

ANNEX 5

Dick Haswell
Head of Licensing and Regulation
City of York Council
9 ST. Leonards Place
York



20th July 2007

Dear Dick

Thank you for your letter asking for our thoughts on the issue of De- regulation of the Hackney carriages. As stated before it is difficult to give a definitive answer to this issue because of the complex issues within the trade and the different affects it will have on the various sections of the trade.

I think it would be fair to say that if you asked each PH driver what they thought then they would vote for De-Regulation. The main reason for this is that at the present time owning a hackney plate is valuable commodity with plates changing hands at £60,000, also because of the current limit there is a good living to be earned from a plate without been committed to set shift patterns as they are at PH companies, however when we have explained to those drivers we have been able to canvass that if de-regulation happened the plates would have no monetary value and also that the level of work is unlikely to increase significantly on the ranks and what there was would have to be shared by more drivers the majority changed their minds.

As an association we are actively working with several agencies including you to improve the image of the trade and the service to customers. We have made great strides forward in many areas i.e. provision of WCF by the PH trade has greatly increased and is still increasing; we have also welcomed the introduction of age limits and emissions standards to improve York's image and air quality. We are also working with the York Tourism Bureau to arrange training courses for drivers as taxi/PH drivers are often the first contact visitors have with York. We hope that all the hard work we have put into improving the trade in York is taken into account when reviewing this issue as the wrong decision could have an adverse effect on the trade overall and damage all the good work that has been achieved, in the main unnoticed. We need to continue work closely on all issues so the right decisions are made at the right time. In this way we can achieve all targets, hopefully with the cooperation of all parties, and this has got to be the best outcome for the City of York and all Taxi users.

Firstly for those that do not know all PH drivers are self employed individuals who in the main provide their own vehicles and as such have substantial costs each week to meet

before any profit is made and we hope that any decision made will not adversely affect any of the 600 drivers who have invested in their own business.

The YPHA have sought comments from many parties on this issue in particular from companies in areas who have de-regulated in the last few years and the comment we have received back have in the main, been negative... For example we spoke to several firms in Sheffield who all told us de-regulation did not work either for them or the customers.

Initially most firms lost about 30-50% of their drivers who applied for a hackney plate, this resulted in too many drivers fighting over too few jobs off the ranks, meanwhile the PH companies could not meet their demand due to too few cars been available (please note that the majority of the most vulnerable customers i.e. disabled, elderly, lone women etc will use PH as they can be picked up from where they choose). Eventually things levelled out with many drivers returning to the PH companies for work (one company charged its returning drivers £600 before it would fit them a radio). Overall the exercise just created a lot of disruption and bad feeling among the trade and while providing the ranks with extra cars it resulted in people booking from an address a worse service. Drivers also stated they were working excessive hours to make the same money as before; this obviously raises safety issues due to driver fatigue, although we had no reports of an increase in accidents.

As well as Sheffield we spoke to companies, drivers association, licensing officers in Swansea and their reactions were generally the same as well as highlighting instances of hackney drivers cutting across lanes of traffic to try and beat another driver to a customer, and of a rise in complaints from the general public of overcharging/bad driving/incivility (presumably from drivers struggling to make a living).

As a successful tourist City and one which we should all be proud of, we need to ensure that all taxi/PH drivers create the right impression to visitors on what is often their first and last contact with the City. We therefore need to ensure drivers are happy in their work and that they can earn a living without working excessive hours. This will ensure a good standard of driver to serve the public.

The YPHA are of the opinion that overall the de-regulation of hackney licences would be a negative step for the City of York, for the trade and most importantly for the users of Taxi/PH vehicles in York.

The outcome of the last survey on waiting times at ranks showed that overall a good service was provided with no excessive waiting times, however two areas that needed improvement was provision for the disabled and the late night trade.

We are disappointed that while the PH have voluntarily made great efforts to improve the provision of WCF vehicles (demand for which is far greater than expected) the Hackney trade appear to have made no effort to improve the number of WCF vehicles available, therefore additional WCF plates need to be made available.

The issue of a shortage of cars for late night pick-ups is a slightly more complex issue, but one we feel can be improved on. Firstly the main reason a lot of drivers do not work at this time of night is one of personal safety and the lack of protection from the authorities. The majority of assault/ non-payers/ customers being sick occur in the early hours, and while all other public service providers appear to get support from the police and other agencies in tackling problems it would appear that taxi drivers don't matter. The bottom line is that many drivers do not feel safe working late at night whilst those that do work feel let down by the agencies that should be supporting them when trouble occurs. On a more positive note many PH firms who do not run a city centre office will have cars sat doing nothing during these peak times, therefore would it not be beneficial to have all interested companies numbers listed at the Bus Stops in Rougier Street and other prime hot spots so customers can arrange PH pick ups (many customers are from out of town so will not know any) , this would greatly reduce waiting time at the busy spots. **LET'S MAKE SURE WE ARE UTILISING THE RESOURCES WE HAVE IN PLACE BEFORE LOOKING AT ALTERNATIVES.**

What we would propose is a cautious but positive approach to improve both these areas and the trade overall while maintaining stability within the trade and importantly to the customer (70-80% of all "taxi journey's" in York are carried out by PH vehicles).

We propose a gradual release of plates at say 10 every six months for the next three years until the next review is due. This will give an additional sixty vehicles over three years which should meet all demand for WCF vehicles as well as help reduce waiting time at ranks. We feel that the trade on both sides could absorb this number of vehicles without any adverse affect, whilst allowing the council to monitor the effects it has on congestion and pollution due to more vehicles trying to rank up or circulating looking for work.

This will also have the added benefit of allowing new blood into the trade and addressing the stagnant waiting list for plates while maintaining a stability within the trade overall. It should also bring down the price of plates which at present we feel are exorbitant. Brining them to a realistic level would allow potential new drivers to buy a business at a realistic price and hopefully curtail the practice of investors buying them and putting on an old vehicle with a couple of drivers who have no pride in their work.

If new plates are issued then there are other issues to review, one is obviously rank space which I know you are dealing with, one other issue is the fact that although there are 158 licences only about 100 have a permit to pick up in the station which means over one third of taxis are not available for station pick ups. We understand station taxis control the issue of permits, so are more permits going to be made available if more plates are released? Why can't all drivers pick up at the station? Surely this would mean the current customer demand at the station could be easily met without any increase in plate numbers?

Finally we would like to say that we feel that there is no easy answer to this issue and a simple yes or no to de-regulation will not solve anything, it will merely replace one problem with another, if a satisfactory conclusion is to be reached it will need

compromise from all parties so that the need of the customers, needs of the trade and the requirement of the Council to meet Government guidelines are met. We feel our proposals can meet all these requirements. When or If the Council ever feel demand has been fully met in all areas we feel that the Council should continue to release plates at set intervals (even if its only one a year) to ensure that York's growing population is catered for and that anyone joining the list for a plate can see movement.

Yours Sincerely

Mark Wilson
Secretary