

# **Telford & Wrekin Council Licensing Conditions Consultation**

06/06/11

## **Introduction**

This document lays out the full response of The London Taxi Company to the Telford & Wrekin consultation on the licensing conditions within the borough. It is structured so that it answers the four primary and five secondary questions set out in the consultation. We have limited our responses to areas on which we can comment with authority

## **Response to Consultation.**

### *Question 1*

We have no comment to make on this issue.

### *Question 2*

We have no comment to make on this issue.

### *Question 3*

We believe that it would not be wise or advantageous to Telford & Wrekin Council to move away from the type approval for public hire used by Transport for London. We, therefore, cannot agree with the proposed changes set out in 3.2 of this consultation.

The London Taxi Company is the manufacturer of the London style 'black cab', purpose built for disability access and recognised throughout the world as a classic British icon. For some time we have argued that the Conditions of Fitness, used by your council, provide the gold standard in taxi licensing. These regulations have been developed by you over many years to ensure that the public are served by the highest standard of vehicle.

Your licensing conditions exist to ensure that the Telford & Wrekin area is serviced by a professional Hackney Carriage fleet that reflects the superior standards that the council wishes to promote across the area. It is often the most visible service the council provides to visitors to the area who may be thinking of investing. It provides a safe and efficient form of transportation that supplements and segues with other public transport services.

These conditions can be met by other taxi manufacturers with a simple adaption to their steering systems, however they find it easier to pressure local authorities to change their conditions rather than seeking to comply with them.

Transport for London licensed a converted Mercedes/Vito taxi in June 2008 which meets the existing conditions and you have subsequently licensed this vehicle in

Telford. **This shows that manufactures can meet your Conditions of Fitness if they choose to make the investment.** Your licensing conditions are there to be met by manufactures not to be amended to benefit individual companies.

We would like to remind you of some of the reasons that we believe that your existing conditions best serve the public who use hackney carriages.

### **Recognisability**

Your Conditions of Fitness ensure that the public are served by a clearly recognisable taxi, which can be hailed on the street. This helps ensure the safety of passengers and eliminates confusion with private hire vehicles.

It is deeply unfortunate that there are high levels of sexual attacks by drivers of unlicensed 'taxis' across the UK. It is for this reason that it is important to retain a clearly identifiable taxi fleet – so that the public are absolutely sure that the taxi they or their children get into is safe and the driver is licensed.

For this reason we believe it is imperative that only taxis meeting the existing Conditions of Fitness should continue to be licensed as hackney carriages. If you were to decide to weaken your current taxi licensing conditions, to allow converted vehicles into your city, you will have approved the instant dilution of your existing recognisable fleet. The consequence of this decision will be to open your city to a plethora of different converted vans. The rank from another area shown below, gives an idea of this point.



It is for this reason that the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976, section 48 (1)(a)(ii): states "*...a district council shall not grant a [Private Hire Vehicle] licence unless they are satisfied (a) that the vehicle is (ii) not of such design and appearance as to lead any person to believe that the vehicle is a hackney carriage.*"

Companies such as Allied Vehicles sell exactly the same vehicle to both private hire and Hackney operators, the only difference being a hire sign. The London Taxi Company's vehicles are never sold for private hire use under any circumstances.

By watering down your conditions to include the widest possible spread of vehicles you will be preventing the public from being able to clearly identify in all conditions the difference between a licensed taxi and a private hire vehicle. This could lead to the virtual collapse of any distinction between the two forms of taxi service which will not benefit the council, the licensed taxi drivers or the public.

We urge you to ensure that licensed taxis remain clearly visible and distinct from private hire vehicles.

### **The 25 foot Turning Circle**

At the heart of the current licensing conditions is the 25 foot turning circle, which allows taxis to safely and quickly cross to the other side of the road in one manoeuvre rather than make a 3-point turn. This is used every hour of every day by drivers in Telford. It is safer than getting passengers to cross the road and causes less pollution and congestion when rejoining the rank or leaving in the opposite direction of travel.

In the Public Carriage Office's review of the London Conditions of Fitness they concluded that "the tighter turning circle offers tangible, significant benefits to the travelling public"<sup>1</sup> and that, "**the tight turning circle on existing London taxis is of considerable practical significance to passengers and road users**"<sup>2</sup>.

Vehicle converters, such as Allied Vehicles, can adapt their vehicle to meet the turning circle requirement; this has been independently confirmed by engineers MSX International and the launch of the Mercedes Vito taxi. It is simply a fact that producers do not wish to incur the costs for these modifications to meet your requirements and would rather get you to lower your standards to the detriment of the public. **There is therefore no reason for converters not to meet the existing taxi licensing conditions.**

The travelling public benefits from this feature as they are assured that a driver can get them to their destination in the minimum of time regardless of which side of the road they hail the cab from. Drivers have the benefit of being able to change direction smoothly and efficiently should they need to due to some unexpected traffic issue. While, finally the council benefits as taxis will cause less congestion to busy roads and emit less pollution due to journeys being as short and efficient as possible.

We urge you to ensure that all licensed vehicle in Telford continue to be required to have a 25 foot turning circle.

### **Purpose Built for Disability Access**

---

<sup>1</sup> page 9, 1.10; Public Carriage Office: Reconsideration of three aspects arising from the 2003 review of the Conditions of Fitness for London Taxis: 15 December 2005;

<sup>2</sup> page 21, 2.51; Public Carriage Office: Reconsideration of three aspects arising from the 2003 review of the Conditions of Fitness for London Taxis: 15 December 2005;

Recognisability and the turning circle are not the only reasons to retain your current taxi licensing conditions. With the passage of the Equality Act 2010 and the new general duty on local authorities to ensure disabled access to services it has never been more important to consider the needs of disabled consumers. We at The London Taxi Company take this duty very seriously and that is why our purpose built taxis are designed for full disability access.

Unlike our competitors, we do not just focus on those disabled members of the community in wheelchairs exclusively but broaden out our focus to include the widest audience possible. This includes amongst other groups the partially mobile, the elderly, the deaf and the partially sighted.

The authoritative Spinal Injuries Association Report<sup>3</sup>, which thoroughly compared our vehicle and the Peugeot E7, reached the following conclusions;

- The TX has two useful features fitted as standard not found in the E7; namely a swivel seat to assist entry for ambulant disabled, and an induction loop (as standard) for those with hearing impairments
- The TX ramp is more stable and secure than the E7
- Allied Vehicles' E7: 'High force is need to open the door: Wheelchair users with limited hand movement had difficulty in opening door'
- Allied Vehicles' E7 has 'less head room than the TX. Some users needed to duck when entering the cab'.
- 'The door height and width are also greater for the TX, making Wheelchair access better'

The report provides an 'unbiased comparison of the facilities offered by the two vehicles'<sup>4</sup>.

The photographs below clearly demonstrate that our ramp angle and length is much more practical than the Peugeot E7.



The purpose built taxi can accommodate 90% of all wheelchair users. The Departments for Transport's Mobility and Inclusion Unit, RADAR (the UK's leading

---

<sup>3</sup> Spinal Injuries Association: 'Accessible Taxis for the Disabled a Comparison between London Taxis International – TX11 and Allied Vehicles LTD – Peugeot E7'; Spinal Injuries Association May 2006

<sup>4</sup> Page 3: Spinal Injuries Association: 'Accessible Taxis for the Disabled a Comparison between London Taxis International – TX11 and Allied Vehicles LTD – Peugeot E7'; May 2006

pan-disability charity), and the Spinal Injuries Association all accept that **‘no single vehicle could achieve 100% suitability for all disabled groups’**.<sup>5</sup>

Other features that can be found on the purpose built taxi include:

- TX series has a swivel seat as standard
- TX series has a hearing loop as standard
- TX series has a special child seat belt as standard

None of the above is standard on conversions and most are not fitted at all and so would not be available should Telford approve a multi-purpose fleet.

It is clear that TX style taxis provide by far the best overall disability access, providing access for 95% of the 10.8 million disabled people in the UK. No other vehicle can so effectively meet the needs of the general public as the purpose built taxi can allowing the council to meet its statutory duty whilst providing a high level of service to the public. This would not be the case if the licence conditions were weakened.

Just recently, Ms Jan Goodall of the Dundee Celebrate Age Network complained to Dundee Council that the myopic concern of the local authority for wheelchair users was detrimental to other members of the disabled community. The elderly and partial mobile passengers found that the taxis on offer were unable to meet their needs. This was the direct result of the council lessening its conditions and opening up its taxi fleet to different types of vehicles.

The TX taxi is capable of meeting the requirement set out in 3.3 of this consultation and we would support this condition. Currently, we ensure that all drivers of TX taxis are fully aware of the fittings to be used to secure wheelchairs and are continually improving our ways of communicating this to the public. We therefore, support proposal 3.4. Finally, all our vehicles carry ramps and the associated equipment to ensure wheelchair users can use the vehicle at any time. We support your proposal at 3.5.

The requirements you set out at 3.3-3.5 merely highlight the problems that the council will face should it try to lessen the high standards that currently operate in the Telford area and this can only be to the detriment of passengers.

We urge you to ensure that all licensed vehicles are capable of meeting the needs of the widest section of the community possible.

### **Step Height**

Your Conditions of Fitness currently require the step height into a taxi not to exceed 38cms or if it does exceed this height than an intermediate step must be fitted. The E7 floor (step height), for example, is 51cms without a step. The optional electric step is not standard on every vehicle, so it is not guaranteed to be fitted. If it is not fitted then

---

<sup>5</sup> Spinal Injuries Association: ‘Accessible Taxis for the Disabled a Comparison between London Taxis International – TX11 and Allied Vehicles LTD – Peugeot E7’; May 2006

passengers are faced with a step height of nearly 150 mm higher than the present taxis. This causes passengers significant difficulty as is demonstrated below.



New E7

This is an issue that affects multi-purpose vehicles but is not present in the purpose built taxi currently in use. Should the conditions be weakened to allow these types of vehicles to operate, the public will find it increasingly difficult to access taxis to the detriment of vulnerable members of the community.

We urge you to ensure that all licensed vehicles are required to have a maximum step height that does not exceed 38cms.

### **Environmental Considerations**

We are sure that environmental considerations are of concern to your Council. Our current TX4 vehicle emits 211g CO<sub>2</sub> per km. This is virtually the same as Allied Vehicles' E7, which you are considering allowing to be licensed under these new proposals. Their CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are only 13g CO<sub>2</sub> per km lower at 198g CO<sub>2</sub> per km. In real terms there is no difference between the vehicles' environmental efficiency.

The E7 is much larger than the TX4 and less manoeuvrable, with its 34ft turning circle, it is therefore forced to perform more three point turns, which uses more fuel and emitting more CO<sub>2</sub>.

### **Safety**

The TX series offer exceptional protection to passengers in cases of road traffic accidents. The steel body is mounted on a solid steel chassis and meets the highest level of European Whole Vehicle Type Approval.



The accident above took place in Edinburgh in 2007 and you can see the taxi's headlight shining out beneath the giant skip that fell on it.

The driver, Sharon Bain said,

*"I was trapped against the steering wheel, lying on my left side, with one of the skips right at my shoulder,"*

*"The passengers had been protected by the vehicle and because the taxi is so solid it took the fire service quite a while to get to me. If I had not been in a purpose-built taxi, I would never have survived. The fire brigade told me that."*

A mother and two children who were passengers when the skip tipped over onto the cab were helped to safety and were completely unhurt.

### **Cost of Current Taxi Licensing Condition**

It is sometimes argued that the current taxi licensing conditions cost the trade and passengers. However, a Public Carriage Office review concluded:

- "There would be no cost savings to drivers and passengers."
- For taxi users the introduction of greater competition into the market would be likely to have no impact on fares.
- even using assumptions that are most generous to AVs [alternative vehicles] the reduction in fares would rise to about 12p (or 1%) after 20 years<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> page 79, 11.42; Public Carriage Office: Reconsideration of three aspects arising from the 2003 review of the Conditions of Fitness for London Taxis: 15 December 2005;

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the majority of the Telford's taxi trade and general public do not want your regulations diluted.

The current taxi licensing conditions, defined by the 25ft turning circle, provide a gold standard in taxi provision, which works very successfully in Telford and is capable of being met by a range of suppliers.

The current taxi licensing conditions exist to be met by manufacturers and for public protection, not to be weakened to help companies sell their vehicles.

- We believe your current conditions are the gold standard and should not be diluted.
- The disabled are well served by the present fleet
- The turning circle is used every hour of every day to help the safety of passengers
- Manufacturers or converters can meet these regulations if they wish, as One80 have done with the Mercedes Vito you have recently licensed

We urge you to retain your existing licensing conditions that secure the highest quality of service to the widest section of the public ensuring that Telford remains a competitive area in these tough economic times.

### *Question 4*

We have no comment to make on this issue.