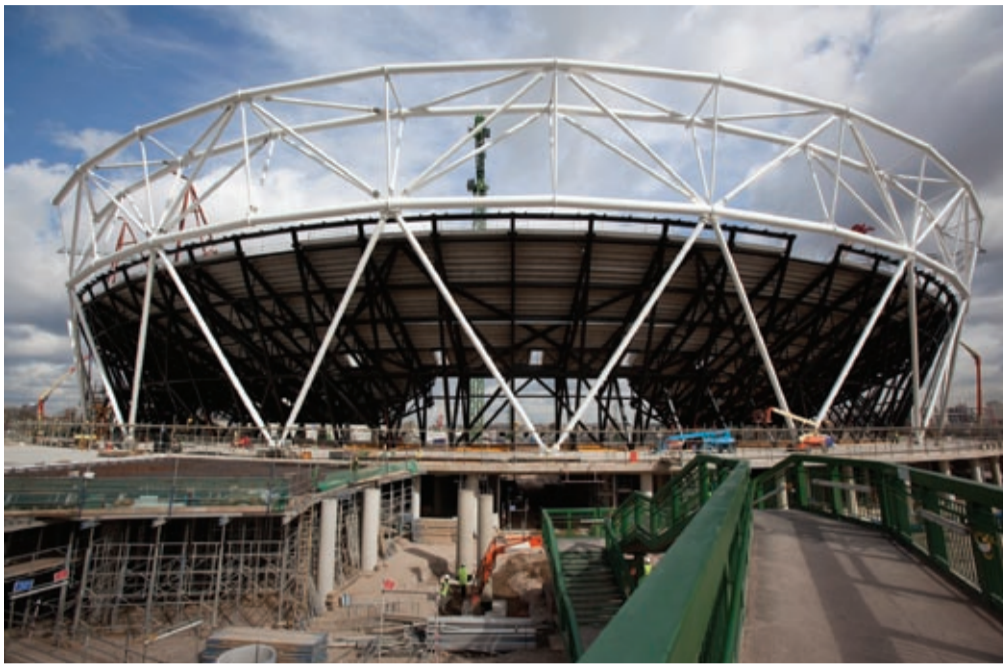


TAXIS WELCOME AT 2012 OLYMPICS

Hugh Sumner, the Olympic Delivery Authority (ODA) Director of Transport, is keen to emphasise that taxis are a welcomed part of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. He told our reporter: "Taxis are a vital part of the operation that will make a significant contribution to the Games." Hugh is well aware of the differences between the private hire trade and licensed taxis and clearly recognises the way in which the two trades operate. He said: "Wheelchair access is a key part of the strategy and planning of the transport for the Games. One of the important areas we are looking at is ensuring that



the facilities for both the cab trade and the private hire are appropriate. The ODA are designing drop off and pick up points for spectators and Games organisers and it is crucial that these are positioned in the right places in order to ensure spectators get to the right place. Nearer the time, more information will be available for taxi drivers in order to ensure that they know which way to get in."

MANY PASSENGERS EXPECTED FOR THE CAB TRADE

It is expected that many people working on the Games will be heavy users of taxis. Combined with the huge numbers of additional tourists and spectators in the Capital, the cab trade will do very well. "We are in the process of designing sensible loading zones," Hugh continued. "We will be giving clear maps to the taxi trade which will indicate clearly what venues are being used each day, and where the pick up and drop off points for each venue will be." This is because there are a number of different venues being used, such as Wimbledon, in addition to the main stadium in Stratford, in east London. Some of the venues will be further away, such as Weymouth for the sailing events and Manchester for football. The teams responsible for transport at the ODA and LOCOG want to develop a good relationship with the taxi trade so that these Games go down in history for being excellent – not just an excellent number of medals for our athletes but also in terms of ensuring that the large numbers of visitors also look back at a seamless experience with excellent transport links and facilities. To this end, information will be given to the taxi trade detailing not only where events are being held but also the finishing times when it is expected large numbers of visitors will be looking for cabs. There will be a secure perimeter to each venue, beyond which there will be no access to vehicles. Visitors will be expected to go through security checks, similar to those at airports in the UK.

WORKING GROUP TO ADVISE ON DROP OFF POINTS

At the current time, there is a Taxi and Private Hire Working Group who are working with London 2012 to develop strategies and how to accommodate the needs of both visitors and the cab trade. "There are prominent members of the cab trade on the working group, helping the team make the necessary decisions to get it right for everyone involved." Hugh continued, "I want to make it absolutely clear to the taxi trade how much we value their service.

The business will be there for the taking." Experience from previous Games suggests that seven per cent of spectators will have some difficulty negotiating the stairs and escalators and a further one per cent will be unable to use stairs or escalators at all. On the busiest day of competition of the Olympic Games, this could mean 23,000 ticket holders. Taxis are crucial in making it all come together and they will do very well out of the Games.

Hugh was asked about the Olympic Road Network (ORN). Some of the reports about the ORN have given misleading

information – at this point in time Hugh said that the fines for entering into the designated Olympic Lanes are aimed to be a deterrent, although there will be fines for repeated offenders straying into the lanes. Hugh explained: "It is part of the Olympic remit to have the ORN – as people may recall, when the Games took place in Atlanta there were problems with athletes not getting to their events on time. No-one really wants to stop athletes getting to their events, so we are working on how to get that message out and keep the Lanes – which will only make up 0.5% of London's roads – free for Olympic traffic."

PLANNING THE ORN

So now the Department for Transport is reviewing the opinions resulting from the ORN Consultation and then the lanes will be designated. The ODA will also continue to work with the utility companies and local authorities to ensure that any planned road works are finished well before the Games, and will not resume until afterwards. Hugh continued, "We have looked long and hard at where we need the Olympic Lanes, so we only use them where it is absolutely essential. All cabbies will know where the Lanes are as we will have told them. They will also benefit enormously from The Knowledge as they will know all the roads around the Olympic Lanes and be able to take the shortest route." In total there will be some 480 kilometers of the ORN across the country, most of which will be completely invisible and unmarked with full use for everyday traffic, with 180 of these in London. Of these only 2% will be lanes which other traffic cannot access."

Along with other legacies, the Transport Traffic Control Centre will be looking at making improvements to the transport system that will last for years after the Games have finished. This will include upgrades to various parts of the traffic infrastructure, such as traffic lights and traffic flow at junctions. In conclusion Hugh said: "We will show what a great host city can do for the Games; our intentions are to show the world how we operate as a fully accessible city. We want everyone to look back in admiration at London 2012 and the taxi trade will definitely be an important part of this."

KEEPING UP TO DATE

Over the course of the next three years, it is hoped that this newspaper will be able to bring regular updates on the progress being made towards the Games and ensure that cab drivers will have the information they need to help everyone enjoy both the Olympics and the Paralympics.