

## TFL TO SPEAK TO DISABILITY GROUPS ABOUT TAXI ACCESSIBILITY

TfL has been advised by lawyers to find out whether there is a case in London for a taxi fleet containing some vehicles that are accessible to disabled people who use larger wheelchairs. Over the next few months, TfL will be speaking to disability groups, reviewing existing research and considering views from the Department

for Transport and other authorities. TfL states that whatever the outcome of the research TfL is committed to maintaining the features which make London's taxis unique: their yellow light, accessibility, availability, safety and most importantly the expert knowledge of London's taxi drivers.

John Mason, TfL's Director of Taxi & Private Hire, said: "Following legal advice we will be undertaking research in to how users of larger wheelchairs want to get around the city and whether London's taxi fleet meets their requirements. We will carry out this process by the end of March 2010."

## CAB DIRECT E7 TAXI PASSED IN NORWICH AND LIVERPOOL

Liverpool and Norwich licensing authorities have now decided to licence Cab Direct's Peugeot E7. The vehicle is now being welcomed to the hackney fleets of the cities in the wake of Cab Direct's landmark victory at High Court in July. The Court ruling showed that the 'turning circle' acts as a barrier to free trade and that fleets made up entirely of TX and One80 vehicles are not accessible for all wheelchair users. Senior LTI directors attended both meetings to argue their case for keeping the status quo. But their arguments were resoundingly dismissed by legal opinion for both Councils. Cab Direct Chairman Gerry Facenna said: "Despite LTI's best efforts to tell councils that the High Court ruling can be ignored these decisions show that the law is the law and has to be followed. We will now be pushing ahead with the ever-reducing handful of authorities which still stick with 'London conditions'."

### TRADE SUPPORT

Encouraged by overwhelming support for the E7 from local trade representatives, Norwich City Council Regulatory Committee concluded that,



given the High Court ruling, there were no longer any reasonable grounds on which to refuse to license the E7. Norwich solicitor Ms. Yvonne Blake announced that the committee now recognised that a class of wheelchair users could not safely access the existing London-style cabs. Ms Blake added that the committee was satisfied that there was no evidence of safety concerns with the Peugeot E7. As a result, the retention of the turning circle and others conditions that prevented the E7 being licensed could not be legally justified. Delighted Norwich cabbie, Paddy Keenaghan, commented: "This has been a long time coming but in the end it's very simple really – if people want to buy the old-style cabs they still can,

whereas many of us have at long last won the right for an alternative choice of vehicle."

### COSTS AWARDED

Two days later Liverpool Licensing Committee met to reconsider Cab Direct's application to license the E7. The committee's decision in March last year to reject the vehicle was quashed by the successful Judicial Review at the High Court, resulting in a £200,000 award of costs against Liverpool City Council.

Committee Chairman Malcolm Kelly announced: "The committee now recognises that a class of wheelchair users cannot safely access the existing Liverpool hackney fleet, as a result of the dimensions and design of the current (LTI) vehicles.

"The committee also now recognises that the E7 would be a valuable addition to the fleet. Although the E7 does not meet the current Conditions of Fitness, following (Justice) Blake's judgement Article 28 is engaged in relation to the turning circle and there is insufficient evidence on health and safety grounds to justify this breach of the European Treaty."

CLlr Kelly concluded: "Following Blake's judgement the committee now accepts that successful usage of the E7 elsewhere is compelling evidence that also allays any other concerns we may have had."

## ELECTRIC BUSES TRANSPORT SHOPPERS TO OXFORD STREET STORE

John Lewis in Oxford Street may have a taxi rank outside, but the store is now offering a new shuttle transport service to its customers to add to the store's green credentials. The nine-seater bus, powered by wind turbine electricity, is fitted with leather seats, wi-fi and laptops. Journeys cost £5 and the service is the result of a partnership between John Lewis and Green Urban Transport Sustainable initiative (GUTSi). The service can be pre-booked on-line.

John Lewis has plans for 20 of the £150,000 coaches to run across London next year. "We are really aiming at customers who would otherwise drive to the stores," said Noel Saunders, managing director of John Lewis Oxford Street. "We have spent four years developing this solution and we think it could have

a major impact on the way people shop. We hope in 10 to 15 years this could be very common." Each of the vehicles is charged overnight using a wind turbine and a power point outside John Lewis tops up the battery in between journeys.

Boris Johnson has commented on the service. He said: "It is fantastic that shoppers will be able to travel in style this Christmas in a super, clean and green electric shuttle bus. I am a huge fan of electric vehicles, which have no fumes belching out of their exhaust pipes, and I want to make these eco-friendly, fuel bill-busting vehicles an easier choice for motorists in London."

What kind of impact the new service will make on the cab trade remains to be seen – if the service is seen as a success by other retailers, these zero emission



vehicles could become a more common sight in the shopping area of the West End. One licensed taxi driver told Taxi Globe that he sees this as a threat to the trade and has already decided to hand back his John Lewis store card in protest.