs; our duty, in fact, to pick up drunkards and deal with soiling in our vehicles on a regular basis. Surely only the lowest of the low would do such a job! At best they feel pity for us, but the reality is that it is a relatively rare occurrence, else most of us simply wouldn't do this job at all.

The seasoned and experienced driver will quite rightly refuse a fare if the passenger is unfit through drink, and **section 53 Town Police Clauses Act 1847** clearly allows it. It has been at least a couple of years since the last time my vehicle was soiled. Our basic principle is this: if you are capable of getting in and out of the vehicle without assistance, unless you are someone with a disability, you are able to communicate your destination, make payment by cash or by card, do not appear likely to soil the vehicle and have not already soiled yourself, you can have imbibed as much as you would like and be taken in a licensed vehicle.

These threats to report us if we don't do as we're ordered by members of the public carry little weight if the licensing authority is more supportive of the trade. Some are not. Worse still, a certain peer-to-peer app company has a tendency to 'deactivate' drivers at the drop of a hat in their attempt to become self-regulating. Drivers have become fearful of this and allow themselves to be abused by their passengers out of fear of losing their livelihoods. Passengers are even known to claim refunds by putting drivers out of work with spurious complaints.

Over the last 29 years that I've worked in this trade, I've asked passengers to leave my vehicle before they've reached their destination perhaps a dozen times if they have been abusive or otherwise disrespectful. I think the last one forgot that he hadn't booked this journey through the proverbial p2p app and was shocked to find himself standing next to his golf clubs at a petrol station miles from home after I had asked him to leave the vehicle. I'm not at risk of 'deactivation,' I can therefore expect to be treated with the respect we all deserve.

Just one bit of advice on this: as a driver, if you do have good reason to terminate a journey prematurely, do so in a safe and well-lit place. Don't just dump potentially vulnerable passengers in the middle of nowhere in the dark. This would obviously not apply if the passenger made you feel imminently threatened, or worse.

A while ago I watched CCTV footage from inside a licensed vehicle. The driver was being repeatedly punched from behind by his passenger. I found it quite distressing to watch. I saw the driver attempt to block the punches by raising his arm. This footage apparently came to the attention of his licensing authority and a licensing officer wished to 'investigate' the fact that he had raised his arm. In my mind there was nothing to 'investigate,' as it was plain to see what was happening: a driver was a victim of assault and was trying, rather unsuccessfully, to defend himself.

'Investigate,' was just a euphemism. What it actually meant was, in addition to the trauma of such an ordeal, the probable fear of returning to work each day for a while, and the injuries he may have sustained, the driver was also to suffer a period of uncertainty regarding his livelihood for no good reason. It was a blatant abuse of power.

The vast majority of licensing officers do a decent job, but this instance clearly demonstrates that we need a 'fit and proper' test for them as well as for us. The sociopaths and bullies need to be weeded out.

Fitness and propriety on our part is not akin to sainthood. We cannot be expected to "turn the other cheek" or to "take it on the chin." We can only be expected to behave as any other decent law-abiding human beings are expected to behave.

A taxi driver in Grantham was recently told by his licensing authority, South Kesteven Council, that he may not wear a Santa hat with a white beard while working over the festive period. Apparently, they have received a complaint that the driver could not be recognised from the photo on his badge. The complaint may well have come from a stooge within the council as I think it highly unlikely to have come from just an ordinary member of the public. The driver also pointed out that he could pull his beard down to show more of his face if asked.

I checked through their licensing policy and byelaws and found no mention of face coverings or anything else to suggest that this was not allowed. The order was therefore a diktat devoid of any mandate from due and democratic process. It was null and void. If they suspended or revoked his licence for this, it should be an easy appeal case to win. This was another abuse of power.

Whilst I was reading through their policy document, looking for a rule expressly forbidding Santa hats, I happened to come upon the following in Appendix G:

Drivers should never:

Become over-friendly in any way with passengers or engage in any form of relationship, infatuation, crush or show favouritism:

<https://moderngov.southkesteven.gov.uk/documents/s35112/Hackney%20Carriage%20and%20Private%20Hire%20Licensing%20Policy.pdf>

We know from what happened in Rotherham a few years ago that **Article 7 European Convention on Human Rights**, which prohibits retrospective legislation, i.e. being punished for breaking a law that was not in force at the time, seemingly does not apply to taxi/PH drivers. I guess this is because we are not human beings and are presumably some subspecies, contrary to recent statements made by Mr Button. Not every licensing authority regularly attends IoL conferences.

That said, I accept that perhaps some of the drivers whose licences were revoked should not have been licensed in the first place. Our reputation as a whole suffers if individuals with a history of serious sexual misconduct are granted licences.

In February 2002 I picked up three young ladies, whom I'd never met, from a village disco. I was chatting to the third passenger for quite some time after we reached her destination. Four years later we were married and have remained happily married ever since. In accordance with their licensing policy, I am clearly not a fit and proper person to hold a driver's licence in the district of South Kesteven. If the policy can be applied retrospectively, it matters not that, in my case, it was nearly 22 years ago.

I read a few years ago of a driver who dropped off a female passenger late at night. She invited him in, but he declined on the basis that his shift was not over. She then invited him to come at the end of his shift. He came several hours later and she let him in.

Afterwards, she regretted what had happened and made a complaint to the driver's licensing authority. What had taken place was clearly by mutual consent, but the authority decided that the driver had taken advantage of a vulnerable person (otherwise known as a consenting adult) and revoked his licence.

Unfortunately, the Crown Court judge dismissed his appeal. It would seem that when we become licensed to drive a taxi or private hire vehicle we give up many rights afforded to normal human beings. It seems that being fit and proper really does mean 'turning the other cheek,' general sainthood and, of course, chastity.

Being a normal human being is simply not part of the deal. Most of us have had relationships or brief encounters that we have regretted at some point in our lives, but if one of the parties is a taxi or private hire driver, this is not allowed. Whilst passengers should never be subject to unwanted advances by their licensed driver, or be made to feel uncomfortable or unsafe through intrusive questioning or inappropriate remarks, the boy-meets-girl (or other permutations) story can happen in many situations, including in a taxi between driver and passenger, as I can personally attest.

I've only done it the once, though, and I have no intention of doing it again. My wedding vows forbid it as much as anything else, and I'm more than content with that.



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CUMBRIA MAN REMANDED IN CUSTODY OVER ALLEGED KNIFEPOINT TAXI ROBBERY

A man has been remanded in custody over an alleged knife-point robbery involving a taxi driver.

Curtis Barron, 26, faces charges of robbery and threatening a person with a blade or sharply pointed article in a public place.

The defendant, from Egremont, is

accused of robbing the taxi driver of a money bag with £80 in Egremont on December 16.

It is also alleged that Barron had a knife in a public place and intentionally threatened the taxi driver with it.

Barron did not enter pleas during

a hearing at Workington Magistrates' Court on 18 December.

The case was sent to Carlisle Crown Court for a plea and trial preparation hearing on January 19. The defendant was remanded in custody until his next court appearance.

MAN SLASHES OUTSIDE OF TAXI WITH KNIFE IN HEMEL HEMPSTEAD

A man used a knife to damage a vehicle in Apsley, Hertfordshire Constabulary reports.

Officers are investigating an incident near to the roundabout by Sainsbury's on London Road. It is estimated that the incident, which is being treated as affray by the police, took place at around 8.50pm on Friday (8 December). A man struck the outside of a taxi

with a knife.

The police force has confirmed no one was injured during the incident and that a specific witness has been identified that it would like to speak to.

Detective Constable Carina NG, from the Local Crime Unit, said: "We are continuing to establish the full circumstances of this incident, which is being treated as

an affray, and I am appealing for anyone with information to please get in touch.

"It's understood that another car drove into Sainsbury's car park, passing the attacked vehicle, as the suspect ran across the road. We are keen to speak to the driver of this vehicle to see if they have any information to assist our investigation.

WIRRAL POLICE DOG CATCHES MAN AFTER CABBIE THREATENED WITH KNIFE

A police dog helped catch a man after a taxi driver was threatened with a "large" knife in Birkenhead. At around 7.30pm on 11 December, it was reported that a man had threatened a member of the public with a knife at the junction of Dock Road and Tower Road, Birkenhead and then walked off. Officers attended and conducted a search of the area where Police Dog Yoko apprehended a man on Oakdale Road in Seacombe.

A 27-year-old man was arrested on suspicion of attempted robbery,



PD Yoko was on patrol in the Wallasey area last night. When a male threatened a taxi driver with a large knife. He made off, but it wasn't long until he was sighted by dog officers. Stupidly, he decided to run! PD Yoko was deployed, who chased and detained the male. #nomoreknives



criminal damage and possession of a knife blade in public place.

CCTV and witness enquiries are being carried out, and officers are appealing for anyone with information to come forward.

Working with the CPS, Merseyside Police has secured 50 Serious Violence Reduction Orders (SVRO) against high-risk knife crime offenders. As one of four pilot forces to trial this new court order, Merseyside Police is taking a proactive approach to reduce knife crime and keep communities safe.

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WIGAN PRIVATE HIRE DRIVER FINED £80 FOR REFUSING GUIDE DOG IN CAR

A private hire driver has been prosecuted for refusing to allow a guide dog into his vehicle.

Responding to a complaint from a member of the public, St Helens Council's licensing department filed a case against taxi driver Florin-Constantin Caliman.

Following an investigation, Constantin Caliman from Wigan, was prosecuted for failure to carry a disabled person who was

accompanied by an assistance dog under the provisions of The Equality Act 2010.

After pleading guilty at Liverpool Magistrates' Court, the driver was ordered to pay an £80 fine, £120 in costs and a £32 victim surcharge.

Welcoming the outcome, Councillor Kate Grocutt, St Helens Borough Council's Cabinet Member for Economy, Business and Skills, said: "The council is

aware that disabled people are particularly reliant on taxi and private hire vehicle services.

"Assistance dogs are vital to their owners' safety and the council will not hesitate to take robust action to investigate and prosecute licensees in response to cases of discrimination to ensure that all operators and licensed drivers treat their role in providing an inclusive service seriously."

WHEELCHAIR USER FORCED TO STAY IN LIBRARY OVERNIGHT DUE TO WAV SHORTAGE IN BELFAST

A 27-year-old woman was left stranded in Belfast city centre as she was unable to get a wheelchair accessible taxi after her car broke down.

Caitriona Brauder had to stay overnight in a south Belfast library, and was unable to use the toilet for 14 hours.

The disability transport charity Motability tried to get a vehicle on her behalf but nothing was available.

There are 354 wheelchair accessible taxis in Northern Ireland, down from 373 last year.

Ms Bauder said this is an ongoing issue and it is not getting better.

"I am a 27 year old adult - I should be able to go to Belfast myself and know that I have a way of getting home.

"I don't think there's been much change, it's pretty static and I think it's getting worse."

On Saturday night, Ms Bauder was in Belfast to celebrate an

anniversary with her partner when things took a turn for the worse - her own adapted car broke down.

Catriona said she tried multiple taxi firms who said they couldn't help and it's not the first time it has happened.

"They [taxi firms] were making out it was a bad night, too late to get one and that the drivers that were driving these types of cars were off or seemed to be no luck that night. "But that's not the case because it is happening all the time, it wasn't just that night," she added.

A Department for Infrastructure spokesperson said there are currently 354 wheelchair accessible taxis of the kind that can be hailed and pre-booked, but said there might be others operating along set routes or as chauffeur services.

In the end, Caitriona was forced to take shelter in a library and waited 14 hours with no toilet access until a friend could drive her home to

Dungannon in an accessible car.

"100% grateful that we had that [library option], without it we wouldn't have had anywhere else to go.

"I don't know what would have happened but it's not ideal at all and it also raises the other issue of having no accessible Changing Places toilet that I can use as well. So it was 14 hours of needing to use the bathroom and I couldn't." Caitriona said she contacted Motability, a charity that helps disabled people get accessible transport.

"The Motability service started ringing ambulance services, they were ringing airport services to get anything - trying every possible option that they could."

Ms Bauder added: "I'm still trying to get back to what I was before. Sitting all night in a chair is not good for me and I have had pain and discomfort and generally not feeling good from that."

The logo features the letters 'I', 'O', and 'm' in a stylized white font. The 'I' and 'O' are positioned above the 'm'. The 'O' is partially enclosed by a blue circular shape with smaller blue circles inside it, resembling bubbles. The background is dark blue with larger, semi-transparent blue circles of varying sizes.

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ROUND THE COUNCILS

BURY:

KNOWLEDGE TEST TO BE SCRAPPED

The geographical “knowledge” test for taxi drivers in Bury is to be scrapped. To gain a taxi licence, drivers currently have to take a geographical test correctly identifying locations and the most direct routes in the borough.

Revised taxi standards agreed by the council will see the geographical element of the test thrown out due to “changes to modern practices and increased use of GPS equipment”.

The current knowledge test for cabbies in Bury sees them asked to pinpoint three locations using a map, face 15 questions on road names of where premises are located and recount two journeys by the shortest route between two specific locations from memory. The new knowledge test would not have any geographical element but would be revised to cover other topics in greater depth which are relevant to public safety such as licence conditions, safeguarding and road signs.

The council said the changes were “aimed at modernising and reflecting changes in current operating practices”. It said the new standards would “maintain passenger and driver safety and support the licensed trade”.

The decision followed a period of consultation with the public and the industry, and will cover drivers of both hackney carriages and PHVs. The new standards also include changes to signs on vehicles.

New standards include the requirement for a rear passenger door sticker on each door, issued by the council, stating “private hire vehicle not insured unless pre-booked with operator”.

Signs will need to be stuck permanently to all passenger windows and must contain the plate number, registration number, expiry date and the number of passengers the vehicle is licensed to carry. Cllr Charlotte Morris, cabinet member for culture, the economy and skills at the council, said: “We’ve worked closely with the licensed taxi trade and appreciate their co-operation in drawing up these changes, which reinforce our shared commitment to ensure that the service they provide meets the highest standards of safety for drivers and passengers alike.”

A spokesman for Bury Private Hire Drivers’ Association said: “The council’s dedication to reviewing policies demonstrates their understanding of the ever-evolving landscape of the taxi trade and their

commitment to meeting the needs of both drivers and passengers.

“We look forward to continuing our collaboration with the licensing service to create an environment that fosters growth, innovation, and the highest standard of service within the taxi industry.”

The new standards will come into effect for all new applications from January 1.

IPSWICH:

MARSHAL SCHEME CELEBRATES 10 YEARS

The taxi marshal scheme in Ipswich town centre which helps more than 3,500 people every month during nights out is celebrating its 10th anniversary. It was launched to prevent disorder and violence and help queues flow as quickly as possible.

Taxi marshals coordinate taxi queues at the Old Cattle Market bus station every Friday and Saturday from 11.30pm until 4.30am.

The scheme is jointly funded by Ipswich Central, Suffolk Police and Crime Commissioner, Tim Passmore, and Ipswich Borough Council.

Mr Passmore said: “It is extremely important that Ipswich has a reputation as a safe and welcoming town where everyone can come to enjoy a drink, a meal or a trip to the cinema and theatre.

“Making our town centres safe and prosperous encourages people to visit and spend time and money enjoying what Suffolk has to offer. I am happy to financially support this Taxi Marshal initiative. I can see tangible benefits for the constabulary and for the people in Ipswich on weekend evenings.

“People will get home quicker and more safely, and fewer people hanging around when the pubs and clubs close will reduce potential disorder, which in turn will reduce the pressure on the police. Everyone wins.” Terry Baxter, chairman of Ipswich Central, added: “It is of paramount importance that people feel safe whilst out in the evening. Enabling people to find a taxi easily and safely at the end of their evening out is as important as the evening itself. We are delighted to continue to play a role in the Taxi Marshal scheme.”

Borough councillor John Cook added: “The marshals are a great example of a successful partnership working between Ipswich Central, Suffolk Police and Ipswich Borough Council. Huge thanks to Stage Security for ensuring that residents and visitors are marshalled safely from the town into taxis at the end of the evening to get home safely.”

ROUND THE COUNCILS

DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY:

CALLS TO INCREASE NUMBER OF WAVS

Dumfries and Galloway Councillors heard calls on 14 December, to help increase the number of wheelchair-accessible taxis in the region. This comes after it was revealed that there are just three suitable vehicles that can cater to wheelchair users out of a fleet of 265.

There are 215 standard taxis and 50 private hire vehicles serving the region, according to a new council report, however none of them are specifically licensed as wheelchair-accessible vehicles.

This issue has been highlighted by Councillor Davie Stitt, who tabled a motion at the full council meeting calling for action. The motion, seconded by his Labour Councillor colleague Carolyn Wilson, read: "The increased difficulty in securing taxi and private hire services in Dumfries and Galloway is being acutely felt by people with disabilities.

"According to the Dumfries and Galloway Council website, there are only three accessible taxis in the entire region. In 2013 the number stood at only two per cent of the entire taxi fleet.

"It is evident we have not moved on in terms of inclusivity in ten years.

"Earlier this year research conducted by Leonard Cheshire found that two-thirds of disabled people have been unable to secure a taxi or private hire service when required, having a negative impact on their wellbeing and preventing them from accessing work, medical appointments and other essential travel.

"We propose that the officers bring forward a report to the communities committee outlining options that could be taken by the council to help increase the number of accessible taxis in the region."

A council report prepared for the meeting states: "Given increased concern raised in respect of the low number of wheelchair accessible vehicles available throughout the region (there is no wheelchair accessible vehicle licensed for use in Dumfries) – and the difficulty that many are increasingly expressing in respect of being able to book/hail a taxi and/or book a private hire car – the licensing service is currently in the process of establishing a working group."

This working group will discuss and identify challenges to the provision of wheelchair accessible vehicles, with a view to putting findings and recommendations forward to councillors for consideration at a later date.

WILTSHIRE:

TAXI NUMBERS AT PRE-COVID LEVELS

The number of taxi drivers has stabilised in Wiltshire following the decline that occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic. According to a report presented to councillors at the latest Wiltshire Council licensing committee meeting, this trend has now stabilised, and driver numbers have risen by 11% over the last 11 months.

The report was discussed at the meeting on 4 December, and indicated that 30 new licence applications and 114 renewals were processed during October 2023.

The total number of licensed hackney carriage drivers at the end of October was 697. Although these numbers are rising, the report noted they are not rising fast enough to meet the increased SEN demand.

According to the report, there is also a noticeable trend of drivers switching from hackney to private hire, reflecting the lower footfall and business in town centres. Since April 2019, the number of hackney carriage drivers has fallen by 182 and the number of private hire drivers has risen by 30.

Tom Ince, the principal compliance officer presenting the reports, said it must be ensured that improvements in Wiltshire's taxi service remain "viable". He concluded that overall, the figures were "positive news" for Wiltshire.

JERSEY:

EXTRA RANKS FOR CHRISTMAS

Additional taxi facilities were introduced in Jersey for St Aubin and St Helier in time for the Christmas party season. A new weekend taxi rank was set up in St Aubin after a consultation involving parish officials, the Jersey Taxi Drivers Association and the Infrastructure Minister.

The new rank at La Neuve Route operates from 6pm to 12am on Fridays and Saturdays, and from 12pm to 12am on Sundays.

In St Helier, the change has allowed taxis to queue along Wharf Street on Friday and Saturday evenings from 10pm, to ensure a good supply of taxis at peak times at the main St Helier rank at the Weighbridge. This means vehicles are unable to park in Wharf Street after 10pm on Friday and Saturday evenings.

The new arrangements came into effect on 1 December.

ROUND THE COUNCILS

EASTBOURNE:

NEW TAXI WAV REQUIREMENT SCRAPPED

New taxis in Eastbourne will no longer be required to be wheelchair accessible, as part of an effort to encourage more drivers to enter the trade.

On 5 December, Eastbourne Borough Council's licensing committee agreed a number of changes to the authority's licensing guidelines for taxi operators. These changes, which went out to public consultation earlier this year, included the removal of a requirement for any new hackney carriages to be WAVs.

Removing this requirement had seen opposition from Mark Simmons, of the Eastbourne Access Group. Mr Simmons said: "The proposed reversal of a promise, that all new hackney carriages would be wheelchair-accessible, is not only unlawful under the Equalities Act but also unfair on those who rely on such vehicles to travel around the town.

"We are not just talking about residents, but also tourists. As a resort that relies on revenue from tourists, why do we want to make it so difficult, if not impossible, for around 20 per cent of the population - those who have some form of disability - to use taxis. "If Eastbourne truly aspires to be a disabled-friendly and accessible place to live, work, play and visit we need to make sure there is provision and accessibility for everyone who needs and wants to use a taxi."

While committee members expressed sympathy with this view, they ultimately opted to remove the requirement both because the relatively high cost of WAVs has been seen as 'a barrier' to new drivers entering the trade and also because of concerns that such vehicles may not be suitable for all disabled passengers.

Cllr Colin Belsey (Con) said: "I was all for the WAVs originally, but what has happened with Covid and all the other things that have happened in between ... [then] and now, is that we have lost so many drivers and so many cars.

"One of the reasons is ... that the cost of purchasing these vehicles for the disabled is immense. You can't go out and buy a secondhand transit and convert it; it's not that easy. You have to buy something that is actually there and ready and operational."

Cllr Belsey went on to say that he would prefer to see the council offer some form of incentive for drivers to use WAVs, rather than make such a vehicle mandatory. He said this could take the form of a discount in licensing fees, or something similar.

The committee supported this view, with their resolution calling on the council to both incentivise drivers to use WAVs and to work with local groups to encourage their use.

The committee also agreed to a number of other changes, including a new requirement for drivers to sign up to the DBS update service when renewing their licences.

Councillors also agreed to allow drivers to make audio recordings in their taxis, albeit in 'limited circumstances'.

This change is intended to reflect how in-vehicle CCTV (many with audio recording capabilities) recently became a mandatory requirement for all private hire and hackney carriage vehicles.

Other changes include a reworded penalty point scheme and the introduction of a Customer and Driver Charter.

NEWCASTLE u LYME:

TINTED WINDOWS ROW BREAKS OUT

A council row has broken out over calls for blackout glass in the back windows of taxis.

Newcastle Borough Council rules mean taxis must be no more than seven years old and most newer vehicles now have tinted windows in the rear passenger seats. It leaves cabbies having to replace the tinted windows to comply with their council licence.

The situation has led council officers to recommend the use of blackout glass in the back windows. But one councillor has condemned the idea. Cllr Gill Williams said: "Our taxi drivers carry vulnerable children around and we've all been on here long enough to know that things have happened in the back of cars.

"We've got people who carry drugs around in taxis. I will never agree to blacked-out windows in a taxi."

The current rule means taxi drivers must have windows with 35 per cent transmission of light. But cabbies are struggling to comply with the rule.

It comes as Stoke-on-Trent City Council and City of Wolverhampton Council have taxi drivers operating in Newcastle-under-Lyme and neither of those local authorities has the same rule.

Cllr Joan Whieldon added: "We are requiring our taxi drivers to have a car that is no more than seven years old yet the majority of new cars have tinted windows. "We're almost at odds with the manufacturers' benchmark for tinted windows and that seems a tad unfair or unjust."

ROUND THE COUNCILS

COLCHESTER:

FIRMS' MANDATORY CCTV RESPONSES

Colchester cab companies have had their say on a councillor's plan for mandatory cameras in taxis. Labour councillor Dave Harris put forward a motion calling for central government to both fund and legislate mandatory cameras in hackneys and PHVs. Mr Harris revealed that in September one taxi driver had been "slapped around the face" by a customer. Mr Harris said the issue had "got worse over the last few years" and that this measure would also protect the "travelling public".

In response to Mr Harris' plans for central government to fund new cameras, Peyman Oyarhossein, from the Hackney Association Taxis Colchester, said: "Ninty per cent of taxis already have cameras in the car."

He explained that in his experience, the issue of people not paying in taxis did not lead to arrests.

Bridget Everitt, from Panther Cabs, agreed with Mr Harris that cameras should be mandatory "for the safety of the drivers and the customers".

She said: "There are always two sides to every story. But if they've got CCTV – which they all should have anyway – then it can be looked at, only with incidents."

According to Ms Everitt, the reason the council didn't previously move ahead with plans for cameras was because it was looking at gear that was too expensive. Ms Everitt added that the council was previously talking about cameras costing over £400, which is why "drivers were not happy about buying them".

Bridget said the last she heard, the council "was trying to find a provider" to find cameras at a reasonable price before this "latest" development. Mr Harris said "he was not precious about audio" but was open to it being included in the mandatory recording that must have "visual evidence" to meet a "minimum requirement."

Regarding the further debate on whether there should be audio as well video, Bridget said: "My opinion is that you should have both, as it should only be used if needed. It's like how we record all our phone calls, in case there's an incident – and we can report it to the police if necessary."

Richard Ford, owner of Aadvark Travels, said: "If set up correctly, I have not got a problem with it. It's just how the council enforces it."

Mr Ford said most of the drivers he knows have some form of CCTV, but that police have previously told him issues with customers were a "civil matter".

Peyman Oyarhossein added: "I've been cabbng for 29 years since 1994. I've had a few problems but nothing to take too seriously.

"95 per cent of people are fine, it's only the minority that causes the problems."

LICHFIELD:

POLICY SET TO BE REVIEWED

The future of taxi provision in Lichfield and Burntwood is set to be reviewed. Lichfield DC's regulatory and licensing committee heard about plans for hackney carriage and private hire regulation at a meeting on Wednesday 13 December.

A report says the review will focus on a number of factors, including whether to use discounted licence costs to boost the number of hybrid or electric and wheelchair accessible taxis.

Fares will also be considered in order to "take account of inflation and to ensure they remain comparable to those set by neighbouring councils".

The report said: "A meeting was held with licensed drivers and representatives of the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers in October.

"Drivers provided feedback about several matters they would like to see reviewed which form the basis of this recommendation.

"Officers also believe improvements could be made to current policy to ensure that swift and proportionate action can be taken to keep the public safe when conditions are breached. This could be within open and transparent parameters set by the committee."

The review will also consider moving away from a current penalty points system to a more "prescribed list of contraventions" which would have pre-determined sanctions.

Reviews to fees for taxi operators were also discussed by the committee.

Drivers will face an increase of 6% to apply for a new or renewal taxi licence, up from £203 to £216.

Vehicle costs will also be on the up, with hackney carriage licences costing £204 instead of the current £177.50 a year; while private hire vehicle licences will rise from £122.50 to £204 – an increase of 67%.

Meanwhile operators will see a hike to £369 for a five-year licence – an increase on the current fees of £264 for those running up to five vehicles and £200 for those with six or more.

The licensing committee agreed to commence the review in January.



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DISQUALIFICATION

Many of us in our driving career will be at risk of a ban at some point. The best way of avoiding this is to avoid committing an offence! But unfortunately life isn't always as easy as that. Most cases we see are where people have accidentally committed an offence and find themselves tied up in the court process, facing the real prospect of losing their licence, with no idea what to do.

The laws of disqualification are complicated and there are a number of ways in which the court can impose a ban – each with its own laws and procedures. This month, we focus on disqualification to give you the best chance of avoiding a ban if you ever find yourself in that situation.

WHEN WILL I BE AT RISK OF A BAN?

The first point to note is that the police don't have the power to disqualify (*unless the driver is on bail for a very serious offence and it is a condition of bail not to get behind the wheel of a car – but this is very rare).

The only power to disqualify comes from the court – so if your case gets to court it means you could be banned in any of the following ways.

If you are ever at risk of a ban in order try to avoid it, it's best to physically attend the court hearing.

1. Discretionary disqualification

This is where you are banned for the offence itself, instead of receiving points.

Any offence which carries points can also carry a ban if serious enough, but whether you actually receive a ban depends on the Sentencing Guidelines. For example, consider the guidelines for driving without due care and attention:

Level of seriousness	Starting Point	Range	Disqualification/ points
Category 1	Band C fine	Band C fine	Consider disq. OR - 7-9 points
Category 2	Band B fine	Band B fine	5-6 points
Category 3	Band A fine	Band A fine	3-4 points

The court determines the category by looking at how serious it is – including accidents, injury, if the defendant was driving for hire or reward, if the driver was distracted. And if it's serious enough, it'll be considered under Category 1 where the driver may be banned.

The guidelines for speeding are a little easier to follow:

Speed limit (mph)	Recorded speed (mph)		
20	21-30	31-40	41 & above
30	31-40	41-50	51 & above
40	41-55	56-65	66 & above
50	51-65	66-75	76 & above
60	61-80	81-90	91 & above
70	71-90	91-100	101 & above
Range	Band A fine	Band B fine	Band C fine
Points/ Disqualification	3 points	Disqualify 7-28 days or 4-6 points	Disqualify 7-56 days or 6 points

Where someone is at risk of a discretionary ban because of the level of seriousness, the defendant can present mitigation of the offence and of their personal circumstances to persuade the court not to disqualify.

Because these bans are imposed instead of points, it doesn't wipe existing points off the licence.

If the ban is for 56 days or longer, the driver will need to reapply for their licence at the end of the ban but wouldn't need to re-take their test.

These disqualifications remain on the driving record for four years.

2. Mandatory disqualifications

For offences carrying mandatory disqualification, the court must disqualify for a minimum of 12 months. This could increase depending on previous convictions and the seriousness of the offence.

For these offences, you cannot avoid a ban unless you challenge. If you plead guilty or are found guilty, you will be banned.

Offences which carry mandatory disqualification are:

- Drink driving / drug driving
- Failing to provide an evidential specimen
- Dangerous driving
- Racing on a public highway
- Causing serious injury by careless/dangerous driving
- Any offence including death (e.g. causing death by dangerous driving or whilst uninsured)

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

- A second offence within three years of driving a vehicle in a dangerous condition (although note here the minimum ban is six months).

Again, because these bans are imposed instead of points, it doesn't wipe existing points off the licence.

These bans remain on the driving record for 11 years.

As the ban is for over 56 days, the driver will need to reapply for their licence at the end of the ban but would not need to re-take their test unless ordered to do so by the court (e.g. – with dangerous driving a person will be banned until they pass an extended driving test. This is called a disqualification 'until test passed'. These are mandatory for offences of dangerous driving but are very rare for other offences).

3. Totting bans

Where someone gets 12 points they are at risk of a six month 'totting' ban which may be increased if the driver has previously been banned within the last three years.

An important point to note is that the Court will consider the total number of points on your licence at the time, and any accumulated since. So if you had nine points on your licence at the time of a speeding offence, you will still be at risk of a totting ban even though some of those may have expired by the time you actually get into court.

A totting ban is discretionary, and the court has the power not to ban if it agrees that a ban would cause exceptional hardship. So the best way of trying to avoid a totting ban here is to attend the hearing and present an exceptional hardship argument.

If exceptional hardship is not found, the court will ban for a minimum period of six months and the licence is wiped clean of points, although the ban and the convictions will still show.

If the court finds exceptional hardship to exist, it has the power not to disqualify at all (in which case the points will remain valid on the licence but there is simply no ban) or it can find hardship to exist and reduce the period of disqualification: a 'reduced totting ban', in which case the licence is still wiped clean of points.

If the ban is for 56 days or longer, the driver will need to reapply for their licence at the end of the ban, but wouldn't need to retake their test.

These disqualifications remain on the driving record for four years.

REMOVING A DISQUALIFICATION

If you have been banned and you are seeking to remove the disqualification, there are a number of ways of being able to do this:

- 1. Statutory declaration.** If someone didn't know about the court proceedings, they have the right to make a declaration under oath that they were unaware of the hearing, which will set aside the ban and give the defendant the opportunity to present their case.
- 2. Appeal.** If someone did know about the court proceedings but was still banned, they can appeal that decision to the Crown Court within 15 business days of the ban being imposed.
- 3. Reopen.** If the Magistrates' Court has made a mistake, the defendant can apply to the court to reopen the case to rectify that error.
- 4. Application to lift a ban early.** If someone has been banned for more than two years, they are able to make an application to the court to remove the disqualification early after;
 - a. Two years, if the disqualification is for less than four-years;
 - b. One-half of the period of disqualification, if it is for less than ten-years, but not less than four-years;
 - c. Five-years in any other case.

But, which route to take is not always immediately easy to identify, and each option has its own procedures, so always seek legal advice before going down any of these routes.

DRIVING WHILST DISQUALIFIED

One final point on driving whilst on a disqualification. It's serious.

Any person who is caught driving whilst disqualified will be looking at an extension of their disqualification and potentially a prison sentence.

Our best advice is – if you are banned – always avoid getting behind the wheel!

For regular updates on road traffic law follow us on [facebook.com/PattersonLawMotoringSolicitors](https://www.facebook.com/PattersonLawMotoringSolicitors) or twitter.com/Patterson_law_

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Andy Peters

Brighton & Hove Cab Trade Association

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It's not always bad news all the time for the trade here, although it usually seems that way. But for once I was actually able to produce a natural smile without any effort where it's usually a "Hello Councillor" smile (which can sometimes take an effort for some of them). The smile I am referring to here was actually very genuine.

This is because Lewes Council, which is next door to us and has supplied Uber its drivers that predominantly work here 'out-of-sight' & 'out-of-mind' of any respective local enforcement, were due to make what we considered to be a life changing decision for the Brighton & Hove cab trade.

Briefly, as I reported last month, some dim-wit at Lewes Council came up with a proposal to change from having a dual-licence (to drive a hackney & private hire) to having a single licence for each. The council only had the dual licence in place for a relatively short time and now wanted to revert back to single ones. The issue being that there would then be less requirements on the knowledge test to get a private hire licence. The absurd point here is that the knowledge test for Lewes doesn't even need much knowledge.

The proposal was based on a ridiculous claim from the ex-Licensing Chair that Lewes is desperate for drivers as quoted in the local Lewes rag. This was totally untrue and I submitted a four-page document to the council and every Lewes licensing councillor, stating the clear facts on such numbers taken from the government's online local authority stats to dispute that claim in the hope to persuade them to reject the proposal.

I also made the point that should Lewes Council decide to support the proposal then it will become the 'Wolverhampton of the South'.

The consultation which was open to public, actually showed that there was absolutely no support for the proposal so that was a very good start, and I'm sure that many drivers here took part in that. But we all know how things like this go, where there is determination from a council to do whatever it wants, come-what-may. However, in this case I am very pleased that the Lewes licensing councillors took note

and made the decision not to support the proposal meaning the 'dual-licence' remains and the knowledge test is kept as is.

It feels me with horror as to what would have happened if the decision had gone the other way. This is because here in Brighton we have seen a downfall in the number of drivers getting licensed locally over the last few years since Uber arrived and fully promoted potential drivers not to bother getting licensed in Brighton but to instead go down the easy licence route in Lewes. Of course that never meant working in Lewes but predominantly here, plugged in to their earphones whilst being fed directions to get around the city. So, if the decision had gone the other way, then the flood gates into Brighton & Hove from Lewes would have been lifted.

I am also pleased that Lewes Council also adopted, word for word, the 'Driver & Customer Charter' that I wrote for the Brighton & Hove trade a few years ago which is on the councils website.

So, that is a good start to 2024!

DfT BEST PRACTICE GUIDANCE

Firstly, once again, the DfT has side-stepped pre-dominant cross-border hiring with no mention of **Section 46 LGMPA 1976** (thank you Lee Ward and Mark Jennings) and the inherent issues this has caused, and passes the buck (again) by suggesting that cash-strapped councils should work together (on cross-border hiring). It's quite clear that the DfT is clueless about the fact that some LAs are even more clueless.

However, having read through this long-awaited document my own view is that it's bland with nothing radical.

I did note that there was a recommendation for no need for a private hire driver to undertake a knowledge test. Now, I find this quite odd and even dare I say, hypercritical, because within the document it refers to (all) drivers as being 'Professional Drivers'. It also set out the standards that should be required for things like CSE, disability training, vocational training. Yet as far as the DfT is concerned a private hire driver doesn't need to know where they're going?

It actually states:

"Private hire vehicles are not legally available for immediate hiring. To hire a PHV the prospective passenger must go through an operator; the operator should gather sufficient information from the



Brighton & Hove Cab Trade View

passenger to identify the collection and drop-off points, this will enable the driver to check the details of a route before starting a journey and plan or enter it in a navigation system. Given the availability, reliability and ease of use of sat nav systems, licensing authorities should not require any topographical knowledge or navigational tests for PHV drivers."

It's very clear to me that the DfT does not live in the real world and possibly there has been some 'Uberesque' influence on this. Even as a hackney carriage, when I'm undertaking office bookings with a destination, a customer can change their mind, or add a pick-up. To give reliance on a satnav is, in my mind, worrying indeed. As I've stated many times, if I call an engineer to service my boiler, I don't expect them to have to consult a book on how to carry out the job. Also, is it expected that customers should put their lives in the hands of someone who is glancing at a satnav, or in the case of most Uber drivers, plugged into earphones listening for which turning to take? Does the DfT actually think it's 100% safe to promote the use of navigation systems instead of the driver having the knowledge to know where they are going? Perhaps I'm too old school.

Intended Use Policy

One point that has interested me is the mention of an '*Intended Use Policy*' as I have been a strong advocate of this, although unfortunately this only applies to hackney carriages. It is however good to note that it stated:

"Licensing authorities should require an applicant for a taxi driver licence to declare that they intend to work predominately within the licensing authority's area."

Again, I refer the DfT to Section 46 LGMPA 1976.

We have had an '*Intended Use Policy*' in Brighton & Hove for a number of years and I was able to persuade other neighbouring LAs to do the same, as we found that 'Out-of-Town' hackneys were predominantly working here under Uber and not servicing the ranks and streets of their respective areas.

However, it's quite interesting that it went further, stating:

"The residential address provided by the application should be considered in assessing the likelihood of this declaration being adhered to when assessing an application for a taxi driver licence."

This brings to mind where I think at one time there was a local byelaw (long rescinded) that stated a driver/proprietor of a hackney carriage must live within five

miles of the local post office. This was probably to prevent the over working of the horse.

There are other sections which I don't have room to go into here, but the BPG contains a point on having to fill in a form for a vehicle safety check for each driver when they use the car. Sanctions would be enforced if this form could not be produced. Yeah right... I can just see Wolverhampton adopting this for their 30,000+ plus cars.

Age Limits

References to age limits state:

"The setting of an arbitrary age limit may be inappropriate, counterproductive and result in higher costs to the trade and ultimately passengers"

"Licensing authorities should not impose age limits for the licensing of vehicles, instead they should consider more targeted requirements to meet their policy objectives on emissions, safety rating and increasing wheelchair accessible provision where this is low"

Yet again this issue of predominant cross-border hiring comes up where one LA has an age limit and another doesn't, so once more the report is very vague and not at all helpful. Also, I have never been a fan of an age limit, within reason; as long as the vehicle carries a current MOT, can pass a compliance test and is presentable, then why allow councils to impose restricting age limits?

Fire extinguishers

Lastly, we recently got the council to review the condition of where a fire extinguisher must be carried, although this was only possible for private hire vehicles so the condition was dropped for those. But, as it was a byelaw for hackney carriages, we were told the byelaw would need to be changed, so could be changed, but this would be a slow process. We added that if the condition remained then the council must provide adequate vehicle fire training, which of course was never going to happen.

However, the DfT's BPG has come to the rescue as it has eliminated having to carry them, which is quite sensible.

Mind you, I was set to battle with the council about being trained to put out a vehicle fire as I would have insisted, they demonstrated with an EV outside the town hall ... and we all know how those can go up!

Have a great New Year!

THE NATIONAL HACKNEY FARES TABLE

JANUARY 2024

NATIONAL AVERAGE 2 MILE
HACKNEY FARE TARIFF ONE
IS NOW £7.23

RISE IN 2024	
RISE IN 2023	
RISE IN 2022	
RISE IN 2021	RISE IN 2015
RISE IN 2020	RISE IN 2014
RISE IN 2019	RISE IN 2013
RISE IN 2018	RISE IN 2011
RISE IN 2017	RISE IN 2010
RISE IN 2016	RISE IN 2008
NO SET FARE	

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POSITION	TARIFF ONE 2 MILE FARE	
	COUNCIL	
20	CLACKMANNAN	£8.50
21	CHELTENHAM	£8.40
22	EAST SUFFOLK (NORTH)	£8.40
23	EDINBURGH	£8.40
24	LEEDS	£8.40
25	MID SUSSEX	£8.40
26	SOUTHAMPTON	£8.40
27	TONBRIDGE & MALLING	£8.40
28	WATFORD	£8.40
29	HUNTINGDONSHIRE	£8.30
30	LINCOLN	£8.30
31	UTTLESFORD	£8.30
32	BCP	£8.20
33	BROXBOURNE	£8.20
34	CARRICK	£8.20
35	EAST HERTS	£8.20
36	GLASGOW	£8.20
37	HART	£8.20
38	MANCHESTER	£8.20
39	RESTORMEL	£8.20
40	WOKINGHAM	£8.20
41	WORTHING	£8.20
42	FOREST OF DEAN	£8.13
43	BRENTWOOD	£8.10
44	BRIGHTON & HOVE	£8.10
45	PLYMOUTH	£8.10
46	SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE	£8.10
47	VALE OF WHITE HORSE	£8.10
48	MOLE VALLEY	£8.08
49	CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE	£8.05
50	ARUN	£ 8.00
51	BRECKLAND	£8.00
52	COVENTRY	£8.00
53	MAIDSTONE	£8.00
54	NOTTINGHAM	£8.00
55	RIBBLE VALLEY	£8.00
56	RUSHCLIFFE	£8.00
57	TANDRIDGE	£8.00
58	TORRIDGE	£8.00
59	TUNBRIDGE WELLS	£8.00
60	YORK	£8.00
61	ISLE OF MAN	£7.90
62	ROTHER	£7.90
63	SWALE	£7.90
64	ADUR	£7.80
65	BRACKNELL FOREST	£7.80
66	EASTBOURNE	£7.80
67	HASTINGS	£7.80
68	NORTH SOMERSET	£7.80
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80	EAST DEVON	£7.68
81	WILTSHIRE	£7.68
82	SHETLAND ISLES	£7.62
83	BASINGSTOKE & DEANE	£7.60
84	BRISTOL	£7.60

POSITION	TARIFF ONE 2 MILE FARE	
	COUNCIL	
85	EAST AYRSHIRE	£7.60
86	FIFE	£7.60
87	KERRIER	£7.60
88	MONMOUTHSHIRE	£7.60
89	SOUTH SOMERSET	£7.60
90	STEVENAGE	£7.60
91	TEST VALLEY	£7.60
92	THREE RIVERS	£7.60
93	WEYMOUTH & PORTLAND	£7.60
94	WINCHESTER	£7.60
95	TORBAY	£7.51
96	BATH & N. E. SOMERSET	£7.50
97	CARDIFF	£7.50
98	CHESTER	£7.50
99	EXETER	£7.50
100	IPSWICH	£7.50
101	MID SUFFOLK	£7.50
102	MILTON KEYNES	£7.50
103	NORTH HERTS	£7.50
104	OXFORD CITY	£7.50
105	SOUTH NORFOLK	£7.50
106	TAMESIDE	£7.50
107	BIRMINGHAM	£7.40
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111	EASTLEIGH	£7.40
112	GLOUCESTER	£7.40
113	LEICESTER	£7.40
114	LEWES	£7.40
115	NORTH TYNESIDE	£7.40
116	PORTSMOUTH UA	£7.40
117	SOLIHULL	£7.40
118	SOUTH AYRSHIRE	£7.40
119	TEWKESBURY	£7.40
120	WEST OXFORD	£7.40
121	NEWARK & SHERWOOD	£7.37
122	NEW FOREST	£7.35
123	ASHFORD	£7.30
124	BLACKBURN	£7.30
125	CAMBRIDGE CITY	£7.30
126	DARTFORD	£7.30
127	DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL	£7.30
128	NORTH DEVON	£7.30
129	NORWICH	£7.30
130	SHROPSHIRE	£7.30
131	SOUTH CAMBRIDGE	£7.30
132	MORAY	£7.26
133	TEIGNBRIDGE	£7.26
134	NUNEATON & BEDWORTH	£7.25
135	BASILDON	£7.20
136	DERBY	£7.20
137	DORSET	£7.20
138	GOSPORT	£7.20
139	HARLOW	£7.20
140	NORTH EAST LINCOLNSHIRE	£7.20
141	REIGATE & BANSTEAD	£7.20
142	SLOUGH	£7.20
143	STOCKPORT	£7.20
144	WEST NORTHANTS	£7.20
145	WEST SUFFOLK	£7.20
146	CHESTERFIELD	£7.16
147	TAMWORTH	£7.14
148	ARGYLL & BUTE	£7.13
149	CANNOCK CHASE	£7.10

POSITION	TARIFF ONE 2 MILE FARE	
	COUNCIL	
1	LONDON (HEATHROW)	£14.20
2	TfL	£10.60
3	EPSOM & EWELL	£10.60
4	GUILDFORD	£10.00
5	LUTON AIRPORT	£9.70
6	CARADON	£9.60
7	NORTH CORNWALL	£9.60
8	ELMBRIDGE	£9.50
9	JERSEY	£9.26
10	ST ALBANS	£9.15
11	READING	£9.00
12	MIDLOTHIAN	£8.80
13	GUERNSEY	£8.70
14	SEVENOAKS	£8.70
15	WOKING	£8.70
16	WEST BERKSHIRE	£8.60
17	PENWITH	£8.52
18	GREAT YARMOUTH	£8.50
19	STROUD	£8.50

POSITION	TARIFF ONE 2 MILE FARE	
	COUNCIL	
150	COTSWOLD	£7.10
151	CRAWLEY	£7.10
152	DOVER	£7.10
153	HIGHLAND	£7.10
154	ISLE OF WIGHT	£7.10
155	MENDIP	£7.10
156	OLDHAM	£7.10
157	RUGBY	£7.10
158	WINDSOR & MAIDENHEAD	£7.10
159	RUNNYMEDE	£7.10
160	HARBOROUGH	£7.09
161	BABERGH	£7.00
162	BROMSGROVE	£7.00
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172	MEDWAY	£7.00
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175	SWANSEA	£7.00
176	WELWYN HATFIELD	£7.00
177	WESTERN ISLES	£7.00
178	SANDWELL	£6.92
179	BRAINTREE	£6.90
180	BURY	£6.90
181	COLCHESTER	£6.90
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187	BROXTOWE	£6.80
188	CEREDIGION	£6.80
189	EAST CAMBRIDGESHIRE	£6.80
190	EAST LINDSEY	£6.80
191	KINGSTON-UPON-HULL	£6.80
192	LIVERPOOL	£6.80
193	MANSFIELD	£6.80
194	MID DEVON	£6.80
195	NORTH KESTEVEN	£6.80
196	NORTH NORTHANTS	£6.80
197	NORTH WARWICK	£6.80
198	SEDGEMOOR	£6.80
199	SOMERSET WEST & TAUNTON	£6.80
200	S. LANARKSHIRE (CAMBUS/R'GLEN)	£6.80
201	SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE	£6.80
202	SOUTHEND ON SEA	£6.80
203	TENDRING	£6.80
204	TRAFFORD	£6.80
205	VALE OF GLAMORGAN	£6.80
206	WEST LOTHIAN	£6.80
207	WIGAN	£6.80
208	WIRRAL	£6.80
209	WOLVERHAMPTON	£6.80
210	DUNDEE CITY	£6.79
211	CHARNWOOD	£6.75
212	WALSALL	£6.75
213	ABERDEENSHIRE	£6.74
214	MALVERN HILLS	£6.72

POSITION	TARIFF ONE 2 MILE FARE	
	COUNCIL	
215	ANGUS	£6.70
216	BLABY	£6.70
217	CONGLETON	£6.70
218	EAST DUNBARTONSHIRE	£6.70
219	FYLDE	£6.70
220	OADBY & WIGSTON	£6.70
221	SHEFFIELD	£6.70
222	SOUTH LAKELAND	£6.70
223	ABERDEEN CITY	£6.60
224	CONWY	£6.60
225	DUDLEY	£6.60
226	EDEN	£6.60
227	FAREHAM	£6.60
228	FOLKESTONE & HYTHE	£6.60
229	HAVANT	£6.60
230	LANCASTER	£6.60
231	NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE	£6.60
232	ROCHFORD	£6.60
233	S. LANARKSHIRE (E. KILBRIDE)	£6.60
234	SOUTH TYNESIDE	£6.60
235	STRATFORD ON AVON	£6.60
236	SUNDERLAND	£6.60
237	WAKEFIELD	£6.60
238	BARROW IN FURNESS	£6.50
239	BASSETLAW	£6.50
240	CALDERDALE	£6.50
241	DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY	£6.50
242	EREWASH	£6.50
243	GEDLING	£6.50
244	HALTON	£6.50
245	LUTON	£6.50
246	ORKNEY	£6.50
247	ROSSENDALE	£6.50
248	SEFTON	£6.50
249	STAFFORD	£6.50
250	STIRLING	£6.50
251	TORFAEN	£6.50
252	DONCASTER	£6.48
253	HYNDBURN	£6.42
254	BLAENAU GWENT	£6.40
255	CASTLE POINT	£6.40
256	COUNTY OF HEREFORD	£6.40
257	CREWE & NANTWICH	£6.40
258	DERBYSHIRE DALES	£6.40
259	ELLESMERE PORT	£6.40
260	HINCKLEY & BOSWORTH	£6.40
261	MELTON	£6.40
262	NORTH AYRSHIRE	£6.40
263	NORTHUMBERLAND	£6.40
264	WEST LINDSEY	£6.40
265	WYRE	£6.38
266	WARRINGTON	£6.35
267	PERTH & KINROSS	£6.33
268	ANGLESEY	£6.30
269	BARNSELY	£6.30
270	CLYDEBANK	£6.30
271	DARLINGTON	£6.30
272	SOUTH HOLLAND	£6.30
273	SOUTH RIBBLE	£6.30
274	ST HELENS	£6.30
275	REDDITCH	£6.25
276	THANET	£6.21
277	CHORLEY	£6.20
278	COPELAND	£6.20
279	EAST SUFFOLK (SOUTH)	£6.20

POSITION	TARIFF ONE 2 MILE FARE	
	COUNCIL	
280	FALKIRK	£6.20
281	FENLAND	£6.20
282	NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE	£6.20
283	SPELTHORNE	£6.20
284	WYCHAVON	£6.20
285	RENFREWSHIRE	£6.15
286	WYRE FOREST	£6.14
287	BRADFORD	£6.10
288	S. LANARKSHIRE (CLYDESDALE)	£6.10
289	NORTHERN IRELAND	£6.06
290	SCOTTISH BORDERS	£6.05
291	ALLERDALE	£6.00
292	BLACKPOOL	£6.00
293	BOLTON	£6.00
294	BUCKINGHAMSHIRE	£6.00
295	DENBIGHSHIRE	£6.00
296	DUMBARTON & VALE OF LEVEN	£6.00
297	EAST STAFFORDSHIRE	£6.00
298	GATESHEAD	£6.00
299	GWYNEDD	£6.00
300	KIRKLEES	£6.00
301	KNOWSLEY	£6.00
302	NORTH WEST LEICESTER	£6.00
303	PETERBOROUGH	£6.00
304	POWYS	£6.00
305	PRESTON	£6.00
306	ROTHERHAM	£6.00
307	SALFORD	£6.00
308	TELFORD & WREKIN	£6.00
309	THURROCK	£6.00
310	WARWICK	£6.00
311	STOKE-ON-TRENT UA	£5.90
312	VALE ROYAL	£5.90
313	EAST RIDING	£5.85
314	FLINTSHIRE	£5.80
315	LICHFIELD	£5.80
316	MERTHYR TYDFIL	£5.80
317	NEATH PORT TALBOT	£5.80
318	NORTH NORFOLK	£5.80
319	RHONDDA CYNON TAFF	£5.80
320	NORTH EAST DERBYSHIRE	£5.75
321	CAERPHILLY	£5.70
322	ASHFIELD	£5.60
323	MIDDLESBROUGH	£5.60
324	NORTH LANARKSHIRE	£5.60
325	S. LANARKSHIRE (HAMILTON)	£5.60
326	WREXHAM	£5.60
327	NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME	£5.55
328	INVERCLYDE	£5.54
329	EPPING FOREST	£5.50
330	PENDLE	£5.50
331	REDCAR & CLEVELAND	£5.50
332	ROCHDALE	£5.50
333	HARTLEPOOL	£5.40
334	SOUTH KESTEVEN	£5.30
335	STAFFS MOORLANDS	£5.20
336	WEST LANCASHIRE	£5.20
337	STOCKTON ON TEES	£5.10
338	CHERWELL	£5.08
339	BURNLEY	£5.00
340	BOLSOVER	£4.60
341	MALDON	£
342	RUTLAND	£
343	SOUTH DERBYSHIRE	£
344	WEST DEVON	£

from Ireland



TAXIS FOR IRELAND COALITION TO ADDRESS SUPPLY SHORTAGE

A newly-formed Taxis for Ireland Coalition has called on the Government to address the taxi supply shortage. The coalition was formed by six organisations from the tourism, hospitality and enterprise sectors.

They wrote to Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, and the Transport Minister, Eamon Ryan, to appeal to the Government to acknowledge the ongoing crisis, as they say the “extreme shortage” of taxis in cities, towns and rural areas across the country has been affecting the Irish public, economy, tourism, and hospitality businesses for years.

Seven out of ten people across the country find it difficult to get home from pubs and restaurants in their area, surveys conducted by the group found. Some publicans are even operating an “informal taxi service” to get customers home.

Coalition members, such as the Restaurants Association of Ireland, Uber, Bolt, and the Vintners Federation of Ireland, have undertaken four surveys this year, which led to the conclusion that the public has a very poor view of the availability of taxis.

More than 63% of publicans described their local taxi service as either poor or non-existent, a survey finds. Another survey finds that 68% of 1,000 people surveyed who either took or attempted to take a taxi in the last three months said that action should be taken to increase the number of taxis.

From a survey of more than 1,000 people living in urban Ireland, 58% agree there is a taxi shortage in Ireland. Meanwhile, 60% of regular taxi users were doing so for night-time socialising.

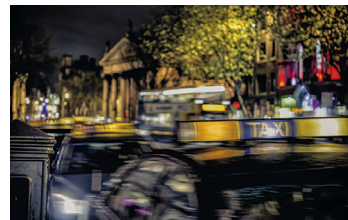
Some 81% believe the availability of public transport at off-peak periods is poor or average.

The coalition say taxi services are a significant part of Ireland's public transport, particularly during peak times and busy social periods such as the approaching Christmas season.

Although the Coalition has acknowledged the work of the National Transport Authority in this area, such as a driver recruitment campaign or increasing fares, they have not resulted in increasing taxi availability, which should be treated as a matter of urgency, they added.

TAXI BOSSES SLAM PLANS FOR DRIVERS TO ‘POLICE’ DUBLIN CENTRE

Taxi industry leaders have criticised proposals for cab drivers to keep revellers safe by helping to police the capital. Dublin City Council officials intended to



fully pedestrianise new civic space planned in the city but the November 23 riots sparked a re-think. The authority may now assess if taxis can be allowed into areas earmarked to be pedestrian zones at night to maintain “passive surveillance”.

Administrators believe cabbies occupying the city will guard against leaving large, empty spaces for anti-social behaviour. The policy change recently emerged during a Dublin Chamber of Commerce briefing about the proposed City Centre Transport Plan.

But taxi industry leader Vinny Kearns warned while taxi drivers have historically been the “eyes and ears” for gardai, they cannot be expected to police the city. Mr Kearns, of Expert Taxis, told Dublin Live: “Taxis might have a place in policing but their main job is getting people from A to B. They can be the eyes and ears of gardai and report things to them, but they cannot be expected to police the city.”

“The safety of Dublin city centre is for gardai but the guards have been grossly under resourced.”

Under Dublin City Centre Transport Plan, cars would be banned from some city centre roads to free up more space for pedestrians, cyclists and buses.

Dublin Chamber spokesperson Aebhrich McGibney said: “The debate about the use of public space once it has been pedestrianised is an important one in the context of the riots. There certainly is a piece around the safety in the city and passive surveillance.”

Dublin City Council’s head of traffic, Brendan O’Brien, said: “It may be better to have taxis in an area so people are not walking through a big empty space.”

The Irish Parking Association chairperson, Keith Gavin, warned that activity has decreased since the coronavirus pandemic started in 2020 and businesses are relating this directly to the increase in anti-social behaviour. He said: “We have seen what has happened since Covid as the city centre footfall reduced. As the level of activity in the area reduced, the safety of the city centre deteriorated rapidly.”

WORLDWIDE TAXI FOCUS

from Japan



POLICE ARREST TOKYO CABBIE AFTER RUNNING OVER A PIGEON

A Tokyo taxi driver was arrested for deliberately driving into a flock of pigeons and killing one, the police said on December 5, reportedly because he was angry that the birds were on the road.

Atsushi Ozawa, 50, "used his car to kill a common pigeon, which is not a game animal" in November, and was arrested for violating wildlife protection laws, a Tokyo police spokesman said.

Ozawa sped off from a traffic light when it turned green, ploughing his taxi into the bevy of birds at a speed of 60kmh, local media said.

A shocked passer-by reported the incident. Tokyo police had a veterinarian perform a post-mortem and determined the pigeon's cause of death was traumatic shock, according to local media.

"Roads belong to humans, so the pigeons should have dodged out of the way," Ozawa was quoted by local media as telling investigators.

Police said nearby CCTV cameras and the taxi's dashboard camera had captured the incident.

Police added that Ozawa's behaviour was "highly malicious" and as a professional driver, he should be held to a higher ethical standard on the road.

new law where patients wishing to reimburse part of the cost of a taxi ride to a doctor under the insurance will have to book a car through private internet platforms, which them-

selves will determine an appropriate taxi firm and offer to make a joint trip with other patients.

At the same time, the passenger will be reimbursed a smaller amount for the trip if he refuses to travel with another patient in the absence of an appropriate certificate and if symptoms of another passenger prevent them from being in the same car.

Currently, the state insurance reimburses 55% of the cost of the trip. The purpose of the new measure is to reduce budget expenditure by "encouraging joint trips." According to the government, joint trips have saved €34m in transportation costs in 2022. However, such trips accounted for only 15% of the total, which is why authorities are trying to expand this practice.



from Malaysia



MALAYSIAN CABBIE CHEATS DEATH AS SEAT BELT SAVES HIM FROM KNIFE

A PH driver cheated death when a robber's knife was deflected by his seat belt. The driver, 65, was carrying a boy, 13,

in the state of Kedah, north Malaysia. The two can be seen chatting in footage taken from inside the vehicle before the boy reaches over and pulls out a knife to take money the cabbie has drawn from his pocket for change.

Fortunately, the knife struck the taxi driver's seat belt and didn't penetrate his skin. The cabbie can be seen struggling to fight off the assailant and biting him as the teenager tries to steal the money from his hand. The boy ran off but was located and arrested. A 25cm knife was recovered from the victim's car.



from France



FRENCH CABBIES BLOCK HIGHWAYS IN NATIONWIDE PROTESTS

Unionised taxi drivers blocked main roads in major cities across France on 11 December, taking 'go-slow' protests against the new Social Security Finance law and causing severe traffic disruptions.

The cabbies organised the demonstrations against the new requirement to simultaneously transport several patients going to doctors and a special procedure for booking such trips.

They blocked roads in Marseille, Toulouse, Lille, Bayonne, Lyon, Bordeaux and other cities.

The reason for the protest relates to Article 30 of the

THE BERNIE THE BOOK COLUMN

2024 – THINGS CAN ONLY GET BETTER

As 2024 dawns, Bernie the Book always gives you the low-down on ante-post wagers for the coming year. Last year I tipped four winners, not bad for events which culminated as late as last October! Have an interest on these now.

JANUARY

AFC/NFC

49-ers 6/4 – Ravens 2/1

This year's Superbowl will be between the two giants above, and with Lamar in imperious form, fireworks!

FEBRUARY

SUPERBOWL

49-ers 5/2

One year on from their heartache in the NFC championship game, QB Brock Purdy will be MVP

FEBRUARY

SIX NATIONS

France 11/8

In a contest which only realistically involves three teams, take Allez Le France to make up for October's woes

MARCH

CHELTENHAM-ARKLE

Marine Nationale 6/4

The novice chasing division will come down to O'Connell's Nationale with Willie in attendance but not winning

MARCH

CHELTENHAM – STAYERS

Teahupoo 4/1

Another one for the Irish with last year's favourite redeeming himself and taking the 3-mile hurdle crown

MARCH

CHELTENHAM – GOLD CUP

Gallopín des Champs 7/4

I had been shouting from the rooftops about Elliott's horse since November but this year's Savile left only one winner

APRIL

WORLD SNOOKER

Ronnie O'Sullivan 9/2

At 48, Rocket Ronnie still is the man you want to have your money on to win an eighth world crown

MAY

EUROPA LEAGUE

Bayer Leverkusen 7/1

Time will show the world what a great manager Xabi Alonso is (as Madrid beckons) but the Europa will do for now

MAY

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Bayern Munich 9/2

With Man City in a malaise, Europe's top team will be FC Hollywood with Harry Kane marshalling the troops

JUNE

EURO 2024

Portugal 8/1

Post Ronaldo (hopefully) take a team brimming with Premier League talent to come of age

JUNE

T20 WORLD CUP

South Africa 8/1

Last year's 50-over version saw the Proteas take great strides in India; this year's T20 might be the result

JULY

WIMBLEDON

Jannik Sinner 12/1

Time for a change at tennis's top table and this serve and volleyer with Italian heritage will go all the way

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Hire Purchase Representative Example*

Monthly	£938.77	Flat Interest Rate	5.9%	Cash Price	£43,995.00
Deposit	£500	Term (months)	60	Completion Fee	£10
Total Cost of Credit	£12,331.20	Representative APR	12.4%	Total Amount Payable	£56,826.20

Based on hire purchase agreement, final option to purchase fee may apply, subject to finance provider. Allied Vehicles Ltd is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority for credit broking and insurance distribution activities under reference number 309873. We act as a credit broker sourcing credit from lenders. Lenders will pay us a fee for these introductions. Offers are subject to status, terms and conditions.

Pricing and vehicle information correct at time of printing.

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Hire Purchase Representative Example*

Monthly	£919.81	Flat Interest Rate	6.6%	Cash Price	£41,995.00
Deposit	£500	Term (months)	60	Completion Fee	£10
Total Cost of Credit	£13,193.60	Representative APR	12.4%	Total Amount Payable	£55,688.60

Based on hire purchase agreement, final option to purchase fee may apply, subject to finance provider. Allied Vehicles Ltd is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority for credit broking and insurance distribution activities under reference number 309873. We act as a credit broker sourcing credit from lenders. Lenders will pay us a fee for these introductions. Offers are subject to status, terms and conditions.
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