

TAXI DEMAND SURVEY RESULTS

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide information detailed by the results of the recent taxi demand survey that was commissioned to accurately assess the availability of taxis in the town centre and to seek approval for the recommendations of the survey report.

2. Background

2.1 BMBC has retained a limit on the number of hackney carriages since the authority was formed. Currently there are 67 hackneys licensed in the Borough. In order to justify continuing to retain this cap on numbers the Council has to carry out a demand survey on a regular basis, in line with the November 2023 Department for Transport Best Practice Guidance. This survey is conducted to assess the position in relation to customer demand and advises as to whether there is an unmet demand for taxis, or whether the cap should be retained as there is no unmet demand.

2.2 A survey of the demand for hackney carriages was carried out in September 2023, the final report has now been completed and a copy is attached to this report as Appendix 1. As part of the survey, key stakeholders were contacted and questions regarding taxis and private hire vehicles were asked of the general public, the Private Hire and Hackney Carriage Drivers, Disability groups and local businesses. A survey of the taxi ranks was carried out, with 24-hour observations and counts on the main ranks from Thursday until Sunday.

3. Current Position

3.1 The results of the survey are complex and a summary is provided below: -

- The industry standard test of significance of unmet demand found a number of changes which on balance saw the index marginally increase by 2.5%, effectively a very similar result to 2017 despite all the changes in between times. The values show an improvement from the interim situation observed in 2018. However, the existence of unmet demand has spread to Thursdays and to earlier on Saturday evenings now.
- The unmet demand occurs over both the daytime and nighttime but predominantly in the early hours of the morning at weekends (Friday night into Saturday morning and Saturday night into Sunday morning).
- Latent demand was increased from the 3.4% of 2017 to 9% now.
- There is an issue in getting drivers to work during the busiest late night/early morning periods. This is recognised by the Trade; however, many drivers do not want to work these hours. The main reasons given for this were driver safety and dealing with difficult customers. 7% (5% last time) saying they avoided times there might be drunken, violent or abusive customers.
- 67% this time (87% in 2017) of all respondents supported the vehicle number limit. The split saw all hackney carriage agree with 47% of private hire also agreeing with its retention.
- Reasons given for this included: -
 - Reduced levels of potential congestion
 - Better vehicle standards
 - Better air quality
 - More reliable service from smaller fleet
 - Overall customer satisfaction is high, despite wait times at busy periods. Customers seem to accept the need to wait.

- The overall view of the taxi marshals was that, though there was queueing, particularly with their presence, there was no significant risk to public safety and people were generally content to wait and happy to be able to return home. They did not feel there was any shortage of vehicles on any night. The small number of incidents reported, however, confirmed that the presence of the marshals was critical to making the operation work in a safe and secure manner.
- Taxi marshals are seen as a positive, particularly with regards to safety issues of both the public and drivers.

Points to note: -

- During the course of the survey, just over 6,045 (3,800 in 2017) vehicles were observed arriving or departing at or near the ranks within the area (partly due the 2023 observations covering a longer period). Of these movements, 21% (13%) were cars, 0.3% (5%) were emergency vehicles, 2.4% (1%) were goods vehicles and 5% (1%) were private hire vehicles. The remaining 71.6% (80%) were hackney carriages from Barnsley. A constant complaint from our hackney carriage drivers is that they cannot get on the ranks as they are constantly obstructed by private cars.
- Any increase in Hackney Carriage vehicle licences may not make any impact on specific times ie Saturday nights, as we cannot issue licences with restricted usage times. It could simply see a shift from private hire drivers to hackney vehicles without increasing supply, or potentially lead to over-supply in general, reducing the income to existing drivers and potentially pushing out some of the drivers who do operate on Saturday nights.

3 Options: -

1 - Do nothing: There is no statutory requirement to act, although Section 16 of the 1985 Transport Act does call into question if a limit can be retained if significant unmet demand is identified. In favour of doing nothing is the stability of the level of service

indicator which is now very similar to that pertaining in 2017. The level of service is also improved since the 2018 test, and significantly so.

All hackney carriages support retaining the limit, as do half the private hire respondents. The public did not suggest they would use hackney carriages more if more were available at ranks. There were no views received from key stakeholders about impacts on their businesses as there were in 2017. Further, this was the chosen option in 2018 by default and as already noted service levels appear to have improved to that set of observations.

The only negative aspect from the evidence against this option is that public views show that latent demand has increased. This is significant given that many other similar studies with strong and significant unmet demand in other places have seen reduced latent demand.

2 - Managed growth: A number of authorities determine a policy whereby they grow the hackney carriage fleet by a number per year. This has the benefit of enabling issues to be stopped or amended if issues arise requiring amendment. It provides more control over impacts than limit removal.

3 - One off issue: A number of hackney carriage plates could be issued as a one-off to seek to redress the level of service.

4 - Limit removal: This would see the current limit removed and any new entrants allowed.

Also, there is the possibility that no applications would be received to any offer of plates, which would be a statement in itself and would need further consideration of why this might occur.

5 – Maintain limit, take remedial actions and review: Given there has only recently been a Hackney Carriage fare change, which saw an increase of 30 pence on the flag and 30 pence on the mile thereafter. It also saw the introduction of a Super Tarriff that saw a further increase of 30 pence on the flag and the mile thereafter after 1am on

Sunday mornings. Any further revision to the hours covered by the night rates would not be sensible but should be discussed and considered for the next review that occurs, with the suggestion being to shift the start of the higher rate perhaps back to 22:00.

Several changes have occurred since the survey was carried out in September 2023:

- Our 2 largest private hire companies and have been amalgamated and have also brought with them out of town drivers that although raising a significant concern to the trade, are helping to fill the unmet demand gap.
- The Midland Street rank has been re-opened for use – giving hackney drivers 3 town centre ranks to facilitate.
- We have hopefully secured funding via the Transport Innovation Fund to install all our hackney carriage vehicles with CCTV with the aim of increasing both driver and passenger safety and encouraging more drivers to work at unsociable times and not avoid the more difficult customers. If this funding is successful a consultation of all drivers and vehicle owned will be conducted.

Documented confirmation of the change of driver operating hours would be obtained if a new comprehensive study was undertaken in due course.

Officers are also currently working on an on-line taxi training option to make the learning and preparation process easier for new drivers. By moving the training online this allows applicants to learn at their own pace and hopefully increase the first-time pass rate of the required theory test.

4 Recommendations

4.1 The recommendations of this report are as follows.

- Note the content of the report and the demand survey.
- Members support option 5 - Maintain limit, take remedial actions and repeat the demand survey in 12 months.

- Note that despite there being unmet demand that is significant we would not introduce more Hackney Carriages vehicle licences at this time, although other research and a repeated full survey with rank surveys no later than March 2025 is recommended by both Officers and the Demand Report.
- Should the funding be successful, Members approve the consultation of all drivers and hackney carriage vehicle proprietors regarding the installation of CCTV in Hackney Carriages.

5. Background Papers

LVSA Hackney Carriage Demand Survey 2024

6. Officer Contact

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