

# **HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE FORUM Meeting**

**Venue: Virtual via Zoom**

**Agenda: 05 November 2020**

## **Attendees and who they represent:**

Cllr Ruth Pickersgill (RP), Chair, representing Bristol City Council  
Jonathan Martin (JM) representing Bristol City Council  
Emma Lake (EL) representing Bristol City Council  
Abigail Holman (AH) representing Bristol City Council  
Saif Hussain (SH) representing BBTLA, Chair  
Mike Bullock (MB) representing Bristol Executive Cars  
Stephen Pick (SP) representing Bristol City Council Public Transport Team  
Shelagh Austin (SA) representing BPAC and Sight Loss Council  
Gary O'Neill (GN) representing Private Hire Driver reps  
Mahad Jama (MJ) representing Magans Taxis  
Desmond Broster (DB) representing V Cars and Veezu  
Patrick Quinton (PQ) representing Police, Taxi Compliance Officer  
Mohammad Islam (MI) representing BBLTA  
Ahmed Ismail representing BBLTA, secretary

## **1. Welcome, Introductions, Apologies**

- Apologies – Alan Dyte, BPAC, Steve Lohia – Prestige Cars, Andri Nicolou – Police Safeguarding

## **2. Agree minutes from last meeting**

Minutes from 05/05/20 and 30/07/20 - agreed

Actions:

- SH to provide revised fares proposal to Council asap  
Disability survey to be distributed with newsletter – complete
- JM to circulate link to national standard – complete and distributed with newsletter

- SP to contact the transport officer at the hospital to improve the directional signage – SP confirmed all signage on rank is now installed but he still needs to engage with hospital to establish directional signage. **Action: SP to engage with hospital for directional signage.**

Further issue raised by trade with location of rank at BRI. Confirmation was received that consultation was undertaken, but there was discussion about the location not being convenient for taxis. A number of suggestions were made regarding it, but trade would prefer it directly outside the BRI entrance. SP confirmed that the whole area is being reviewed currently to see how it can be improved. **Action: RP to write note to Highways for considering a review of the ranks when review of area is being considered.**

### **3. Latest Covid updates and guidance including video tutorials.**

JM outlined the current position, including that reports have been received of passengers who are not exempt from the requirement not being required to wear masks. The importance of both drivers and passengers wearing masks was reiterated, to ensure the safety of everyone in the vehicle. It was also noted that Covid marshals will be deployed shortly to guide the public.

It was flagged that separate advice had not been provided for drivers undertaking school runs, and this would differ slightly in respect of the requirement to wear masks.

JM advised that much of the communication about masks and safety had been sent out by email, and these important messages must be read.

It was highlighted that if customers feel safe in taxis, particularly in the current environment, they are more likely to use them. A concern was raised about the level of customer service of some drivers, and some of the concerns raised by WECIL about disabled passengers being left, or not being treated

appropriately, however the report from WECIL also highlighted a number of positives and many drivers do go out of their way to help disabled passengers.

A discussion was had around measures taken by different operators in Covid-19 secure practices. Some concerns were raised about provision of masks, and the differences across the sector in respect of this. DB advised he would check what their provision was and update to JM (attached at Appendix 1). JM also confirmed he would see if additional masks could be made available for the private hire trade further to the 9000 which had been distributed to the hackney trade.

JM confirmed that a video was being put together regarding how to present to someone with visual impairment to demonstrate the most appropriate form of customer care, especially during Covid, however this was taking some time as it needed to go through the Comms team. SA reiterated Sight Loss Council's commitment to assisting with this.

Responses were made in respect of the issues around disabled people not being picked up, and in particular it was felt that:-

- Sometimes drivers switch jobs at the last minute if another one for more money comes up
- some fares are reported as no-shows because the driver has not checked the surrounding area to make sure that the passenger is there
- if the passenger is visually impaired they may not be able see that the vehicle is there
- Sometimes instructions to the driver are either not read, or not provided.

It was noted that requirements were proposed in the new operator policy to require details of special requirements to be recorded.

#### **4. Clean Air Zone consultation**

Details of revised plans were circulated to trade a couple of weeks ago which are significantly different from what was announced last time. It was flagged that the exemptions were obviously important to the trade, and confirmed that Euro 6 Diesel and Euro 4 Petrol or better will be exempt from charges. Euro 5 Diesel will be charged. The taxi policy was obviously drafted with the implementation of the zone in mind.

It was highlighted that the best way to make comments on the clean air zone proposals was to respond to the consultation. It was noted that licensed vehicles from other areas would have access, but would not be subject to the exemptions, and would be charged each time they used the zone.

A query was raised about the disparity between the policies for South Gloucestershire and Bristol City Council and the longer licensing period for Hackney Carriage Euro 6 and ULEV vehicles in Bristol. JM flagged that generally it was cheaper to purchase a saloon vehicle, which most private hire vehicles were and that there was an additional investment required in both wheelchair accessible and ULEV vehicles. RP noted that it was not appropriate to lower our standards simply because a neighbouring authority didn't have similar standards, and the aims were to try to significantly improve air quality in the area. A concern was also raised about costs of drivers being charged being passed on to the customer.

## **5. Policy Update including National Standards.**

A summary of the previous action was given. The authority had lobbied at government level for national standards, draft ones had been released in 2019 which the authority commented on and received no response. Then in July 2020 new national standards were released unannounced, which had immediate effect. It was noted that there were some significant changes required to the current policies as a result of these standards.

It was also noted that it would take some time for these policies to be revised and implemented for a number of reasons. It was

also highlighted that it would not have an effect on cross border hiring, which was not covered or dealt with in the standards.

EL provided a summary of the major issues from the standards, which focused primarily on safeguarding. She advised that:

- The current multiple policies would be consolidated into a single document with a commitment to review them every 5 years.
- The authority wants to ensure everyone is clear from the start what the implications might be for both current licence holders and new applicants. A number of proposals were already being worked on which would now be folded in to the new policy and now needed changing because of the national standard.
- DBS update service was one of the biggest changes, as the national standard required checks to be undertaken every 6 months. There would be a requirement under the new policy to sign up to the update service and maintain this subscription, drivers who didn't or had new information on the certificate would be required to complete a new check at cost to them.
- It was likely that there would be a date by which everyone would need to sign up, and be considered against the new convictions policy. There would be some people who would need to do a new DBS before the normal 3 year cycle because of the changes. Online DBS applications would be available within the next few weeks which should reduce processing time for drivers to get certificates back.
- The convictions policy would be very different. Existing licence holders would need to be reconsidered against the new standard, there were some significant differences, dishonesty, violence and drug offences were highlighted in particular.
- An addition was the requirement for someone who has spent more than three months out of the country to obtain a

‘Certificate of Good Character’ from the country they were in.

- Language proficiency was also highlighted as a requirement, so the authority need to look at how this affects existing drivers
- It was noted that it wasn’t simply a case of updating the policy, but also ensuring systems are robust and able to record the information, securing providers for the training and implementing the policy itself. (An example was given regarding the requirement to establish with complaints whether there is a pattern not only with a specific driver but also with trends across the sector as well.)
- Another significant change was the requirement for vehicle proprietors to undertake a basic disclosure, which isn’t currently required. The authority is trying to think about how this will affect the process, whether it will cause delays and how to avoid them.

JM flagged the timing was complicated, and the policy was being drafted, so it might be appropriate to have a specific forum focusing solely on the national standards. It was important to look at the purpose of the standards; improving customer care, confidence and safety were all key.

**Action: Nationals standards focused meeting to be organised.**

It was flagged that the national standards had been progressed as a result of the issues experienced in Rotherham and other locations with safeguarding. It was a stringent standard for the whole country, but the government had not addresses the other issues the trade were concerned about. **Action: RP to chase MP meeting.**

It was noted that the taxi trade had pushed for some of the changes in the national standards, particularly in respect of basic disclosures for vehicle proprietors, and this along with operator conditions was important to maintain a safe fleet. It was also raised that the national standards should be balanced with other

considerations, and should have some discretion built into the policy as well as consideration of equalities implications.

## **6. Comfort Break**

## **7. Updates:**

### **a. Licensing backlogs**

The recent backlogs for licensing were highlighted, and some of the reasons outlined including the number of taxi applications received, as well as the additional time spent dealing with other areas of licensing such as hospitality, and the recent changes because of Covid. It was noted that licensing are completely self-funding and unable to call on the central budget, and as a result had to let some temporary staff go in August. Due to the new increased demand, the authority has now re-employed some temporary staff, who are being trained, and in addition overtime was being undertaken on evenings and weekends. The backlog was around 2 weeks. A plea was made to encourage applicants to submit well in advance as well as including all the documents on application, as a number of applications were still deficient or sent in in multiple emails which were delaying the processing as there were a high number of emails.

It was noted that changes were being pushed for, in particular to finalise a system which would make DVLA checks quicker and easier to undertake. Medicals would continue to be considered on a case by case basis, and the authority is aware many GPs are closed. It was mentioned that the authority had engaged with the Occupational Health team to see whether they could undertake any medicals, however that option was not available.

Concerns were raised about contacting the team, and that the CSC team were not able to answer questions. Additionally that emails were sent and then the same information was requested again. It was agreed that

specific issue would be picked up, and JM flagged the change from licensing taking phone calls to the CSC handling them was to free up the licensing team to process licences because the team has a finite amount of resources.

**b. South Gloucestershire - policy alignment**

JM highlighted that conversations were continuing with South Gloucestershire around aligning policies and standards, and that there was a significant political interest in this work. He also noted that the Knowledge Test had been revised to add a focus on some safety based questions and safeguarding as well as other updates. He noted that it would not solve the cross border hiring issues, but should decrease the perceived advantages of moving to South Glos.

**c. Taxi Cop update**

PQ noted that his emphasis is moving away from random stops and patrol to intelligence based work, and more daytime than night-time work. Paul Canes, a PCSO had been working with him. He also noted that the amount of high profile and serious cases has increased over the last few months. He was also just about to take 987<sup>th</sup> job from a driver, and it remains very busy.

**d. Transport updates**

SP updated on the changes since last Forum took place, in particular there had been significant changes in city centre, including pedestrianisation of Corn Street, and the Bristol Bridge access restrictions. It was good to get feedback on those changes from trade. His team were also working on project to enhance infrastructure on ranks, improve visibility etc. with the City Design team. He noted that routine maintenance is continuing throughout Covid.



It was flagged that maintenance was required on the Whiteladies Road rank.

### **SP to action**

A number of road closures were coming up:

- Bishport Avenue – works until December.
- Clouds Hill Road – two way lights and some overnight road closures until December.
- Broad Weir – recladding of building and five nights of road closures from 16<sup>th</sup> Nov.
- Wells Road at Airport Road junction road closures for four nights from 16<sup>th</sup> Nov
- Triangle - traffic signals refurb due with a possible start date of end Nov

Concerns were raised about the signage surrounding Bristol Bridge and the diversions, with vehicles not realising that the bridge was closed to traffic until they were at it. SP confirmed that signage had recently been updated and some larger VMS signs were being put up in the next week to assist with the visibility and advance warning. He confirmed that there had also been some issues with the arrangements on Haymarket and Lewins Mead which may be feeding into this traffic.

SP confirmed that there was a statutory process for road closures and changes to roads in place, and it was suggested that road closures or changes could be brought to the Forum to seek engagement. RP requested that a senior officer from his team attend the next meeting to explain the process and how engagement could happen.

**Action: RP to request attendance from senior officer in Transport/Highways**

Concerns were also raised regarding the Covid created cycle and pedestrian lanes on some main roads. It was confirmed that these schemes were introduced as part of

the Covid response and that they were under review but that generally the intention was to free up the centre from traffic and have more pedestrian and public transport options.

PQ queried whether there was an SLA for response times to fix issues, and also where issues could be reported to.

**Action: SP to confirm SLA for issues to be fixed and contact for reporting road or rank issues.**

It was also confirmed that Fix My Street (<https://www.fixmystreet.com/>) was a useful way of reporting many street issues.

#### e. HC Fare Review

SH confirmed that the trade had drafted a proposal which now needs redoing slightly, but that they were not in a hurry to have an increase at the moment.

**Action: SH to update at next Forum.**

He also confirmed that the card machine policy proposal is very important, and RP noted that it was going through the process and would be picked up with the other policy changes.

## 8. Other issues from trade

a) Concerns were raised regarding the six month free licence, and what would be required at the end of that period. It was confirmed that an additional 6 months would be issued with the requirement for a vehicle inspection check. It was agreed that a further review of this would be undertaken. **Action: JM to review six month licences**

b) A concern was raised regarding Fleet Services not issuing pass sheets for certain things. It was confirmed that this was correct and that they should contact the

Licensing Team to discuss further. This had been confirmed in the newsletter as well.

## 9. AOB

*None*

## 10. Actions for next meeting:

Action Point	Matters arising	By Whom	Completed?
1	SP to contact BRI re directional signage and guidance	SP	
2	RP to write to Transport/Highways team to highlight that rank positioning should be considered in review of area currently underway	RP	
3	DB to update Veezu/V Cars practices to JM	DB	
4	Nationals standards focused meeting to be organised.	JM	
5	RP to chase MP meeting	RP	
6	RP to request attendance from senior officer in Transport/Highways	RP	
7	SP to confirm SLA for issues to be fixed and contact for reporting road or rank issues.	SP	
8	JM to review six month licences	JM	

**Next meeting: Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> January 2021**

## Appendix 1

From Des Broster in response to Jon Martin's question about the measures V Cars have taken:

The following email (link below) was sent to all Driver Partners with V Cars on 26 Oct.

[https://mailchi.mp/b8ab7dc06f05/veezu-services-v-cars-driver-partner-bulletin-2020\\_10\\_26](https://mailchi.mp/b8ab7dc06f05/veezu-services-v-cars-driver-partner-bulletin-2020_10_26)

It highlights the requirement for face coverings for both driver partners and passengers.

- It states: Since July 2020, we have made available more than 270,000 free face coverings to Driver Partners, for their own use while driving. Driver partners are encouraged to contact their local Driver Partner Experience Team to collect a pack, free of charge, every week on an ongoing basis.
- They can have 6 face coverings free of charge each week, and have been able to since well before masks were mandatory.
- It also shows the face covering notice we ask drivers to display in their vehicles.
- To assist with encouraging passengers to wear masks we have produced and distributed to all drivers a link to an A6 sized poster they can print and display in their vehicle. If required, we offer to print this for them on request – whilst there is no requirement for us to do this we hoped it would be helpful and supportive to drivers and hopefully reduce any passenger conflicts. (This is in the link above)

In response to a comment in the forum, I am sure the logistics of trying to deliver these face coverings to drivers will have been recognised by other drivers and officers, hence we ask drivers to call into the office where we can also have strict social distancing measures in place that are compliant with legislation.

In addition...

- Upon booking passengers are sent a reminder that a face covering is required.
- V Cars have posted video content on YouTube with passenger guidance

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1w0akOR2VQQ&feature=youtu.be>

- V Cars social media feed continues to remind passengers that face coverings are required

<https://www.facebook.com/VCarsTaxis/posts/639238356772974>

- The V Cars website is being updated on a regular basis for both Driver Partners and Passengers. (Being updated today to reflect the 5 Nov Lockdown UK Gov guidance that was only issued earlier today).

<https://www.v-cars.com/covid-19/>