

LONDON TAXI CAB PUBLIC RELATIONS *by John Kennedy*

www.ltcpr.blogspot.com

Yes after a lot of thought and debate at various tea stalls, cafes and ranks over the years, I'm taking the plunge and on the 31st January 2009 will launch an online political lobby/pressure group named London taxi cab public relations. With the private hire trade on the march, with touting out of control, the creation of "satellite mini-cab" offices, Whitcomb Street and then couple this with a recession we are under threat like never before.

Ever since the inception of a Mayor and the creation of Transport for London we have become a political football to be kicked about by whoever holds this office so we need to change our relationship with Transport for London and place this trade on sound footings.

We happen to be adults who have no voice or say in the way our industry is run let alone managed, we were never asked if we wished to be controlled by Transport for London it was just taken as a given. We moan, groan even complain, yet it appears nobody actually listens, an example of this is the touting that happens every night of the week in the capital. Laws are passed, mini-cabs licensed yet the touting still goes on, those who have the power to do something choose to ignore the problem and instead seek to legitimise "ranking" of mini-cabs by amending traffic management orders, yet we witness the Road Traffic Act applied in a rigorous fashion except in the centre of London at night where cars, touts park illegally and the wardens walk on by.

The parking laws within the capital have made the job of the taxi-cab driver near on impossible especially now we have enforcement by CCTV but instead of us just appealing tickets we should have been seeking amendments to the Road Traffic Act to take into account the job we do. Why shouldn't we be allowed to park on a meter bay for free for 20 minutes so you I or could go to the toilet or maybe the bank to get some change? With camera enforcement of Road Traffic offences the days of a telling off by a Police officer have gone, but has the pendulum swung too far the other way, is camera enforcement fair? After all just look at the way a blind eye is turned to touting, yet you or I happen to hit 35 mph on The Embankment and yes you're nicked. Let me make this clear I do not condone the breaking of the law but for people like us who drive for a living we can be unfairly punished for making a genuine mistake, surely a caution and/or a greater allowance of points on our driving licenses should be sort.

So I like many of you have had enough and I firmly believe the only way forward for us is to lobby, campaign and apply pressure to those in authority so if we want change we must lobby all politicians ranging from local councillors, London Assembly members, the Mayor of London and both Houses of Parliament. I/we shall seek permission from you the subscriber to lobby on your behalf on the following issues:

1. To split the Public Carriage Office in two, therefore divesting the mini-cab operation into a Private Hire Office. We can compete with each other but our right to "ply for Hire" must be protected at all costs.
Transport for London and the PCO should be protecting this right and not seeking to undermine our position by interpreting and or amending the Private Hire Act of 1998 which has had the effect of creating hundreds of "illegal mini-cab ranks".
2. One Badge One Vote on all issues that affect the working conditions of the London taxi-cab driver, they call it democracy.
3. To amend the road traffic act so that parking laws take full account of the job we do.
4. To seek a caution for a first time road traffic offences and an increase in amount of points allowed upon driving licence.
5. To ban "rickshaws" from the public highway.
6. To seek amendments to the Private Hire Act 1998 so it clearly defines what an operating centre is, so we end the madness of clipboard operators, oversized telephone booths becoming mini-cab offices and these anti-competitive practises.
7. Meaningful consultation to take place between Transport for London and all badge/plate holders, let's end the rumour mill by ensuring we know what is happening to our industry. If meaningful purposeful consultation is not forthcoming we shall revisit Parliament and seek alternative arrangements of management and may seek to divest ourselves from Transport for London control.

8. Retain the high standards of the Knowledge of London, this examination still produces the world's finest taxi-cab drivers our passengers expect no less.

9. With over 50,000 mini-cabs licensed in the capital and touting rife we must seek a "new enforcement unit" fit for purpose and funded by the mini-cab trade to ensure they do pre booked work only and finally end the epidemic of touting with the capital.

Now like any pressure group as goals are met and situations change we shall adapt to changes in the political world and if need be change tack so that we meet the main aim and objective which is to place this trade back on sound stable footings and ensure the finest taxi trade has a future brighter than any headlamp the automotive industry can make. I certainly have more radical proposals but to lobby on those I would like to be able to seek a mandate from the majority of London taxi cab drivers so over time and as we increase the subscriber base this will become achievable, the more of you that subscribe, the bigger the noise we can make in Parliament and the cheaper the cost will be to you all.

The initial cost will be £32.00p per year per badge holder; this will be reviewed annually with the sole intention to reduce the cost to you. Cost will depend on the numbers that subscribe and I like all of you understand that we are at the beginning of a recession. Let me make this clear we are not a union nor trade association, we will be a political lobby/pressure group if "any" trade organisation wishes to work in partnership they will be more than welcome in fact looking back at those nine objectives how could they not want to !

Now you may well be wondering why did I stopped at no.9 - well I didn't. The 10th issue is an immediate and very important issue one that could do us great harm at the beginning of a recession and that is the tariff increase.

Now can anybody show me any other business that is not in receipt of public subsidy that is putting its prices up. Therefore I firmly believe the trade organisations should continue the good work they do on the tariff review but the final say should be given to the taxi-cab driver via a ballot. I'm sure our friends and colleagues at the PCO could post us a letter with a ballot form enclosed to be returned no later than said date and hey presto we will have started to see democracy in action and I'm sure the London taxi-cab driver will make the right decision depending upon the prevailing economic winds. In fact we could witness the beginning of "One Badge One Vote".

Now this is a "e business" so we shall communicate with subscribers via email and keep you all informed of progress via the web addresses below, your subscription shall run from 1st May and be valid for one calendar year.

Between 31st January and 1st May I shall be visiting various cafes, venues, garages and hopefully speaking to you the taxi-cab driver about how we shall meet these goals. But be under no illusion I/we shall use all modes of the media available to us from the printed press, radio, television to the world wide web, we shall highlight the plight of this wonderful trade to the world and will shall produce evidence to back up the claims we make. We will be denounced by some but when you know something is wrong and you understand that wrong you have a duty, a moral obligation to do something about it. One driver amongst our ranks who has worked so hard highlighting the problems we face on a daily basis is Thomas the taxi of the Anderson Shelter, without you this would not be possible so I personally thank you for your endless tireless work now come on board with me and let us place this trade back at the top of the tree where we belong, remember "a London taxi always leads the others merely follow".

Application forms will be available at various sites such as the Chelsea Tea stall Chelsea Bridge, Tom's Snack Wagon on Clapham Common, the Astral Cafe Regency Street and also down loadable from the 31st January at our website www.ltcpr.blogspot.com or www.andersonshelter.blogspot.com

Please fill out form and make cheques payable to "London taxi cab public relations" and leave at one of the above named sites, if you choose to pay by cash please place money in a envelope provided.

Tune in to the Big George show on BBC London 94.9 fm on Friday 30th January 2009 I will be launching Ltcpr just after midnight you can call Big George on 0207 224 2000 or text on 07786 200 949 Monday to Friday between 10pm to 2am or log onto www.londondailynews.com to keep up to date with London news and the progress of Ltcpr.