

Licensing Applications Committee

07 November 2023



Title	Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicle Strategy 2023-2028
Purpose of the report	To make a decision
Report status	Public report
Report author	Matthew Golledge, Public Protection Manager
Lead councillor	Councillor Ennis, Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport
Corporate priority	Healthy Environment
Recommendations	<p>The Committee is asked:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. That the comments received during the public consultation process be considered.2. That the changes to the Strategy proposed following the consultation be approved.3. That the draft Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicle Strategy 2023-2028, as appended to the report, be adopted.

1. Executive summary

- 1.1. The Council is committed to ensuring the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Sector remains integrated into our sustainable transport network to continue to move passengers to destinations safely, whilst contributing to the economy with minimal environmental impact.
- 1.2. A draft Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicle Strategy 2023-2028 was approved for consultation by the Licensing Applications Committee on 13 July 2023, setting out the council's overall vision for the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire trade in the borough. The Strategy aims to set out how we can achieve meeting this vision and make improvements to the system over the next 5 years.
- 1.3. The consultation exercise took place between 14 August 2023 and 18 September 2023 and 22 responses were received.

2. Policy Context

- 2.1. The draft Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicle Strategy takes account of several key policy areas including the Local Transport Plan 2040, the Electric Vehicle Strategy 2040 and environmental factors resulting from the declaration of a Climate Emergency. The Strategy details the Council's commitment to ensuring full compliance with statutory guidance issued by the Department for Transport on Statutory Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Standards and sets out the Council's position in relation to taxi ranks, wheelchair accessible vehicles and highways use benefits. The Strategy includes an Action Plan that details how and when the key objectives will be achieved.

3. The proposal

3.1. Current Position

3.1.1. Licensing Application Committee on the 13 July 2023 resolved:

(1) That the draft Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicle Strategy 2023-2028 be approved for public consultation.

(2) That a further report be submitted to a future meeting to adopt the final Strategy, having taken the results of the public consultation into account.

3.1.2. A consultation exercise on the Strategy was conducted between 14 August 2023 and 18 September 2023. The consultation was promoted on the Council's website and sent to individual drivers and operators.

3.1.3. A total of 22 responses were received a full breakdown of which is provided at **Appendix 2**. There was support for the Strategy but also a number of concerns. The responses can be broken down into the following key areas together with the Council's reply:

3.2. Private Hire Vehicles from out of area working in Reading

3.2.1. It is recognised taxis and private hire vehicles are working out of area and across licensing authority borders and this undermines the councils' ability to safeguard the local community because enforcement action could not be taken against taxi drivers licensed by other authorities, even if they are operating in their areas. The Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle (Safeguarding and Road Safety) Act 2022 aims to tackle issues associated with out-of-area drivers by making it mandatory for licensing authorities to report concerns about out-of-area drivers to the council which issued their licence. The requirements of the Act are being implemented in Reading and in addition the Strategy includes the action to explore implementing joint authorisations with other local authorities to aid enforcement of out-of-town vehicles.

3.3. Use of bus lanes by Hackney Carriages and Private Hire Vehicles

3.3.1. This issue has been raised by the private hire trade and the Strategy includes an action to review the use of bus lanes for Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicles by April 2025.

The Traffic Management Sub-Committee received a report at the meeting of the 13 September 2023 following a request from the Private Hire Trade to enable Council licenced private hire vehicles to use the Kings Road, outbound, bus lane. The committee resolved:

- That an informal consultation be carried out on the requested change to enable Reading Borough Council licenced private hire vehicles to use the Kings Road (outbound) bus lane;
- That a number of stakeholders be included in the informal consultation, such as, bus companies, taxi associations, cycle groups, disability access groups and the general public;
- That a report setting out the results of the informal consultation be submitted to the meeting in January 2024.

It is intended the results of the consultation will help form policy on future bus lane use.

Some further concerns were raised about the potential to prioritise newer less polluting vehicles in bus lanes and whether this would be discriminatory. The council would conduct a full consultation exercise with regard any proposal and this would take into account the review of the Kings Road bus lane consultation and the Emissions and Age Policies.

3.4. Limited EV Charging Infrastructure

3.4.1. The Council recognise that one of the significant barriers to adopting electric vehicles (EVs) is the ability to charge vehicles. A new draft Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure (EVCI) Strategy has been developed as a sub-strategy to the Reading Transport Strategy 2040. EV charging is a rapidly changing area, therefore the strategy will be regularly reviewed as technology advances and new national policies and funding streams are brought forward. A consultation on the strategy was held during August and September 2023. The comments received will help form the final plan which aims to be adopted in March 2024. It is intended the EV Strategy will provide confidence to the trade that the infrastructure will improve to meet their needs.

3.5. Disabled access to services

3.5.1. The Hackney carriage fleet in Reading are all wheelchair accessible but the council recognises that certain users still have difficulty using Hackney Carriages with their type of wheelchair. The Strategy includes an action to review the type of Hackney Carriage vehicles allowed on the fleet to increase accessibility levels, however responses to the consultation have also highlighted other areas where disabled people could be disadvantaged including; the visually impaired using card payments, being charged more with a wheelchair and being refused to be taken with a wheelchair. It is proposed that the action plan is widened to include a review of other accessibility issues. In addition, wheelchair accessibility should be considered when considering any review of the Emissions and Age policies.

3.6. Extending the Hackney Carriage Vehicles Emissions Policy

3.6.1. The Council's Hackney Carriage Vehicle Emissions and Age Policy 2019 intends to improve the Hackney Carriage vehicle fleet by removing older vehicles, creating a safer more reliable fleet and removing more polluting vehicles which will improve local air quality within Reading. The policy aims to encourage the move to cleaner vehicles and highlight the benefits to the trade as residents and businesses demand a greener alternative transport offer.

3.6.2 The policy uses a staged approach to remove the older and more polluting vehicles whose exhaust fumes are harmful to health and detrimental to the environment. The policy was formulated in consultation with the Taxi trade following the declaration of the Climate Change Emergency. The policy has set a target that all vehicles will be minimum ULEV by 1 October 2028.

3.6.3. An extension to the policy was approved by Licensing Committee on the 1 February 2022. It was resolved that a hybrid approach be applied to extend the pause in policy for a further year until 23 October 2023 with the following changes:

- the six TXII vehicles registered in 2008 be removed from the fleet by 23 October 2022, with the remaining 10 vehicles being allowed to remain on fleet until 23 October 2023;
- the 15 class Euro 5a vehicles that were due to be removed from the fleet by 23 October 2023 be allowed to remain on fleet until 23 October 2024;
- That the incentive of a free first-year's licence for Ultra-Low Emissions Vehicles or 100% electric vehicles be extended until 1 October 2023;

3.6.4 It is recognised there can be significant cost in transferring to ULEV and the council will continue to look at innovative ways of supporting the trade. However, there is a strong indication that there is a desire to move to cleaner vehicles, of the 225 Hackney Carriage vehicles licensed in Reading, 34 are now ULEV. It is intended that further reports are taken to Licensing Committee to review the policy and the action plan has been amended to reflect this.

3.6.5 In addition, concerns were raised regarding the Emissions and Age Policy only applying to Hackney Carriages. The aim is to ensure all vehicles operating in the sector are

ULEV. There is an action in the strategy to review and reduce the age limit policy for private hire vehicles and it proposed this is amended to include reference to aligning with the Emissions and Age Policy.

3.7. Number of Hackney Carriage Licenses/Type of vehicle on fleet

- 3.7.1. Responses were received which either indicated there were too many Hackney Carriage licenses issued or not enough and this discriminated against sections of the community. The Council has adopted the policy to not issue any additional hackney carriage vehicle licenses unless there is evidence of significant unmet demand for hackney carriage services. This is reviewed at least every three years by way of an independent unmet demand survey being conducted and is carried out with full consultation of the trade.
- 3.7.2. Responses were received which proposed extending the type of vehicle allowed as Private Hire and Executive vehicles to reflect the current vehicle options available in the market. The Strategy highlights that existing policies will be reviewed against the Strategy, and this will include private hire conditions and vehicle specifications. A further action has been added to the plan to reference this.

3.8. Taxi Ranks

- 3.8.1. There was support for a review of the existing taxi rank provision but some concern that prioritising low emission vehicles would penalise other drivers. The review of the ranks would include consideration of the Emissions and Age Policy and the Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Strategy as a key aspect is to encourage the transition to ULEV and have the necessary infrastructure in place to support this. Concerns are also noted regarding bus stops which become part time ranks which are blocked by buses and this will form part of the wider review of taxi rank provision.

3.9. Other Points

- 3.9.1. Several other points were made regarding actions in the plan for example, facilitating customer choice and the costs of introducing CCTV. The Strategy is an overarching document and further details will be provided on these particular aspects as they are developed.
- 3.9.2. A number of responders offered to work with the council on exploring options which were detailed in the strategy, which was very much welcomed.

4. Option Proposed

- 4.1. The proposal is to adopt the updated overarching strategy (**Appendix 1**) which sets out the vision and objectives for the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire sector in Reading over the next five years and will steer policy development over that period. It is intended all policies will be reviewed against the strategic plan going forward. The measures which have been set out will all be subject to full consultation processes and discussed as part of the ongoing meetings held with the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire trade representatives.
- 4.2. There are no changes proposed to the 4 key objectives which underpin the basis of the strategy or how they will be achieved:
- **Customer focused:** high levels of customer service, accountable operators and drivers and a service which provides value for money.
 - **Safe:** the sector is trusted; passengers are confident in using the services and vehicles are modern and accessible for all.
 - **Clean:** the fleet is greener and cleaner helping to deliver services with a low environmental impact.
 - **Well regulated:** the Council has an effective regulatory framework to administer and enforce statutory and local requirements, to benefit both the trade and customers.

The objectives will be achieved by:

- Regulating and developing a modern fleet of hackney carriages and private hire vehicles utilising the latest technology that is easy to book, with contactless payment and accessible for all.
- To consult and support the trade so drivers and operators can operate on a viable commercial basis and have confidence to invest in their service.
- Incentivise the uptake of Ultra Low Emission Vehicles (ULEV) and invest in charging infrastructure across the Town.
- Ensure that the Council's engagement with the taxi and PHV sector enjoys a high degree of public confidence and that regulatory interventions are targeted, proportionate and consistent.
- Being transparent and accountable with up-to date policies and procedures which ensure compliance with statutory standards.
- Enhancing the online processing of licensing applications and communications with customers.

4.3. The changes made to the draft Strategy resulting from the consultation are shown in **Appendix 3**.

4.4. The action plan has been updated to consider changes to target dates. Some actions in the plan have already been taken forward including: assessing against the criteria of the Department for Transport (DfT) Statutory Taxi and Vehicle Standards and to align policies to those standards and updating the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Convictions Policy.

5. Contribution to strategic aims

5.1. The Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicle Strategy will, through setting out the council's vision and objectives for the sector, contribute to the following priorities in the Corporate Plan:

- **Healthy Environment** - Developing Reading as a Green City with a sustainable environment and economy at the heart of the Thames Valley – reducing the emissions from the Taxi and PHV fleets will contribute to a lower carbon footprint and reduce the NOx (Nitrogen Oxides) and particulate matter in the air which is associated with poor health outcomes.
- **Thriving Communities** – by ensuring the Taxi and PHV sector remains integrated into our sustainable transport network to continue to move passengers to destinations safely, contributing to the economy with low impact on the environment through cleaner vehicles.
- **Inclusive Economy** - Taxis and PHVs are one of the most flexible elements of the transport system operating 24/7 on a commercial basis. They are integral to supporting local businesses to thrive by transporting residents and visitors around the Borough. The services are a primary mode of passenger transport for many people for whom mainstream public transport is not an option or suitable. Taxis and PHVs help support many disabled and vulnerable people to live more independent lives. They also play an important part in supporting the night-time economy, providing a safe and secure mode of transport for many people home.

6. Environmental and climate implications

6.1. Transport is the biggest greenhouse gas emitting sector in the UK accounting for around 27% of total carbon emissions. As set out in the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-25, this figure is lower in Reading with transport accounting for around 20% of carbon emissions. However, significant investment in sustainable transport

solutions is vital in order to respond to the Climate Emergency declared by the Council in February 2019 and to help achieve our target of a carbon neutral Reading by 2030.

- 6.2. The Climate Impact Assessment tool (**Appendix 4**) has been used to assess the proposal as set out within this report, resulting in an overall Net Medium Positive impact. This is due to the Strategy being focused on encouraging the introduction of less polluting vehicles and improving the electric vehicle charging infrastructure. The Council's Hackney Carriage Vehicle Emissions and Age Policy 2019 intends to improve the hackney carriage vehicle fleet by removing older more polluting vehicles, creating a safer more reliable fleet which will improve local air quality within Reading.

7. Community engagement

- 7.1. The Strategy has been drafted in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport.
- 7.2. A public consultation exercise on the draft Strategy was conducted between 14 August 2023 and 18 September 2023.
- 7.3. The consultation was available to view on the council's website and all licensed drivers and operators were notified.

8. Equality impact assessment

- 8.1. Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, a public authority must 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, and
 - Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 8.2. The Council will undertake an equality impact assessment scoping exercise on the projects included within the strategy at the appropriate stage of development.

9. Other relevant considerations

- 9.1. There are no other relevant considerations.

10. Legal implications

- 10.1. The Taxi Strategy is an overarching document setting out the role of the Licensing Authority and how the council will apply its policies. Legal implications for each of those policies will be considered as they are reviewed.

11. Financial implications

- 11.1. There are no direct financial implications of the strategy for the Council. Where detailed aspects of the strategy, as they are introduced, result in additional costs as part of the licensing process, this will be reflected in the fees charged. Higher fares could result where operators and drivers costs increase. Any changes to the fees or fares are required to be approved through the committee process.

12. Timetable for implementation

- 12.1. The draft Strategy is for a five-year period, 2023-2028. The Strategy sets out the key actions and timescales in an action plan.

13. Background papers

- 13.1. There are none.

Appendices

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