

Outcome of the Consultation On The Inclusion Of The Geographical Element Of The 'Knowledge Test' For Dual And Private Hire Drivers

Background

All taxi drivers based in Bracknell Forest need to be licensed. During the licensing application process drivers are required to undertake various checks and assessments including medical and Disclosure and Barring Service checks (DBS).

Drivers are also required to undertake specified training including safeguarding and disability awareness and a 'knowledge test'. The cost of a new licence includes initial tests, safeguarding and disability training.

There are four elements to the 'knowledge test' for dual and private hire drivers. All the test requirements vary slightly depending on the type of licence being applied for but include:

1. The Highway Code;
2. Testing on the Carriage of Disabled Passengers;
3. Driver and Vehicle Law and Conditions attached to their particular licence;
4. Geographical Knowledge of locations within the Borough. (How to get from A–B via the shortest possible available route.)

We consulted on the requirement to retain this fourth element of the test. No changes were proposed to the first three requirements. Both dual and private hire drivers have to pass a map based part of the test to assess their knowledge of the area and dual drivers have an additional oral element to the test. This oral element is undertaken as hackney carriages can be hailed by customers and journeys are not always pre-booked.

Due to the nature of the work that they undertake, often based on fixed routes, Home to School and Chauffeur drivers and operators do not have to do the geographical part of the 'knowledge test'.

What We Consulted On

Respondents were asked to respond to an online survey which asked for their views on the following:

1. To what extent they agreed or disagreed that the geographical element of the 'knowledge test' should be retained:

2. The reason for their response
3. Any specific impacts or alternatives they thought should be considered in relation to the geographical element of the 'knowledge test'
4. If they had any other suggestions or comments to make about the geographical element of the 'knowledge test?'

Why We Wanted Your Views

Discussion about the requirement to undertake the geographical element of the 'knowledge test' had taken place at previous Committee meetings. Members had therefore requested that it be included as a formal agenda item at a meeting. The future of the knowledge test was discussed at the [Licensing and Safety Committee on Thursday, 22 June 2023](#).

The Committee, after hearing arguments in favour of retention and reasons for removing the requirement, requested that a three week consultation be undertaken to provide information for them to base a decision on in the interests of openness and transparency.

The outcome of the consultation would then inform a decision as to whether or not any changes were needed to the guidance notes, Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy and or procedures associated with the 'knowledge test'.

Who and How we Consulted

- The consultation was posted on the Council's Consultation Hub on the 07 July 2023
- A link to the consultation was posted on the relevant page of the Public Protection Partnerships website on the 07 July 2023
- An email was sent to the Bracknell Taxi Trade.
- A link to the survey was sent to colleagues in Thames Valley Police (10 July 2023) and neighbouring licensing authorities.
- A notification about the consultation was circulated to Members by Bracknell Forest Council's Democratic Services Team.
- We emailed the Parish Council's to notify them about the consultation on the 07 July 2023.
- Officers in the licensing team were consulted on 07 July 2023.
- The consultation ran from the 11 July to 28 July 2023.
- Social Media post on 07 July 2023/ press release on 12 July 2023.
- Verbal discussion at the Taxi Trade Liaison Meeting on the 09 October 2023.

What you Told Us

The Council received 38 responses to the consultation via the consultation hub and three responses were emailed directly to Officers. One of those responses was signed by 45 of the hackney carriage drivers and another by 14 private hire drivers. It is noted that some of these drivers also submitted individual responses via the online consultation process.

The respondents identified themselves as:

BFC Licensed Hackney Carriage/ Private Hire Driver	25
BFC Licensed Home to School Driver	1
BFC Chauffeur Driver	3
BFC Licensed Operator	2
BFC Town/ Parish/ Council or Councillor	0
BFC Councillor	0
BFC Council Officer/Team	2
Public Sector Authority	2
Resident	2
Business	0
Community Group	0
Other	3
No Response	1
Total	41

Question 1 To what extent do you agree that the geographical element of the ‘knowledge test’ should be retained?

Of the 39 respondents to this question 65% agreed or strongly agreed that the knowledge test should be retained, 28% disagreed or strongly disagreed with its retention. There seemed to be a clear divide between hackney carriage drivers wanting to retain it and private hire and chauffeur drivers wanting to remove this requirement. The view from officers and other public sector organisations appears to be a suggestion that it should be retained.

Strongly Agree	22
Agree	3
Neither Agree or Disagree	3
Disagree	3
Strongly Disagree	8

Question 2: Reasons given for retaining the Knowledge Test

Those respondents seeking to retain the test focussed on safety for passengers and drivers, the ability to identify alternative routes easily, knowledge of the area being a point of difference, the ability to avoid busy routes, improved customer satisfaction, improved customer engagement, sat navs not always identifying the shortest routes, technology not always being available especially at busy events, appearing professional, not being distracted by the technology and being aware of local facilities.

It helps driver and passenger both. It makes both parties life easy.
It help both parties, driver, and customer
Knowledge test is important for new drivers and all hackney drivers must have the knowledge.
Important and it must continue for new applicant Hackney driver
Exercise your brain.
Should have they local knowledge
Driver must have road knowledge
In times of traffic etc knowledge of alternative routes is helpful; especially if we know shorter routes as it keeps the customers happy. This is best for Hakney drivers not pre booked Private Hire
Being familiar with the area, means driver would find alternative route to avoid busy Road through rush hour
New drivers will use GPS which will put them and passengers at risk Being familiar with traffic. If busy they can use short cuts Reduced satisfisfaction between driver and passenger as driver needs to focus on GPS and driving
It works as it is.
i feel very strongly that all licensed drivers should have knowledge of the local area as we are obliged to take the shortest route and sat navs are not that accurate. also knowledge of guest houses, care homes and doctors surgery's etc should be essential to doing an efficient job

<p>Sat nav has to rely on various elements that can 'go down'. Without a proper knowledge of the Borough a driver would be lost if any of these situations arose. In my opinion that is wholly unprofessional. If you want a borough of unprofessional cab drivers then go ahead and take it away</p>
<p>Passenger feel safe drive know the area. Driver may be life saving when know the people and area as well. Look like more Passenger local cab driver</p>
<p>Constantly using GPS that new driver will be distract. Which cause risk to driver and passenger r</p>
<p>Been familiar with the area means if there is traffic the new driver can take another route to not impede the clients schegule having more experience</p>
<p>Constantly using gps means that new driver will be distract, which cause risk to driver and passengers</p>
<p>Regular customer have a lack of trust in new driver as they wouldn't know common routes</p>
<p>I would agree that Hackney Carriage drivers should have a good level of knowledge of the local area as they hail customers. I don't think that private hire drivers would need to necessarily retain this element for the nature of the business, being on advance booking only there is an element of preparation of route for the driver before he/she his dispatched</p>
<p>Customers are charged by distance and sat navs don't always take the shortest distance, but the fastest. Sat navs also do not always have the local knowledge of roadworks and the specific time of day (eg school drop off/collections) issues on different routes and may not include any avoiding routes to use as alternatives. There is not always phone cover to use a sat nav, therefore you need to have a knowledge of the area (I had sat nav problems in Bracknell Forest only last week). Customer confidence is greater when you get into a vehicle and the driver knows where your destination is. A knowledgeable driver can also tell you where the nearest pub/takeaway/restaurant/ATM is to your destination which is helpful if you do not know the area, but the driver does.</p>
<p>We believe that the geographical element of the knowledge test should be retained for those times when sat nav is unavailable or not suitable. For example, when there is a large event and the mobile phone network is not functioning properly (we have recent experience of this during Henley Regatta when drivers could not use their sat nav systems on their phones), or when a passenger may not know the exact name of the place, road name or postcode (for example, they might want to go to "the large swimming pool with slides between Bracknell and Crowthorne"), or when the sat nav system does not know there has been an accident on the proposed route and the driver should be able to switch to a new route without pulling over and looking for another way. In addition, it is poor customer service if a driver is constantly having to rely on a sat nav to get to each destination. It would not be expected that the test be complicated or lengthy, or that it would contain little-known residential roads, but licensed drivers should have a good basic knowledge of key locations within the district.</p>
<p>Drivers should have a working knowledge of the geographical area in which they want to work</p>
<p>Constantly using GPS means that new drivers will be distracted, which causes risk to the driver and passengers.</p>

Constantly using GPS means that new drivers will be distracted, which causes risk to the driver and passengers. Being familiar with the area means that if there is traffic, the new driver can divert to another route to not impede the clients' schedule. Focusing on GPS means there is limited interaction between driver and passengers, reducing client satisfaction.

Constantly using GPS means that new drivers will be distracted, which causes risk to the driver and passengers. Being familiar with the area means that if there is traffic, the new driver can divert to another route to not impede the clients' schedule. Focusing on GPS means there is limited interaction between driver and passengers, reducing client satisfaction

My view is that with the latest technology and sat navigation I can understand that PH driver are giving the location by their Operator and therefore they can put the address into their systems. To a point this is the same for HC drivers however I do believe that drivers on the ranks should show some knowledge of the local area.

It was possible to enter the wrong post code into a sat nav and this could be avoided if the driver was familiar with the area rather than relying on technology. *(added at the TTM)*

Question 2: Reasons given for removing it

Respondents that sought to remove the knowledge test stated that the prevalence of modern technology meant that drivers did not need to have local knowledge, a large proportion of their journeys were outside the district and this was not covered in the test, technology could identify blockades and stoppages in advance which could then be avoided, reduced stress for new applicants, increased pass rates which would address driver shortages, would assist with the integration of real time traffic information, alignment with industry trends and most new cars have built in satellite technology reducing the reliance on internet usage.

I don't believe that it is needed for a chauffeur because very little of our work is within this area also along with modern technology like google maps it's just completely a waste of time and more importantly money

Everything you need to know is on Google maps

Because if you don't know where an address is it is easy to use your satnav

I think this doesn't make sense, the geographical test is only Bracknell but drivers have to also go out of Bracknell 9 out of 10 times where they use maps. Well I have seen even drivers using maps inside Bracknell to use fast routes. So it doesn't make sense

Satnav technology

With the technology available now and the wide use of smart phones I believe it's not necessary.

With most vehicles now having SATNAV the map area of the Knowledge Test is almost obsolete

It should be removed. We use technology to navigate. Navigation system updates about route blockades or accidents which helps taxi drivers to find better routes.

We understand the importance of ensuring public safety and quality service from private hire drivers, however we believe that the current Geographical part of knowledge test places an unnecessary burden on aspiring Private hire drivers, this requirement discourage potential drivers from pursuing a livelihood in the private hire industry, limiting the opportunities for Private Hire operator to recruit more drivers. Furthermore, advancements in technology have made access to accurate navigation tools more prevalent than ever, many private hire drivers have GPS navigation apps and Vehicle are equipped with GPS systems that provide realtime directions, which can be relied upon to ensure passengers reach their destination promptly and safely. These technological advancements render the geographical knowledge test redundant and obsolete. More logical reasons to consider removing the Geographical part of Knowledge Test are as follows:

1. Focus on Essential Driving Skills
2. Promoting efficient use of Navigation Tools
3. Advancement in navigation Technology
4. Encouraging Drivers Workforce
5. Reduce Stress & Anxiety for some applicant to pass the geographical Test.
6. Increased Pass rates
7. Addressing Driver shortages in trade
8. Supporting Private Hire Industry
9. Integration of real-time Traffic Information
- 10.Reduce Wait time for drivers to receive their Private Hire Licences
- 11.Alignment with evolving Industry Trends

In Conclusion, we kindly urge the Bracknell Forest Council to reevaluate the necessity of the Geographical knowledge test for Private Hire drivers. We believe that its removal will promote fairness, encourage a more diverse workforce in Taxi & Private Hire Trade.

Technological advancements: With the prevalence of navigation apps and GPS systems, the need for memorising routes or locations may be less relevant in modern times. Eliminating geographic tests can make it easier for prospective drivers to obtain a licence. Most of new cars have a built in navigation system where they don't need any mobile data or internet to use that.

Question 3: Please tell us about any specific impacts or alternatives you think should be considered in relation to the geographical element of the 'knowledge test'.

Suggestions included differentiating between vehicles that could be hailed and those that had to be pre-booked, replacing the current verbal test with a written multiple-choice option (which would also be quicker to mark), combining the knowledge test and geographical

test with 30 or 35 questions only and having up to 60 knowledge tests that could be selected at random, thus making crib sheets an unworkable cheat system.

My view is that with the latest technology and sat navigation I can understand that PH driver are giving the location by their Operator and therefore they can put the address into their systems. To a point this is the same for HC drivers however I do believe that drivers on the ranks should show some knowledge of the local area.
Knowledge test must be even compulsory for any new comer taxi driver, what will be very helpful for driver to take passenger to their destination without needing of Satnav
Help both the passenger and driver because the driver dont have to worry about satnavs
The drivers shouldn't always rely on Internet, because you might not always have connection to the Internet
Imagine if a new driver pick up a passanger and his rushing for a meeting because trains was delayed, wants go asap. No time play on GPS
Keep busy
Driver without road knowledge can't take passengers in shorter way & it will be a problem for both
Having knowledge of the area will give better service and customer confidence.
None it should be scrapped
People taking the knowledge test don't always pass the test and they don't get license & give up trying. No need for a knowledge test
None just remove the test and make it easy as. Which M , A or B route u would take for example what motor u would take for Heathrow M4, M3 or A30
Regular customers have less trust with driver because they won't have knowledge of common routes Having more knowledge of common routes leave more efficient service
No alternative. The knowledge test should stay.
In the time of technology anybody can drive anywhere in the world.
Knowledge test must be compulsory
Having more experience of routes means there is better more efficient services
In today's environment, technology is very accurate and reliable that can assist a driver to drive from A to B without the need of specific knowledge of the area
Alternatives to the current verbal element of the knowledge test could be considered such as a multiple choice written paper. It isn't easy doing a spoken test, as may be remembered from a language exam at school or a university viva. This must be even more daunting if English is not your first language. A well written paper, multiple choice or otherwise, would help to alleviate this issue. The current verbal exam and especially the marking of it, is also very time consuming for the officer(s) involved. A written exam would be quicker and simpler to administer and much faster to mark.

SATNAV, local knowledge of living in the area and passenger knowledge
Geographic knowledge is important to assist with passengers that have difficulty in communicating, partially or fully sighted and being able to find difficult locations
It's the knowledge of just one town and Uber drivers navigate in our town all day long without passing geographic knowledge test . It's just fair that local private hire drives should be allowed to do the same .
Regular customers have a lack of trust in new drivers, as they wouldn't know common routes. Having more experience of routes means that there is a better and more efficient service. Increase client satisfaction, as drivers may be able to take shorter routes due to a knowledge of the area, which would decrease fare prices for the passengers.
It's an extra burden on new comers
Regular customers have a lack of trust in new drivers, as they wouldn't know common routes. Having more experience of routes means that there is a better and more efficient service. Increase client satisfaction, as drivers may be able to take shorter routes due to a knowledge of the area, which would decrease fare prices for the passengers.

Question 4: Do you have any other suggestions or comments to make about the geographical element of the 'knowledge test'?

Make it more though.
Keep as it is. The driver should have a minimum knowledge of the area.
Some people come from outside the town and they don't always have the address with them, so having knowledge will help passengers as well, and it saves both passengers and drivers time.
If you have no network to use GPS or if passenger change his mind to go different address, so driver will have to stop just to use Google map. Won't be a good idea.
Not to rely on set nav.
Please, keep the same way without any changes on knowledge test.
Well knowledge test and geographical test should all together , one test 30 or 35 questions only
The current test is perfect as new drivers should have understanding of area that they operate on Knowledge test should jsut test common routes
I have heard on many occasions that 'crib sheets' are circulating that can be memorised to assist potential drivers to pass the knowledge test. I think you should have up to 60 knowledge tests that could be selected at random, thus making crib sheets an unworkable cheat system.
it's a waste of time and money to have a knowledge test as I have mentioned above people are arriving from abroad and driving for Uber within a month of arriving in the country

Council must have knowledge test.
Think the current test is perfect, as the new drivers should have an understanding of the area they are operate
Geographical knowledge test should just test common routes so any obscure destinations would not need to be known but learnt over time through experience as a driver
Firstly this survey is too complicated and many drivers aren't very fluent in English . It should have been a simply yes / No or tick box survey . BFBC is aware that majority of the taxi trade drivers are from ethnic minorities , of older age , who first language isn't English and they aren't going to be able to answer this survey in detail . Hackney drivers want to gate keep and retain knowledge test because they don't want to dilute the job market . So this test should be retained for hackney drivers if they wish but removed for private hire drivers . we have an acute shortage of drivers and we need more PH drivers to join the trade . Current tests are time consuming , finically cumbersome , and with modern technology at our disposal they are redundant. If this was any other field of work you wouldn't expect people to start a job one year after applying and paying hundreds of pounds upfront . We have to move with times and Geographical knowledge is pointless exercise in my view.
We think the current test is perfect, as new Hackney drivers should have an understanding of the area they are operating in, and it should continue to be a test or new dual badge applicants. The geographical knowledge test should just test common routes, so any obscure destinations would not need to be known but learnt over time through experience as a driver.
Offer incentives for drivers who voluntarily undergo additional training or obtain certifications related to geographic knowledge and safe driving practices.

What We Are Proposing To Do

All comments on the consultation will be presented to Members at the [19 October 2023](#) Licensing and Safety Committee meeting for discussion. This discussion will inform any changes to the Draft Hackney Carriage and Private Vehicle Licensing Policy and the Guidance Notes for Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicle Owners, Drivers and Operators.