

CONSULTATION ON THE LICENSING OF MOTORCYCLES AS PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLES

A response from The London Taxis Branch of the Rail, Maritime, and Transport Union (RMT)

Firstly, on behalf of the Branch, I would like to thank the PCO for the opportunity to contribute to this debate. It is the first such opportunity that we have had to participate in such a discussion due to the very recent forming of our branch but that aside, we intend to become a fully integrated and integral part of the political life of the London Hackney Trade.

The actual response in the first instance was carried out by the branch Chair, Eddie Lambert, and branch member Phil Curran. This was then put before the branch to ratify, amend, or radically change if the members felt this was needed. Eddie Lambert has held a London Green Badge since 1992 and served two terms as the Branch Secretary and two further terms as Vice Chair of the former T&G Cab Trade Sections, Central London branch. He is a motorcyclist of over 39 years experience, and ex despatch rider of six and a half years and currently owner of a Yamaha XJ 900 and a Laverda RGS Corsa. Phil Curran has held a London Green Badge since 1999. He was a despatch rider for 20 years and motorcyclist for 34 years, his current bike a 2.3ltr Triumph Rocket 111.

We are in complete agreement with the verdict Leeds City Council v Chauffeur Bikes (Leeds County Court 26th October 2004) and subsequent appeal in the Queens Bench Division in which the original decision was upheld - not to grant licences. The main source of danger is most likely to be the passenger especially if they have not had any experience (or very little) of either piloting a motorcycle/scooter, or moped themselves. Changes of weight position especially whilst moving through close traffic or cornering at speed can have significant effects on the stability of the bike. Given the nature of the rides in general, i.e. fast trips to and from the

airports rail stations etc with strict time tables to keep to, this is not a good time to teach or learn how to ride pillion. This needs to be done when there is no time pressure and the rider and pillion can take their time acclimatising to each other.

Further to this matter, we are concerned about the proper fit of protective gear and crash helmets in particular. In the event of a mishap leading to a bike going down or a passenger thrown off, a badly fitting crash helmet could actually be the cause of more damage than not wearing one at all. The damage could also be extended to the neck as the weight of a loose fitting helmet adds to any impact. If you look at a helmet supplier such as Bell Helmets on the web you will see that some of their helmets come in up to 9 different sizes. It is most unlikely that without a prior meeting to sort out the correct size of helmet, a rider will bring the correct size helmet for each different passenger every time.

We also feel that to give these bikes the legitimacy of licences could give an apparent illusion of safety and respectability that is not there at present. Even the best riders in the country, the Met Police's "Black Rats", as they are known to most, are never seen on a police bike with passengers. Indeed several police forces, (Essex, Northumberland,) have on occasion in the recent past sort to drop their use of motorcycles completely for health and safety reason. However due to problems with controlling traffic, chasing motorcycle and cycle thieves etc they have had to re-introduce motorcycle patrols.

Our conclusion is that the PCO should not licence motorcycles as Private Hire Vehicles. We accept that as far as we know, so far there have not been any serious accidents involving these bikes with fare paying passengers but feel it is wrong to wait until someone is killed or seriously injured before putting an end to this practise.

We would also like to ask the PCO how it has allowed itself to fall from being the country's

leading Licensing Authority, which many other LA's across the country (and indeed the world) took their lead from and often adapted their own licensing conditions to mirror those of the PCO's, with local changes to suit the local situation to one in which it is years behind the practise of many LA's across the country. One can only conclude that it is the change of control which has led to this situation.

Under the previous stewardship of the Met Police, decisions were made purely in the interests of public safety. Nowadays all sorts of political agendas and politically correct sacred cows seem to take precedence over the one reason for the existence of the PCO, the safety of the travelling public.

A contentious point but one surely worth raising on the issue of public safety is the continued existence of third world transportation vehicles "Pedicabs", on the busy streets of Central London. (In many parts of the third world where life is generally not given the same value as in the civilised west, these contraptions are either now banned or facing a ban on the grounds of public safety and/or the cause of pollution due to traffic building up behind them.) It is about time someone from, TfL/PCO, GLA, Mayor's Office etc. took the bull by the horns and took steps to have these contraptions removed from the public highway, and relocated in the public and Royal Parks. Unfortunately they seem to fear a backlash from rabid greens that for the most part would not actually be seen dead in a pedicab.

It is not the actions of an intelligent, progressive, responsible public body to wait for the inevitable death or deaths of either passengers or riders, before removing these vehicles to a much safer environment.

On Behalf of RMT Taxis London Branch
Eddie Lambert
Phil Curran
Given vote of acceptance at Branch Meeting
1st July 2009.

MASTER ATTENDS GARDEN PARTY

Andrew Overton, Master of The Worshipful Company of Hackney Carriage Drivers, is pictured here with his wife Carol, outside Buckingham Palace as they were about to attend one of this year's Royal Garden Parties. Andrew said: "We were delighted to be invited to such a wonderful event."



TX4S BEGIN WORK IN CHENGDU

The Chengdu Evening News in China has reported that the first fleet of 40 TX4s will begin to work on the streets of Chengdu, capital of southwest China's Sichuan Province, in September. Traditional tea drinking began in the city some 1300 years ago and now another tradition is about to begin as London taxis take to the streets. Chengdu is an important transportation hub for the area, the gateway to scenic Jiuzhai Gou, the Buddhist mountains of Emei Shan and Le Shan, and one of the most important panda breeding centres. Many travellers travel to Tibet from Chengdu. The taxis will be the city's new handicapped-accessible taxis and are equipped

with standard GPS systems. Disabled people will be able to book the taxis by phone. The taxis will be permitted to carry regular passengers if drivers do not receive calls to transport handicapped ones, according to the city's traffic authorities. A further fleet of 760 new regular taxis has been ordered for the city, alongside the fleet of TX4s. Chengdu has taxi stands in its streets. The stands, about two metres high, a green ginkgo leaf shaped board on a blue Y-shaped support. The signs are written in both Chinese and English. Pedicabs are a common sight here, with the riders wearing uniforms and carrying ID cards.