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## 1 *Introduction*

1.1 Guidelines issued by the Department for Transport state that consultation should be undertaken with the following:

- all those working in the market;
- consumer and passenger (including disabled) groups;
- groups which represent those passengers with special needs;
- the Police;
- local interest groups such as hospitals or visitor attractions; and
- a wide range of transport stakeholders such as rail/bus/coach operators and transport managers.

## 2 *Indirect Consultation*

2.1 In terms of direct consultation, letters were sent out to a number of individuals and organisations to find out their view of the industry, thus fulfilling the DfT guidelines.

2.2 **Leeds City Council** provided written responses from a number of representatives. A consultee stated that the queuing of taxis on New Station Street was causing a nuisance to residents and a blockage to buses and that as of yet no taxis waited on North Concourse side of the Station. More hackney carriages are required near Civic buildings in Leeds (for example the Town Hall, Civic Hall, and Carriageworks).

2.3 Another consultee felt that there was generally an adequate supply of both Hackney and private hire vehicles. It was considered that the private hire vehicle gave the impression of being old, dirty and poorly maintained and badly driven. Further training for taxi drivers was considered by a large number of respondents as a good idea to enhance the driver attitude. It was felt by one consultee that the number of private hire firms seem to have increased, however it was felt that there is still a need for more hackney carriages. Hackney carriages were described as "proper" taxis.

2.4 The correspondent stated that improvements to the taxi service in Leeds should include a clear fare structure and for signage to be larger and more prominent. It was also mentioned that taxis do not integrate with other public transport.

- 2.5 It was suggested that a number of licenses should be issued specifically to women taxi drivers for women who use taxi on their own.
- 2.6 One respondent felt that a service specifically designed for the elderly and infirm should be introduced, where drivers are trained on how to assist them in and out of the car. Another respondent felt that disabled accessibility, particularly in private hire vehicles is very poor.
- 2.7 It was also considered that drivers' knowledge of the area could be improved as it can leave customers with an unsettled feeling and private hire vehicles should be metered to avoid conflict over fares.
- 2.8 **Strategic Partnership & Service Development Team from Leeds City Council** felt that the local private car hire service was prompt and efficient but it needed to enhance the communication and social skill. It was highlighted that service for the elderly and children travelling without an adult should be provided by helping the person out of the house and escorting them into the car.
- 2.9 The **Area Management Officer from Leeds City Council** recently raised issues regarding taxis from the Pudsey & Swinnow forum. There included the following:
- there was a huge demand for taxis for people to come home from Leeds city centre on Saturday evenings;
  - service from Leeds Bradford airport was considered as very bad, especially early in the morning.
  - Acquiring a wheelchair accessible vehicle is difficult. Getting a wheelchair accessible private hire vehicle was felt to be impossible.
  - the standard of driving was regarded negatively, with some driving too fast.
  - the forum felt that private hire vehicles seem to 'charge what they want' and that all taxis should be metered.
- 2.10 **Leeds Chamber of Commerce** felt that the use of saloon vehicles and not 'black cabs' were not adequate. The correspondent expressed his concerns about the saloon vehicle. First of all, it projected a poor image for first time visitors to the city. Secondly, it did not provide good space for luggage and did not provide the adequate passenger capacity (3 verses 5 in a cab). In addition, it was stated that taxis often do not pick up from the street which means that the quality of service away from taxi ranks could only be described as very poor. The quality of 'knowledge' of the city was not particularly good, and often left the customer with an uncertain/unsettled feeling.
- 2.11 **A representative of a person with a disability** felt the hackney carriage supply was not adequate. It was stated that all the taxi firms were at some time unreliable even if it had

been booked well ahead of time. The consultee said that there was a shortage of taxis between 4pm and 6pm due partly to its being a shift change over time for drivers and partly due to congestion in the city at this time. Basic disability training is required for taxi drivers. This can be as simple as making sure that the telephone operator sends to appropriate vehicle or making it compulsory that wheelchair accessible vehicles have fully working ramps at all times.

- 2.12 The taxi service on evenings and weekend were regarded as particularly problematic.
- 2.13 It was felt that a rivalry between hackney carriages and private hire was not ideal, but was necessary to keep a competitive market and be of benefit to the public.
- 2.14 **Leeds Involvement** represents the Alliance of Services Users and Carers and other disabled and older peoples groups. Taxi transport is vital to many disabled people and carers, attending meetings through Leeds Involvement and our service user groups.
- 2.15 Service users reported that there was a shortage of wheelchair accessible taxis at peak times and found it difficult to get taxis on the outskirts of Leeds, especially at night.
- 2.16 The attitudes of some drivers were described as problematic. More disability training is required including correct use of the ramps. There reports of ramps being placed to steeply against the taxi causing damage to the chair.
- 2.17 Taxi fares were considered too high.
- 2.18 Leeds Involvement suggested that taxi drivers could carry a sheet to cover their seats when a carrying a hearing or guide dog.
- 2.19 **Strategic Partnership & Service Development Team (Older People and Disabled People)** officer stated that private hire vehicle is his preferred choice over hackney carriages because they meet more of his needs. In general private hire vehicles service is prompt and efficient. However, some drivers lack social skills which are important when offering a service to the public.
- 2.20 The consultee would like to see services specifically geared to the needs of the elderly/infirm would be a good idea. Taxi drivers should not honk its horn and sit outside the house waiting for the person to come out, instead drivers should be willing to spend time to help people out of the house, make sure they locked the door, escort them into the car, help with fastening seat belt, and then do all this in reverse at the other end of the journey. In many cases it would probably be helpful to be able to specify either a male or female driver.

- 2.21 **Access Committee for Leeds** felt that clear that Hackney Carriages have a critical role to play in the transport needs of a significant number of disabled people in Leeds. This role is defined as being the only accessible door-to-door transport services that can be provided 24 hours a day 7 days a week.
- 2.22 The reliance on hackney carriages by disabled people must reflect the diversity of needs and requirements. There are occasions when wheelchair users have been refused a service because of health and safety, or the fact the wheelchair will not physically fit into the cab.
- 2.23 It was stated that during periods of high demand, individual wheelchair users who require accessible cabs might have to wait up to 3 hours for an appropriate cab. This also occurred for those wheelchair users who lived in the suburbs of Leeds.
- 2.24 With regards to private hire disabled people who required accessible cabs have a very limited choice of taxis whilst disabled people who did not require accessible vehicles have a greater choice and availability to meet their transport needs.
- 2.25 It was stated that there was apparent difference in the standards of service for disabled people. Access Committee for Leeds had assisted to identify the need for peer-led disability and diversity training for all drivers and re-training for drivers who failed in the duties under the Disability Equality Legislation.
- 2.26 Ranks across the centre of Leeds were felt to be insufficient to meet the needs of the public.
- 2.27 The correspondent said that based on the needs and diversity of disabled people it is difficult to provide one type of vehicle to meet all needs. The Local Authorities Licensing Panel and Licensing Section continue to apply its existing Best Practice and logical approach to this issue and work to develop a fleet within Leeds that was diverse and have the volume and ability to meet the needs of all the people of Leeds.
- 2.28 Improved publicity around the transport needs of people with disabilities needs to be fully evaluated.
- 2.29 It was stated that there seemed to be little solid evidence of a truly meaningful approach to developing an inclusive and integrated transport service.
- 2.30 In addition Access Committee for Leeds suggested some of the following actions;
- allow wheelchair accessible Hackney and private Hire cabs to access the whole bus lane network across Leeds;

- a Taxicard scheme similar to the London model to address this inequality within Leeds
- Drop off points across all pedestrianised area, this is especially relevant across the expanse of Leeds City Centre
- Under the Disability Equality Act 2005 and associated equality legislation, the Local Authority has a clear duty to meaningfully involve disabled people in such key transport considerations.

- 2.31 A **verbal response** to the written consultation was given on the 11/12/07 over the phone from a wheelchair user, who was passed the letter through a disability organisation who had received the consultation letter.
- 2.32 The consultee found that even wheel chair accessible taxis are often difficult to access. Due to the size of his wheelchair and his height, wheelchair accessible taxis are often too small, so has to use a minibus taxi.
- 2.33 The availability of taxis is a problem due to Leeds Education contracts with taxis. This means that between 8-10am and 2-5pm it is virtually impossible to get a taxi. When you do book a taxi, many operators will not guarantee a pick up time for wheelchair accessible vehicles.
- 2.34 It was felt that there needs to be more taxis which frequent taxi ranks in the outer areas such as Wetherby. Wetherby has a population of twenty-one thousand, but there are rarely any hackney carriages seen, instead taxis tend to cluster in Leeds and Harrogate.
- 2.35 In terms of the image of the trade, the vehicle type and quality need to be more accessible to different types of wheelchair, taking in to account of people who are tall! Driver attitudes can be poor, with occasions where the wheelchair has not been secured. It was suggested that disability awareness training was required. It was questioned as to whether the problems people with disabilities face was a training issue or compliance issue.
- 2.36 It was thought that taxi fares were in line with neighbouring cities.
- 2.37 Finally, it was stated that the transport integration of taxis with other types of public transport worked reasonably well.

- 2.38 **Connect in the North** provided a response regarding taxi provision in Leeds. The organisation has been involved in a campaign called "Taxi Get it Right!" in January 2007. The campaign involved questionnaires being sent to 80 people in Leeds.
- 2.39 The questionnaires found that taxis and private hire vehicles have been late collecting people or not turn up at all. Many people in the campaign group find it frustrating that taxi firms will not guarantee the times of a pre-booked taxi even if its booked days in advance.
- 2.40 In terms of the image of the trade, there were reports of taxi drivers being rude to passengers, and there was one incident of racism. Another person reported that taxi drivers often refer to them as a "wheelchair" rather than a "wheelchair user". It was believed that drivers need more training on appropriate language and disability awareness. There is also a need for taxi operators to be trained, so that they are more helpful and honest if they can't get a taxi in time.
- 2.41 One wheelchair user said that taxi drivers often ignore him when he is waiting at a taxi rank. He believes that this is because it takes more time for him to board the taxi than a non-disabled person.
- 2.42 Finally, in terms of taxi fares, many people in the campaign group are concerned that wheelchair users often have to rely on hackney carriages which they regard as more expensive than private hire cabs.
- 2.43 **First** bus operators responded regarding taxi provision in Leeds. In their experience hackney carriage supply in Leeds is well organised and strictly controlled but it is difficult to determine whether there is sufficient supply as both the hackney carriage and bus service provision is severely hampered by the inadequate control of the private hire provision within the city.
- 2.44 First believe that private hire companies and organisations in Leeds are consistently and repeatedly flouting the legislation. Private hires often block bus lanes and obstruct the highway in the city centre. This severely hampers the provision of bus services and is likely to have a detrimental effect on the hackney carriage supply. This issue has been brought to the attention of the authorities and the police are attempting to take some action, however it is proving difficult due to elusiveness of the private hire trade. First would like city centre observations to confirm that this is taking place.
- 2.45 A recent BBC television programme centred on Leeds highlighted the concern of the illegality of the private hire operation and the dangers of illegally picking up young people who are pub and club goers who can be reckless in their travel home arrangements.

- 2.46 With regards to ranks, New Station Street leading to the railway station is a major problem to bus operators, where the over supply of hackney carriages causes blockages and congestion during the peak daytime periods, but then there is a shortage of taxis in the evening. It was suggested that the rail station rank should be contracted to taxi suppliers who offer 24/7 coverage and DDA compliance.
- 2.47 As a bus company First buses have to adhere to a strict procedure for bus service provision. It was felt that the private hire need revision and control in their provision. It is only then that a proper assessment of the sufficiency of hackney carriages or indeed bus service provision can be done.
- 2.48 **John Jamison School** responded to the consultation regarding taxi provision in Leeds. The representative was of the opinion that there is an adequate supply of hackney carriages across all times of the day and all areas within Leeds.
- 2.49 With regard to the image of the trade, the representative felt that the quality and attitudes of the drivers are good, although there may be some need for additional training.