



**GMB PROFESSIONAL
DRIVERS BRANCH**

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BLTF

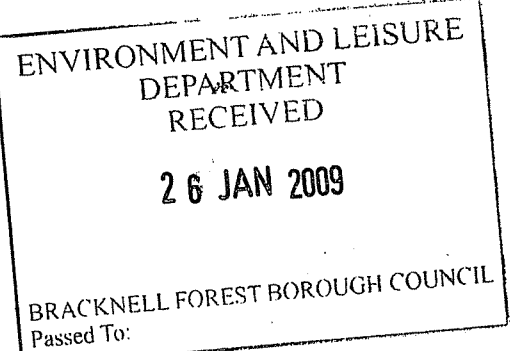


REPORT TO LICENSING AND SAFETY COMMITTEE

REPORT OF: BLTF

SUBJECT: UNMET DEMAND SURVEY

DATE: 21st January 2009



Introduction

Since April 2008 the newly formed BLTF affiliated to the GMB PDB Union, has endeavored to re-establish a good working relationship between hackney carriage drivers / proprietors and the council.

This relationship broke down at the beginning of the new millennia. Bridges had to be built to restore the trust between drivers and the council. The BLTF / GMB have worked closely with head of licensing Rob Sexton and licensing team leader Laura Driscoll to achieve this. After having had several meetings with Rob and Laura we now believe the foundations are firmly in place.

The BLTF has and will continue to act in a responsible and professional manner. Our objective is to work with the council on all hackney carriage issues for the good of the trade and customer / consumers that depend on it.

Current Situation

Since June 2008, the date the original petition was delivered to Councilor Paul Bettison at Time Square, the situation for taxi drivers in Bracknell has unfortunately worsened. We stated back then that waiting times for a fare were anything up to one hour. That has now increased from anywhere between 45mins to 1 ¼ hours and on a bad day can stretch to 1½ hours. Although there was a sharp decrease in demand for hackney carriages in 2008/2009 we believe that the number of taxi's working the ranks have slightly increased

This puts a large question mark against the argument that if quantity controls are lifted the market would find its own level. This is what we feared.

The recession that was looming is now upon us, and the drivers are really struggling. Mini bus and coach services have taken much of the work from the train station and chauffeur and exec cars have capitalized on the wheelchair accessible policy and have taken much of the airport work as predicted. Our customer base is continuing to be depleted. The regeneration has been postponed yet again. Although this has come as no surprise it's still another major blow to the hackney carriage trade.

OFT Report

Having studied the OFT report in great detail it seems to be inconclusive. The OFT report having put the hackney carriage trade under the microscope did not find the evidence they were looking for to prove the benefits of deregulation to the consumer. In fact once read carefully it could be perceived that it proved the opposite. We are sure that once you have studied the report in full you will make the same observations that we have, in that there are more benefits to the consumer by having quantity controls.

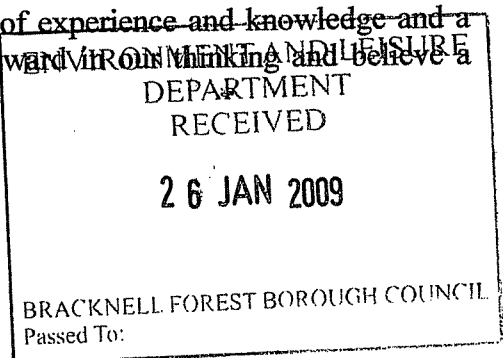
It would seem the only benefit to the consumer in having an unlimited number of taxis is that there are sufficient numbers on the rank at all times of the day, resulting in customers not having to wait on the rank for a taxi. This is obviously beneficial to the consumer but the problems of this policy begin when the taxi's start to exceed the numbers needed. This is when the deregulation policy has the opposite effect and then can become detrimental to the trade. Many areas that have deregulated have experienced a decline in standards of service and have gone back to a regulative policy. We also stated in our original petition that this would lead to higher fares. This has been backed up by an unmet demand survey carried out in Chelmsford by Halcrow. In their report that we have read it stated that lifting quantity controls can lead to significant increases in fares. This report can be made available if requested.

There are many other examples indicating that the best policy would be limiting. These are listed in the transport committee report in the response to the OFT report.

The Government decided that licensing authorities were best placed to determine local needs and therefore came to the conclusion that if an authority carried out an unmet demand survey which proved there was no significant unmet demand, they could legally refuse to issue any more licenses. This would be sufficient to ward off any legal challenge.

The substance of the OFT report seems to be based mainly on ideology. In the ideal world all of their recommendations would work perfectly well and everybody would be happy. But we don't live in an ideal world and the current situation is far from ideal. With the recession, credit crunch and dysfunctional town centre we have all the ingredients for disaster. Drastic action needs to be taken and taken soon to stop the trade spiraling into total meltdown.

The BLTF drivers unfortunately do have to live and work in the real world, we have done so for many years and in doing so have built up a wealth of experience and knowledge and a true understanding of how the trade works. We are forward thinking and believe a more pragmatic approach to this problem is needed.

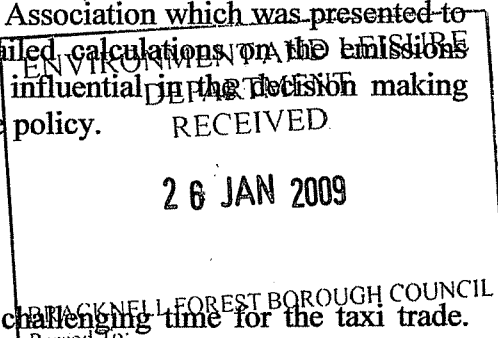


It is imperative that the council take heed of the warning signs and appreciate the seriousness of this situation. If ignored it could be perceived as a gross dereliction of duty on the part of the committee. I refer back to the report from Chelmsford, Essex quoting Lord Hanningfield's call to arms November 26th 2008 calling for unprecedented action to be taken within Essex to protect the people and their businesses in these difficult financial times. In the words of Lord Hanningfield "This could be Armageddon"

Environmental Impact

It is now becoming clear that the lifting of quantity controls is resulting in an oversupply of taxis in many areas. Not only does this cause unnecessary congestion it also causes over ranking. We have a serious problem at the bus station where taxis have to over-rank. This is mainly due to a lack of work. This leads to more important issues of unnecessary pollution. It is a fact that the larger wheelchair accessible vehicles emit higher carbon emissions. We have stated before that there is only so much work to go round. Increasing taxis numbers will only result in more cars clogging up the already congested ranks and surrounding areas. This will result in longer wait times for a job which will mean engines running for even longer periods of time. We must not be fooled into believing that a taxi that is not working is not polluting. Taxi engines are idling for hours every day, in the summer for keeping the cars cool and in the winter to keep the cars warm in their quest to reach the front of the rank.

We have submitted to you a report from the Oxford Taxi Association which was presented to Oxford City Council. In this report you will find detailed calculations on the emissions emitted by each taxi. This report was apparently very influential in the decision making process that led Oxford City Council to adopt a regulative policy.



Summary / Conclusion

There is no doubt that the next year or two will be a challenging time for the taxi trade. Driver's takings are already down considerably and will probably continue to fall as the recession bites. With most drivers now operating the wheelchair accessible vehicles the running costs have generally increased. This has resulted in drivers already working 60-70 hours per week having to work even longer. Having tired, miserable, resentful drivers will be of no benefit to consumers.

We would like the committee to take great consideration on the relationship between good working conditions and job satisfaction and the standards of service delivered to the consumer. We all know that people working in jobs that they enjoy and feel they are respected deliver a better standard of service to the customer. This is the case in all trades and professions and is no different in the taxi trade. This is what the OFT report seems to have overlooked. Most of the BLTF drivers have been in the trade for several years and would like to continue doing the job they love to do. We believe that the residents of Bracknell would also prefer to keep the experienced drivers of the BLTF. This is what they have been telling us.

BFBC's current licensing policy allows any number of plates to be issued. There is no limit. If there is an influx of new plate applications this year which we feel is very likely in the current economic climate, it will probably result in many experienced drivers having to leave

the trade altogether due to lack of revenue. This would be detrimental to the trade and consumers alike. As we all know there is no substitute for experience.

The BLTF has worked closely with the GMB PDB to try and find an appropriate solution to this problem. We believe the only logical solution is to carry out an unmet demand survey.

The BLTF have agreed that the cost of this survey is to be incorporated in the annual licensing fees. We would like to remind the committee that the original petition stated for an unmet demand survey to be carried out. The council are in receipt of 70+ copies of the petition which contains the signatures of the drivers confirming this.

We will be carrying out an official GMB ballot so that every driver has the opportunity to state whether they are prepared to meet these costs or not. This will show transparency in our decision making and we will be willing to submit the results of the ballot to the committee.

This report has been compiled by the BLTF. It is to the best of our knowledge that all information is factual and correct.

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