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Cumbrian Newsprint, Cumbria

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TOUGH TIMES FOR MBH

Manganese Bronze Holdings PLC has announced its interim management statement for the period 1 July to 29 September 2009. MBH is the parent company of LTI Vehicles and earlier this year the Group Chief Executive, John Russell, told the taxi trade that things have been difficult for the company and that changes to the business were needed to return it to profitability. The latest statement reports that trading in the UK continues to be negatively impacted by the recession. The MBH Board believes that demand for new vehicles in the second half of the year will follow the normal seasonal pattern and be below that of the first half. Sales for the eight months to the end of August were down 9.1% to 1,207 vehicles versus 1,328 vehicles in the comparable period of 2008. The manufacturing break-even level is around 2,000 vehicles per year. The company says it is now entering into a Consultation with the workers and other stakeholders to “identify means of returning its currently loss making UK operation to profitability”.

MBH said: “The benefits of lower cost Chinese parts have not yet been sufficient to reduce the break even level. Price increases from UK suppliers and sales discounting has more than offset this benefit.” Meanwhile, the joint venture in China, Shanghai LTI, which is 48% owned by the group, offers the “greatest potential to achieve our vision and secure a long term future” for the group.

Another change which is in place is that of developing a direct sales operation, with an improved aftersales network. This follows the news in July 2009 that LTI were ending their independent main dealerships across the UK.

The TX4 recall is now over 98% complete and the case has been closed by the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA). Liability for the original problem has yet to be established.

TAXI EMISSIONS

Since the summer of 2008, all black cabs in London have met Euro III standards for PM and NOx emissions. Darren Johnson, a Green member of the London Assembly, has said that the mid-year inspections of taxis, introduced by former mayor Ken Livingstone in October 2007 but scrapped by Mayor Boris Johnson 13 months later, took a vital part in reducing harmful emissions of PM10 particulates from taxi exhausts.

John Mason, Director of Taxi & Private Hire at the PCO was quick to respond, saying: “London’s taxi trade has an excellent reputation for safety and quality of service, and we are determined to see them maintain that reputation. It’s our job to ensure they are safe and fit for public use at all times.

“Mid-year inspections were introduced in 2007 with the aim of improving standards, but they failed to have

the desired impact - pass rates for annual and on-street inspections remained fairly stable. We scrapped mid-year inspections to focus on on-street inspections instead, as we believe the unpredictable nature of these inspections provide a better incentive to keep a taxi in the best possible condition all year round.

“There is no evidence that scrapping mid-year inspections has had any impact on emission levels from London taxis.”

15,000 on-street inspections have been carried out in 2008/09. TfL is working with the taxi trade, including service providers, taxi drivers, operators and vehicle manufacturers to improve the level of first time passes. Regular inspection forums with key groups are held to discuss the issues relating to the main failure points.

THE LONDON TAXIDRIVERS' FUND FOR UNDERPRIVILEGED CHILDREN

The AGM of the LTFUC will be held on Tuesday 1st December 2009 at 7.30pm at the New Park Day Centre, 19 Highbury New Park, Highbury, N5.

There is parking at the Centre and refreshments will be available.

All drivers are most welcome to attend.

OVER-RANKING AT WATERLOO STATION

Transport for London’s traffic enforcement officers have been monitoring the taxi rank at Waterloo Station, reminding drivers about the rules when using designated ranking areas. TfL say that an increasing number of taxis have been seen lining up beyond the designated area at Waterloo Station, extending onto Addington Street and, on occasion, even around the corner onto York Road.

The problem of cabs over-ranking is not unique to Waterloo, and is a particular problem at taxi ranks outside the other mainline train stations in London. Over-ranking can have a significant impact on traffic congestion and, in the case of Waterloo, has also caused disruption to bus services as they have been prevented from accessing the area where they park during rest breaks.

John Mason, Director of Taxi and Private Hire, said: “We appreciate cabs lining up at this rank are doing their best in the current financial situation to ply their trade but over-ranking at Waterloo is causing problems for buses and other road users. Rather than just start issuing penalties, I have arranged for traffic wardens to spend time, on street, for the next couple of weeks to remind drivers of the importance of sticking to the designated rank. By going down and speaking to the regular users of this rank, I hope the need to issue penalties to taxis can be avoided.”

Penalties are likely to be issued to drivers who continue to stop their vehicles outside the taxi rank area following the monitoring ending on 12th October.

