

MORE LOOS NEEDED

A demonstration was held by some of London's bus drivers recently, calling for more toilet facilities in the capital. The T&G Section of Unite the Union, which represents more than 25,000 members employed in the London bus industry, staged the demonstration. Westminster City Council has said it welcomes London bus drivers' call.

Westminster has the highest number of public toilets in the UK and spends £3 million every year, more than any other local authority in the country, maintaining the services despite the lack of government funding. Taxi drivers know only too well the difficulties in finding suitable conveniences. Councillor Alan Bradley, Cabinet Member for Street Environment, said: "I certainly appreciate the concerns that the union has raised with regard to public toilet provision in London. Local authority provision of public conveniences is discretionary and not directly funded by central Government.

"Westminster does, however, have an unrivalled, award-winning provision of public toilets, placing us far ahead of any other local authority in the country and we have been opening and refurbishing more conveniences at a time when many areas have seen a reduction.

"We would encourage other London boroughs to follow suit and open more public toilets throughout the city to service the capital's workers and visitors." There are currently a total of 55 council-run and leased toilet facilities across the city, including 12 temporary units placed out in the West End every Friday and Saturday night. The council spends £3 million every year maintaining these public services, more than any other local authority in the country.

As a result of the Council's commitment to this important public service, there are now more public toilets in Westminster than there were at any time in the last 20 years. Whilst the last five years has seen the number of public toilets across the UK fall by around a third, the same period has seen Westminster invest heavily in such provision, including a £600,000 refurbishment of toilets in Oxford Circus and Piccadilly Circus, which are completely free.



It has also seen the introduction of innovative "open air" and mobile facilities in the West End, which are made available at the busiest times, and again are also free."

But taxi drivers and bus drivers face similar problems in finding a suitable facility. At least for a taxi driver there is the possibility of finding somewhere

to park and find a loo; for bus drivers many of them are working shifts of 6 hours or more with no break which means they sometimes have to leave a bus full of passengers whilst they nip off to the loo. Bus drivers at the demonstration who were interviewed by the press told how embarrassing this is as everyone knows where they are going. But surely everyone should have the right to clean easily accessible facilities during their working hours. Let's hope that those responsible for providing the facilities will listen to the bus drivers and then taxi drivers could benefit as well.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor

Have you found things are a little tough this year? Are you looking to earn an extra few bob to supplement the Kipper? Why not sell your badge on e-bay? Should you lose your badge down the back of the sofa, obviously the first thing you do is go to the Yard and get it replaced. Your old number will now become null and void. A few months later, it's down to Land of Leather and out goes the old armchair. Before you give it up to the binmen, cut open the base of the sofa and you will probably find a half chewed fur covered Murray Mint, a comb (but sadly doubtful in my case), a small amount of change and your old badge.

Put the mint and comb in the bin, change in your pocket and your old badge on E-BAY! Green Badge 1320 sold earlier this week for £111.50. Included in the price was the little leather badge holder and postage. Obviously the lower the number the more valuable it would be. If any Cloth Cap and Mufflers are reading this then get the grandchildren to hook you up to EBAY. You will get more cash than the pension plan you have been saving for.

And it's perfectly legal apparently as the badge is no longer valid. When I spotted the badge for sale I contacted the PCO, who in their own words, stated that they 'have advised Ebay not to allow the sale' but they had no legal power to stop it. I asked if the badge was the property of the driver or that of the PCO. She stated she has already answered one question and she didn't have to answer anymore.

I Spoke to PCO Licensing who said it was not their patch and I should speak to TOCU. Now this is where the fun began. It's a shame I didn't record the conversation because it had the makings of a Brian Rix farce. This is the abridged version of the conversation. To sell the badge is NOT illegal as it is all tied up in ancient laws such as Roadkill. To kill certain birds is illegal. However, if you have found it already dead, you may take it home, cook it and eat it – (as long as no one saw you kill them, if you get the idea!) No I didn't really get it either.

Twenty four hours later I called them back to see if there was a real Policeman I could get information from. He said that as no-one has broken the Law it's not a Police matter and I should speak to the PCO. He told me that as the badge was no longer valid it was a chattel or memento and was perfectly legal to buy and sell.

So there you have it, and official too. Having a quiet day? Stick the badge on Ebay and earn that extra cash. One word of advice though: if you go to an Internet café to check on the progress of the Ebay auction, don't leave your cab on a rank. TOCU are out there and watching, they will swoop down Sweeny Style and nick you! Now, where are the cab keys? I'm off to Land of Leather.

Yours faithfully

Gary Zylberszac

(Badge No. coming to a computer screen near you soon)

LONDON PAST AND PRESENT

In the last issue of Taxi Globe we printed a letter from Michael Barrett who was looking for a cab driver by the name of Alex. Michael had met this cab driver during the time he was writing his latest book, London Past and Present. In the book he compares a selection of images from London in the Postwar Years by Douglas Whitworth, with modern views taken from identical positions. The images are accompanied by captions explaining the changes which have occurred. His stunning colour photography contrasts with the evocative views of the post-war years to create an important visual record of England's capital city. Published in hardback, the book costs £18.99 and is published by Tempus Publishing.

