



Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF PUBLIC PROTECTION

TO THE LICENSING AND SAFETY COMMITTEE

8TH JUNE 2005

**CONSIDERATION OF A SINGLE COLOUR FOR PRIVATE HIRE
VEHICLES AND CHANGE TO LICENSING PLATES/STICKERS ON
PRIVATE HIRE AND HACKNEY CARRIAGE VEHICLES**

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 On Tuesday 22nd March 2005 a report was considered by the Taxi/Private Hire Liaison Group concerning :-
- a) Updating and revising the licensing paraphernalia displayed on private hire vehicles
 - b) Single colour for private hire vehicles
 - c) Updating the Licence plates for Hackney Carriages.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 Members are recommended to consider the options and agree on the choice of identification alternatives for both Private Hire and Hackney Carriage vehicles including:-
- i) New type of licence bracket
 - ii) New type of licence
 - iii) New type of side sticker
 - iv) Unification of colour for private hire vehicles
- 2.2 Members are recommended to ensure that any new licensing plate system should have a permanent style of fixing to the vehicles.

3.0 UPDATING AND REVISING THE LICENSING PARAPHERNALIA DISPLAYED ON PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLES

- 3.1 Since the implementation of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 private hire vehicles in Walsall have been permitted to be any ordinary car/ mini bus that met the Committees agreed criteria including shape, size and seating arrangements and, in certain cases since 1998, colour.
- 3.2 The self adhesive licence plates issued by this Authority for fixing to the rear windows of private hire vehicles have proved very effective in identifying licensed vehicles. However, as vehicle designs have changed over the years rear wash wipers, which are almost standard on most vehicles now, have been found to damage the self adhesive plates which consequently require constant replacement.
- 3.3 Enquiries have been made with a number of suppliers to consider the different types of licensing systems available on the market.
- 3.4 Officers have also considered upgrading the side stickers, with the view to making them more eye catching and containing all relevant information to support the public need for easy identification and safety, and ongoing enforcement activity.
- 3.5 An indication of the comparative features of the options and relative costs of signage is provided in **Appendix 1**.

Option 1

"MOGO"/"VIP " brackets/plates

- 3.6 These two companies, MOGO and VIP, now supply to most Authorities including locally, Sandwell and Wolverhampton.
- 3.7 Both companies sell purpose made plates and brackets. In each case the licence plate is attached to the support bracket by security plugs that identify immediately if the plate has been tampered with. The licence plate can also have a number of security features included to stop forgery or alteration.
- 3.8 A growing number of car manufacturers, however, do not now permanently screw the registration plates to the vehicles but use double sided adhesive tape. This may present a problem in respect of the back plates issued by MOGO as they attach to the rear of the Registration plate and may therefore not be as secure as we require. In the case of VIP these plates can be securely fixed in any position prescribed by this Committee. **(Examples to be produced at the meeting).**

- 3.9 Officers have made enquiries in neighbouring Boroughs and have observed vehicles licensed by those Boroughs where there are no strict fixing criteria. This indicates that the private hire licence plates are often fixed by string hanging from the rear boot or stuck on the rear parcel shelf to display the plates through the rear window. Neither method is considered to be permanent or tamper proof.

Option 2

Magnetic Roof Signs

- 3.10 If used correctly roof signage provides an extremely visible means of identifying a licensed private hire vehicle. This system would enable the existing licence plates issued by the Council to be affixed on the one side of the roof sign and on the other a message identifying the vehicle as private hire, pre-booked journeys only.
- 3.11 However there can be problems with the use of roof signs attached by magnetic means. Experience has shown that if an operator can remove a plate easily so that the vehicle can be used for other purposes or be driven by unlicensed persons for whatever reason, then it will be done.
- 3.12 The costs to put this system in place are extremely high. The life expectancy of the roof sign can be no more than 5 years, before the magnets lose their power.

Option 3

Existing Licence Plates

- 3.13 The licence plating system in use by this Authority over a number of years has been very effective and because it is not used by other Authorities is unique to the area, and therefore recognised by the public in Walsall. The system is also significantly flexible to produce smaller plates and signs for the interior of the vehicle.
- 3.14 It is possible to update the private hire licence plate which is the same size as an existing registration plate on the vehicle. The plate carries all the relevant information (Same as MOGO and VIP) showing that the vehicle is licensed and that it is fitted to the right vehicle and carrying the correct number of passengers. It can be easily read from a distance.
- 3.15 Currently, the prescribed manner for fixing is by self adhesive backing to the outside of the rear windscreen. It is proposed, if approved by Members to keep the current system, to re-site and amend the fixing.

- 3.16 It is proposed that a blank plate, the same size as a registration plate, would be affixed to the rear bumper by screws. The Licence plate would be then stuck on that covering the screws. If the plate is not so fixed then the vehicle will not be licensed. Self tapping screws would enable the plate and licence (property of the Authority) to be removed for enforcement purposes. The existing Licence plate printing system would continue to be used, however the present printing unit is old and a new one would have to be purchased. The continued availability of this machine cannot be guaranteed. **(Example of plate to be produced at the meeting).**

Option 4

Side Identification Plates

- 3.17 Members have often expressed concern that the public should be aware of what is and isn't a private hire vehicle, and be aware of the law governing these vehicles as opposed to Hackney Carriages.
- 3.18 Members are aware that private hire vehicles can only operate on pre booked journeys and are not allowed to tout for business. This Authority was instrumental in the early use of compulsory side plates for private hire vehicles, but as part of the licensing update a better and more significant side plate is envisaged.
- 3.19 Both MOGO and VIP produce effective side stickers that contain information in respect of pre-booked journeys, can show the licensing authority, the licence number of the vehicle, registration number of the vehicle. These plates can be in a number of shapes – half moon, full moon, rectangular or square and are highly visible. **(Examples to be produced at the meeting).**
- 3.20 Alternatively, the firm (Brisco) that produce our existing side stickers have indicated that they can offer a highly reflective larger side plate containing the information we require. **(Examples to be produced at the meeting).**

4.0 SINGLE COLOUR FOR PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLES

- 4.1 Following consultation with the Liaison Group this Committee agreed in September 1998 that all new hackney carriages being first licensed should be new vehicles and laid down stipulations that they must be black and wheel chair accessible.
- 4.2 At that same meeting Members agreed that any euro style conversions, because of the build similarity, to be licensed for private hire purposes must be white.

- 4.3 There is no stipulation, relating to colour, for other licensed private hire vehicles.
- 4.4 Within the provisions of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions Act 1976 Section 48(2) a District Council may attach conditions to the grant of a licence in respect of private hire vehicles.
- 4.5 The proliferation of the trade over the years has brought with it attendant problems of identification as to what is and isn't a licensed private hire vehicle.
- 4.6 Members of the public believing themselves to be in a licensed vehicle have been subject to physical and sexual assault, robbery and theft.
- 4.7 This Authority has always been most stringent in its attitude that the public must be protected and should be able to recognise easily a licensed vehicle.
- 4.8 A West Midlands Forum recently set up to include all local authorities from the West Midlands and the Police came together to discuss amongst other things a uniform approach to the problems of identification and the possible adoption of one colour across the region and/or other forms of high visibility identification. Dudley, however, who has been the front runner in one colour for private hire would not change from white. Sandwell have just introduced a silver colour scheme for their vehicles.
- 4.9 It was suggested that if all vehicles across the region were the same colour then identification of each authority's vehicles would be an issue. It was proposed at the Liaison Group that this Committee should look at one colour for all private hire vehicles. The colour suggested was 'Yellow'. The reason put forward was that the colour was synonymous with the public's perception of cabs and is instantly recognisable standing out from other vehicles.
- 4.10 There is case law to support an Authority proposing one colour. However, Members should be aware that if a single colour scheme is opted for then before it can be implemented a full survey would have to be carried out to assess the impact. This would cost in the region of £15,000 - £20,000. There are no funds available for this.
- 4.11 If Members approve the proposed colour change it would be immediately applicable to all new vehicles being first licensed. It is recommended to Members to consider phasing in the single colour requirement over a number of years, and for existing vehicles, a reasonable time span would be 5 years.

- 4.12 'Yellow' is not a popular colour and would in nearly all cases require the owner to have a vehicle re-sprayed at considerable cost. That may be considered unfair and open to challenge. It would also mean that vehicles would have a very low trade in price at the end of their licensed life.
- 4.13 A comparison exercise has been carried out in Walsall concerning the existing fleet of licensed private hire vehicles and the majority colour is silver. This is in keeping with the public popularity for the colour, silver being in 'vogue'. If that colour were chosen, therefore, the vehicles would not stand out and would still require high definition stickers and license plates.
- 4.14 The Committee has in some way already elected to require a single colour by stipulating white for the Euro style vehicles and similar models. It would be unfair to expect those owners to have to undergo another colour change. White cars of the right type are available on the second hand market although not as popular as silver.
- 4.15 Having held a number of meetings with the trade, they are not averse to a single colour, if it is readily available, but would ask Members to explore other means of identification first and would support changes in respect of identification and high profile stickers on the vehicles.

5.0 UPDATING THE LICENCE PLATES FOR HACKNEY CARRIAGES

- 5.1. Hackney Carriages are recognised externally by
- i) Style of vehicle.
 - ii) A roof sign advertising 'Taxi' and
 - iii) A licence plate fixed to the rear of the vehicle.
- 5.2 A problem has recently been highlighted in respect of Hackney Carriages. There is no external display to show that the vehicle is licensed or whether indeed the licence plate corresponds to that vehicle. We have had a number of incidents where vehicles have continued to be used after the expiry date of their licence, or used without being licensed.
- 5.3 It is recommended that if changes in the plating system and identification for private hire vehicles are implemented, then this is also an area that needs to be addressed.

5.4 Members are recommended to require the display of additional information on the licence plate. The size of the licence plate fitted to a hackney carriage to be of sufficient size to accommodate the information required:-

- i) Plate No
- ii) Registration Number
- iii) Expiry date of licence
- iv) Number of passengers licensed to be carried.
- v) Licensing authority identification

5.5 The system made by MOGO and VIP can produce plates of the same size with all the relevant information displayed.

6.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The cost of upgrading the licensing paraphernalia and plates was contained within the Increase in Fees Report.

6.2 There is a right of appeal against any decision and costs would have to be met.

6.3 It is estimated that the cost of conducting a survey to determine the impact on the public and trade of any wholesale colour scheme change for private hire vehicles, would be in the region of £15,000 - £20,000. There is no budget for this.

7.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The Council has the authority to implement the policy changes.

8.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Legal Services consulted: No

8.2 Section 48 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 provides that a district council may attach to the grant of a private hire vehicle licence such conditions as they may consider reasonably necessary including:-

- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| Subsection (i) | that a private hire vehicle shall not be of such design and appearance as to lead any person to believe that the vehicle is a hackney carriage. |
| Subsection (ii) | requiring or prohibiting the display of signs on or from the vehicle to which the licence relates. |
| Subsection (vi) | requires that the plate issued by the council shall be exhibited on the vehicle in such a manner as the council shall prescribe by condition attached to the licence. |

9.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

9.1 None

10.0 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

10.1 None

11.0 WARDS AFFECTED

11.1 All

12.0 CONSULTEES

12.1 Taxi Liaison Group. Other Local Authorities.

13.0 CONTACT OFFICER

13.1 Bruce Corlett – Licensing and Enforcement Officer

Appendix 1

COMPARISON OF OPTIONS

OPTIONS	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES	COSTS
VIP	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. computer generated compatible with new licensing system and new driver identification system 2. information shown on plate to councils requirements 3. plate can be secured to vehicle as per council requirements 4. can be part of total integrated licensing system including driver's badges 5. anti tamper/secure clips to fasten licence to back plate 6. easily removed for enforcement purposes 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. difficult to read from distance 2. requires expensive software package 3. not distinguishable from other authorities 4. lengthy change over period required 5. labour intensive in preparation 	<p>Licence bracket (one off payment for each vehicle) £4.20</p> <p>Licence plate (renewable at each time of licensing) £3.70</p> <p>Total £7.90 per vehicle</p>
MOGO	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. computer generated compatible with new licensing system and new driver identification system 2. information shown on plate to councils requirements 3. hologram security device on licence. 4. can be part of total integrated system including drivers badges 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. difficult to read from distance 2. secured to rear of vehicles registration plate. Not adaptable to every vehicle. 3. not distinguishable from other authorities 4. more expensive than existing system 5. labour intensive in preparation 6. lengthy changeover period required 	<p>Licence bracket (one off payment for each vehicle) £8.80</p> <p>Licence plate (renewable at each time of licensing) £5.98</p> <p>Total £14.78 per vehicle</p>
MAGNETIC ROOF SIGNS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. highly visible 2. able to be fitted with other messages on front for public information 3. Use with existing licence plate system 4. can be easily removed for enforcement purposes 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Expensive 2. costs passed onto trade 3. easily removed to steal or conceal 4. easy to be passed onto another vehicle 5. no long life in base unit 	<p>£65.00 per unit.</p> <p>Licence plate (renewable at each time of licensing) £8.00</p> <p>Total £73.00 per vehicle</p>

Appendix 1

COMPARISON OF OPTIONS

<p>EXISTING LICENSING PLATES WITH NEW BACKING PLATE</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. secured to vehicle 2. licence plate system already in place 3. recognised by public/ enforcement 4. easily read 5. can be removed for enforcement purposes 6. low update costs 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. requires new printing machine. 2. cannot be linked into computer system 3. has to be printed independently 4. existing type of equipment may be phased out due to advances in technology. 	<p>Licence plate (one off payment for each vehicle) £1.50 Licence plate (renewable at each time of licensing) £8.00 Total £9.50 per vehicle</p>
<p>SIDE IDENTIFICATION PLATES</p>	<p>VIP/MOGO</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. high visibility 2. larger size/several shapes 3. can be printed in corporate colours 4. can carry information/messages as required <p>EXISTING SIDE PLATES.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. easily recognised as Walsall 2. not expensive <p>NEW BRISCO SIDE PLATE</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. reflective 2. high profile colour 3. larger size/easily identified 4. can carry information/messages as required 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. expensive to produce from computer/printing system due to printer cartridge costs <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. labour intensive to put on individual numbers 2. not as visible as others 3. not big enough to carry information/messages <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. more expensive than existing plates 2. labour intensive putting on individual numbers 	<p>£5.28 x 2 per vehicle</p> <p>£1.50 x 2 per vehicle</p> <p>£8.90 x 2 per vehicle</p>