



***Birmingham Rail Branch 0141***

**National Union of Rail,  
Maritime & Transport Workers**  
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Date: 15th May 2017  
To Mr Chris Neville  
Head of Licensing  
Birmingham City Council  
Place Directorate  
Regulation and Enforcement  
Manor House  
40 Moat Lane  
Birmingham. B5 5BD

Dear Chris

**Taxis - Birmingham & Solihull – Vehicle emissions**

RMT organises and represents hundreds of taxi drivers in Birmingham and Solihull. I am secretary of the RMT Birmingham Rail branch and President of the RMT Midlands regional council – I write to you in those capacities.

This letter coincides with the consideration of proposals concerning taxi and minicab vehicle emission policy (as formulated by the Council's Regulation and Enforcement team and placed before the Licensing and Public Protection Committee in February 2017). However, the scope of this letter is broader, takes priority over and is not contingent on the consultation.

My members are all long-term resident in Birmingham & Solihull, as are their families (ie a significant number of people of all ages are reliant on the income earned by taxi drivers). I have been inundated with messages of concern from members. Those concerns are well-founded and I fully share them.

While we support the department's stated goal of reducing emissions/ improving air quality in Birmingham and Solihull pledge to play an appropriate role in achieving that goal, the proposals as currently formulated represent an unacceptable threat to taxi drivers' livelihoods. Indeed the viability of the trade is thrown into question by these proposals.

Following discussions with our member drivers, we are responding to the questions posed in the consultation currently underway. However, it is already apparent that the consultation is too narrowly focussed. Accordingly, we are setting out in this letter, our assessment of the condition of the sector, together with steps that we recommend be taken as a priority.

We believe that the City Council could do more to support taxis. We propose that the City Council regularly and consistently promote the use of Hackney carriage as a mode of public transport. Further we request that City Council account jobs, be allocated to taxis rather than private hire.

We are concerned about the poor positioning of ranks together with the lack of signage directing members of the public to ranks. The situation deteriorated following the implementation of the tram system in the city – which resulted in the loss of several important ranks.

We propose a review of ranks, to take place in conjunction with cab trade representatives. Our intention is that this will lead to the repositioning of old ranks and introduction of ranks at new locations. In particular, we request that ranks be created at shopping centres, locations at which such vehicles are known to routinely illegally tout.

We are concerned about the restrictions placed on routes that could otherwise be used by taxis. Such restrictions have resulted in the lengthening of journey times (meaning higher cost to passengers and unnecessarily elevated emissions). Bus lanes and 'u' turns which are currently not available for use by all modes of public transport (ie including taxis) should be opened up.

In order to give passengers a choice of public transport modes, Corporation Street should be opened to taxis, and Broad Street should revert to cabs and buses only.

The double barrier at the main entrance of New St station is causing tailbacks. Accordingly we propose that New Street station barrier be removed.

The number of taxis and private hire vehicles already licensed is excessive and the sector is oversupplied. We propose that, until such time as the level of vehicles has been reviewed by a trade body, no new taxi or private hire licences should be issued.

While a nominal attempt is made to curtail the ever prevalent illegal activity of touting, this issue still remains a huge and ever increasing problem. For example, satellite areas (eg Moseley, Harborne, Sutton, Erdington and Bearwood) now have private hire regularly forming 'ranks' with little or no regard for the law.

The City Council should honour its previous agreement to use the already existing and extensive CCTV network to gather evidence and, where appropriate, prosecute illegal plying for hire and 'touting'. All taxi vehicles not licensed by Birmingham City Council and unlawfully plying for hire in and around the city, should be seized.



The Police should be regularly trained on plying, touting and illegal ranking of the private hire. Further, complaints about the failure of Police Officers to uphold the law, should be facilitated, fast tracked and monitored by the Council.

Reflecting the high costs of initial purchase and the specialist nature of taxi vehicles (eg wheelchair accessible), the age restriction on cabs should be extended to 16 years. Also, all hackney vehicles that fit the criteria to be licensed for seven passengers, in line with all surrounding towns (eg Dudley, Sandwell and Solihull), should be granted permission to operate.

The City Council should purchase new taxi vehicles for drivers and/or provide an interest free loan (covering the full cost of a new vehicle) for drivers to purchase a new taxi vehicle themselves.

The City Council should examine alternative means of reducing emissions, via the use of alternative fuels/ additives (eg hydrogen cells and liquefied petroleum gas conversions).

Threats to drivers' livelihood must immediately be removed. Irrespective of the type and age of vehicle, there should be a moratorium until such time as all the available options have been fully explored, exhausted and a mutual agreement has been reached.

In relation to integrated public transport issues and any future infrastructure changes, the City Council should consult with the Hackney carriage trade via the RMT.

Thank you for considering the above matters. I look forward to meeting with you urgently to discuss how and when drivers proposals will be implemented.

*Many thanks*

*Yours Truly*

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Raja Amin', written over a horizontal line.

*Raja Amin JP MBE*

*President RMT Midland Regional Council.*

*Birmingham Rail Branch Secretary.*

*Mobile: 07968 186238*

*P.S the below are answer to your Emissions proposal.*

**7. The draft policy sets out proposals to remove the oldest vehicles that emit the highest levels of pollution first. Do you agree that this is the right approach?**

No

**8. If you have answered no to the last question, what criteria do you think should be used to decide which vehicles should be removed first?**

The premise of the question is incorrect. It is not necessary to remove (ie permanently ban the use of vehicles). It is only necessary to reduce the volume of vehicles on the road at certain times. This can be achieved by pricing mechanisms – for example, congestion charge for leisure use of private vehicles during hours of peak demand.

The environmental costs of producing a new vehicle (including in terms of air pollution) are high. The traditional black cab vehicles made famous by their use in London and Birmingham, are manufactured in Coventry. Requiring the purchase of/ ordering the manufacture of new taxi vehicles will lead to the emission of pollutants (ie inherent in the component delivery/ production process) adverse to human health within the Midlands.

Banning a taxi vehicle which is currently in use, from being driven entirely, is a crude and environmentally illiterate measure. It is a knee-jerk, non evidence based measure, borne of an instinct to over-compensate for years of complacency and regulatory inaction. RMT opposes an outright ban on vehicles based solely on the age of a vehicle – not least because some new vehicles are more polluting than older vehicles.

Instead of banning a vehicle entirely, the use of genuinely more polluting vehicles should be discouraged through pricing mechanisms. For example, by imposing an appropriately calibrated higher licensing fee for such vehicles.

Similarly, the use of genuinely less polluting vehicles should be encouraged with full financial support. This is the orthodox and intelligent way of altering behaviour in a structured way.

The cost of purchasing a new low or zero emission vehicle produced by the London Taxi Company, is prohibitively high. The Council should permit the use of other wheelchair accessible vehicles as taxis, other than those produced by the London Taxi Company. The Council should use its purchasing power to itself acquire a fleet of low or zero emission taxi vehicles at bulk rates, which it would then lease back to drivers.

A taxi driver who only works part-time (eg Friday and Saturday night) should not be required to buy an over-priced and unproven new vehicle. To make such a requirement would be unreasonable and disproportionate.

A taxi driver who can demonstrate that, if required to purchase a new vehicle, s/he would suffer financial hardship, should be able to apply for an extension on having to replace a vehicle to the accelerated timetable proposed by the Licensing Department. Such a driver should also receive early confirmation that they will receive full financial support at the point at which they are compelled to acquire a new vehicle.



How polluting a vehicle is, should be assessed with real life road tests and not assumed from results derived from unrealistic and easily manipulated lab tests. This is because there is substantial evidence, including as recently published by respected consumer group “Which?” (<http://www.which.co.uk/news/2016/01/car-emissions-is-nobody-clean-430938/>) that lab tests do not reflect emissions from vehicles given how they are driven in practice. This discrepancy extends well-beyond the software installed by VW, to poorly performing systems installed in a variety of cars, such as those within the Renault group.

**9. Do you think that the proposals allow sufficient time for vehicle owners to update their vehicles to meet the emission standards?**

No

**10 If you answered no to the last question, what deadlines do you think we should apply in order to ensure that Birmingham meets the minimum Clean Air Zone standards of Euro 4 for petrol vehicles and Euro 6 for diesel vehicles by 2019?**

The timescale for drivers switching vehicles is far too compressed. The Licensing Dept proposes that all drivers - by December this year (ie in just a few months) - switch from their existing vehicles to a Euro 3 or 4 compliant vehicle (depending on whether the engine is fuelled by petrol or diesel). Followed by all drivers switching by December 2018 (ie further change just a year later) to a Euro 5 or 6 compliant vehicle (again, depending on whether the engine is fuelled by petrol or diesel).

If enacted this would result in the majority of the current fleet/ hundreds of vehicles being rendered obsolete. The economic impact on the trade, already suffering from unfair competition from Uber and equivalent interlopers, would be significantly to the downside. The cost of Euro 5 or 6 compliant vehicles would rocket and the resale value of models of taxis currently in use would collapse.

In practice – due to the differential in earnings - taxi vehicles in use in Birmingham are purchased second hand from London cabbies. Any new vehicle requirement in Birmingham must therefore be linked to the mass release by the black cab manufacturer (the London Taxi Company) and take up of new models by London cabbies. The earliest that the latest LTC model will be released is January, the earliest that the current taxis in use in London will be put up for resale will therefore be many months after January 2018.

Also, for the reasons set out in my answer to Question 8, the expensive requirement to change vehicles will likely not appreciably lower harmful emissions from vehicles.

**11. Do you agree with the age policy that we have proposed that would take effect in 2021 of 14 years for hackney carriages and 8 years for private hire vehicles?**

There should be different age limits

**12. If you answered the last question to say that there should be different age limits, what age limits would you suggest?**

How polluting a vehicle is, is not necessarily reflected in its age. Some newer vehicles are more polluting than older versions of the same vehicle.

How polluting a vehicle is, should be assessed with real life road tests and not assumed from results derived from unrealistic and easily manipulated lab tests. This is because there is substantial evidence, including as recently published by respected consumer group "Which?" (<http://www.which.co.uk/news/2016/01/car-emissions-is-nobody-clean-430938/>) that lab tests do not reflect emissions from vehicles given how they are driven in practice. This discrepancy extends well-beyond the software installed by VW, to poorly performing systems installed in a variety of cars, such as those within the Renault group.

**13. The most significant impact of the proposals is likely to be felt by hackney carriage owners due to the limited choice of suitable ultra-low emission vehicles on the market and the cost of buying a new hackney carriage. One option that has been put forward is that Birmingham should consider licensing a mixed fleet of wheelchair accessible 'London style' cabs and saloon vehicles as hackney carriages? Would you be in favour of this proposal?**

No

**14. If you have answered no to the last question, what are your reasons for opposing a mixed fleet of hackney carriages?**

Low and Zero emission technology is still in developmental stage. Such vehicles are expensive and have not been rigorously tested. Further, London Taxi Company does not have an unblemished track record in developing new models. Further, their current proposals are for vehicles which are far more ambitious/ involve more of a technological leap than ever before. Their risk of failure is commensurately larger.

Taxi vehicles need not solely be provided by the London Taxi Company. However, they should continue to be wheelchair accessible, provided that the Council takes its responsibility for protecting the investment which drivers make in expensive wheelchair accessible vehicles. Namely, by taking steps – as Reading Council has done – to prosecute and exclude PHV minicabs which are illegally plying for hire via mobile phone apps operated by interlopers such as *Uber*.



**15. Do you agree that Birmingham should aim for all of its licensed hackney carriages and private hire vehicles to be zero-emission vehicles by 2030?**

**16. How significant do you think the impact on disabled passengers would be if there were fewer wheelchair accessible hackney carriages licensed by Birmingham? Can you support your answer with any data?**

The population is ageing. There are already around 1.2 million wheelchair users in the UK (<https://www.england.nhs.uk/ourwork/pe/wheelchair-services/>). The proportion of people able to comfortably use salon style vehicles is shrinking. The impact of a restricted fleet on disabled passengers will be very significant.

**17. The cost of buying a new hackney carriage or private hire vehicle is likely to be substantial. If you are a licensed vehicle owner or driver would you consider renting or hiring a vehicle as an alternative to buying one?**

No

**18. If you have answered no to the last question, what is your reason for saying no?**

I would only be willing to lease a vehicle from the Council and not from private car hire operators. Private car hire operators have a history of exploiting new taxi drivers in particular. Currently the Council does not own taxi vehicles and lease them out. However, the Council should use its purchasing power to itself acquire a fleet of low or zero emission taxi vehicles at bulk rates which it would then lease back to drivers. The Council would do this on a not-for-profit basis, ie at no cost to itself.

**19. Is there anything that you think the City Council or the Government can do to help vehicle owners to drive cleaner, less polluting vehicles or to reduce levels of air pollution in the city?**

Taxis are just one minor contributor to emissions. The council needs to share the burden more fairly and more intelligently between all types of vehicles – lorries, private cars, buses, motorcycles and above all mopeds and delivery vans.

Mopeds have primitive two stroke engines which emit fumes unfiltered. A moped is more polluting in terms of particulates known to be toxic to health, than the emissions of a lorry. Many cities are taking steps to limit the use of mopeds (eg Genoa, Italy). Further mopeds are often driven erratically by



teenage tearaways and are associated with petty crime (eg mobile phone snatching).

Online shopping and the tax dodging companies that provide goods over the internet are undermining trade on our high streets. Delivery vans facilitate this trade. Delivery vans are proliferating and causing congestion and higher vehicle emissions. They should be banned from delivering to offices and other locations in the city centre during peak hours.

We recommend stronger enforcement measures be taken against vehicle engine idling. Emissions are highest (ie least filtered) when vehicles are stationary. Private hire vehicles are reliant on business directed to them via mobile phone apps. Drivers, when “on duty” are required to be constantly available and ready to accept work – failing which they can be penalised. *Uber* and equivalent apps operate on the “Apple” operating system. Apple phones have short phone lives and the *Uber* app quickly drains phone batteries. As a result PHV drivers often run their engines simply to charge their phones. PHV drivers should be required to carry spare pre-charged charging packs and they should be subject to punitive penalties for engine idling.

Other than black cabs, the cost of purchasing a car is too cheap and has been consistently falling. The UK, unlike most comparable EU countries, is witnessing an increase in new car ownership (up 4.5% a year).

According to the “Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders” the increase is “partly down to a plethora of car loan deals”. Certainly there is lax regulatory control of financing arrangements (especially “Personal Contract Plans”). The Bank of England shares this analysis: <https://www.autocar.co.uk/car-news/new-cars/bank-england-looks-regulate-pcp-car-finance-deals>.

The glut of new cars obviously has a knock-on impact on the price of second hand cars. The volume of cars being put up for resale has increased and data from ONS shows the cost of buying second hand cars consistently dropping:

The council should be lobbying central government to intervene to make financing for private cars, less attractive, eg a higher initial deposit and extend minimum period over which someone must own their car before they can return it to a dealer.

Birmingham is not failing to comply with all categories of emissions. The number one source of emissions which need tackling is NOX (nitrogen compounds). These are substantially agricultural (resulting from the spreading of nitrates by farmers on fields, which are then carried on the wind. The cause of this type of pollution has nothing to do with drivers. Farmers in the region





should be presented with alternatives and required to only spread nitrates during periods of sustained forecast low wind.

Around half of the pollutants causing the city to have low air quality are derived from the building sector. I am concerned that the Council is disproportionately penalising taxi drivers, when it should of course be taking a holistic and integrated approach to the issue. I am keen to hear about your proposals for better controlling dust generated from construction. I am also keen to hear about your proposals for improving building energy efficiency.

**20. Is there anything else that you would like to say about the proposals that you have not said so far?**

I am disappointed that the Regulation and Enforcement team have advanced their proposals in such a gung-ho fashion and with such scant regard for the anxiety caused to hard-working and responsible drivers. Given the draconian nature of their proposals and the far reaching implications for the city's economy, that the department pressed for a compressed four week consultation period, shocks me. It suggests to me that the department has little interest in giving my views a fair hearing. I hope that the consultation will turn out to be a meaningful and genuine one. I certainly expect to see progress with the alternative proposals which I have outlined above.

*Many thanks*

*Yours Truly*

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ramin', written over a horizontal line.

*Raja Amin JP MBE*

*President RMT Midland Regional Council.*

*Birmingham Rail Branch Secretary.*

*Mobile: 07968 186238*