

FAIRNESS NOT FAVOURITISM *by Peter Rose*

In the last issue of Taxi Globe, the Transport for London's Director of Taxis and Private Hire stated that Thursday 5th February would have been better spent talking about the issues facing the London taxi trade rather than demonstrating about them. Personally I couldn't agree more. The only problem that I have with that scenario is the fact that as much as the trade talks to Transport for London very little seems to get done.

ONE STRIKE AND YOU'RE OUT

Working taxi drivers all received the 'one strike and you're out letter', sent out, not only to private hire drivers, (which it was intended for) but also every London taxi driver, (which it was not). But why did taxi drivers get a copy of the letter? Apparently it was sent to us in the name of fairness. Did the PCO forget that we are actually allowed to ply for hire, it's what we do. Or did they not want to upset anyone in the private hire trade? If the latter is the case why are they so weak that they live in fear of the private hire lobby?

At a subsequent meeting between the Public Carriage Office, Taxi driver groups including the Unite Cab Section and a senior representative from TfL, all of the Capital's taxi drivers, repeat, taxi drivers, were supposed to get a letter of apology from the Public Carriage Office. Have we got it? NO! We are still waiting. Will we ever get what we were promised? It is this and many other things that have made ordinary working taxi drivers angry at the way our licensing authority treats us. It is no good the PCO telling us that we should sit down and talk if things that are agreed are not going to be carried out.

When we have a licensing authority which sees nothing wrong with a line of private hire cars, illegally parked, attended by a marshal, waiting for work and the only obstacle to someone getting in straight away is a quick record of the journey jotted down on a clipboard, taxi drivers are going to get angry at the injustice. I have lost count of the times that clipboard operations have been reported to me; something that Martin Low from Westminster Council

categorically said on LBC radio was illegal but which it seems the licensing authority condone. Either that or are unable to enforce.

SATELLITE OFFICES

I would argue, as I'm sure most taxi drivers would, that if the licensing authority cannot enforce the rules then the notion of Private Hire Satellite offices, which has given birth to the clip board Johnny, should not be entertained. Why do private hire firms need satellite offices in the first place? As far as I'm aware private hire is supposed to be pre-booked i.e. in advance not be available for an immediate hiring. All someone has to do if they want to be picked up by a car is to make a phone call and order one. The booking will be taken at the regular office, the car will turn up at the 'pre arranged' time and the customer will get in, simple. If on the other hand the customer wants greater flexibility they can come out on to the public highway and hail one of the Capitals 20,000 excellent Licensed Taxis.

A meeting between the united drivers groups and Transport for London will, by the time you read this will have, barring accidents, taken place. We can only hope that the taxi trades concerns will be listened to. Many drivers who were at the drive in are already asking 'when will the next one be'. Let's hope it doesn't come to that and that we are given a fair crack of the whip and at last the taxi trade is shown true fairness and an end is put to the favouritism the licensing authority shows the private hire trade.

LICENSING AUTHORITY IS OUT OF TOUCH

Finally I take exception to the notion that the 5th February's show of anger was somehow put on by a few disgruntled trade reps; not so, it came from the bottom up, it was as a result of lobbying from the membership of three driver trade groups and from non affiliated drivers alike. Not to recognise this simple actuality exemplifies how far our licensing authority has lost touch with reality.

Peter J Rose.

Organisation and Recruitment 1/230 branch Unite the UNION

SHEPHERD'S BUSH RANK CONSULTATION

In a Public Notice on 6th February, Hammersmith and Fulham Council gave notice that the Council propose to revoke the existing taxi rank located in Uxbridge Road northeast side, Shepherds Bush. Any person wishing to object to the making of the proposed Order was asked to write to the Council with their objections by 27th February 2009. However, although a local authority can apply or remove a prohibition of stopping (whereby vehicles other than taxis are not allowed to park in the allocated space) and they can apply or remove road markings identifying the taxi rank, only the PCO can appoint or revoke a taxi rank. A spokesperson for the PCO told Taxi Globe: "The PCO only recently received this notice, and we have objected to the proposal. We wrote to Hammersmith & Fulham last week and pointed out that only the PCO can appoint or revoke a taxi rank. We are hoping to arrange a site visit with the Council to see the rank in action and discuss the issue with them in more detail."

At the time of going to press, the closing date for objections had passed. Taxi Globe asked Hammersmith and Fulham Council if in view of the PCO's comments and the fact the PCO are the only ones who can revoke a rank whether the Council would be taking down the notices. A Hammersmith & Fulham spokeswoman said: "We are currently carrying out a consultation with the Public Carriage Office, London Buses and Westfield about the possibility of moving the existing taxi rank to a safer place. No decision has yet been made on the future of the rank and we will, of course, take all comments into consideration."

A decision on the future of the rank is expected to be made in March. The legal notices are still up and will not be taken down until the end of the consultation.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor

A SIGN OF THE TIMES

I refer to your report 'United Trade Demo' (issue 602), more particularly one of the published pictures.

This image shows a driver, so clearly incensed about the current situation vis a vis the PCO and Westminster Council, that he took the time to show solidarity with his fellow cabbies & demonstrate at Trafalgar Square. To magnify the point he fabricated a DIY banner to vent his rage, strengthening the sign with brown tape to both reinforce his message and banner!

The sign nearly looked as good as the advert he carried on the side of his cab promoting the Heathrow Express, a direct competitor to his own trade and income!

Would he one day volunteer to carry a promotion for the minicab outfit operating from the half-price ticket booth in Leicester Square?

I thought that the DVLA didn't allow people that short sighted to drive Public Service Vehicles.

If this letter was my banner in a photo it would read: "If it is your cab, refuse to carry the advert and change advertising companies. If it's a fleet cab then go and ask them to return your 'Bill' and go work for a guv'nor that actually supports the cab trade."

Yours sincerely

Gary Zylberszac

The London Cab Company Ltd

Editor's note: Whilst some drivers may agree with Gary's sentiments, others say that the Heathrow Express brings and takes work into Paddington Station which then goes in the back of a cab. The Heathrow Express runs frequently and the rank at the station is a busy one.

