

# A VOICE AND A VOTE NOT AN AIR FRESHENER

## by John Kennedy, Vice Chair RMT London taxi branch

In recent weeks and months the RMT specialist transport union and its London taxi branch have come under sustained attack from the friendly society known as the Licensed Taxi Drivers Association (LTDA). Fact is the RMT Taxi Branch are not here to go to war with fellow taxi-cab drivers - but we are here to protect our collective right to ply for hire, to campaign to ban pedicabs from the streets and roads of the capital, to seek the ending of the greatest threat to our existence which is the satellite mini-cab office and its' illegal ranks and touting that follows. The RMT will stand up for your rights like no other trade union or friendly society, we aren't afraid to protest and we are always prepared to talk, for dialogue is the key to finding solutions to the many issues that blight our trade. On 16th March 2010 John Mason, TfL's Director of Taxi and Private Hire met with myself (John Kennedy Vice Chair), David Vidgen Branch Secretary, Stan Marut, Complaints and Compliance, James Croy RMT political officer and John McDonnell MP for Hayes and Harlington and the convenor of the RMT parliamentary group.



I have to say that John Mason is a man of his word and back in December 2009 he agreed with me to meet on a regular basis with the RMT and its London taxi branch and include us in all formal consultations that affect you the London taxi-cab driver. A PCO notice was produced which led to a little confusion for some within the London taxi trade and immediately I brought this to the attention of John Mason. Consequently he withdrew PCO notice 05/10 and issued PCO notice 06/10 which states clearly that NO trade organisation is recognised by TFL/PCO but it also confirmed that he would meet with the RMT and its London taxi branch on a regular basis and that we are to be included in ALL formal consultations. What was of real interest in our detailed discussions with John Mason was his answer to a question that we put to him regarding the re-test fee that TFL/PCO will introduce in April 2010. It turns out that the LTDA were informed in November 2009 of the plans for a retest fee. Now if this is the case, and we have no reason to doubt the word of John Mason, we must ask the question why is the LTDA asking for an urgent meeting with TFL/PCO regarding the re-test fee when it knew of these plans back in November? We must also ask the same question to UNITE and the LCDC - when did you know of the introduction of the retest fee?

On a much more positive note, we can report to the wider trade that many issues were discussed with John Mason ranging from Pedicabs, M4 bus lane, Satellite mini-cab offices, Richmond station rank, illegal hackney carriage ranks, communications, misinformation, other trade groups/bodies and the relationship with the RMT, the lack of any planned future for the taxi trade, reform of the PCO, bullying at Heathrow Airport and a lot more besides. What I am really pleased to say is that this trade has a director of Taxis and Private Hire that is open, honest and forthright with his views and opinions. I would also say that John Mason is listening to the concerns of all and we within this trade need to understand that changes cannot be introduced overnight; consultation will need to take place. We can assure London's taxi trade that the RMT will be right there at the front seeking views and opinions of its ever growing membership base here in London at the best attended branch meetings amongst any trade body here in the capital.

### DEMO HELD ON ST PATRICK'S DAY

Hot from the Gasworks (Parliament) and not wishing to lose momentum, the RMT London taxi branch raced down to the offices of Westminster City Council and held a protest on the 17th March 2010 (St Patrick's Day) where we asked Martin Low, Head of Transportation for the Council to honour his previous pledges of rest bays for the capitals taxi-cab drivers, a more relaxed regime of parking controls and better planning of the road network - for example, taxis need roads not kerbs to navigate. With parking a real issue in this central London borough taxi-cab drivers gathered by the banner and along with three members of the council of executive of the RMT Craig Johnson, Pete March and Owen Herbert made some

noise outside the council offices. The demonstration was good humoured and just has the clock struck 2.30 pm Martin Low appeared from the building and held a robust but polite conversation with us. Martin Low was thanked by all after he agreed to meet with me and has a gesture of good will, we decided to terminate the protest due to this positive development. The RMT is looking forward to meeting with Martin Low and along with other key players here in the capital. He will be invited to attend a RMT London taxi branch meeting where the membership set the agenda and not others who haven't driven a taxi-cab in years. Remember when you join the RMT you get a Voice and a Vote, but not an air freshener, welcome to democracy, welcome to the RMT [www.rmt.org.uk](http://www.rmt.org.uk).

A very special thank must go to two RMT London taxi branch members who work tirelessly for their trade and this union. Dizzy the chap who produces those posters/banners (we are still laughing now at the humour) with the help and facilities of Unity house and its staff plus committee member Mick Tinnion whose organisational skills are just impeccable but then again he was a former guardsman. Well done to those two members who work for the betterment of others like the many of you within the RMT. Oh and let's not forget the chap with the base drum, where did you manage to find one at such short notice, well done to you Mike Fitzpatrick for you really did top off a good humoured demonstration.



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