

TAXI DEMAND SURVEY RESULTS

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide information on issues raised by the results of the recent taxi demand survey into whether there is unmet demand for hackney cabs (taxis that can ply for hire) in the Borough, 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 cabs since the authority was formed. Currently there are 67 hackneys 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 Department of Transport best practice guidance. This survey advises as to whether there is an unmet demand for taxis, or whether the cap can be retained as there is no unmet demand.

2.2 A survey of the demand for hackneys was carried out earlier this year, and the final report has now been completed. As part of the survey, questions regarding taxis were asked of the general public and local businesses. A survey of all of the taxi ranks was carried out, with observations and counts on the main ranks, including at the busy night time/early morning periods. The taxi trade were also consulted, although only 11% replied to the all driver survey, which included both hackney and private hire drivers.

3. Current Position

3.1 The results of the survey are complex, a summary of the results is provided below;

- There is highly significant unmet demand, according to the industry standard index result. This indicates that there is an issue with unmet demand which needs to be addressed.
- The majority of the unmet demand occurs in the early hours of the morning at weekends (Friday night into Saturday morning and Saturday night into Sunday morning).
- Only 58% of the available hackney cabs were working at any one time, which suggests significant spare capacity.
- 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 family commitments.
- 87% of respondents to the driver survey supported keeping the cap. Reasons given for this included that it means drivers are well-known by customers, fares are kept low, vehicles are kept to a high standard and pollution and congestion are kept under control by the limit on vehicles.
- Overall customer satisfaction is high, despite wait times at busy periods. Customers seem to accept the need to wait.
- Taxi marshals are seen as a positive, particularly with regards to safety issues of both the public and drivers.
- There is an overall reduction in driver numbers, though this has been largely offset by the move to dual badges for all drivers (allowing them to drive either hackneys or private hire vehicles).
- There is an issue with a shortage of private hire vehicles at peak times, which is increasing the pressure on hackney vehicles.
- The Trade see the entry requirements for new drivers as being too onerous, although Licensing consider that the requirements are necessary to ensure that drivers are fit and proper and suitably trained to be taxi drivers. .

3.2 The usual response to unmet demand would be to increase the numbers of vehicles; however there are times when demand is high but sufficient vehicles are already available. The problem appears not to be the lack of vehicles but the lack of vehicles working at peak unsociable hours. Therefore, even if we were to increase the number of vehicles, there would be no guarantee of any extra vehicles working at peak times. There is no legal way of ensuring that vehicles work at the times of highest demand. Extra vehicles could also have a negative impact on the need for rank space at off peak times.

3.3 The solution to the issue of unmet demand lies with the drivers. There is an accepted need that more drivers must be encouraged either to work longer hours, or to exchange less busy hours for the peak times when their services are needed.

3.4 The Trade and the Council need to work closely together to try to address this issue. Officers have already had an initial meeting with the Trade to discuss the findings of the report, and will continue to work with them via the Taxi Liaison Group.

4 Recommendations

4.1 The recommendations of this report are as follows;

- Renewed taxi marshal provision to be fully taken advantage of, with continued enforcement action by Licensing to minimise unlicensed operations (“Facebook taxis”).
- The Trade to work together to maximise hackney carriage availability at all times, including consideration of shared driving (one vehicle utilising several drivers) and also to see encouraging new drivers as a key part of their future.
- Licensing to work with the Trade to facilitate new drivers being recruited, but without in any way compromising the application process.

- Better signage and marketing of the Market Hill rank, with an increased daytime presence there by hackney vehicles.
- A further review/survey to be carried out to identify if levels of vehicle availability have increased.

4.2 It is proposed that the further review takes place at some point within the next 6-12 months, when a report will be prepared based on the findings.

This report will consider whether the numbers of hackneys should stay the same, should be increased or even whether the cap should be lifted completely.

5. Background Papers

LVSA Hackney Carriage Demand Survey November 2017

6. Officer Contact

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