

MARY DOWDYE WISHES LONDON'S TAXI TRADE A HAPPY HEALTHY PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR

Taxi Globe talked to Mary Dowdye shortly before Christmas and due to our issue dates we were not able to pass on Mary Dowdye's wishes for a Merry Christmas to drivers. However, Mary has asked us to wish London's taxi trade a happy New Year.

JOINING THE TEAM AT THE PCO

At the end of 2006, Mary Dowdye was appointed to a new role at the PCO. As Head of Standards and Regulations, Mary joined Dave Stock as Head of Service Delivery, Len Simkins as Head of Strategy and Planning and Alan Matthews as Head of Projects and Developments and Julian Fiorentini as Mobility Programme Manager working under the leadership of Ed Thompson, Taxi and Private Hire Director. At the time, Roy Ellis was retiring as Head of the PCO and the imminent closure of the inspection services for taxis at the yard in Penton Street was just weeks away. One year on, Roy Ellis is settled into his enjoyable retirement and taxi inspections are now undertaken by SGS.

Mary had been working in Traffic Enforcement at TfL for over 5 years before joining the team at the Carriage Office. Her new role has presented her with lots of new challenges. "I am really enjoying my new role – in fact it is hard to believe the first year has passed so quickly. I love new challenges and there is a lot to learn in this role. My colleagues have been extremely supportive in explaining different facets of the PCO and I have also enjoyed a trip to the LTI factory in Coventry to see the taxis being built." Mary's previous role gives her a great insight and understanding of traffic enforcement issues, including CCTV. She said: "I realise how frustrating some of the issues are facing the taxi trade when it comes to parking tickets. The tickets are not within the remit of the PCO and it is up to drivers to appeal any tickets they receive during the course of their working day. However, I do understand that sometimes drivers and the radio circuits simply pay the ticket as the amount of time spent in an appeal often seems more than the ticket fine is worth. But it is always worth appealing. The CCTV cameras are able to look at the circumstances surrounding the alleged contravention, including for example if a driver were directed into a bus lane or was helping a less able bodied passenger."

LACK OF COMMUNICATION

At Taxi Globe we are often told by our readers that over the past year the PCO has seemingly become even more remote and one of the criticisms is that they do not communicate with drivers and the taxi trade enough. As Head of Standards and Regulations, Mary has been involved in many different projects this year. One which it is hoped will benefit taxi drivers in the near future is a new sticker which is currently being tested on some taxis. This will advise passengers of the problems facing drivers asked to stop in certain places such as an ATM. Passengers think drivers can just stop anywhere; stopping for just a quick moment can be enough to cost taxi drivers a parking fine. This is something which the trade are often faced with; passengers think that the driver can stop anywhere. The sticker will also include details of how TfL calculates fares and also what a passenger should do if they would like to commend a driver for their journey or in rare cases complain about their journey. Once the final decision has been made about the stickers it is expected they will be voluntary to start with, although they may become mandatory at a later date. These stickers may not be welcomed by all of the trade, but anything which helps explain to the public that drivers cannot just stop at the nearest ATM machine has to be a positive step forward.

BUS LANE SIGNAGE FOR PH

Whilst on the subject of stickers, Mary commented on signage to allow private hire vehicles to use bus lanes. It has been reported in some taxi and private press that signage are about to go live which would allow phv in bus lanes. This is not the case at present. Mary said: "We are currently



waiting for signs for phv to be able to set down or pick up on Red Routes. This is a complex task as the stickers have to have clarity for the CCTV cameras or parking attendants or police officers. The stickers also have to be designed in such a way that they will fall apart if they are tampered with or someone tries to peel them off the vehicle." The use of bus lanes is not an option at the present time for the private hire trade. New roundels are likely to feature the well known roundel used for the London Underground as this is a well recognised symbol in London.

Mary also told our reporter about the change over to inspections at SGS. She commented: "From the information we have now been able to study from the testing stations, standards of vehicles presented for inspection do show an improvement. This is good news for the travelling public and although the trade offered some resistance to the idea of six monthly checks, these are also helping to raise standards. Obviously this is the primary role of the PCO; we have to make sure that the travelling public is using vehicles which are fit for purpose. The main failure point for taxis at the moment is the smoke test. Hopefully, this will continue to improve over the next few months." On the day of this interview with Mary, taxis and buses were once again in the news for being "dirty" in terms of emissions in Oxford Street. The fact that there are far more buses on the road must have some impact on the air quality, especially as taxis are now Euro III compliant to meet with the Mayor's Taxi Emissions Strategy. Buses have been fitted with particulate traps which cut emissions of particulates by over 90%; and two thirds of the fleet meet Euro III emissions standards.

LICENSING OF PEDICABS

Another issue which has received a lot of press coverage is that of pedicabs. Mary said: "We are still awaiting a judgement from the High Court as to the status of pedicabs. Once this has been determined, decisions will be made. However, I would argue that if the pedicabs are going to be on our streets,



then they should be licensed in order to help protect the public. This would give some measure of control over the way they operate. I can see the issues the pedicabs cause in the bus lane outside Hamleys for example but until the High Court delivers its decision the situation cannot be resolved in any way." The taxi trade can see for itself the large numbers of pedicabs on the streets of the capital but so far have not had to see tuk tuks. As some may remember, a tuk tuk service was launched during 2006 in Brighton and the proprietor was keen to get his service into cities across the UK, including London. However, the tuk tuk is a different issue to pedicabs because it is motorised and so this service is now up to London Buses to decide on.

ONE YEAR ON

Mary often uses cabs, both in the course of her work and socially. She is always interested to hear what the drivers have to say, although for many of them they are not sure of her role when she gets in their taxi. She said: "Some of them ask me what I do at the PCO. It is always interesting to hear the drivers' points of view and I too have been told there is a lack of communication between the PCO and the taxi trade. This is something I would like to see improved and I will be looking into this."

Once again, as in our interview last year when Mary stepped into her role at the PCO our reporter found Mary to be easy to talk to and so Taxi Globe would hope that it will be possible to open the channels of communication between drivers and the PCO to a level which most drivers would prefer to see.