

AGENDA ITEM

COMMITTEE: REGULATION

DATE: 10TH DECEMBER, 2003

SUBJECT: PETITION REQUESTING REMOVAL OF ROOF SIGNS
AND SUBSTITUTION WITH DOOR SIGNS ON
PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLES

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT AND
REGENERATION

CONTACT OFFICER: JOHN RAINBOW 01582 - 546193

IMPLICATIONS:

LEGAL	<input type="checkbox"/>	COMMUNITY SAFETY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
EQUALITIES	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	ENVIRONMENT	<input type="checkbox"/>
FINANCIAL	<input type="checkbox"/>	CONSULTATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/>
STAFFING	<input type="checkbox"/>	OTHER	<input type="checkbox"/>

WARDS AFFECTED: ALL

PURPOSE

1. To inform Members of Regulation Committee of the results of consultation following receipt of a Petition from the Luton Hackney Carriage Trade requesting removal of Roof Signs and substitution with Door Signs on Private Hire Vehicles.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

2. Regulation Committee is recommended to note the Contents of this report, and either –
 - a) Make no change to the current scheme permitting roof signs to be displayed on Private Hire Vehicles, or
 - b) Remove Roof Signs from Private Hire Vehicles and substitute Door Signs bearing the same information and a windscreen strip bearing the legend, “Telephone Bookings Only”, or
 - c) Amend the current scheme relating to the display of roof signs on Private Hire Vehicles to take into account the options set out in this report, viz –

- i) **Retain the existing Roof Signs and supplement them by the addition of Door Signs bearing the same information, or**
- ii) **Retain the existing Roof Signs and supplement them by the addition of Door Signs bearing the same information and a windscreen strip bearing the legend “Telephone Bookings Only”**

BACKGROUND

- 3. Members may recall that at the Regulation Committee meeting held on 20th October 2003 it was reported that a Petition, signed by 100 of 101 Hackney Carriage Vehicle licence holders in the town, had been received calling for the withdrawal of the current Private Hire Roof Sign Scheme. The principal grounds for making the request is their alleged misuse by Private Hire drivers
- 4. The allegation of misuse is based on the fact that in many towns where there is no “Black Cab” policy for Hackney Carriages, the presence of a roof sign (illuminated during the hours of darkness) identifies vehicles as Hackney Carriages available for hire. In consequence members of the public, many of whom are unaware of the differences in operation between Hackney Carriages and Private Hire Vehicles, approach/hail such vehicles and the less scrupulous Private Hire Drivers accept the fare, albeit illegally.
- 5. Members were advised that a similar Petition had been received from the trade some 18 months previously. At that time Regulation Committee had considered the results of consultation with major stakeholders and resolved to make no change in the current scheme. In consequence, on receipt of this Petition the Director of Environment and Regeneration had again contacted the stakeholders on the matter. However, before the results of that consultation could be reported the trade submitted an amendment to the Petition. The amendment, whilst still seeking removal of Roof Signs, suggested their replacement with Door Signs bearing similar information.
- 6. Members considered the Petition, and amendment thereto, and resolved that major stakeholders in the issue be consulted again and the results of the combined consultation be reported to a future meeting of Regulation Committee.

REPORT

- 7. In response to receipt of the original petition, contact was made with the following principal stakeholders in this issue –

Luton & District Hackney Carriage Association

Luton Private Hire Association

Luton & Bedfordshire Police – including the Traffic Police

Arriva The Shires Busses

Transport Matters – Bedfordshire and Luton Transport Service for Disabled People

The Equalities Officer in lieu of the Disability Policy & Access Officer

The Community Safety Officer

The general text of the letter of consultation sent to each consultee, together with the key points contained in the responses received, is given at Appendix A to this report.

8. The salient points of the amendment to the Petition is given at Appendix B whilst the general text of the letter of consultation and the key points contained in the responses received are given at Appendix C. Colour photographs of the Door Sign/Windscreen Strip scheme operated by Birmingham City Council, and sent out with the consultation letters, will be available at the meeting.
9. It should be noted that due to the timescales involved only two responses in respect of the amendment to the Petition had been received at the time of writing this report. Any further responses received will be reported at the meeting.

PROPOSAL/OPTIONS

10. Having considered the representations made by the responding stakeholders in respect of the original Petition and subsequent amendment, Regulation Committee could resolve to comply with the petitioners' request and require the removal from Private Hire Vehicles of Roof Signs and substitution with Door Signs. However, Committee may consider the strength of argument put up by the stakeholders in supporting the original purpose for which the roof signs scheme was introduced, viz.
—

Providing better identification to customers that a vehicle calling to pick them up is —

- a) a bona fide licensed Private Hire Vehicle, and
- b) from a firm with which they had made a prior booking,

is sufficient to justify their retention.

11. With regard to the responses received from the Community Safety Officer in respect of the amendment to the Petition, Regulation Committee may consider it appropriate to amend the existing Roof Scheme to require Door Signs/Windscreen Strips in addition to Roof Signs.

APPENDICES

Appendix A - Text of consultation letter and responses in respect of original Petition.

Appendix B - Salient points of amendment to original Petition.

Appendix C - Text of consultation letter and responses in respect of Petition amendment and Key points contained in the responses.

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972, SECTION 100D

There are no background papers relating to this report.

TEXT OF CONSULTATION LETTER SENT IN RESPECT OF ORIGINAL PETITION.

“You may recall that the Licensing Manager wrote to you about 12 month’s ago seeking your views regarding a petition received from the Luton Hackney Carriage Association calling for the removal of roof signs from Private Hire Vehicles. The premise for the LHCA’s request was that the public are unable to differentiate between Private Hire Vehicles and Hackney Carriages (Black Cabs) resulting in unscrupulous drivers of private hire vehicles using this fact to illegally ply for hire.

The Luton Hackney Carriage trade has now submitted a further Petition calling for the removal of Roof Signs citing the same concern. The Petition will be considered by the Council’s Regulation Committee at its next meeting and my purpose in writing to you today, therefore, is to enquire whether your opinion on the matter has changed over the past year in order that I may report to the Committee Members accordingly.”

KEY RESPONSES.

Community Safety Officer –

“My observations and objections remain unchanged from when this issue arose previously. There have been cases throughout the country where bogus drivers have attacked vulnerable people because vehicles have not been required to carry roof signs without which it is much more difficult to tell if the vehicle is genuine. I appreciate there is a problem with plying for hire but don’t really think that removal of the signs will stop that.”

Bedfordshire Police –

“In the interests of public safety it is imperative that private hire vehicles are clearly identifiable as such.”

Head Of Equalities (in lieu of the Disability Policy & Access Officer) –

“There is no reason to vary from the response given by the Disability Policy & Access Officer when this issue arose previously, i.e. that the present Roof Sign Scheme should remain unchanged.”

Transport Matters – Bedfordshire and Luton Transport Service for Disabled People -

“The main objection to the possible removal of Roof Signs from Private Hire Vehicles is on grounds of safety. They enable the public to see clearly that the vehicle is a bona fide Private hire Vehicle with all the relevant details.”

SALIENT POINTS OF AMENDMENT TO ORIGINAL PETITION

“The Door Signs would be fitted and removed only by Luton Borough Council authorised personnel, this would ensure that the vehicle is licensed and not illegally used as a private hire vehicle. The door signs should be permanently fixed to the doors.”

It should be the responsibility of the private hire operators that these drivers work for to ensure the company identification is in on the vehicles as these are often removed on vehicles illegally plying for hire.”

The customer is more likely after a night out to observe the writing on the doors than look at a roof sign. This way they would know which company and more importantly the license number of the vehicle they are getting in and in this way the council will be able to trace the licensee who is responsible for any person driving such a vehicle and ascertain who was the driver if required”.

It may be prudent to also have the company name on these door signs as this would mean that every time somebody changed company they would have to inform licensing to change door signs as currently licensing are not informed when private hire drivers are changing companies.

The MOT details would still remain on the rear of the vehicle on the plate.

These vehicles with standardised door signs will enhance the image of the private hire trade and also promote the town when these vehicles are driving around the country.”

Suggested Door Sign Layout –

Luton Borough Council
Private Hire Vehicle
Plate N^o 999
Reg N^o X123 PHV
NO BOOKING
NO INSURANCE

TEXT OF CONSULTATION LETTER SENT IN RESPECT OF PETITION AMENDMENT

“I wrote to you recently regarding a petition received from the Luton Hackney Carriage trade calling for the removal of Roof Signs from all Private Hire Vehicles licensed by the Council

Shortly before the petition, and the results of the consultation exercise, were due to be reported to the Council’s Regulation Committee the Hackney Carriage Trade put forward an amendment to their original request. The amendment consists of the substitution of Roof Signs by Door Signs which would carry the same information currently displayed on Roof Signs, viz., details of the vehicle, the Operator for whom the driver of the vehicle is working, that the vehicle responds to prior bookings only and wording to the effect that absence of a prior booking negates the driver’s insurance.

The Trade use, as supporting evidence for their proposal, the Door Sign Scheme operated by Birmingham City Council where the Door Signs are further supplemented by a windscreen strip”.

NB - The letter was accompanied by the copies of the colour photographs which will be available at the meeting.

KEY RESPONSES

Community Safety Officer –

I have looked at the proposals and still believe that they do not address the basic safety concerns. The existence of a standard, illuminated roof sign on a vehicle means that it is readily identifiable even during the hours of darkness. Members of the public, particularly lone females, have some confidence that a vehicle carrying a sign is a bone fide legal public conveyance and in the case of any complaints, have all the details to hand to give to the Licensing Unit. The [door] signs used in Birmingham are too small and not distinctive enough at night. They are also easy to make up and can be obtained from a number of suppliers and I have seen a growing number of cars using this type of advertising. The window strips, although a good idea, are again not distinctive, particularly at night and can be obtained from a number of sources unlike the current roof signs.

Could we not insist that the window strip 'Telephone Bookings Only' be added to the vehicles?

Head Of Equalities (in lieu of the Disability Policy & Access Officer) –

“I have to say that they [Door Signs] do not serve the purpose well. The signs on the door would not be visible from any distance and would not give customers the opportunity to identify their taxi. Lighted Roof Signs can be seen from a distance and, [it] is reassuring to customers to identify their taxis, particularly vulnerable groups.”