

To: Councillor Woodward (Chair),
Edwards, Asare, Davies, G Dennis, Keane,
Kitchingham, Mitchell, Page, Robinson,
Rowland and Tarar

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12 February 2024

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NOTICE OF MEETING - LICENSING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE 20 FEBRUARY 2024

A meeting of the Licensing Applications Committee will be held on Tuesday, 20 February 2024 at 6.30 pm in the Council Chamber, Civic Offices, Reading. The Agenda for the meeting is set out below.

| <u>ACTION</u> | <u>WARDS AFFECTED</u> | <u>Page No</u> |
|--|---------------------------|----------------|
| 1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST | | |
| Councillors to declare any disclosable pecuniary interests they may have in relation to the items for consideration. | | |
| 2. MINUTES | | 3 - 8 |
| To confirm the Minutes of the Licensing Applications Committee meeting held on 7 November 2023. | | |
| 3. PETITIONS | | |
| Petitions submitted pursuant to Standing Order 36 in relation to matters falling within the Committee's Powers and Duties which have been received by the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services no later than four clear days before the meeting. | | |
| 4. QUESTIONS | | |
| To receive questions submitted by Councillors and members of the public pursuant to Standing Order 36 in relation to matters falling within the Committee's Powers & Duties which have been submitted in writing and received by the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services no later than four clear working days before the meeting. | | |

CIVIC OFFICES EMERGENCY EVACUATION: If an alarm sounds, leave by the nearest fire exit quickly and calmly and assemble on the corner of Bridge Street and Fobney Street. You will be advised when it is safe to re-enter the building.

5. HACKNEY CARRIAGE UNMET DEMAND SURVEY

**BOROUGH
WIDE**

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A report presenting the outcome of the Hackney Carriage unmet demand survey carried out in 2023 by CTS Traffic and Transportation Ltd.

Present: Councillor Woodward (Chair); Edwards (Vice-Chair), Asare, Davies, G Dennis, Keane, Kitchingham, Page, Robinson, Rowland and Tarar

Apologies: Councillor Mitchell

9. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Licensing Applications Committee meetings held on 28 September 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

10. HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLE STRATEGY 2023-2028

The Committee considered a report that recommended the adoption of the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire and Private Hire Vehicle Strategy following the completion of a public consultation. The following documents were appended to the report:

- Appendix 1 - Draft Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicle Strategy 2023-2028
- Appendix 2 - Consultation Responses
- Appendix 3 - Proposed changes following the consultation
- Appendix 4 - Climate Impact Assessment

The report explained that the Council was committed to ensuring that the hackney carriage and private hire sector remained integrated within the town's sustainable transport network so that it could continue to move passengers to destinations safely, whilst contributing to the town's economy with minimal environmental impact.

The draft Strategy took account of the draft Local Transport Plan 2040, the draft Electric Vehicle Strategy and environmental factors resulting from the declaration of a Climate Emergency. The draft Strategy also detailed the Council's commitment to ensure full compliance with statutory guidance issued by the Department for Transport (DfT) on Statutory Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Standards and set out the Council's position in relation to taxi ranks, wheelchair accessible vehicles, app-based taxi operations and highways use benefits (the use of bus lanes by Hackney Carriages and Private Hire Vehicles). The draft Strategy included an Action Plan that set out how and when the key objectives would be achieved.

The draft Strategy set out the Council's overarching vision and objectives for the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire sector in Reading over the next five years and would be used to steer policy development over that period. It was intended that policies relating to the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire sector would be reviewed against the Strategy going forward. Each measure set out within the Strategy would be subject to a full consultation process and be discussed as part of the ongoing meetings held with the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire trade representatives.

The report explained that, at the meeting held on 13 July 2023, the Licensing Applications Committee had given its approval for a public consultation to be conducted on the content

LICENSING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES - 7 NOVEMBER 2023

of the draft Strategy. The consultation had been carried out between 14 August 2023 and 18 September 2023. The consultation had been promoted on the Council's website and had been sent to individual taxi drivers and operators. A total of 22 responses had been received. Copies of the responses were attached to the report at Appendix 2. An analysis of the consultation responses had revealed that, whilst there was support for the Strategy, a number of concerns had also been raised. The respondents' comments and concerns, along with officers' replies to those comments, were set out in the report under the following headings:

- Private Hire Vehicles from out of area working in Reading;
- Use of bus lanes by Hackney Carriages and Private Hire Vehicles;
- Limited EV Charging Infrastructure;
- Disabled access to services;
- Extending the Hackney Carriage Vehicles Emissions Policy;
- Number of Hackney Carriage Licenses/Types of vehicles in the fleet; and
- Use of Taxi Ranks.

As a result of the consultation a number of changes had been made to the draft Strategy and Action Plan, the changes were summarised in the report under each of the above headings and were also listed in Appendix 3 of the report.

Asif Rashid, Chairman of Reading Taxi Association, and Imran Ali, a local hackney carriage driver, were present at the meeting and addressed the Committee on the item.

Resolved:

- (1) That the comments received during the public consultation process be noted;**
- (2) That the changes made to the Strategy proposed following the consultation be approved;**
- (3) That the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicle Strategy 2023-2028, as attached to the report at Appendix 1, be adopted.**

11. HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE CONVICTIONS POLICY

The Committee considered a report that recommended the adoption of the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Convictions Policy following the completion of a consultation with members of the hackney carriage and private hire trade. The following documents were appended to the report:

- Appendix 1 - Draft Hackney Carriage & Private Hire Convictions Policy
- Appendix 2 - Objection from the from the RTA
- Appendix 3 - Objection by Mr Anjum
- Appendix 4 - Objection by Mr Ditta
- Appendix 5 - Objection by Mr Rafiq
- Appendix 6 - Objection by Mr Sajid

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- Appendix 7 - Objection by Mr Shahzad
- Appendix 8 - South Oxfordshire District Council Conviction Policy (points 4.19, 4.42 & 4.43)

The report explained that in July 2020 the Secretary of State for Transport had issued statutory guidance (Statutory Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Standards) to all licensing authorities. The Standards were aimed at safeguarding children and vulnerable adults and set-out a range of robust measures to protect taxi and private hire vehicle passengers, particularly the most vulnerable. In May 2022 the Department for Transport (DfT) had also issued statutory guidance to licensing authorities to help them to comply with their new duties under the Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles (Safeguarding and Road Safety) Act (TPHVA) 2022. A fundamental part of the TPHVA now required licensing authorities to share safeguarding and road safety concerns about taxi and private hire vehicle drivers with each other. The report explained that Council's Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Convictions Policy had been updated to ensure that it met with the requirements and standards set out in the legislation and associated statutory guidance.

The purpose of the Policy was to provide guidance on how the Council would now determine the suitability of new applicants and existing licence holders to hold a Hackney Carriage or Private Hire licence where the applicant or licence holder had been convicted of a criminal or driving offence.

At its meeting on 13 July 2023 the Licensing Applications Committee had approved the publication of the updated draft Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Convictions Policy for consultation with members of the hackney carriage and private hire vehicle trade (Minute 4 refers). The consultation had been conducted between 2 August 2023 and 3 September 2023. The consultation was sent out to 1,351 drivers and 37 Private Hire and School Transport Operators who were asked to ensure their drivers read the report and updated policy. The consultation was also sent to the Chief Constable of Thames Valley Police. During the 28-day consultation period 6 objections had been received. Copies of the 6 objections were attached to the report at Appendices 2 to 7.

The report summarised each of the objections that had been received and provided the Licensing Team's perspective in response to each concern. A key concern expressed by drivers related to the changes made to the draft Policy regarding the consideration of driving offences and in particular the implications for the accumulation of DVLA penalty points for licenced drivers. As a result of the objections that had been received the Licensing Team had contacted other licensing authorities to compare the content relating to driving offences in Reading's draft Policy with that in the policies used by other licensing authorities. The findings of the comparison were summarised in the report with a copy of the response that had been provided by South Oxfordshire District Council attached at Appendix 8.

The Committee discussed the concerns that had been raised by drivers. At the meeting it was noted that that the new Policy proposed that where licence holders had **more than 6** valid penalty points for driving offences (in other words, 7 or more valid DVLA penalty points) their licence would be revoked. The Committee considered that this was an appropriate and reasonable standard to expect professional drivers to adhere to.

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The Committee also asked that some aspects of the draft Policy be made clearer and instructed that paragraphs 52 and 53 of the draft Policy be combined so that they would be read as one single paragraph.

Asif Rashid, Chairman of Reading Taxi Association, and Imran Ali, a local hackney carriage driver, were both present at the meeting and both addressed the Committee on the item.

Resolved:

- (1) That officers be authorised to make minor changes to the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Convictions Policy in order to improve clarity, including that paragraphs 52 and 53 be combined into one single paragraph.**
- (2) That, having given due consideration to the consultation objections received, the updated Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Convictions Policy, as attached to the report at Appendix 1, be adopted, subject to (1) above.**

STREET TRADING POLICY

The Committee considered a report that recommended the adoption of a Street Trading Policy for Reading for 2023-2028. A copy of the proposed Street Trading Policy was attached to the report at Appendix 1.

The Street Trading Policy had been developed to improve the quality of the town centre experience and would allow the Council to regulate unwanted street trading activities more effectively. The Policy looked to enhance visitors' experience of the town and improve how it functioned as a commercial centre. The Policy would ensure that residents, visitors and businesses would have greater certainty about how the Council viewed, monitored and managed street trading activity and would provide confidence that street trading had been properly considered, debated and a clear policy position had been formed. The Street Trading Policy aimed to:

- ensure fair trading between mobile premises in the Borough;
- protect the amenity of residents by ensuring that licenced traders did not cause nuisance, damage, disturbance or annoyance;
- ensure the safety of the people using street traders;
- promote diversity and consumer choice; and
- provide applicants with advice and guidance on the Council's approach to the administration of applications for street trading consents and licences.

The Street Trading Policy contained general guidance and advice to applicants, information on how to apply for Street Trading Consent, information on how the Council would determine applications, information on renewals, refusals and appeals, information relating to transfers and variations, information on the Council's enforcement activities and its complaints investigation process, information relating to waste management, information concerning pitch sharing and detail regarding relevant fees and payments.

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The report also explained that a voluntary consultation on the new Street Trading Policy would be undertaken for a period of one month. It was noted that there was no legal requirement for the Council to conduct a consultation but that doing so would provide the opportunity to obtain valuable community input on the newly adopted Street Trading Policy.

Resolved:

- (1) That the Street Trading Policy, as attached to the report at Appendix 1, be adopted;**
- (2) That the intention to carry out a voluntary consultation on the Street Trading Policy to seek the views of the local community be noted.**

(The meeting started at 6.30 pm and closed at 7.46 pm)

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Licensing Applications Committee

20 February 2024



Reading
Borough Council
Working better with you

| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Title | Hackney Carriage Unmet Demand Survey |
| Purpose of the report | To make a decision |
| Report status | Public report |
| Report author | Rob Abell, Consumer Protection Group Manager |
| Lead Councillor | Councillor John Ennis, Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport |
| Corporate priority | Not applicable, but still requires a decision |
| Recommendations | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That the results of the Unmet Demand Survey be noted. 2. That the Best Practice Guidance issued by the Department for Transport be noted. 3. That the current limit on Hackney Carriage licences be retained. |

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 In accordance with the provisions of the Town & Police Clauses Act 1847, as amended by the Transport Act 1985, Reading Borough Council currently limits the number of Hackney Carriage licences to 216.
- 1.2 The present legal provision on quantity restrictions for taxis outside London is set out in section 16 of the Transport Act 1985. This provides that the grant of a Hackney Carriage Vehicle licence (HCVL) may be refused for the purpose of limiting the number of licensed taxis if, but only if, the licensing authority is satisfied that there is no significant unmet demand for taxi services in their area.
- 1.3 The Department of Transport (DfT) published guidance in 2023 which advises that licensing authorities may continue to choose to limit the number of Hackney Carriage (HC) licences, provided that, in order to justify the imposition of quantity restrictions, they conduct an unmet demand survey at least every five years (previously 3yrs) to assess any significant unmet demand. This is provided as Appendix 2.
- 1.4 In April 2017 the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) issued guidance to Local Authorities in relation to the limitation of hackney carriage numbers. In the opinion of the CMA

“Quantity restrictions are not necessary to ensure the safety of passengers or to ensure that fares are reasonable. However, they can harm passengers by reducing availability, increasing waiting times, and reducing the scope for downward competitive pressure on fares.”

The CMA takes the view that concerns around congestion, air pollution and enforcement costs can generally be addressed through measures less harmful to passengers’ interests than quantity restrictions.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/private-hire-and-hackney-carriage-licensing-open-letter-to-local-authorities/regulation-of-taxis-and-private-hire-vehicles-understanding-the-impact-on-competition>

A PDF version of this is provided as Appendix 3.

- 1.5 The DfT's view is that licensing authorities that elect to restrict taxi licences should review this decision and, if the policy continues, the frequency should be at least every 5 years and aligned to the production of local transport plans where possible. The Department also expects the justification for any policy of quantity restrictions to be included in the Local Transport Plan process where this is their responsibility.
- 1.6 Since re-applying the limit on hackney carriage vehicle numbers after a survey in 2009, the licensing team has undertaken regular 3-yearly reviews of the level of unmet demand in line with DfT best practice. A new Unmet Demand Survey has now been carried out by CTS Traffic and Transportation Ltd which identifies that there is no unmet demand within the boundaries of Reading Borough Council.
- 1.7 This report is to allow members to consider the results of the recently completed hackney carriage unmet demand survey (a copy of which is attached at Appendix 1) and then consider whether it is appropriate to continue to limit the number of Hackney Carriage Vehicles licensed or amend the current limiting policy approach to hackney carriage numbers.

2. Policy Context

- 2.1 The Council is the licensing authority for Hackney Carriages. Under the Town Police Clauses Act 1847, a licensing authority had an unfettered discretion to limit the number of Hackney Carriage licences by being able to licence only such numbers as it thought fit. It was a power, which was widely used by many authorities to restrict the numbers of HC's for the purposes of exercising control and supervision over them. Under the Transport Act 1985, the position in law changed and the 1847 Act, as now amended by Section 16 of the Transport Act, provides as follows:

“that the grant of a licence may be refused, for the purpose of limiting the number of hackney carriages in respect of which licences are granted, if, but only if, the person authorised to grant licences is satisfied that there is no significant demand for the services of hackney carriages (within the area to which the licence would apply) which is unmet”.

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1985/67/section/16>

- 2.2 If the decision is taken to continue with a limitation policy, then there is the possibility of legal challenge to the decision in court, albeit this risk is mitigated by the carrying out of the survey every 3 years to identify whether there is any significant unmet demand or not. Regular three-year surveys have enabled Council's that have been challenged to put up a robust defence of their regulatory policies which has been accepted by the Courts.
- 2.3 If a decision was taken to de-limit the number of taxis, then subsequent monitoring of taxi ranks may reveal a need to expand their size or number, which the Council would be responsible for funding. Any further monitoring would be covered by the licensing fee income. At this stage it is unknown if there would be a need to increase the number of ranks. Any decision to do so would be subject to the normal budgetary processes. Demand from drivers to reduce the cap on numbers is very low.

3. Summary and Proposals

- 3.1 The report suggests the next review should commence in October 2026.
- 3.2 In relation to ranks, the review found the general picture of service to ranks in Reading is of a wide service provided generally promptly across all ranks in the central area. Some severe peaks do occur, but the trade seemed well-placed and organised to meet the overall demand requirements of the area.
- 3.3 From surveying the public, when asked if there were enough hackney carriages in the Reading area, of the respondents 59% (60% 2018) said there were enough and the balance saying there were not.
- 3.4 From trade stakeholder views, in terms of options moving forward, all those responding gave an answer. 44% said no more plates for at least the next three years; 56% said a restricted number should be issued. When split by owners and renters, unsurprisingly, 92% of owners said the limit should be retained, with two saying add one plate per month. For renters, 93% said add more plates with the balance saying retain the limit. Of those saying more plates, 75% said add one a month, with one renter each saying add two per month, add ten per month, add five a year, add 15-20 a year and finally add 12-24 immediately then one per month for five years.

No respondent suggested complete removal of the limit.

- 3.5 In the 'evaluation of unmet demand and its significance' section (section 7), it says: These results suggest that the current policy limiting vehicle numbers remains of benefit to the public interest. However, the increase implies a reduced level of service which needs to be noted although it has not taken the index over the threshold level of being significant.
- 3.6 The conclusion of the report does not recommend adding new plates at this time and states there is no evidence of any unmet demand. It states the committee is able to retain the present policy of limiting vehicle licences and at the same level of vehicle numbers.
- 3.7 The options for consideration are:

Option 1 - To consider the unmet demand report prepared by CTS Traffic and Transportation Ltd and agree to retain the current limit as set out in their report attached at appendix 1. This is the officer recommendation.

Option 2 - To consider the unmet demand report prepared by CTS Traffic and Transportation Ltd and agree to remove the existing limit on Hackney Carriage Vehicle Licences on condition that any new licences must be issued only to brand new ULEV or brand new fully electric purpose built hackney carriage vehicles for licensing within three months of being permitted to apply for a Hackney Carriage Vehicle licence and allowing market forces to determine on the number of licences that are applied for and issued.

Option 3 - To consider the unmet demand report prepared by CTS Traffic and Transportation Ltd and agree an increase in the number of Hackney Carriage Vehicle Licences per year to be agreed by members. Any additional Hackney Carriage plates must be issued only to brand new ULEV or brand new fully electric purpose built hackney carriage vehicles for licensing within three months of being permitted to apply for a Hackney Carriage Vehicle licence.

4. Contribution to Strategic Aims

- 4.1 The HC trade contribute greatly to the transportation links provided in Reading and are part of the Local Transport Plan 2040 that is currently be developed.

5. Environmental and Climate Implications

- 5.1. The CIA has been submitted for comments and we are currently awaiting a reply.

6. Community Engagement

- 6.1. A consultation exercise was conducted through CTS Traffic and Transportation Ltd with Supermarkets, Hotels, Pubwatch / individual pubs / night clubs, Other entertainment venues, Restaurants, Hospitals, Police, Disability representatives, Rail operators and other council contacts within all relevant local councils.
- 6.2. A consultation was also carried out by the Licensing Team to all HC Drivers and owners the results of which are detailed in the report by CTS Traffic and Transportation Ltd.

7. Equality Implications

- 7.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:
- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 7.2 The Council will undertake an equality impact assessment scoping exercise on the projects included within the recommendations where applicable and at the appropriate stage of development.

8. Legal Implications

- 8.1 Section 16 of the Transport Act 1985 gives us the ability to control numbers, if, but only if, the person authorised to grant licences is satisfied that there is no significant demand for the services of hackney carriages (within the area to which the licence would apply) which is unmet. This is the legal reason this committee report has been prepared, in conjunction with the recent unmet demand survey.
- 8.2 The Department for Transport and Private Hire Vehicle Licensing: Best Practice Guidance lays out a set of recommended questions for licensing authorities to consider when setting any taxi quantity controls. The Guidance suggests that taxi quantity controls should be reviewed regularly and for proper justification of any control to be laid out in local transport plans. These questions are designed to support licensing authorities in reaching a verdict on any such controls and to give them an idea of the things they should be considering to demonstrate that control would be proportionate.
- 8.3 The Department for Transport and Private Hire Vehicle Licensing: Best Practice Guidance 2023, Section 9 (Quantity restrictions of taxi licences outside London) reaffirms the legal power to control numbers comes from the Transport Act 1985 (as above). It also comments on competition, gives guidance on conducting unmet demand surveys, recommends consultation, conduct reviews every 5 years, and poses a number of questions to be considered. It is our view that this section of the guidance has been complied with.
- 8.4 The Competition and Markets Authority 2017 guidance on the Regulation of taxis and private hire vehicles: understanding the impact of competition is relevant for consideration.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/private-hire-and-hackney-carriage-licensing-open-letter-to-local-authorities/regulation-of-taxis-and-private-hire-vehicles-understanding-the-impact-on-competition>

This notes that consumers are in a relatively weak position to compare offers, negotiate prices in relation to the taxi trade.

This guide is designed to help local authorities understand the impact some licensing conditions can have on consumers and hence help to reach the right balance between ensuring passenger safety and avoiding consumers having to face higher prices or lower service quality.

The CMA has found that some licensing conditions are likely to restrict or distort competition in ways that may result in higher prices and/or worse service for consumers.

- 8.5 Case law shows that in the decision of *R v Great Yarmouth Borough Council, ex p Sawyer* that a local authority can at any time decide to delimit the number of Hackney Carriages for which it will grant licences, subject only to the proviso that that decision must not, of itself, be *Wednesbury* unreasonable. Provided that the council has taken into consideration the relevant matters and, conversely, has not considered anything irrelevant, it can decide to take that course of action.

9. Financial Implications

- 9.1 RBC legal costs could be incurred in defending any decisions made by members which are appealed against through the courts.
- 9.2 The cost of future unmet demand surveys required to help review the continuation or otherwise of a limitation policy, will be in the region of £16,000. The cost of carrying out the survey is covered by the annual licence fee for hackney carriage vehicle licences.

10. Timetable for Implementation

- 10.1 To be determined following the decision by members if required.

Appendices

1. Hackney Carriage Unmet Demand Survey 2023 by CTS Traffic and Transportation Ltd
2. Department for Transport Guidance November 2023 – Section 9
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/taxi-and-private-hire-vehicle-licensing-best-practice-guidance/taxi-and-private-hire-vehicle-licensing-best-practice-guidance-for-licensing-authorities-in-england>
3. Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) Guidance

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Appendix 1



Reading
Taxi survey

January 2024

Executive Summary

This Taxi survey has been undertaken on behalf of Reading Borough Council following the guidance of the April 2010 DfT Best Practice Guidance document, and all relevant case history in regard to unmet demand. This Executive Summary draws together key points from the main report that are needed to allow a committee to determine from the facts presented their current position in regard to the policy of limiting hackney carriage vehicle licences according to Section 16 of the 1985 Transport Act. It is a summary of the main report which follows and should not be relied upon solely to justify any decisions of a committee but must be read in conjunction with the full report below.

Since re-applying the limit on hackney carriage vehicle numbers after a survey in 2009, the licensing area has undertaken regular 3-yearly reviews of the level of unmet demand in line with DfT best practice. Neither the 2012, 2015 or 2018 surveys identified any unmet demand that was significant. The current survey mirrors work undertaken in the previous surveys to provide a robust review of demand at 2023 (with earlier surveys delayed due to atypical conditions related to the pandemic).

For this survey, estimated weekly demand is 11% lower than that recorded in 2018, although station rank demand has increased 6% despite reduced levels of rail users (still only 78% of pre-pandemic levels around the time of the survey). Up to 40% of rail passengers continue their journey using one of the three ranks, less any passengers walking in from around the station.

Annually, rank passengers are around 1.17m (measured) with hailed passengers around 0.21m, app-based hirings 368,200 and phone bookings around 982,000 based on the surveys and results of the public interviews. This suggests the licensed vehicle fleet of Reading serves 2.73m passengers per year.

A key benefit of the limit on hackney carriage vehicle numbers was keeping numbers stable during the pandemic at a time when private hire numbers that are not so protected fell strongly.

The area has followed the national trend in seeing reduced demand but increased unmet demand. For Reading this may be due to some drivers choosing not to work unsociable times and to others being able to take more app-based bookings rather than from the ranks. The balance in the area seems to be towards hackney carriage trips. Renting demand for hackney carriage vehicles remains strong.

The next Reading LTP is being developed at this time and includes reference to the licensed vehicle service. This focusses on transport up to 2040, with no current date for the next review known. This, and the fact that levels of unmet demand have increased towards being significant suggests the next review should be no later than three years from the rank surveys (therefore October 2026), but would preferably occur in October 2025 to ensure that unmet demand had not continued to grow and become significant in the interim period.

The limit clearly provides benefit to the public and trade, particularly in giving stability. Perversely, the value it gives to plates also ensures that any plates that become available are readily taken up.

The Committee can readily retain the current policy of limiting vehicle numbers and do so at the present level. This decision could also be readily defended if needed although as already noted the confidence in the conclusion will reduce towards the end of the three year period.





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1 General introduction and background

Reading Borough Council is responsible for the licensing of hackney carriage and private hire vehicles operating within the Council area and is the licensing authority for this complete area. Further details of the local application of Section 16 of the 1985 Transport Act with regard to limiting hackney carriage vehicle numbers is provided in further Chapters of this report. Hackney carriage vehicle licences are the only part of licensing where such a stipulation occurs and there is no legal means by which either private hire vehicle numbers, private hire or hackney carriage driver numbers, or the number of private hire operators can be limited.

The Best Practice Guidance

This review of current policy is based on the Best Practice Guidance produced by the Department for Transport updated in November 2023 (BPG). It seeks to provide information to the licensing authority to meet section 16 of the Transport Act 1985 “that the grant of a hackney carriage vehicle licence may be refused if, but only if, the licensing authority is satisfied that there is no significant demand for the services of hackney carriages within its local area, which is unmet.” This terminology is typically shortened to “no SUD”.

Background

Current hackney carriage, private hire and operator licensing is undertaken within the legal frameworks first set by the Town Polices Clause Act 1847 (TPCA). This has been amended and supplemented by various following legislation including the Transport Act 1985, Section 16 in regard to hackney carriage vehicle limits, and by the Local Government Miscellaneous Provisions Act 1976 with reference to private hire vehicles and operations. This latter Act saw application of regulation to the then growing private hire sector which had not been previously part of the TPCA (and remains outside of it). Many of the aspects of these laws have been tested and refined by other more recent legislation and more importantly through case law.

Beyond legislation, the experience of the person in the street tends to see both hackney carriage and private hire vehicles as ‘taxis’ – a term we will try for the sake of clarity to use only in its generic sense within the report. We will use the term ‘licensed vehicle’ to refer to both hackney carriage and private hire. The formal Dft stance is to term its documents using ‘taxi’ for hackney carriage alone, with private hire termed separately and hackney carriage no longer used. However, many legal references will remain for some while.

Review of Policy and Legislation

The legislation around licensed vehicles and their drivers has been the subject of many attempts at review. The limiting of hackney carriage vehicle numbers has been a particular concern as it is often considered to be a restrictive practice and against natural economic trends. The current BPG in fact says “most local licensing authorities do not impose quantity restrictions, the Department regards that as best practice”.

The most recent reviews were by the Office of Fair Trading in 2003, through the production of the BPG in 2010, and the Law Commission review which published its results in 2014, the Parliamentary Task and Finish Group which reported in September 2018, the Government Response in February 2019 and the consultation on “Protecting Users” which closed on 22 April 2019 that then resulted in issue of the “Statutory Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Standards” (STPHVS) on 23rd July 2020. A fully revised Best Practice Guidance document draft was issued, consulted on during 2022 and finally issued in November 2023 after the data collection for this Report had long been completed.

None of these previous changes resulted in any material change to the legislation involved in licensing. Other groups have provided their comments (including the Urban Transport Group and the Competition and Markets Authority), but the upshot remains no change in legislation from that already stated above.

With respect to the principal subject of this survey, local authorities retain the right to restrict the number of hackney carriage vehicle licenses. The Law Commission conclusion included retention of the power to limit hackney carriage vehicle numbers but utilizing a public interest test determined by the Secretary of State. It also suggested the three-year horizon also be used for rank reviews and accessibility reviews. It is assumed the Government response to the Task and Finish Group is now effectively the current reaction to this extensive research. There was no mention of this topic in the STPHVS although that document did discuss wider review of the overall BPG document in the next consultation (see below).

Current Government Policy review status

The more comprehensive review of the sections of the BPG not affected by the February 2019 Statutory Guide, as stated in para 1.8 of that document – “A consultation on revised BPG, which focusses on recommendations to licensing authorities to assist them in setting appropriate standards (other than those relating to passenger safety) to enable the provision of services the public demand, was taken forward once the final Statutory Guidance was issued.” STPHVS suggested the aim of making “clear recommendations on the measures licensing authorities should consider in order to enable the trade to react to the demands of passengers”. The November 2023 version provided such recommendations.

The present background to policy

A more recent restriction, often applied to areas where there is no ‘quantity’ control felt to exist per-se, is that of ‘quality control’. This is often a pseudonym for a restriction that any new hackney carriage vehicle licence must be for a wheelchair accessible vehicle, of various kinds as determined locally. In many places this implies a restricted number of saloon style hackney carriage licences are available, which often are given ‘grandfather’ rights to remain as saloon style.

Within this quality restriction, there are various levels of strength of the types of vehicles allowed. The tightest restriction, now only retained by a few authorities only allows ‘London’ style wheelchair accessible vehicles, restricted to those with a 25-foot turning circle, and at the present time principally the LTI Tx, the Mercedes Vito special edition with steerable rear axle, and the Metrocab (both of the latter no longer produced).

Others allow a wider range of van style conversions in their wheelchair accessible fleet, whilst some go as far as also allowing rear-loading conversions. Given the additional price of these vehicles, this often implies a restriction on entry to the hackney carriage trade. For some authorities this is complicated by local education authority rules on vehicles used on their contracts.

Some authorities do not allow vehicles which appear to be hackney carriage, i.e. mainly the London style vehicles, to be within the private hire fleet, whilst others do allow wheel chair vehicles.

The most usual method of distinguishing between hackney carriages and private hire is a ‘Taxi’ roof sign on the vehicle, although again some areas do allow roof signs on private hire as long as they do not say ‘Taxi’, some turn those signs at right angles, whilst others apply liveries, mainly to hackney carriage fleets, but sometimes also to private hire fleets.

Some authorities have also considered use of deregulation in favour of more sustainable vehicle types as a further potential quality restriction given the urgent need to improve overall vehicle emission standards, but the status of charging points and public views regarding electrification in general are not as favourable now, particularly with reduced government subsidy.

Unmet demand and its significance

After introduction of the 1985 Transport Act, Leeds University Institute for Transport Studies developed a tool by which unmet demand could be evaluated and a determination made if this was significant or not. The tool was taken forward and developed as more studies were undertaken. Over time this 'index of significance of unmet demand' (ISUD) became accepted as an industry standard tool to be used for this purpose. Some revisions have been made following the few but specific court cases where various parties have challenged the policy of retaining a limit.

Some of the application has differed between Scottish and English authority's. This is mainly due to some court cases in Scotland taking interpretation of the duty of the licensing authority further than is usual in England and Wales, requiring current knowledge of the status of unmet demand at all times, rather than just at the snap-shot taken every three years. However, the three year survey horizon has become generally accepted given the advice of the BPG and most locations that review regularly do within that timescale.

The DfT asked in writing in 2004 for all licensing authorities with quantity restrictions to review them, publish their justification by March 2005, and then review at least every three years since then. The reaction of many authorities to that request was to remove limits. In due course, DfT produced a summary of the government guidance which was last updated in England and Wales in 2010 (but more recently in Scotland), and now most recently in November 2023.

The BPG also continues to provide additional suggestions of how these surveys should be undertaken, albeit in general but fairly extensive terms. A key encouragement within the BPG was that "an interval of three years is commonly regarded as the maximum reasonable period between surveys". The new BPG now encourages all review on a five year horizon aligned with the local transport policy (LTP) for the area. BPG suggests key points in consideration are passenger waiting times at ranks, for street hailings and telephone bookings, latent and peaked demand, wide consultation and publication of "all the evidence gathered".

The most recent changes in legislation regarding licensed vehicles have been enactment of the parts of the Equality Act related to guidance dogs (sections 168 to 171, enacted in October 2010), the two clauses of the Deregulation Act which were successful in proceeding, relating to length of period each license covers and to allowing operators to transfer work across borders (enacted in October 2015), and most recently enactment of Sections 165 and 167 of the Equality Act, albeit on a permissive basis (see below).

The latest STPHVS required an update given to the DfT by the end of January 2021 in terms of consideration of the measures included in that document, principally production of a comprehensive policy document, review of if CCTV might be mandated and documentation of passenger complaints but it is not clear if DfT have actually reviewed this.

Case law and unmet demand

In respect to case law impinging on unmet demand, the two most recent cases were in 1987 and 2002. The first case (*R v Great Yarmouth*) concluded authorities must consider the view of significant unmet demand as a whole, not condescending to detailed consideration of the position in every limited area, i.e. to consider significance of unmet demand over the area as a whole.

R v Castle Point considered the issue of latent, or preferably termed, suppressed demand consideration. This clarified that this element relates only to the element which is measurable. Measurable suppressed demand includes inappropriately met demand (taken by private hire vehicles in situations legally hackney carriage opportunities) or those forced to use less satisfactory methods to get home (principally walking, i.e. those observed to walk away from rank locations).

2019 saw three challenges with respect to surveys of unmet demand. All three found in favour of the current methodology being undertaken. A key focus was the need for a robust and up to date independent survey report being available.

In one case it was made clear the current guidance is based on the 2010 BPG, which supersedes previous notes and DfT advice, whilst in another case having a valid survey meant those challenging had no case for their proposed challenge, and in the final case an authority was clearly told they could not rely on a very old survey which itself could not be produced. In the end a fresh survey was undertaken, finding no unmet demand.

Most recent changes relating to demand

The most recent changes in legislation regarding licensed vehicles have been enactment of the parts of the Equality Act related to guidance dogs (sections 168 to 171, enacted in October 2010), the two clauses of the Deregulation Act which were successful in proceeding, relating to length of period each license covers and to allowing operators to transfer work across borders (enacted in October 2015), and most recently enactment of Sections 165 and 167 of the Equality Act, albeit on a permissive basis (see below).

In November 2016, the DfT undertook a consultation regarding enacting Sections 167 and 165 of the Equality Act. These allow for all vehicles capable of carrying a wheelchair to be placed on a list by the local council (section 167). Any driver using a vehicle on this list then has a duty under section 165 to:

- Carry the passenger while in the wheelchair
- Not make any additional charge for doing so
- If the passenger chooses to sit in a passenger seat to carry the wheelchair
- To take such steps as are necessary to ensure that the passenger is carried in safety and reasonable comfort
- To give the passenger such mobility assistance as is reasonably required

This was enacted from April 2017. There remains no confirmation of any timetable for instigating either the remainder of the Equality Act or the Law Commission recommendations, or for the adoption of the update of the BPG.

The two 2022 Acts make small but significant changes. The 2022 Acts are the "Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles (Safeguarding and Road Safety Act) (31 March 2022)" and the "Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles (Disabled Persons) (28 June 2022)".

The first makes it mandatory for any licensing authority in England that has information about a taxi (hackney carriage) or private hire vehicle (phv) driver licensed by another authority that is relevant to safeguarding or road safety concerns in its area to share that information with the authority that issued that drivers licence.

The second amends the Equality Act 2010 to place duties on taxi and phv drivers and operators such that any disabled person has specific rights and protections to be transported and receive assistance when using a taxi or phv without being charged extra for doing so.

Regard has also been had to the Statutory Taxi and Private Standards July 2020 which were published on 21 July 2020 and represented a milestone in transportation regulation, because for the first time the safeguarding of children and vulnerable people were put right at the heart of the taxi licensing system. This publication is now supported and expanded by the latest November 2023 BPG.

The current status regarding unmet demand studies

In general, industry standards suggest (but specifically do not mandate in any way) that the determination of conclusions about significance of unmet demand should take into account the practicability of improving the standard of service through the increase of supply of vehicles.

It is also felt important to have consistent treatment of authorities as well as for the same authority over time, although apart from the general guidance of the BPG there is no clear stipulations as to what this means in reality, and certainly no mandatory nor significant court guidance in this regard.

During September 2018 the All-Party Parliamentary Group on taxis produced its long-awaited Final Report. There was a generally accepted call for revision to taxi licensing legislation and practice, including encouragement for local authorities to move towards some of the practical suggestions made within the Report. However, the Report has no legislative backing, and the key conclusion was that the Government needed to act firstly to revise the 2010 BPG but then to move to revisions to primary legislation as soon as practicable.

Despite some opposition from members of the group, the right to retain limits on hackney carriage vehicle numbers was supported, with many also supporting adding a tool which would allow private hire numbers to be limited where appropriate, given reasonable explanation of the expected public interest gains. This latter option is now being taken forward in Scotland, with two studies published and the Scottish Government preparing guidance, although the Government response did not support this option.

As already stated, other groups have provided comments giving their views about licensing matters, but the upshot remains no change in legislation from that already stated above. The Scottish Government are moving forward in terms of their application of the potential limiting of private hire vehicle numbers but this is specific to Scottish law and not presently relevant to the English licensing authorities.

A number of authorities have recently changed and become unitary authorities. This has led to a number of former 'limited' areas now becoming a larger single area and losing their limit on vehicle numbers. However, the overall proportion of authorities with limits appears to be remaining similar.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the present legislation in England and Wales sees public fare-paying passenger carrying vehicles firstly split by passenger capacity. All vehicles able to carry nine or more passengers are dealt with under national public service vehicle licensing. Local licensing authorities only have jurisdiction over vehicles carrying eight or less passengers.

Further, the jurisdiction focusses on the vehicles, drivers and operators but rarely extends to the physical infrastructure these use (principally ranks).

The vehicles are split between hackney carriages which are alone able to wait at ranks or pick up people in the streets without a booking, and private hire who can only be used with a booking made through an operator. If any passenger uses a private hire vehicle without such a properly made booking, they are not generally considered to be insured for their journey.

Drivers can either be split between ability to drive either hackney carriage or private hire, or be 'dual', allowed to drive either kind of vehicle. Whilst a private hire driver can only take bookings via an operator, with the 'triple-lock' applying that the vehicle, driver and operator must all be with the same authority, a hackney carriage driver can accept bookings on-street or by phone without the same stipulation required for private hire.

Recent legislation needing clarification has some operators believing they can use vehicles from any authority as long as they are legally licensed as private hire. At first, under the 'Stockton' case, this was hackney carriages operating as private hire in other areas (cross-border hiring). More recently, under the Deregulation Act, private hire companies are able to subcontract bookings to other companies in other areas if they are unable to fulfil their booking, but the interpretation of this has become quite wide.

The 'triple lock' licensing rule has also become accepted. A vehicle, driver and operator must all be under the same licensing authority to provide full protection to the passenger. However, it is also accepted that a customer can call any private hire company anywhere to provide their transport although many would not realise that if there was an issue it would be hard for a local authority to follow this up unless the triple lock was in place by the vehicle used and was for the area the customer contacted licensing.

Further, introduction of recent methods of obtaining vehicles, principally using 'apps' on mobile phones have also led to confusion as to how 'apps' usage sits with present legislation.

All these matters can impact on hackney carriage services, their usage, and therefore on unmet demand and its significance.



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2 Local background and context

Key dates for this Taxi survey for Reading are:

- appointed Licensed Vehicle Surveys and Assessment (LVSA) on 22nd February 2023
- in accordance with our proposal of February 2023
- as confirmed during the inception meeting for the survey held on 23rd March 2023
- this survey was carried out between April and November 2023
- On street pedestrian survey work occurred in July 2023 (on a Thursday and Monday)
- the video rank observations occurred in October 2023
- Licensed vehicle driver opinions and operating practices were obtained during our inception trade meeting and from your in-house survey
- Key stakeholders were consulted throughout the period of the survey
- A draft of this Final Report was reviewed by the client during January 2023 and reported to the appropriate Council committee following that date.

Reading Borough Council is one of six unitary authorities within the former Berkshire county area. The authority has a current 2021 population of 174,200 (was 166,100 at time of 2018 survey) using the initial estimates currently available from the 2021 census.

With reference to transport policy, the Reading Transport Strategy 2040 (RTS 2040) is under development. Present policy retains the Local Transport Plan adopted in 2011 and which covers 2011-2026 and continues to be delivered by regular reviews, which will be replaced by the RTS 2040 once adopted. The input in the June 2023 consultation version of RTS 2040 is copied below:

"Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles

5.34 Taxi and private hire vehicles are a key part of the public transport network providing a service when other modes of public transport may be unavailable, or in areas that the current public transport network may not serve, allowing journeys that may not otherwise be possible to be made by public transport. This reduces the need for people to own private cars.

5.35 Our role seeks to ensure that providers of taxi and private hire services adhere to the quality obligations set out in the relevant licences, and are

compliant with all relevant guidance on the conditions that arise from the application of the appropriate sections of legislation.

5.36 Alongside the Police, we can revoke taxi and private hire licences if the licence holder does not meet their obligations. A penalty points system is in place for breaches of regulations, as set out in the licence holder handbook. Through these mechanisms, we will continue to work with taxi and private hire providers to deliver high-quality and reliable taxi services in Reading.

5.37 Technology can play a huge part in making taxis more accessible to people with the introduction of apps, cashless pay systems and enabling ride sharing.

5.38 We are also responsible for providing and maintaining suitable taxi ranks and pick-up points, and we will continue to liaise with operators to maintain adequate and appropriately located facilities across Reading. We will continue to support a shift towards electric taxis and will work with taxi and private hire service operators to identify ways in which we can support fleet changes.

5.39 A new policy has been adopted to encourage taxi drivers to switch to cleaner vehicles to improve air quality and contribute towards the aim to be a carbon neutral town by 2030. We are initially offering incentives in the form of reducing licence fees for the cleanest vehicles. Since April 2020, a 25% reduction in the vehicle licensing fee for all Ultra Low Emission Vehicles (ULEVs) (emitting a maximum of 50g/km of CO₂) has been available. A discount of 50% is offered for electric vehicles.

5.40 Additionally, by 2028, all hackney carriages in Reading will be required to be either electric or ULEVs. This is further supported by our EV strategy, which aims to reduce emissions from our taxi fleet, and private hire vehicles.

5.41 This will contribute towards reducing, and eventually removing altogether, the most polluting taxis on Reading's roads, having a positive step towards combating the impacts of climate change.

Policy RTS10 – Taxis and Private Hire

10.1: We will work with operators to deliver smart, accessible and efficient taxi services across the Borough.

10.2: We will work with taxi and private hire services, offering support and incentives to encourage a shift towards the use of cleaner vehicles.

10.3: We will work with taxi operators in Reading to transition to electric or hybrid vehicles by 2030."

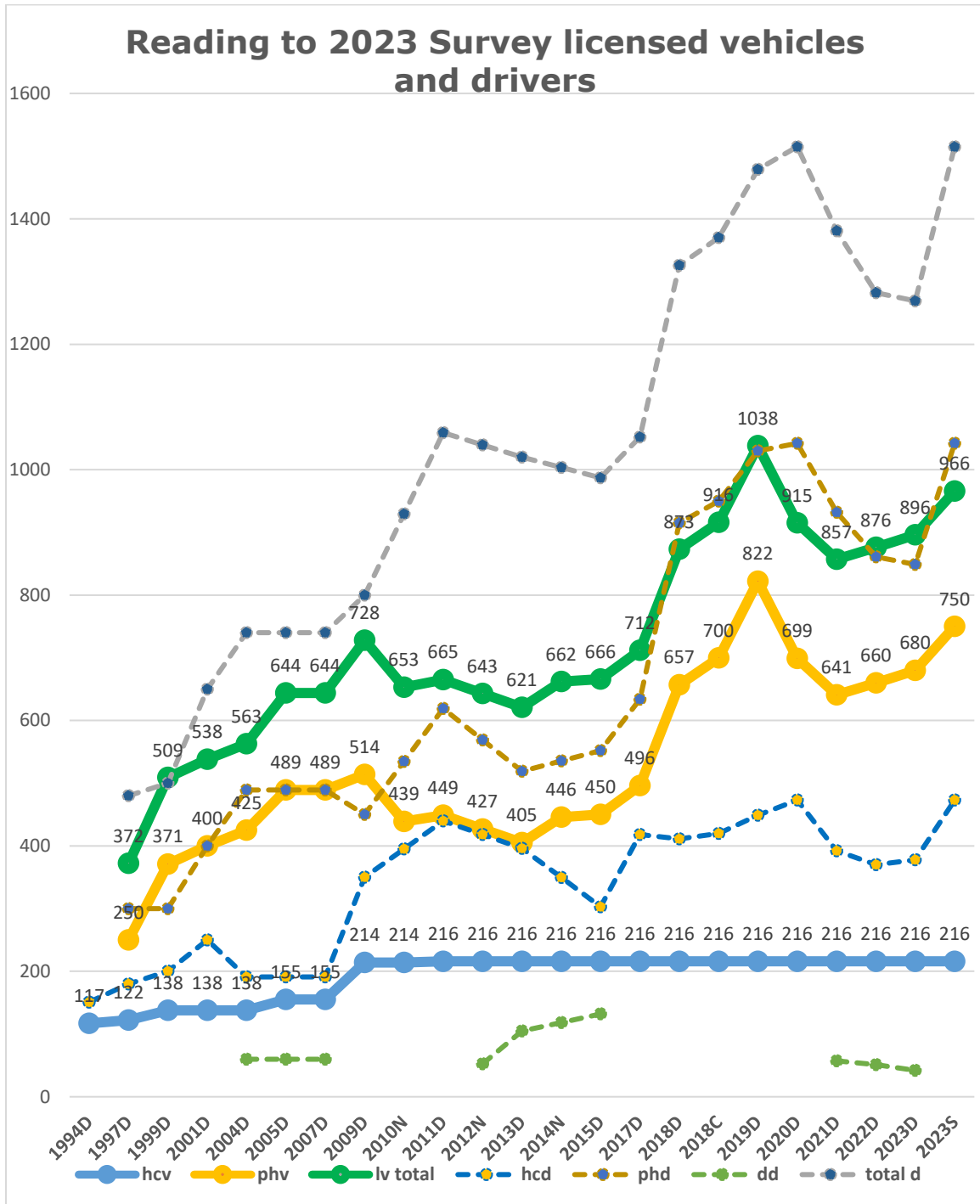
In terms of rank provision, all ranks are provided by the Council itself which is the local highway authority. In 2023 there are no private ranks within the area. All three rail station ranks remain on council land even following the redevelopment of the station. Although there was a time between the last survey and now when there was a question regarding the main Horseshoe rank, and access to it, this is now back to the status it had during the last survey, and is likely to remain thus for the foreseeable future although during this survey it was still subject to disruption arising from the large adjacent building works continuing.

Reading has chosen to utilize its power to limit hackney carriage vehicle numbers, although it removed its restriction in April 2007 but returned the limit in March 2009 after a further survey. Surveys in 2012, 2015 and 2018 all found the levels of unmet demand were not significant and no requirement existed for any new plate introduction, whilst retention of the limit policy remained possible given the conclusions of no significant unmet demand in the area. Another key fact is that Reading has long held a policy that all hackney carriages must be wheel chair accessible, and essentially London-style.

At the present time, licensing policy aims to see all hackney carriage vehicles ULEV by 2028. The minimum age for a new vehicle is 8 years, with a maximum of 12 which rises to 15 years for ULEV, although the present only vehicle retains a small petrol engine used as a range extender.

By drawing together published statistics from both the Department for Transport (D) and the National Private Hire Association (N), supplemented by

private information from the licensing authority records (C), recent trends in vehicle, driver and operator numbers can be observed. Due to the comparative size, the operator figures are shown in the second picture.



Licensing Statistics from 1994 to date

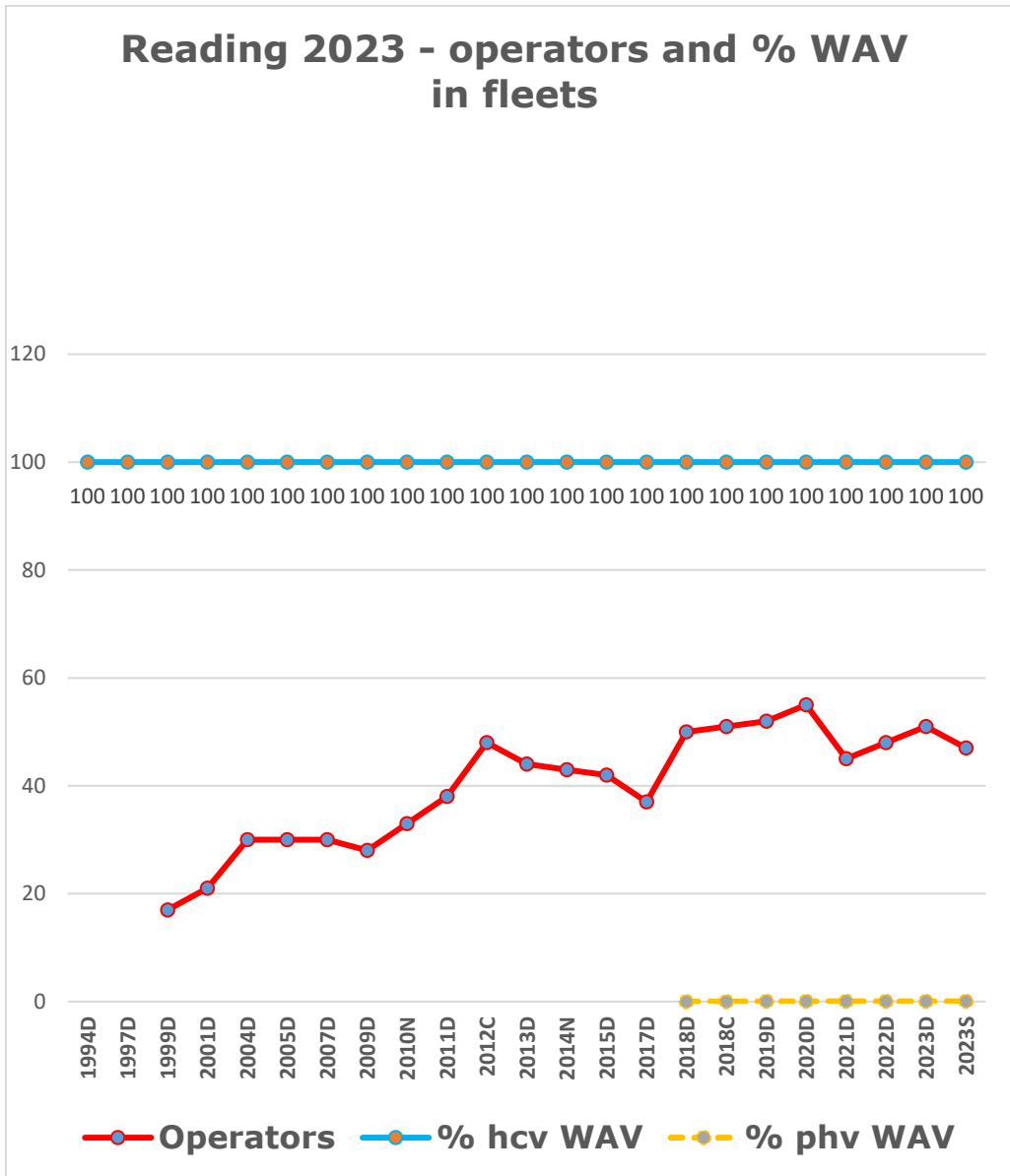
The graph shows how vehicle numbers were gradually increased up until the limit was removed, with a sharp increase to almost the current level of 216 was set after the 2009 review and reintroduction of the limit.

Interestingly, the period when anyone could have a hackney carriage, as long as it met the current vehicle criteria which were fairly stringent, saw private hire numbers also grow strongly. When the hackney carriage vehicle limit returned, hackney carriage numbers remained fixed with private hire numbers slumping, but then starting to grow again from a low point in 2013. Numbers grew to a peak of over 800 in 2019, but were then knocked back hard by the impact of the pandemic. However, the low point of 641 occurred in 2022 since which numbers have grown again with there being around 750 at the time of the survey compared to the 216 hackney carriages. There was no formal impact of the pandemic on numbers of hackney carriages although it is understood there were some plates which became available but were promptly taken up and added the latest EV style vehicles to the fleet. There were two plates not renewed and one revoked, all three were offered and replaced promptly with new EV vehicles.

Both hackney carriage and private hire drivers peaked just before the pandemic, then dipped but both have now returned to very similar levels to pre-pandemic although perhaps marginally lower.

Information is also available from these sources to show how the level of wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAV) has varied. It must be noted that in most cases the values for the private hire side tend to be much more approximate than those on the hackney carriage side, as there is no option to mandate for private hire being wheelchair accessible. In some areas, to strengthen the ability of the public to differentiate between the two parts of the licensed vehicle trade, licensing authorities might not allow any WAV in the private hire fleet at all.





Operator numbers and levels of WAV provision in the fleet

For Reading, the hackney carriage fleet has been fully wheelchair accessible, principally using mainly vehicles also accepted by TfL, for a long period of time. There are a very small number of wheelchair accessible vehicles in the private hire fleet although the actual numbers are not confirmed.

Most private hire operators with need for such vehicles are understood to have arrangements with relevant hackney carriages in order to meet their customer requirements in this regard.



Operator numbers grew from after the last survey, dipped slightly in the pandemic and saw some return, but also some reduction in the latest period for which information was available at the time of the survey.

The licensing section informed us that out of town vehicles regularly are noted in Reading, including from Fareham, New Forest, West Berkshire, Bracknell, Windsor and Maidenhead, Wokingham, South Oxfordshire and Transport for London. Whilst some may be legitimate activity given the large hinterland for Reading, others may seek to gain custom from local trips. This has not changed since the last survey.

With reference to the differentiation of hackney carriage and private hire, other than the distinction that all hackney carriage must be wheelchair accessible, private hire are not allowed to have company names that include either 'cab' or 'taxi'. This is consistent with latest BPG guidance.

Reading undertakes regular review of its policy to limit hackney carriage vehicle numbers in line with the BPG. The previous surveys were in 2019, 2015, 2012 and 2009, before which as already noted there had been a brief spell of no limit on hackney carriage vehicle numbers. The current survey was delayed by the COVID pandemic and then leaving time for the fleet to return to more normal operations.

Fleet profile

The analysis of the fleet profile that identified a high level of non-owning hackney carriage drivers was not repeated this time. In 2018 there were 45 vehicles that did not have owner-drivers and 39% of drivers had no owned vehicle.





3 Patent demand measurement (rank surveys)

As already recorded in Chapter 2, control of provision of on-street ranks in Reading is under the jurisdiction of the Borough Council, which is the local highway authority as well as being the licensing authority. Appendix 2 provides a list of ranks in Reading at the time of this current survey.

Our methodology involves a current review both in advance of submitting our proposal to undertake this Taxi survey and at the study inception meeting, together with site visits were considered necessary. This provides a valid and appropriate sample of rank coverage which is important to feed the numeric evaluation of the level of unmet demand, and its significance (see discussion in Chapter 7).

For 2023, the ranks to be covered were reviewed in advance of the observations being undertaken with both the Trade and the licensing team.

For 2023, the Bridge Street rank remains designated a 'rest rank' where vehicles can wait but principally for the purposes of driver safety rather than acting as places that passengers can join the vehicles, as in 2019.

Although the trade comment that Queens Road is unused is accepted, it was agreed to observe this location to understand overall potential options for this location, including if it saw any private hire usage.

The Yield Hall Place private and council ranks no longer exist and in fact any hackney carriage accessing the private area is likely to be fined for doing so, so this area was removed from the observations.

The Horseshoe and Station West (Station Hill) ranks continue to operate as in their revised 2017 format. At Station West there are two lanes in the main part of the rank. The outer lane is for vehicles servicing the Station West rank. The inner lane is for any vehicle waiting to move on to the Horseshoe location. All vehicles for the Horseshoe must pass through this location before moving on to service the head of the rank, or before waiting in the reduced number of spaces in Garrard Street. For 2023, ongoing building work in Garrard Street means the number of spaces there is limited, with vehicles also waiting along Greyfriars Road. Garrard Street has two marshals provided by the construction company during site working hours who hold back traffic, including hackney carriages, when passage is not safe.

Overall survey results

The observations from the rank surveys were analysed and overall estimates produced for an average weekly level of demand at each rank. To validate this information and understand current levels of usage against those from the past, information from the previous surveys has been included. The overall results are shown in the table below.

| Rank | Passengers per week 2023 survey | % of total | Passengers per week 2018 survey | Passengers per week 2015 survey (% of total) | Passengers per week, 2012 survey (% of total) | Passengers per week 2009 survey |
|--|---------------------------------|------------|---------------------------------|--|---|---------------------------------|
| Horseshoe | 11,628 | 52 | 10,584 (42%) | 11,719 (40%) | 15,830 (59%) | 69% |
| Station West | 2,948 | 13 | 3,217 (13%) | 1,553 (5%) | n/a | n/a |
| Station North | 2,582 | 12 | 2,296 (9%) | 2,507 (8%) | n/a | n/a |
| (all three above station ranks) | 17,158 | 77 | 16,097 (64%) | 15,779 [53%] | 15,830 [59%] | [69%] |
| Gun Street | 1551 | 7 | 915 (4%) | 414 (1.1%) | 1,854 (7%) | |
| Pitcher and Piano | 1,052 | 5 | 2,588 (10%) | 4,018 (14%) | 3,472 (13%) | |
| Quicksilver | 940 | 4 | 1,695 (7%) | 2,289 (8%) | 1,010 (4%) | |
| Headmasters | 673 | 3 | 1,840 (7%) | 2,418 (8%) | 620 (2.25%) | |
| Royal Berkshire Hospital | 583 | 3 | 410 (2%) | 264 (1%) | | |
| Station Road | 460 | 2 | 564 (2%) | 1,057 (4%) | 2,223 (8.3%) | 27% |
| Oxford Road | 10 | 0.0 | Unused | 125 (0.4%) | 84 (0.3%) | |
| St Mary's Butts 24-hr | 0 | 0 | 361 (1%) | 342 (1%) | 12 (0.05%) | |
| Casino | 0 | 0 | 35 (0.1%) | 67 (0.2%) | | |
| Minster St, 2018 see Gun St above | 0 | 0 | | 18 (0.1%) | | |
| Bridge St (rest rank only from 2018) | 0 | 0 | | 268 (1%) | 344 (1.3%) | |
| Oracle and Yield Hall Place (private) feeder | Gone | | 752 (3%) | 2,397 (8%) | 132 (0.5%) | |
| Oracle Feeder, for 2018 see Oracle rank above) | | Gone | | 13 (0.0%) | 1,057 (4.3%) | |

| | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| King Street | Gone | | 48 (0.2%) | | |
| Total est weekly demand | 22,427 | 25,255 | 29,516 | 26,638 | 17,600 |
| Growth from previous | -11% | -14% | 11% | 51% | n/a |
| Growth from 2009 | 27% | 43% | 68% | 51% | n/a |

Since the last survey, overall usage of hackney carriage ranks in Reading has reduced by a further 11% (14% from 2015 to 2018). However, this still remains 27% higher than the low values identified in the 2009 survey.

The total passenger flow through all three station ranks over the survey period actually increased, with the total station demand now being 77% of all passenger demand (up from 64%). Both the Horseshoe and the Station North ranks have increased in absolute terms and in share, with the Horseshoe now taking 52% of total weekly estimated passenger demand. Although Station West has reduced absolute numbers it has kept its 13% share of overall demand. This is encouraging given the impact of the pandemic on rail passenger flows, still nationally lower than pre-pandemic. Further discussion of rail passenger numbers are provided below.

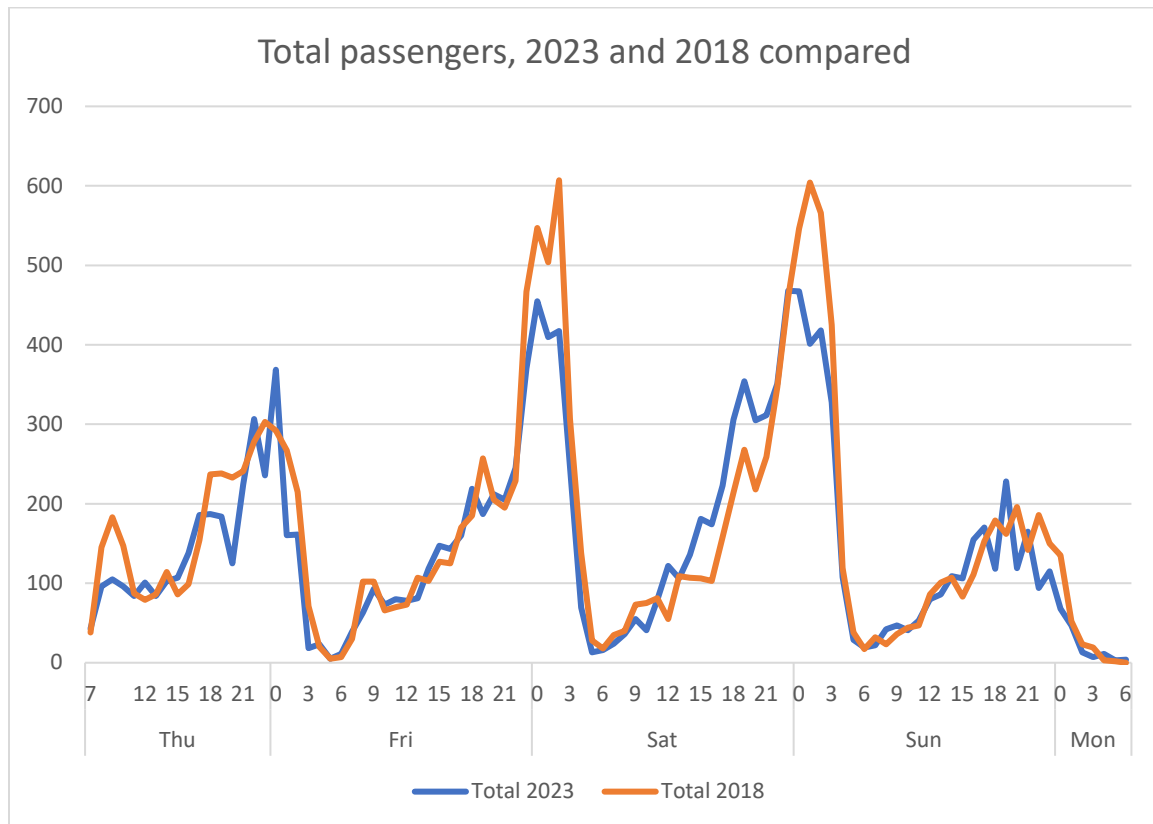
In general most of the night ranks, and therefore night demand, are reduced from 2018 although Gun Street appears to have gained patronage and share. This may relate to the deletion of the Oracle / Yield Hall Place rank, but also may relate to the development of several clubs directly adjacent to this rank. The other three night ranks remaining have all effectively halved their share of total patronage. For both the Pitcher and Piano rank and Station Road the trend actually continues the reducing numbers and share evident since at least 2015, and is not therefore just a result of the pandemic. Again, in reality the growth of Gun Street was evident from 2015 to 2018 even before the change to Yield Hall Place or the pandemic.

The hospital rank has continued to have increased in usage, although for this survey observations were also added at the further rank near to the Maternity block which may have been omitted in earlier surveys (although its usage is small compared to the main rank).

It should be noted that if the estimated passenger numbers are divided by the average occupancy of 1.5 passengers and then shared between the 216 hackney carriages and then spread over a seven day week, this implies rank work is providing just ten paid fares per day per hackney carriage. That is not a high level and suggests vehicles need other business (hailing is high, apps are used, some take bookings, and some have contracts), but it is clear relying on rank work alone would not provide sufficient remuneration.

Total passenger flows

Data for all ranks were combined to create a total passenger profile for the full survey period. This does not allow for cases where some sites were only covered on some days, but in general a similar sample was collected for both 2015 and 2018 so the two graphs are generally comparable.

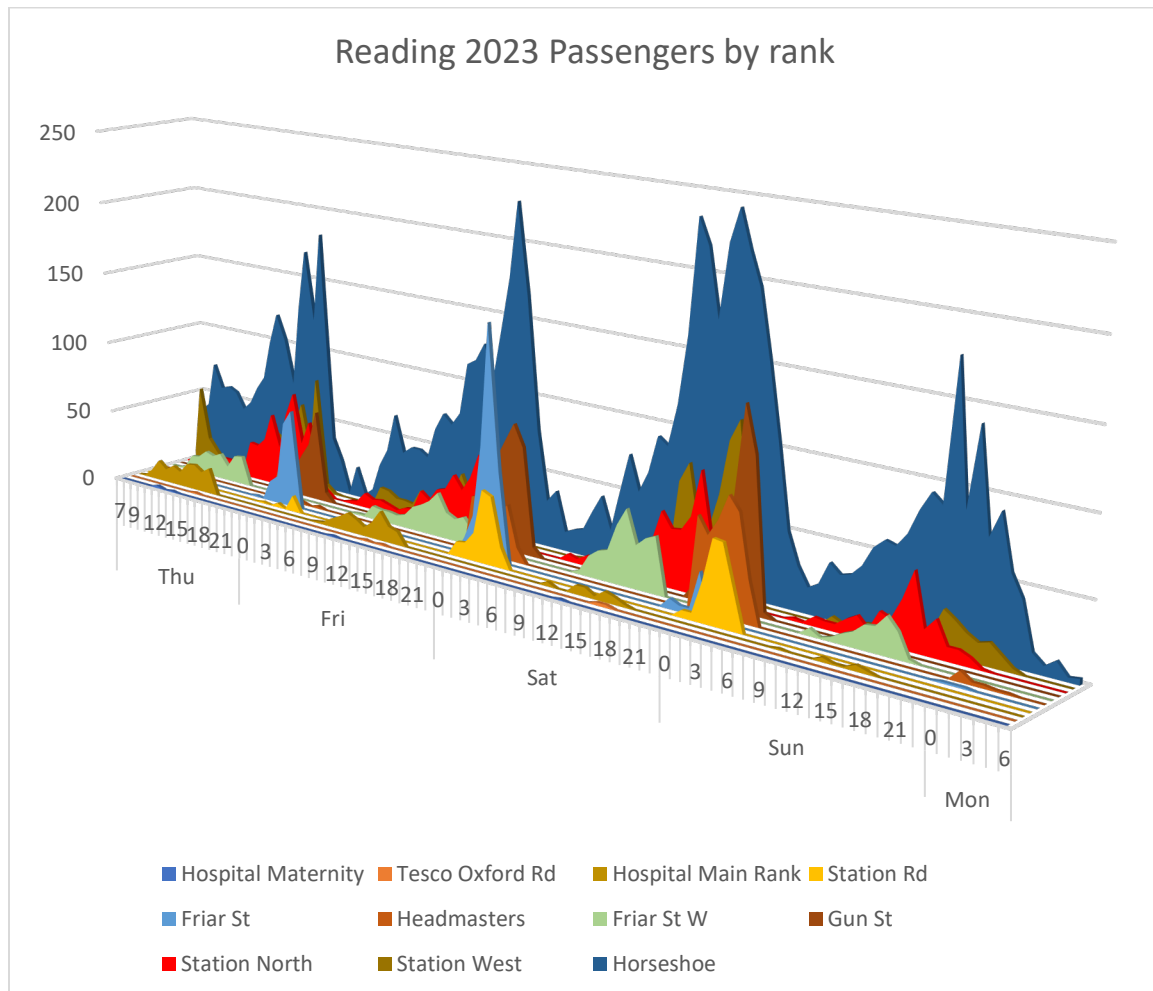


The profiles are remarkably similar particularly given the pandemic in between the two sets of data. Both Friday and Saturday night peaks are clearly reduced but Thursday does see some higher flows, as does Saturday daytime. These profiles would confirm the reduced demand that, all things being equal, should lead to improved service were the fleet operating similarly in both situations.

The two years of data see the peak earlier in 2023 on Saturday night in the 23:00 hour (468) although the following hour has just one passenger less. In 2018, the peak was higher (604) and also in the 01:00 hour. Flows dropped steeply in both cases in the 05:00 hour. The Friday/Saturday in 2018 and 2023 both see the peak flow in the midnight hour on Friday, with 455 passengers in 2023 and 547 in 2018. Flows drop significantly in the 04:00 hour in 2023 but the 05:00 hour in 2018.

Contribution of individual ranks over time

The separate rank demand by hour was plotted for the survey period to demonstrate how each separate rank contributed to the total demand for each hour. With the extensive level of surveys undertaken, this picture is comprehensive for the days covered.



The graph also clearly shows the dominance of the Horseshoe rank whilst most of the other ranks also contribute well to the overall total passenger service in the central area, as in 2018. The hospital rank is mainly a daytime and weekday location whereas most other ranks appear to service longer time periods. For this survey, Friar Street West is essentially a daytime only rank and Station Road and the other Friar Street rank tend to focus on Friday and Saturday night demand. Thursday and Sunday both see triple peaks at the main Horseshoe station rank which may relate to key train arrival times.

Whilst Sunday is clearly a much quieter day, mainly dominated by the Horseshoe demand and the other two station locations, it is not far behind Thursday in terms of overall levels of rank usage. Again, this is as in 2018. Friday and Saturday daytimes both see growth from morning to the late-night peaks, although Thursday in 2023 also seems to follow a similar pattern.

Incidence of passenger delay

From all the information gathered, totalling some 750 (734 in 2018) hours of observations across all operational ranks in Reading, there were 5% (2% in 2018) of hours when there was an average passenger delay in that hour of a minute or more. A further 10% (13% in 2018) of hours saw average passenger delays less than a minute. This means that 85% of all passengers travelled in hours when there was no delay at all (the same as in 2018).

To further clarify the number of people affected, 7.7% in 2023 (4% in 2018) of all passengers experienced an actual wait of a minute or more. There were 59 (18 in 2018) people in total who experienced waits of 11 minutes or more. While in 2018 these were in just three hours, in 2023 these waits were in eight different hours, mostly at the Horseshoe but also at Station North. Worst hour was Friday midnight, followed by Sunday midnight and the following hour, all at the Horseshoe.

A check was made for the Horseshoe and it was noted that there were no significant delays arising there during the working day at the time the restrictions on access along Garrard Street were in place.

The worst APD value was just under seven minutes at Station North in the 13:00 hour on the Friday, but this affected all four passengers arriving in that hour and two that arrived in the previous hour. Two waited 11 minutes or more, two 6-10 minutes and two under five minutes. The 08:00 hour on the Friday at the Hospital rank saw an APD just over six minutes, but the longest wait just under seven minutes. Again, flows were just two people – so both the two worst delays were the result of ‘thin demand’.

There were fourteen hours with APD two minutes or more. Eight of these saw low overall passenger numbers, as in 2018, but two were when flows were very high (217 and 182 passengers in the hour) (Saturday midnight and Friday midnight both at the Horseshoe).

In our watching of the relatively high flows at Gun Street we noted no real passenger waiting there with vehicles always present awaiting customers – spilling over into the feeder rank at times (but only in the early hours of Saturday morning, and then only for a short period).

Overall, the average passenger delay over all observed passengers during our survey period was just 0.35 minutes, or 21 seconds, which is minimal, albeit increased from the 0.3 minutes of 2018. However, the general picture is of worsened waiting now compared to 2023. This will be discussed further in the synthesis chapter.

Review of activity level for hackney carriage vehicles

For this survey, as was undertaken three years ago, a review was undertaken of the level of activity of all hackney carriage vehicles during the days of the rank survey. Samples were collected on the Thursday and Friday of the survey, with the Thursday also identifying overall waiting times for vehicles servicing the Horseshoe rank from the feeder at Station West.

The Thursday saw typical waits from arriving at Station West feeder to leaving the Horseshoe of 26 (40 in 2018) minutes during the 10:00 to 11:00 period. The next sample found typical waiting times of 32 (five or six in 2018) minutes from 13:00 to 13:30 but again reducing for 13:30 to 14:30 to 27 (two and five) minutes.

The final sample found longer waits again between 16:30 and 17:30, between 15 and 25 minutes in 2018, but in the final half hour after 17:30 the typical wait reduced to between two and eight minutes. For the 2023 sample, the times were 10 minutes, nine and finally seven minutes respectively.

In the equivalent test in 2015, waiting times on average were 24 minutes for the morning, 20 for the early afternoon and 24 for the late afternoon, suggesting a lengthening of waiting times in the early period, but a significant reduction for the early afternoon (which may have been due to the rail disruption that occurred and we understand gave many hackney carriages longer trips, reducing supply to the rank later).

This demonstrates a range of wait times which are not always predictable given different train loadings and impact of rail delays that can occur at any time.

The full plate survey covered the three days of the rank survey. On the Thursday the focus was on time taken to pass through the feeder system to the Horseshoe in three 1.5 hour periods. On the Friday and Saturday, the focus was on five 1.5 hours and two 1-hour periods covering three locations expected to intercept the bulk of hackney carriage movements in the central area. Some extra plate observations were also added from the watching of the two lesser used (principally rest) ranks.

A total of 2,228 different plate observations were made over the three days. All were checked to the current list of hackney carriage vehicles and private hire for the authority. 78% of records were legitimate local hackney carriages. 10% of observations were unable to record the actual vehicle for various reasons. 6% of the observations could not be proven as local hackney carriage or private hire whilst 1% were found to be local private hire. There were 5% of observations that were double counted for the purpose of estimating journey times through the feeder to the main Horseshoe rank.

In 2023, over the three Thursday periods, some 58% (39% in 2018) of the total hackney carriage fleet were observed. At the Horseshoe, proportions observed rose from 18% (10%) in the morning to 21% (16%) at lunchtime and 30% (27%) in the evening peak, with 45% of all plates seen at this site within those hours. This suggests more of the fleet are active on the Thursday than were in 2018.

The Friday and Saturday sets of observations covered a total of 9.5 hours at three different locations between 14:00 and 03:00 the next morning. In terms of proportions of the fleet observed, the level on the Friday was 16% (same as 2018) for the 14:00 to 15:30 period, rising to 21% (20%) for 16:00 to 17:30, then 30% (17%) for 18:30 to 20:00, 28% (17%) for 20:30 to 22:00, rising to the peak of 35% (23%) out between 22:30 and midnight. Levels of vehicles observed then dropped to 26% (17%) in the hour from 00:30 on and 29% (5%) from 02:00 onwards. This shows an improved operating profile for the Friday observations compared to 2018.

For the Saturday, values in order of time period are 31%, 26%, 47%, 34%, 41%, 34% and 30%, all higher than those for the Friday, although very similar in the last period observed. There are no equivalents from 2018 for comparison but the profile does appear to show a good operating level for all periods.

When all the data was put together, over the three samples some 90% (93% for just the first two days in 2018) of the total fleet was observed, a high level of activity, although it must be noted that no period saw more than 47% (39%) of the fleet, although this would be partly suppressed by the range of locations the fleet would be serving across the town centre. This was the same as the 90% in 2012 across three days and more than the level observed on the Thursday and Friday in 2015.

The only concern is that the proportion for the final hour on the Saturday drops compared to the previous hour whereas on the Friday the share of vehicles out continues to increase. This suggests some avoidance of the early hours of Sunday morning. Taken with the increased level of activity on Thursdays this suggests the national trend of more vehicles working at preferred times, i.e. midweek rather than early hours of Sunday morning, also applied here. This will be drawn upon later in the synthesis section of this Report.

Rail Stations

For the latest rail station patronage information, that covering the period ending at the end of March 2023, there are three stations within the Reading authority area. The main Reading station is currently 29th highest in total passenger flows within the UK database. The level of usage dropped during the pandemic to 18% of the value seen to the end of March 2019, the period closest to the previous survey. The present year values are 73% of that value, still some way behind pre-pandemic levels, or down 27%.

Taking the total estimated weekly passengers using the three ranks suggests that 40% of these departing passengers leave the station in a hackney carriage from the rank, a high level.

Impact of pandemic

A private client collected information about hackney carriage usage of the station ranks in February 2021. Comparing those flows to those for October 2023 found overall the 2021 flows were just 10% of the current. Interestingly, Station North fared best with 15%, Horseshoe with 11% and Station West with just 5% of the present flows. Station statistics from national sources suggest the 2021 flows would have been around 24% of the current.

Summary

The general picture of service to ranks in Reading is of a wide service provided generally promptly across all ranks in the central area. Some severe peaks do occur, but the trade seemed well-placed and organised to meet the overall demand requirements of the area.



4 General public views

It is very important that the views of people within the area are obtained about the service provided by hackney carriage and private hire. A key element which these surveys seek to discover is specifically if people have given up waiting for hackney carriages at ranks (the most readily available measure of latent demand). However, the opportunity is also taken with these surveys to identify the overall usage and views of hackney carriage and private hire vehicles within the study area, and to give chance for people to identify current issues and factors which may encourage them to use licensed vehicles more.

Such surveys can also be key in identifying variation of demand for licensed vehicles across an area, particularly if there are significant areas of potential demand without ranks, albeit in the context that many areas do not have places apart from their central area with sufficient demand to justify hackney carriages waiting at ranks.

These surveys tend to be undertaken during the daytime period when more people are available, and when survey staff safety can be guaranteed. Further, interviews with groups of people or with those affected by alcohol consumption may not necessarily provide accurate responses, despite the potential value in speaking with people more likely to use hackney carriages at times of higher demand and then more likely unmet demand. Where possible, extension of interviews to the early evening may capture some of this group, as well as some studies where careful choice of night samples can be undertaken.

Our basic methodology requires a sample size of at least 200 to ensure stable responses. Trained and experienced interviewers are also important as this ensures respondents are guided through the questions carefully and consistently. A minimum sample of 50 interviews is generally possible by a trained interviewer in a day meaning that sample sizes are best incremented by 50, usually if there is targeting of a specific area or group (e.g. of students, or a sub-centre), although conclusions from these separate samples can only be indicative taken alone. For some authorities with multiple centres this can imply value in using a higher sample size, such as 250 if there are two large and one moderate sized centre.

It is normal practice to compare the resulting gender and age structure to the latest available local and national census proportions to identify if the sample has become biased in any way.

More recently, general public views have been enlisted from the use of council citizens' panels although the issue with these is that return numbers cannot be guaranteed. The other issue is that the structure of the sample responding cannot be guaranteed either, and it is also true that those on the panel have chosen to be there such that they may tend to be people willing to have stronger opinions than the general public randomly approached.

Finally, some recent surveys have placed an electronic copy of the questionnaire on their web site to allow interested persons to respond, although again there needs to be an element of care with such results as people choosing to take part may have a vested interest.

For this survey, 198 (199 in previous survey) people were interviewed around the central area of Reading. For this survey, there was a slightly higher level of response from females (2% more than in census), compared to a much higher level of males than the census estimates in the last survey, with 61% of that sample being males compared to 50% in the census (this census share has not changed since the last survey, even with the latest census being that from the 2021 information).

In terms of age structure, there were more of the two higher age groups and therefore 9% less of the under 30's interviewed (19% compared to 28% in census). This was different, but better, than the last survey where more of the two lower age groups and less of the older group interviewed. For the over 55 group, 32% (14%) were interviewed compared to 27% in the census (both for 2018 and 2021), whilst the under 30 group saw 19% (33%) compared to 28% (29%) in the census, and the mid group 49% (53%) compared to 45% in the census (again same in 2018 and 2021). This should not adversely affect the overall results but needs to be borne in mind.

87% (73% last survey) were from the Reading council area. The remaining respondents were from various places mainly around the London area as previously, this time with a fifth from Guildford and 12% from Dartford, with the remainder all scoring 8% or less of the total from out of the area.

Of the respondents, 71% (30% last survey, 24% 2015, 52% 2012 and 55% 2009) said they had used a licensed vehicle in the Reading area in the last three months, much higher than in any previous survey. This split to 36% by hackney carriage only, 17% by private hire only and 18% by both types of vehicles.

All (35% in 2018) of those interviewed told us their level of usage. This resulted in an estimated 0.9 (1.1 2018, 0.9 2015) trips by licensed vehicle per person per month.

The most frequently quoted usage was 38% (26%) who said they used them once or twice monthly. 10% said never.

A similar question was asked but focussing on hackney carriage usage only. The response saw 20% (31% in 2018) saying once or twice yearly and 36% (29%) saying once or twice monthly (just slightly lower than for all licensed vehicles), with the overall level of trips per person per month being 0.84 (just 0.4 last time). This suggests that 90% (compared to just over a third in 2018) of all licensed vehicle trips in Reading are made by hackney carriage. This is again the highest value quoted in any known survey.

However, for this survey, 4% (none in 2018), said they could not remember when they last saw a hackney carriage, and 16% could not remember when they last actually used one (this had also been zero in 2018). That seems contrary to the apparent increased usage of hackney carriages.

The current proportion by hackney carriage using the trip rate is much higher than the proportion of vehicles, with about 24% (30% in 2018) of the fleet being hackney carriages.

When people were asked how they normally got a licensed vehicle, 99% (about a third in 2018) of those interviewed gave information. For this survey, 6% gave three responses, 23% two and the remaining 70% just one option (54% last time). Considering all responses, 38% (44% in 2018, 39% 2015) said a rank, 32% (33%) telephone, 12% (10%) an app and 18% (9% 2018 and 7% 2015) hailing.

The joint response for hackney carriage usage (56%) is lower than the 90% from the trip-making question suggesting more frequent use of ranks in Reading by those using them.

People were then asked what companies they would phone if they obtained a licensed vehicle by phone. 63% (18% in 2018) of interviewees gave an answer. Of these, 16% (14%) gave three names, 27% (a third) gave two names and the remainder just one name. Overall, there was a much higher response to this question than in previous surveys (rising from a total of 20 names given in 2015 to 58 in 2018 and 201 now).

For all the responses, twelve (11 in 2018 and 14 in 2015) companies were named (eleven of which had been suggested as likely by the Council). Top response gained 29% (19% 2018), then 21% (17% 2018), 14% (16% 2018), two with 8%, one with 7%, two with 3%, two with 2%, one with 1% and one with about 0.5% (a single response). The top two between them took half the mentions whilst the top three were the only ones over 9% and took nearly two thirds.

In 2018 there were five with between 12 and 19% of responses, with these top five taking 78% of the total. Three of those were 'apps', with a total of 21% quoting either of the two hackney carriage apps, and 19% quoting a private hire based app. The highest two pure private hire proportions were 16% and 12%. In 2023, those two companies gained 14% and 8%, both reducing. In the company mentions in 2023 only one was an app (3%).

When directly asked specifically about app usage, in 2018 71% said they used a private hire-based app, whilst 14% each of the small response said the two hackney carriage based apps. In 2023, there were more responses, some 64 in total, with four apps named in this section (but not the one mentioned in the company section). Top app obtained 47% of the quotes, second 39% (an out of town private hire app), 13% and 2% (the latter both national private hire apps). Use of one national app had reduced from 19% in 2018 to not being mentioned in the company list, but scoring 13% of the share of the 'app' section now. One of the two hackney carriage apps was no longer mentioned in either section whilst the main hackney carriage app was only mentioned in the app section.

Six of the companies named in 2018 were also mentioned in 2023 with all but one having lost quoted share, with one (but only at 3%) retaining share. Eight of the companies named in the smaller 2015 response were named again in 2023, including the top four from 2015. All of those companies had increased share this time. There were five companies named in 2015, 2018 and 2023, although the top of these was third highest in 2023 but having reduced share from 2018 to 2023 marginally.

This suggests a very strong level of competition in the private hire sector at this time, although hackney carriages are clearly taking a fair share of private hire bookings (although their main app nationally now includes private hire in addition to providing bookings for hackney carriages).

For this survey a slightly different method was used with regard to ranks. A list was provided of the main ranks and people were asked to say if they were aware of them and if they used them or not. 73% of those interviewed provided a response, with all giving a view of use or non-use for all ranks. No extra ranks were added at all. This was much higher than the just under a quarter of those interviewed last time.

In 2018, 4% of those responding gave three locations, 38% gave two and the rest just a single location. This time all responded to each rank.

Although the questions were differently worded, in 2023, 42% of those telling us which ranks they used said Station Road. In 2018, 40% of total mentions were for the same location, although this is most likely the station rank even though many also specified that rank. This value was 59% in 2015.

In 2023, 7% specifically said the Horseshoe rank at the station, 9% Station Hill and 7% Station North. In 2018 the shares specifically were 30% for the Station and 13% for Station North. Taking all station values together, 2023 sees 64% there, 2018 83% and 2015 66%.

Second in 2023 was Headmasters (13% used it), the Hospital (11%), Friar St near McDonalds 8%, the Casino 3% and Friar Street Pitcher and Piano 2%. In 2018 13% said Friar Street, but not where, with Gun Street mentioned, in 2015 12% said Friar Street, 7% the Oracle and 2% O'Neills.

For this survey, the average level of people saying they used a rank was 15%, compared to a resounding 89% in 2018, but with a much lower total number of mentions (just 70).

People were then asked their ratings of various aspects of their most recent trip by hackney carriage, ranging from very poor to very good. In 2023, 93% responded compared to just under a quarter in 2018.

In 2023 the overall view was that most aspects were poor, with price and state of vehicle repair tending more towards average. This was worse than the situation in 2018 when most apart from price saw good scores. Strangely, the best score was 18% very good for driver knowledge, but this element also had the highest very poor score at 21%, suggesting a wide range of experience by the public.

When asked about what might encourage people to use hackney carriages or to use them more often, a lower 81% responded. Overall, 82% (35% in 2018) said only more affordable fares would increase their usage. This is a very strong statement.

No other factor scored highly apart from 12% who said if they could pay by electronic means. In 2018, 25% said more hackney carriages they could phone for, 18% better vehicles and 16% more hackney carriages they could hail or get at a rank and 4% said better drivers.

The level of people saying they did not need an adapted licensed vehicle rose from 71% in 2018 to 82% now, suggesting reduced need of adapted vehicles now. The share saying they knew someone needing a WAV remained high at 13% (but lower than the 27% of 2018). This suggests the fully WAV policy remains appropriate.

Latent demand was then considered. People were asked if they had ever given up waiting for hackney carriages either at a rank or when hailing. If they responded that they had, they were asked where to check the validity of their response. Six had given up at legitimate Reading ranks with one saying they had given up in the town centre. This implies a latent demand factor of 3.7%, higher than in 2018 (rank only 1.5, combined rank and hail 3%). The value is still much reduced from the 9% obtained in 2012.

Most of those telling us how they got home when they gave up waiting for a hackney carriage said they used public transport, about half used buses and half used train.

When asked if there were enough hackney carriages in the Reading area, 90% responded (much higher than the just over a quarter from 2018), with 59% (60% 2018) saying there were enough and the balance saying there were not.

People were asked if they considering they knew the difference between a hackney carriage and a private hire vehicle in Reading. All but two interviewees responded, with 82% saying they felt they did know the difference.

Statements were then provided to test their knowledge. These were shared with the licensing department who defined their current view of what answers would be correct for Reading at this point in time.

96% of those responding correctly said hackney carriages were black cab style. However, two people said 'both' and four said 'phv'. With regards to having a taxi roof sign, people were less correct. 43% said hackney carriages, correct, but 54% said both, and five said private hire. This may reflect national practice rather than that for Reading, suggesting need to make it clear that for Reading licensed vehicles this is a clear difference.

94% correctly understood that only private hire in Reading had door stickers giving company names. However, eight said this was the characteristic of a hackney carriage, none said both.

87% said you could only hail a hackney carriage. However, 10% thought you could hail both and 3% that you could only hail a private hire vehicle. This could partly arise from the increase in app usage. 75% correctly understood you can book both types of vehicle. 21% said only private hire and 4% only hackney carriage. The views about which kind of vehicle you could obtain via an app showed 51% correctly said you could get both, 44% said only private hire and 4% only hackney carriage.

These are generally encouraging responses although there is some room for education.

5 Key stakeholder consultation

The following key stakeholders were contacted in line with the recommendations of the BPG:

- Supermarkets
- Hotels
- Pubwatch / individual pubs / night clubs
- Other entertainment venues
- Restaurants
- Hospitals
- Police
- Disability representatives
- Rail operators
- Other council contacts within all relevant local councils

Comments received have been aggregated below to provide an overall appreciation of the situation at the time of this survey. In some cases, there are very specific comments from given stakeholders, but we try to maintain their confidentiality as far as is possible. The comments provided in the remainder of this Chapter are the views of those consulted, and not that of the authors of this report.

The list contacted includes those suggested by the Council, those drawn from previous similar surveys, and from general internet trawls for information. Our target stakeholders are as far as possible drawn from across the entire licensing area to ensure the review covers the full area and not just specific parts or areas. However, with the reticence of people to speak by phone, the main emphasis was on emailing people with a standard set of questions.

For the sake of clarity, we cover key stakeholders from the public side separately to those from the licensed vehicle trade element, whose views are summarized separately in the following Chapter.

It must be noted that this element of the investigation is not statutory, and we have no power, nor does the licensing authority, to require response. Since the pandemic, response has been very small in most cases. For Reading, although 34 invitations were issued, there was just one single response. The person was a council representative but also included their own views. They use a power wheelchair to travel. They said: "There are definitely some good taxi drivers in Reading, I've had the pleasure of riding in their cabs. They are polite, friendly and well-trained in the use of ramps, etc. and make sure that you feel safe. There are also some great taxis which are easy to use from a wheelchair. The Council's Access and Disabilities Working Group took part in a trial, and the new, "green" taxi was excellent - there's so much room to manoeuvre, and the ramp isn't too steep, as they often are.

However, unfortunately, there are drivers who refuse to take me in my power chair - they say it's "too big" - but I never have any problems in London, and as far as I know, they have exactly the same taxis. It can be very embarrassing and makes me angry. I know I should report it, but it usually upsets me too much. So I seldom bother with taxis in Reading unless I definitely know they'll be happy to take me - usually the drivers in the bigger WAVs are better.

We also get complaints about people being overcharged when travelling in their wheelchairs, which is, of course, illegal. People are encouraged to report this, and I hope that is what happens. I can't recall it happening to me in Reading, but then I haven't used a taxi for quite some time.

People also complain about not being able to get a taxi when the school runs are on - which cuts out a large percentage of the day. It's very difficult for people to get to medical appointments. This does sound mostly negative, but we were delighted to find the green taxi to be so easy to use in the trial, and that it was obviously the 'greener' option. We definitely need more of those taxis, although of course they're very expensive."

The lack of response may well represent satisfaction from those contacted and at least they have been given opportunity to provide feedback.



6 Trade stakeholder views

The BPG encourages all studies to include 'all those involved in the trade'. There are a number of different ways felt to be valid in meeting this requirement, partly dependent on what the licensing authority feel is reasonable and possible given the specifics of those involved in the trade in their area.

The most direct and least costly route is to obtain comment from trade representatives. This can be undertaken by email, phone call or face to face meeting by the consultant undertaking the study. In some cases to ensure validity of the work being undertaken it may be best for the consultation to occur after the main work has been undertaken. This avoids anyone being able to claim that the survey work was influenced by any change in behaviour.

Most current studies tend to issue a letter and questionnaire to all hackney carriage and private hire owners, drivers and operators. This is best issued by the council on behalf of the independent consultant. Usual return is now using an on-line form of the questionnaire, with the option of postal return still being provided, albeit in some cases without use of a freepost return. Returns can be encouraged by email or direct contact via representatives.

Some authorities cover private hire by issuing the letter and questionnaire to operators seeking they pass them on when drivers book on or off, or via vehicle data head communications.

In all cases, we believe it is essential we document the method used clearly and measure response levels. However, it is also rare for there to be high levels of response, with 5% typically felt to be good and reasonable.

For this survey, we discussed issues with the key trade representatives at inception, but no all-trade survey was undertaken as the overall view from the hackney carriage trade was strong support both for the survey to be undertaken and for the limit to be retained.

At our inception meeting, the trade confirmed they felt they were seeing higher levels of competition for trade, particularly from private hire operating through 'apps'. They confirmed ranks that were and were not used.

The Council also undertook their own survey of drivers. The questions in summary were:

- If the person regularly drove a Reading licensed hackney carriage
- If the person currently owned or part owned a Reading licensed hackney carriage vehicle
- If owned, if they purchased from a previous owner, applied for a new plate, or some other ownership route

- If they believe there is currently an oversupply of taxis licensed in Reading
- what of the following options they would prefer to see adopted:
 - 1: retain limit on numbers for at least next three years
 - 2: grant extra licences but limited in any 12 month period such as one per month or 12 per year
 - 3: issue unlimited number of licences to any who request

Option for further comment was also provided.

This received 52 responses, a 14% response rate. Of these, 46% said they were owner-drivers and 54% rented. All those that owned answered the next question with 79% having purchased from a previous owner, 17% having obtained a plate with a re-issue of plates and 4% saying they owned the vehicle but not the plate.

Of the owner-drivers, 88% said there was an oversupply of vehicles; for those saying they rented, 94% said there was an oversupply.

In terms of options moving forward, all those responding gave an answer. 44% said no more plates for at least the next three years; 56% said a restricted number should be issued. When split by owners and renters, unsurprisingly, 92% of owners said the limit should be retained, with two saying add one plate per month. For renters, 93% said add more plates with the balance saying retain the limit. Of those saying more plates, 75% said add one a month, with one renter each saying add two per month, add ten per month, add five a year, add 15-20 a year and finally add 12-24 immediately then one per month for five years.

No respondent suggested complete removal of the limit.

Discussion with the hackney carriages association identified the following (all their views and not necessarily those of the writer of this Report):

- the hackney carriage trade no longer operates any 'circuits'
- most drivers use either Free Now or GETT or both
- Both Station North and Station Hill ranks operate similarly to pre-pandemic
- During COVID many drivers took on school runs and many retain these reducing available vehicles at school run times
- The private rank in Yield Hall Place and its council extension are no longer in place and vehicles are fined for using either area
- The Queens Road casino rank saw no hackney carriage patronage
- On Station Hill the left lane is for Station Hill serving vehicles
- The nearby bus stops and the right hand lane are used as extra waiting space to proceed to the Horseshoe rank

- Delays in vehicles getting to the Horseshoe can arise from the building works on Garrard Street – ranging from a few minutes to half an hour in occasional worst cases for deliveries
- Traffic movements, particularly taxis, are regulated during building site working hours by two marshals from the construction company
- Discussion of the initial results from the on-street survey meant the trade suggested we must have included those using hackney carriages at night
- They advised us the McDonalds area is much busier at night than the Pitcher and Piano end
- However, McDonalds did have a spell of being closed for four months
- There is no issue with extra licences being issued if unmet demand is identified
- Rail disruption can lead to major changes in demand levels and needs to be watched for and taken into account
- Rail strike dates are not appropriate for rank observations





7 Evaluation of unmet demand and its significance

It is first important to define our specific view about what constitutes unmet demand. Our definition is when a person turns up at a hackney carriage rank and finds there is no vehicle there available for immediate hire. This normally leads to a queue of people building up, some of who may walk off (taken to be latent demand), whilst others will wait till a vehicle collects them. Later passengers may well arrive when there are vehicles there, but because of the queue will not obtain a vehicle immediately.

There are other instances where queues of passengers can be observed at hackney carriage ranks. This can occur when the level of demand is such that it takes longer for vehicles to move up to waiting passengers than passengers can board and move away. This often occurs at railway stations but can also occur at other ranks where high levels of passenger arrivals occur. We do not consider this is unmet demand, but geometric delay and although we note this, it is not counted towards unmet demand being significant.

The industry standard index of the significance of unmet demand (ISUD) was initiated at the time of the introduction of section 16 of the 1985 Transport Act as a numeric and consistent way of evaluating unmet demand and its significance. The ISUD methodology was initially developed by a university and then adopted by one of the leading consultant groups undertaking the surveys made necessary to enable authorities to retain their limit on hackney carriage vehicle numbers. The index has been developed and deepened over time to take into account various court challenges. It has now become accepted as the industry standard test of if identified unmet demand is significant.

The index is a statistical guide derived to evaluate if observed unmet demand is in fact significant. However, its basis is that early tests using first principles identified based on a moderate sample suggested that the level of index of 80 was the cut-off above which the index was in fact significant, and that unmet demand therefore was such that action was needed in terms of additional issue of plates to reduce the demand below this level, or a complete change of policy if it was felt appropriate. This level has been accepted as part of the industry standard. However, the index is not a strict determinant and care is needed in providing the input samples as well as interpreting the result provided. However, the index has various components which can also be used to understand what is happening in the rank-based and overall licensed vehicle market.

ISUD draws from several different parts of the study data. Each separate component of the index is designed to capture a part of the operation of the demand for hackney carriages and reflect this numerically. Whilst the principal inputs are from the rank surveys, the measure of latent demand comes from the public on-street surveys, and any final decision about if identified unmet demand is significant, or in fact about the value of continuing the current policy of restricting vehicle numbers, must be taken fully in the context of a careful balance of all the evidence gathered during the survey process.

The present ISUD calculation has two components which both could be zero. In the case that either are zero, the overall index result is zero, which means they clearly demonstrate there is no unmet demand which is significant, even if other values are high.

The first component which can be zero is the proportion of daytime hours where people are observed to have to wait for a hackney carriage to arrive. The level of wait used is ANY average wait at all within any hour. The industry definition of these hours varies, the main index user counts from 10:00 to 18:00 (i.e. eight hours ending at 17:59). The present index is clear that unmet demand cannot be significant if there are no such hours. The only rider on this component is that the sample of hours collected must include a fair element of such hours, and that if the value is non-zero, review of the potential effect of a wider sample needs to be considered.

The other component which could be zero is the test identifying the proportion of passengers which are travelling in any hour when the average passenger wait in that hour is greater than one minute.

If both of these components are non-zero, then the remaining components of the index come into play. These are the peakiness factor, the seasonality factor, average passenger delay, and the latent demand factor.

Average passenger delay is the total amount of time waited by all passengers in the sample, divided by the total number of passengers observed who entered hackney carriages.

The seasonality factor allows for the undertaking of rank survey work in periods which are not typical, although guidance is that such periods should normally be avoided, if possible, particularly as the impact of seasons may not just be on the level of passenger demand but may also impact on the level of supply. This is particularly true in regard to if surveys are undertaken when schools are active or not.

Periods when schools are not active can lead to more hackney carriage vehicles being available whilst they are not required for school contract work. Such periods can also reduce hackney carriage demand with people away on holiday from the area. Generally, use of hackney carriages is higher in December in the run-up to Christmas, but much lower in January, February and the parts of July and August when more people are likely to be on holiday. The factor tends to range from 0.8 for December (factoring high demand level impacts down) to 1.2 for January / February (inflating the values from low demand levels upwards).

There can be special cases where summer demand needs to be covered, although high peaks for tourist traffic use of hackney carriages tend not to be so dominant at the current time, apart from in a few key tourist authorities.

The peakiness factor is generally either 1 (level demand generally) or 0.5 (demand has a high peak at one point during the week). This is used to allow for the difficulty of any transport system being able to meet high levels of peaking. It is rarely possible or practicable for example for any public transport system, or any road capacity, to be provided to cover a few hours a week.

The latent demand factor was added following a court case. It comes from asking people in the on-street questionnaires if they have ever given up waiting for a hackney carriage at a rank in any part of the area. This factor generally only affects the level of the index as it only ranges from 1.0 (no-one has given up) to 2.0 (everyone says they have). It is also important to check that people are quoting legitimate hackney carriage rank waits as some, despite careful questioning, quote giving up waiting at home, which must be for a private hire vehicle (even if in hackney carriage guise as there are few private homes with taxi ranks outside).

The ISUD index is the result of multiplying each of the components together and benchmarking this against the cut-off value of 80. Changes in the individual components of the index can also be illustrative. For example, the growth of daytime hour queueing can be an earlier sign of unmet demand developing than might be apparent from the proportion of people experiencing a queue particularly as the former element is based on any wait and not just that averaging over a minute. The change to a peaky demand profile can tend towards reducing the potential for unmet demand to be significant.

Finally, any ISUD value must be interpreted in the light of the sample used to feed it, as well as completely in the context of all other information gathered. Generally, the guide of the index will tend not to be overturned in regard to significant unmet demand being identified, but this cannot be assumed to be the case – the index is a guide and a part of the evidence and needs to be taken fully in context.

The Table below provides the results for each element of the ISUD equation for all surveys for which this is available.

| Element | 2023 | 2018 | 2015 | 2012 | 2009 | 2002 | 1997 |
|---|-------|------|------|------|------|-------|------|
| Average wait (mins) | 0.35 | 0.3 | 0.19 | | | 1.27 | 1.42 |
| Peak factor | 0.5 | 0.5 | 0.5 | 0.5 | | 1 | 1 |
| % Queues in weekday daytime hours | 24.03 | 6.45 | 19.4 | 0 | | 6.98 | 0 |
| % pass in hours with waiting over 1 min | 11.25 | 3.32 | 3.8 | 3.6 | | 32.91 | 26 |
| Latent demand | 1.037 | 1.03 | 1.03 | 1.09 | n/k | n/k | n/k |
| Overall index | 45.89 | 3.31 | 7.25 | 0 | 37 | 291 | 0 |

Average wait time across all ranks and all passengers has increased marginally to 0.35 minutes (21 seconds) from 18 seconds in the 2018 survey. The peak factor remains the same although the peak to average ratio has reduced. Both the proportion of hours with daytime queues and the proportion of passengers travelling in hours when the APD is a minute or more have increased, as has latent demand. The two key elements have both more than tripled, with the daytime value having increased most. However, the value remains significantly less than that in 2002 and only slightly higher than the 2009 value.

This means that the total index has gone up from 3.31 in 2018 to 45.89 now, but still remains well below the cut-off value of 80 that is taken to imply the observed unmet demand is significant requiring consideration of issue of more plates. It must also be noted that total passenger demand has reduced 11% since 2018, which all things being equal should have led to improved levels of service. This contrary result between demand and ISUD performance is discussed further in the synthesis chapter below.

These results suggest that the current policy limiting vehicle numbers remains of benefit to the public interest. However, the increase implies a reduced level of service which needs to be noted although it has not taken the index over the threshold level of being significant.

8 Summary, synthesis and study conclusions

This Taxi survey on behalf of Reading has been undertaken following the guidance of the BPG and other recent case history regarding unmet demand and its significance. This Report has drawn together all the evidence gathered to enable the licensing committee to determine if, at this present time, there is any evidence that observed unmet demand is significant according to the requirements of Section 16 of the 1985 Transport Act, and on that basis if, and at what level, the current limit on hackney carriage vehicle numbers can continue. This chapter summarises the key points from each chapter, draws a synthesis and conclusions together and make recommendations regarding the way forward. However, it must be reiterated that it is the Committee alone who need to be satisfied that their decision is robust and would stand up if scrutinized in Court.

Background and context

The current limit on hackney carriage vehicle numbers in the Reading Borough Council licensing area was put in place following a survey in 2009, before which there were two years when there was no quantity restriction in place. Since that time, the authority has undertaken regular reviews using a survey at the BPG recommended interval of no more than three years. The previous surveys in 2018, 2015 and 2012 found no unmet demand that was significant at those points in time. This survey is the latest in this series of reviews and ensures that Reading continues its best practice of regular review within BPG guidelines. As already noted, the latest survey was delayed given the DfT guidance not to survey during the pandemic, and following a decision during 2022 that a 2023 survey would be more appropriate.

The 2023 survey began in April with on the ground survey work undertaken in July for the pedestrian interviews and October 2023 for the rank observations (as in all previous surveys once the university students had returned) and other consultation during the full period of review between April and November 2023. The authority has long had a further policy in place that all hackney carriages must be fully wheel chair accessible. This has generally been focussed on vehicles similar to the present TfL requirement.

In advance of the pandemic both driver and private hire vehicle numbers were at a peak, but the pandemic hit all quite hard, seeing hackney carriage and private hire driver numbers and private hire vehicle numbers all drop. The impact on hackney carriage did see a small number of plates ending up being reissued to people who also introduced EV style vehicles.

Rank observations

A very similar level of rank observations were undertaken as in the previous survey, with the Yield Hall private and associated council rank removed as they no longer exist. The impact of the building work on flows through Garrard Street was noted and not found to have any significant impact on overall service from the Horseshoe rank.

The estimated weekly total passenger demand from ranks in Reading in 2023 is some 11% lower than that observed in the previous survey in 2018, although this level remains 27% higher than that observed in 2009. Most night ranks have reduced usage although Gun Street saw increased usage. For the Pitcher and Piano and the Station Road ranks, the decline continues trends that began in 2015 and are not directly related to the pandemic. Steady growth of usage of the two hospital ranks continues.

The total flows provided from the three station ranks now sum 77% compared to 64% in the previous survey, with actual flows showing real growth (apart from at Station West which reduced slightly).

Profiles of passenger demand were compared between 2018 and 2023 observations of total passengers per hour. The two profiles are remarkably similar with Friday and Saturday peaks both lower in 2023, but some flows on Thursday and Saturday daytime were in fact higher in 2023. The peak flow in 2023 was lower and in the 23:00 hour on the Saturday compared to 01:00 on the Sunday in the 2018 profile. However, the Friday/Saturday peak hour is the same (midnight) with the significant flow drop occurring an hour earlier in 2023.

The Horseshoe rank is clearly dominant in the plot of separate rank flows. However, most ranks contribute to the overall totals at some point. For this survey, Friar Street West is principally a daytime rank. The hospital rank operates daytime and weekends whilst most other ranks operate at night only. The Horseshoe rank sees triple peaks on both Thursday and Sunday possibly relating to rail arrival peaks. Overall, Thursday and Sunday demand appear closer to each other than is often the case in such studies.

As in 2018, 85% of all passengers travelled in hours when there was no passenger delay at all. An increased 7.7% (4% in 2018) of passengers actually experienced a delay of a minute or more, and 59 (18) passengers experienced waits of 11 minutes or more, all in three specific hours. A specific test confirmed there were no significant delays at the Horseshoe that could be attributed to restricted supply arising from the road closures there.

Despite high flows at Gun Street, we found no evidence of any significant passenger queueing developing there, with vehicles available nearly all the time for the passengers that arrived.

Overall average passenger waiting time only rose by one second, minimal although clearly overall unmet demand was worse despite lower total passenger numbers.

Our tests of vehicle waiting times for the Horseshoe rank and general activity levels of vehicles identified several operating statistics. On the Thursday the waiting times of vehicles to get to the head of the Horseshoe rank ranged from around 26 (40 in 2018) in the morning but were much longer (32 compared to five to six around lunch time, and 27 compared to two to five for 13:30 to 14:30. Waits in the evening sample were shorter in 2023.

For those servicing the main rail rank only, some 39% of the fleet were observed during the three sets of observations. The highest level in an individual period was 27% in the evening peak sample.

Over the full three-day review of activity, 90% of all vehicles were seen at some point, a little lower than the 93% observed over two days in 2018 but similar to the 90% observed in 2012.

The general picture remains of a wide service provided generally promptly across all central area ranks. Again, the trade seemed well-placed and organised in meeting overall demand at ranks in the area. Activity levels varied with demand although there were many fewer vehicles out overnight.

The operating profile was better on the Friday now than in 2018. Saturday values were all higher for the same period. The only exception was the final hour on the Saturday where shares of vehicles operating fell suggesting some avoidance of servicing Sunday early hours flows.

It is estimated that 40% of the passengers arriving at the main Reading station leave the station in a hackney carriage from one of the three ranks, a relatively high level of usage.

On street public views

A reasonable sample of the population in the streets of central Reading were interviewed. The sample was the same size and a little better in terms of being close to the census values for both sex and age groups. 87% (73% in 2018) were from the area.

A much higher level, 71% (30% in 2018), said they had used a local licensed vehicle in the last three months (compared to the 24% who said this in 2015, over 50% in the 2012 and 2009 surveys). 36% said they used hackney carriage only, 17% private hire only and 18% by both types of vehicle.

The estimate of licensed vehicle trips per person per month was 0.9 (1.1 2018 and 0.9 2015) for all licensed vehicles and 0.84 (0.4) for hackney carriages. This implies 90% now compared to 33% in 2018 of trips were made by hackney carriage – a very high level compared to other surveys.

However, the number saying they could not remember when they last used a hackney carriage rise from zero to 4% whilst the level not remembering when they last used on went up to 16% again compared to none in 2018.

38% (44% 2018) of those responding said they got licensed vehicles from a rank, 18% (9%) hailed, 12% (10%) used an app and 32% (33%) telephoned.

With respect to companies used if phoned for, the level of response gave many more responses than in previous years, albeit only producing one extra company. However, the top companies were more dominant now with the top three companies taking nearly two thirds of responses. Evidence remained that the hackney carriages were getting their share of bookings.

More told us use of apps with four quoted, the top gaining 47% (one including hackney carriages) and being local, the next 39% and out-of-town but with the two national apps quoted with just 13% and 2% respectively, clearly overtaken by the local.

In terms of rank usage, top was 'Station Road' although this is most likely the Horseshoe rank, although 7% specifically named the Horseshoe, 9% Station Hill and 7% Station North. Overall mention of the Station now was reduced compared to 2018 (which is counter to the increased usage there). Headmasters was the second most quoted specific rank with 13% using it, followed by the Hospital with 11%.

Of concern was the fact that the overall view of service was that most aspects were poor compared to the good levels in 2018. Best score was for driver knowledge. There was a very strong statement that only more affordable fares would increase usage of hackney carriages.

In terms of need of wheel chair accessible vehicles, the proportion needing such a vehicles was lower at 18% (29%), but retaining all requiring fully wheel chair accessible styles, supporting the current Reading policy focussing on such vehicles.

Latent demand was marginally increased at 3.7% (3% 2018).

59% (60%) felt there were enough hackney carriages in Reading.

82% felt they knew the difference between local hackney carriages and private hire vehicles. The main concern was that 54% felt both could have roof signs, which is incorrect. 10% felt you could hail both.

Key stakeholder views

As is sadly the case since the pandemic, despite strong attempts there was just one key stakeholder response. This was from someone that travelled in a power wheel chair. They provided mixed reviews including reticence to report issues they experienced, a typical response.

Trade views

The trade provided explanation in detail of how the current rank system worked, and principally expressed concern over the high current level of competition from private hire, particularly that from non-Reading bases. They strongly supported the current limit and felt it provided public benefit whilst ensuring there were not too many vehicles causing issues. They confirmed most hackney carriages operated apps as well as working ranks.

The council survey of all hackney carriage drivers saw almost equal response from those renting and those owning vehicles. Both felt there was an oversupply of vehicles. 44% said no more plates should be issued with 56% suggesting a limited issue was needed. However, 92% of owners said retain the limit whilst 93% of renters wanted more plates added. None suggested complete removal of the limit.

Formal evaluation of significance of unmet demand

Average wait time has increased marginally from 18 to 21 seconds for this survey. Both daytime queue and overall levels of people waiting in hours with over a minute average passenger delay have increased, as has latent demand. The overall index has risen from 3.31 to 45.89, a large increase but remaining not significant in terms of unmet demand levels.

This still implies that there remains public benefit in retaining the limit policy.

Synthesis

Overall estimated weekly usage of hackney carriages from ranks in the Reading licensing area is about 11% down from that recorded in 2018. However, the station ranks have seen 6% increase in estimated flows despite demand there having dropped to 18% of the 2018 level during the first year of the pandemic and only rising back to 73% for the latest year. Estimates suggest 40% of the passengers arriving leave the station in hackney carriages from one of the three ranks, assuming no non-rail passengers use these locations (which is probably a fair assumption given the station location and other nearby rank sites). This is a very important level of service provided and a critical transport link (despite the high level of bus service provided near the station).

At an annual level, rank passengers are in the order of 1.17million (775,000 trips based on the observed occupancy of 1.5). From the stated public attitude figures, hailed hackney carriage passengers are 210,000; phoned-for private hire 982,000 and app-based hirings 368,200, giving a total of 2.73 million licensed vehicle passengers per year in Reading.

The limit on hackney carriage vehicle numbers clearly kept their numbers much more stable through the pandemic than private hire, although clearly many drivers did cease to work and have only more recently returned.

The overall level of hackney carriage activity seems very similar to 2018 in terms of shares of the fleet being active, although there is some evidence of reduced service to the early hours of Sunday mornings (a national trend against drivers serving less amenable customers). The level of unmet demand observed has increased highly since 2018 despite the reduced level of overall demand. This suggests a change in the supply of vehicles has occurred – although the share of the fleet appears to be similar (its spread must have changed). Latent demand levels have increased, but not as much as might be expected (again a normal national response given that people tend to be confident that if they wait a vehicle will eventually come).

There is also evidence that some of the issue may be hackney carriages gaining high levels of fares from apps which would draw them away from servicing the ranks, reducing service levels there. This increased level of demand may lead to vehicles not needing to work hours they prefer not to work.

This needs to be held in the context of the estimation that rank-based work provides in the order of 10 fares per day per hackney carriage based on the observed demand.

The public appear to use high levels of hackney carriage compared to private hire although there are concerns about standards of service and comments suggesting peoples' main concern over usage are with the cost of hackney carriages.

The demand from those currently renting plates to have their own plate remains as strong as ever. For Reading, there is no issue with these persons providing all new EV vehicles, reinforcing the strength of demand. However, this demand is not arising from shortage of vehicles to the public per se. Even those wishing for plates support retaining the overall limit policy.

Evidence does however suggest that the level of service to the public has declined even with reduced demand, which with the same level of vehicles observed active overall suggests they must be operating for less hours or at least servicing ranks for less hours. Some of this will arise from app usage and some from related choice not to service less preferable working hours (the latter being a known national change following the pandemic and a rethinking of the ethos of work-life balance for drivers). There was also evidence presented that some vehicles had gained school contracts which would also reduce off-peak service levels to the ranks.

It is accepted that the new BPG encourages review of unmet demand every five years rather than every three years, but there is also encouragement this should be in line with the overall development of transport policy and the Local Transport Plan. The latest LTP is currently under development as the Reading Transport Strategy 2040 with consultation in mid-2023 and already contains some licensed vehicle strategy elements.

However, any decision to review unmet demand next in five years should be tempered by the fact that the performance indices have moved towards significance despite reduced demand suggesting (see below) that a five year wait for review might allow unmet demand to become significant before that time, to the detriment of the public and the overall transport performance for Reading.

Conclusions

It is clear that the limit is providing benefit to the public and clearly provided stability to the trade during the pandemic. All the hackney carriage trade, even those wanting plates they could own themselves, support retention of the limit per se.

There is clearly need to monitor the level of public service by further rank observations perhaps within no more than two years to ensure that the trend towards unmet demand becoming significant does not continue. Interim review might need to see performance indicators such as observance of queues over more periods as warning signs.

That provides some suggestion that adding a small number of new plates may also be beneficial although clearly any take-up of these by those renting at present may not provide as great an increase in available vehicles as take-up by someone transferring from private hire or new entrants to the trade. New vehicles, however, would provide environmental improvements given that any new plate must be filled with a new EV style vehicle.

Any determination to add perhaps say no more than five plates per year would also require testing to identify impact within six months of any new plates being issued to ensure that the impact on public service was a positive one given the reaction to extra plates by current drivers is complex. We would not recommend this course of action at this time.



9 Recommendations

On the basis of the evidence gathered in this Taxi survey for Reading, our key conclusion is that there is no evidence of any unmet demand for the services of hackney carriages either patent or latent which is significant at this point in time in the Reading licensing area. The committee is therefore able to retain the present policy of limiting vehicle licences, and at the same level of vehicle numbers, and defend this if necessary.

The limit has clearly benefitted the public and trade and is well supported by all the hackney carriage trade. However, there is also evidence of willingness to add new vehicles although their main benefit would be environmental rather than improving levels of service unless they were put in place by new drivers to the hackney carriage trade.

There is no evidence to support removal of the limit policy as it is supported widely and is presently providing benefit to the travelling public.



Department for Transport (DfT)

Guidance

Taxi and private hire vehicle licensing best practice guidance for licensing authorities in England

Updated 17 November 2023

Link to full document

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/taxi-and-private-hire-vehicle-licensing-best-practice-guidance/taxi-and-private-hire-vehicle-licensing-best-practice-guidance-for-licensing-authorities-in-england>

9. Quantity restrictions of taxi licences outside London

9.1 Legal powers

The present legal provision on quantity restrictions for taxis outside London is set out in [section 16 of the Transport Act 1985](#). This provides that the grant of a taxi licence may be refused for the purpose of limiting the number of licensed taxis if, but only if, the licensing authority is satisfied that there is no significant unmet demand for taxi services in their area.

In the event of a challenge to a decision to refuse a licence, the authority concerned would have to establish that it had, reasonably, been satisfied that there was no significant unmet demand.

9.2 Impacts of quantity restrictions

The Competition and Markets Authority was clear in its 2017 guidance on the [Regulation of taxis and private hire vehicles: understanding the impact of competition](#) that:

Quantity restrictions are not necessary to ensure the safety of passengers, or to ensure that fares are reasonable. However, they can harm passengers by reducing

availability, increasing waiting times, and reducing the scope for downward competitive pressure on fares.

Most licensing authorities do not impose quantity restrictions. The department regards that as best practice. Where restrictions are imposed, the department would urge that the matter should be regularly reviewed. The matter should be approached in terms of the interests of the travelling public:

- What benefits or disadvantages arise for them because of the continuation of controls?
- What benefits or disadvantages would result for the public if the controls were removed?
- Is there evidence that removal of the controls would result in a deterioration in the amount or quality of taxi service provision?
- Are there alternative ways in which the issue could be addressed?

If alternative measures could be used to achieve the same effect, then the department believes these should be used in preference to quantity restrictions.

It has been observed that where quantity restrictions are imposed, vehicle licence plates command a premium, often of tens of thousands of pounds. This indicates that there are people who want to enter the taxi market and provide a service to the public, but who are being prevented from doing so by the quantity restrictions.

9.3 Demand surveys

If a licensing authority does nonetheless take the view that a quantity restriction can be justified in principle, there remains the question of the level at which it should be set, bearing in mind the need to demonstrate that there is no significant unmet demand. This issue is usually addressed by means of a survey. It will be necessary for the licensing authority to carry out a survey sufficiently frequently to be able to respond to any challenge to the satisfaction of a court. To assist in the inclusion of the taxi and private hire vehicle sector in Local Transport Plans these surveys should, where possible, follow the cycle of their production but should be undertaken at least every 5 years.

The following points should be considered when conducting a survey on quantity restrictions:

- waiting time at ranks
- waiting time for street hailing
- waiting time for telephone/online/app engagement
- latent demand (those that would choose to travel by taxi but do not due to excessive waiting times) peak demand (the most popular times for consumers to use taxis should not be discounted as atypical)
- assessments should consider whether the demand for WAVs has been met

The financing of demand surveys should be paid for by the local taxi trade through general revenues from licence fees. Other funding arrangements may call in to question the impartiality and objectivity of the survey process.

9.4 Consultation on quantity restrictions

As well as statistical demand surveys, assessment of quantity restrictions should include consultation with all those concerned, including user groups. User groups that typically use taxis (and/or private hire vehicles) the most include people with mobility difficulties, women, older people and those without access to a car. The views of the retail and hospitality sector (including hoteliers, operators of pubs and clubs and visitor attractions) should also be sought and considered, recognising that most taxi (and private hire vehicle) journeys are for leisure and shopping purposes.

The role taxis can play in dispersing the public that have enjoyed the night-time economy should not be ignored. Alongside pre-booked private hire vehicles, taxis may be the only means by which people can return home. Excessive waits for vehicles may lead to conflict among passengers or the increased use of unlicensed, unvetted and uninsured drivers and vehicles, both of which may then result in increased call upon police resources: they should therefore be consulted on any restrictions.

All local transport plans are expected to promote the use of active or public transport - taxis are frequently used for the 'first and last mile' of longer journeys that could be made using public transport. The views of the providers of other transport modes (such as train operators) should also be sought and considered if a quantity restriction is to be imposed.

All the evidence gathered in a survey should be published, together with an explanation of what conclusions have been drawn from it and why. If quantity restrictions are to be continued, their benefits to consumers and the reason for the level at which the number is set should be set out.

9.5 Reviewing quantity restrictions

The department's view is that licensing authorities that elect to restrict taxi licences should review this decision and, if the policy continues, the quantity at least every 5 years and aligned to the production of local transport plans where possible. The department also expects the justification for any policy of quantity restrictions to be included in the local transport plan process where this is their responsibility. Licensing authorities should consider the following questions when considering quantity controls.

Have you considered the government's view that quantity controls should be removed unless a specific case that such controls benefit the consumer can be made?

Questions relating to the policy of controlling numbers

- Have you recently reviewed the need for your policy of quantity controls?
- What form did the review of your policy of quantity controls take?
- Who was involved in the review?
- What decision was reached about retaining or removing quantity controls?
- Are you satisfied that your policy justifies restricting entry to the trade?
- Are you satisfied that quantity controls do not:
 - reduce the availability of taxis
 - increase waiting times for consumers
 - reduce choice and safety for consumers
- What special circumstances justify retention of quantity controls?
- How does your policy benefit consumers, particularly in remote rural areas?
- How does your policy benefit the trade?
- If you have an accessibility policy, how does this fit with restricting taxi licences?

Questions relating to setting the number of taxi licences

- When last did you assess unmet demand?
- How is your taxi limit assessed?
- Have you considered latent demand, i.e. potential consumers who would use taxis if more were available, but currently do not?
- Are you satisfied that your limit is set at the correct level?
- How does the need for adequate taxi ranks affect your policy of quantity controls?

Questions relating to consultation and other public transport service provision

When consulting, have you included:

- those working in the market
- consumer and passenger (including disabled) groups
- groups which represent those passengers with special needs, children and other vulnerable groups
- local interest groups, e.g. hospitals or visitor attractions
- the police
- a wide range of transport stakeholders e.g. rail/bus/coach providers and traffic
- managers

Do you receive representations about taxi availability?

What is the level of service currently available to consumers (including other public transport modes)?

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Guidance

Regulation of taxis and private hire vehicles: understanding the impact on competition

Published 12 July 2017



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About the Competition and Markets Authority

On 1 April 2014, the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) became the UK's lead competition and consumer body. The CMA brought together the competition and consumer protection functions of the Office of Fair Trading and the Competition Commission.

The CMA has a statutory duty to seek to promote competition for the benefit of consumers. The CMA has an advocacy function, which involves giving information or advice to public authorities on the impact on competition of public policy.

As part of this work, HM Treasury has asked the CMA to consider how local authorities can support competition, and to challenge them when they do not.

The purpose of this guidance note

As part of our work on local authorities' impact on competition, the CMA has undertaken a review of taxi and private hire vehicle (PHV) licensing conditions.

The CMA recognises that taxi and PHV licensing conditions play a crucial role in ensuring the safety of passengers. Regulations on vehicle safety and driver suitability are clearly necessary to ensure safety.

This guide is designed to help local authorities understand the impact some licensing conditions can have on consumers and hence help to reach the right balance between ensuring passenger safety and avoiding consumers having to face higher prices or lower service quality.

The CMA has found that some licensing conditions are likely to restrict or distort competition in ways that may result in higher prices and/or worse service for

consumers.

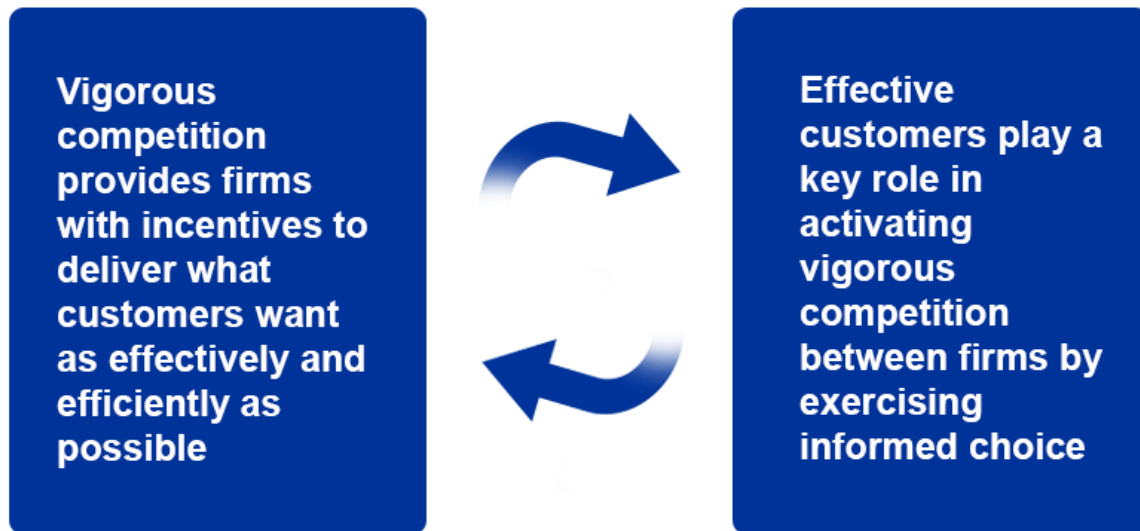
The CMA recognises that licensing authorities face competing pressures and tough decisions over how to strike the right balance.

The CMA's short report on the impact that licensing conditions can have on consumer welfare is available on request (advocacy@cma.gov.uk).

Competition and regulation

Competition is a process of rivalry between firms that benefits consumers.

Competition can exert downward pressure on prices and upward pressure on quality, because greater competition means that firms must fight harder to attract and retain customers.



Effective and fair competition is underpinned by competition and consumer protection laws which govern how businesses can compete.

Government may impose additional regulations in a market where, for example, there are concerns around consumer safety.

The CMA's view is that competition should only be restricted by regulatory rules to the extent that is necessary to protect consumers.

This guide illustrates how some licensing conditions can affect consumers' interests, in order to help ensure conditions are targeted and proportionate.

Background

The CMA's understanding of the hackney carriage and PHV markets is informed by the OFT's 2003 market study and the subsequent impact evaluation in 2007, the examination of a merger between private hire operators in Sheffield and our recent evidence review and analysis of licensing conditions. We also considered the 2014 Law Commission report on Taxi and Private Hire services.

The OFT's 2003 market study found, among other things, that:

- Passengers are in a relatively weak position to compare offers and negotiate prices in the hail and rank (taxi) trade. There is therefore a need for fare regulation of taxis. This also provides a justification for greater regulation of service standards of taxis compared to PHVs.
- Quantity regulations on taxis are not necessary to ensure either the safety or quality of taxis, or that passengers are charged reasonable fares. However, quantity regulations may damage consumer welfare by reducing the availability and increasing waiting times for taxis.

As part of our review of licensing conditions, the CMA has written to several licensing authorities, including [Transport for London](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cmas-response-to-tfls-private-hire-regulations-proposals) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cmas-response-to-tfls-private-hire-regulations-proposals>) and [Sheffield City Council](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/taxi-and-private-hire-regulation-cma-letter-to-city-of-sheffield) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/taxi-and-private-hire-regulation-cma-letter-to-city-of-sheffield>), to highlight where conditions may restrict competition and harm consumer welfare.

CMA view of taxi and private hire trades

The 2 tier system

Taxis' right to ply for hire necessitates different regulation for taxis and PHVs. Passengers are in a weak position to judge the quality or to compare prices of taxis; it is therefore necessary to regulate taxi fares (and service standards).

The scope for competition between taxis and PHVs, increasing with the emergence of app-based models, can deliver benefits for passengers. To facilitate this, regulatory distinctions between taxis and PHVs should not go beyond what is required by legislation or necessary to protect passengers.

Private hire

Passengers are in a better position to assess the quality and compare the prices of private hire operators than they are with taxis. Competition can generally work well between private hire operators.

There is a need to ensure passenger safety, but licensing conditions that go beyond this may reduce passenger choice, and increase cost and prices.

Some conditions may also create barriers to entry, reducing the number of operators, and hence reducing competitive pressure on operators to reduce prices or improve service quality.

Hackney carriages

As noted above, there is a need to regulate the prices and service standards of taxis, owing to their unique right to ply for hire. There is also a need, as with the private hire trade, to ensure the safety of passengers.

Quantity restrictions are not necessary to ensure the safety of passengers, or to ensure that fares are reasonable. However, they can harm passengers by reducing availability, increasing waiting times, and reducing the scope for downward competitive pressure on fares.

The CMA takes the view that concerns around congestion, air pollution and enforcement costs can generally be addressed through measures less harmful to passengers' interests than quantity restrictions.

If the removal of quantity restrictions leads to increased waiting times for taxi drivers between journeys, this indicates that price competition which would benefit passengers is not occurring. Licensing authorities should monitor waiting times and consider adjusting the regulated fare cap to address mismatches between supply and demand. Addressing such mismatches is likely to benefit passengers.

Licensing conditions that can have negative impacts on consumers

The CMA's [competition impact assessment guidelines](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/competition-impact-assessment-guidelines-for-policy-makers) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/competition-impact-assessment-guidelines-for-policy-makers>) can help those designing policy or regulations to assess their impact on competition and the interests of consumers.

These guidelines contain 4 tests which help policy makers assess whether their proposals will limit competition:

1. Will the measure directly or indirectly limit the number or range of suppliers?
2. Will the measure limit the ability of suppliers to compete?
3. Will the measure limit suppliers' incentives to compete?
4. Will the measure limit the choices and information available to consumers?

Considering these questions will help ensure local authorities are aware of the restrictions they may be introducing on competition and may encourage them to consider alternative courses of action where possible.

Examples of conditions that may harm the interests of passengers

| Competition impact assessment test | Examples | Nature of harm |
|---|--------------------------------|---|
| 1. Limiting the number or range of suppliers | Quantity restrictions on taxis | Quantity restrictions may cause harm to passengers through reduced availability, increased waiting times, reduced scope for downward competitive pressure on fares and reduced choice. They also may increase the risk to passenger safety if |

| Competition impact assessment test | Examples | Nature of harm |
|---|---|--|
| 1. Limiting the number or range of suppliers | Restricting market development by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Banning drivers from working for more than one operator - Conditions on vehicle signage that make it difficult for drivers to work for more than one operator | <p>they encourage the use of illegal, unlicensed drivers and vehicles.</p> <p>Such conditions make it difficult for firms to enter the market or expand by recruiting existing drivers on a part time basis. They may also encourage drivers to move to the largest operator. This may reduce the number of firms, thereby reducing competitive pressure to reduce prices or improve service quality.</p> |
| 2 & 3. Limiting the ability and incentives of suppliers to compete | Service provision is over regulated beyond passenger needs/wants: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Compulsory landline helpline, sometimes having to be based within the authority - Minimum number of days advance booking function - Extensive navigational skills assessments for PHV drivers | <p>Private hire is a market where passengers are likely to be in a good position to trade off price and quality levels that best suit their needs. If sufficient numbers of passengers desire a high service standard, then it is likely that some operators will offer it.</p> <p>Over-regulation of service standards is likely to mean higher costs and therefore higher fares for passengers, especially those who would most value a low cost service. It may also create barriers to entry, thereby reducing the</p> |

| Contents | Competition impact assessment test | Examples | Nature of harm |
|---|---|--|--|
| About the Competition and Markets Authority | | | number of operators, and hence competitive pressure between them. |
| The purpose of this guidance note | 2 & 3. Limiting the ability and incentives of suppliers to compete | Introducing restrictions on business models or unnecessary distinction between conditions imposed on PHVs and taxis: | Restrictions on how PHV operators must operate are likely to reduce innovation that could reduce costs or improve the quality of service for passengers. |
| Competition and regulation | | - Prescribing the method in which pre-booked fares should be recorded (eg written records) | Conditions that apply to PHV operators and not to taxis may increase, relatively, PHV operating costs. Such conditions may therefore make it harder for PHV operators to attract passengers who might otherwise use taxis, potentially resulting in passengers paying higher fares or receiving lower service quality. |
| Background | | - Restrictions on advertising products on vehicles | |
| CMA view of taxi and private hire trades | | - Restrictions on where PHVs can park | |
| Licensing conditions that can have negative impacts on consumers | | - Requirement to specify exact fare in advance | |
| Examples of conditions that may harm the interests of passengers | - Approval required for any changes to operating model | | |
| What to do if you are considering reviewing your licensing regime | | | |
| | 4. Limiting choices and information | Banning aspects of service valued by passengers: | Banning aspects of service that passengers might find valuable is likely to directly harm their welfare. |

| Competition impact assessment test | Examples | Nature of harm |
|------------------------------------|---|----------------|
| available to consumers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Displays of vehicle availability in-app - Compulsory minimum waiting times between booking and journey start | |

What to do if you are considering reviewing your licensing regime

Ensure your proposed measures are necessary to achieve your objective(s).

Consider the questions set out in the CMA's [competition impact assessment guidelines](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/competition-impact-assessment-guidelines-for-policymakers) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/competition-impact-assessment-guidelines-for-policymakers>).

Where measures are likely to restrict competition and harm consumer welfare, consider whether alternative, less-restrictive measures could be employed to achieve your objective(s) and if not, whether the objectives really do necessitate the restriction.

The CMA's short report which contains further detail and information on our view on taxi and PHV licensing conditions is available on request.

If you would like to discuss these issues, including issues not addressed in this review, you can contact advocacy@cma.gov.uk for further advice.

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