

TAXI
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BORIS BEGINS ON HIS ELECTION PLEDGES

As the New Year begins, the taxi trade is facing the Kipper season. This year some of the challenges ahead will be hard as the economic situation continues to be uncertain across the UK. As the New Year began in 2008, Boris Johnson began his campaign to become Mayor of London. At the Royal Oak he told cab drivers: "Taxi drivers give London a great service – they are an institution. They work hard to earn the right to drive on the streets of the Capital and I do not believe in trying to wreck their trade in the way that Mayor Livingstone has been doing over the last eight years." He continued by saying he would scrap the mid year inspection. He said: "These inspections are adding to the cost of the taxi drivers' livelihood, increasing the cost of their licence, putting an unnecessary burden on drivers." Secondly, Boris promised that cab drivers would no longer be penalised for stopping on Red Routes to allow passengers to use cashpoints. Thirdly, Boris promised to work with local councils to make the rules on using bus lanes the same across London, enabling cab drivers to use all bus lanes.

By the beginning of this year, the mid year inspection had gone, although the trade is still waiting to hear what will happen about the increase in cost that they are still paying

to cover this inspection. Stopping for ATM's is now allowed at certain times of the day, although this is as a trial for six months, which is almost over.

Another promise was to get rid of bendy buses. "I want to pension them off. I am sure there will be somewhere suitable to send them, perhaps a Scandinavian airport somewhere would be the best place. Certainly not on our streets!"

Now the beginning of the end is in sight for the bendy bus. "Three bus routes – 38, 507 and 521 – will no longer use bendy buses when their contracts expire this year. Boris Johnson said: "During the election, I promised that I would phase out bendy buses, and I can announce their demise has begun, which means the first bendy buses being removed from our streets by the summer."

Boris also promised to put a representative of the taxi trade on the TfL Board. Bob Oddy, General Secretary of the LTDA, has duly been appointed, as well as Steve Wright Chairman of the Licensed Private Hire Car Association to represent the ph industry.



Boris at Royal Oak January 2008

WESTMINSTER COUNCIL SEIZE DEATH TRAP PEDICABS

Just before Christmas, a series of operations were carried out by Westminster Council officials, together with officers from City of Westminster Police and Traffic Unit, which saw a number of electrically assisted pedicabs seized. In a combined high profile police and Westminster City Council operation, pedicabs which have been modified with car batteries were targeted. Described as "death traps" by Westminster City Council, as many as 80% of the estimated 1000 pedicabs in the West End are modified with car batteries to travel faster. These car batteries are often hidden under the seats of the pedicabs and allow them to run at dangerous speeds. The push-bike pedicabs travel between five and seven miles an hour but the modified

versions can travel at up to 20 mph. Like the push bike pedicabs, the motorised pedicabs are not licensed in any way, there is no code of conduct for drivers and no minimum safety standards for their vehicles.

CONSULTATION BY TFL

TfL has previously undertaken a consultation exercise, seeking views on a proposal to introduce a licensing scheme for pedicabs. Currently this proposal is on hold, pending determination of an application by TfL to the High Court for a Declaration that a relatively old case stated appeal to the High Court that held that pedicabs are "stagecoaches" was wrongly decided. Should TfL be successful, pedicabs will be deemed to be hackney carriages. This means they will fall to be licensed/controlled by TfL under the black cab legislation. Their application is contested by the representative body for pedicabs, which has resulted in the proceedings becoming rather protracted. A decision is not expected until spring of 2009, at the earliest.

Westminster City Council has in the past few weeks received permission from DfT for the road markings and signs that would be needed to indicate the presence of a pedicab bay. The Council is now examining potential sites for the proposed

bays, and is liaising with the police and TfL to see if a voluntary permit scheme could be implemented ahead of legislation. Westminster Council is simultaneously promoting a London Local Authorities and Transport for London parliamentary Bill, jointly with TfL, which will seek to obtain the powers to enforce parking and moving traffic offences in the same manner as they currently do, in respect of motor vehicles. An essential factor that will need to be in existence for this proposal to be effective would be the display of licence plates and a central record of registered keepers. This will come about in the event that TfL win their High Court case and go on to deal with pedicabs as per black cabs, or lose and introduce a separate, stand alone licensing scheme. But this Bill is not anticipated to have completed its parliamentary processes and to have received Royal Assent before the autumn of 2009, at the very earliest.

UNINSURED, OVERLOADED AND FLOUTING THE LAW

Meanwhile, the joint operations soon showed that many of the "drivers" of the motorised pedicabs were uninsured, carrying more passengers than the pedicab was designed for and frequently flout traffic laws. Six who were arrested on the first night of the operation in the West End were travelling at more than 20mph. Staff from The Department for Work and Pensions were also on hand to check those stopped are not fraudulently claiming benefit. PS Christian Ardron, West End and Chinatown Safer Neighbourhoods Team, said: "This operation was aimed at targeting the many number of pedicabs that have been fitted with electric motors. This alteration results in their overall weight and speed being increased, and subsequently defines them as motor vehicles with the requirement for appropriate documentation. We have also been made aware of a number of collisions involving pedicabs, and by working with Westminster City Council we hope to avoid further collisions and serious injury, as well as reducing the anti-social behaviour associated with obstructing pavements and roads."

"A TRAGEDY FOR INNOCENT PASSENGERS"

WARNS COUNCILLOR

Despite an on going campaign by the LTDA which warns of the dangers of pedicabs, the number of pedicabs has continued to increase. In November 2008 bystanders narrowly avoided injury after a pedicab mounted the pavement in central London's Soho and smashed into a restaurant window. Councillor Danny Chalkley said: "The sheer number of these death traps has left us with little choice other than to take firm action. At the moment what should be a fun visit to the West End could all too easily turn into a tragedy for innocent passengers, and I'm not prepared to stand by and wait for that to happen."