

Answers to the questions raised by the York Access Group

Q. Would the scheme reduce the number of taxis available to eligible disabled persons?

A. Although many local operators are currently on record as accepting tokens, the reduced amount of tokens in circulation over the last few years means that smaller operators often struggle to collect the minimum amount of tokens (£300) required for reimbursement.

In order to launch the taxicard, the Council would aim to fit one vehicle for every 20 cards in circulation. It is believed that this would be more than adequate for the volume of journeys likely to be made. By having an agreed number of fully-fitted taxi operators, all participating operators will have a clearer understanding of the taxicard and its users' needs.

Q. How would taxicard users check the value of their card?

A. The taxicard would have to be presented to a card reader for an exact display of the stored value. The Council will be provided with monthly reports showing outstanding card values of all cardholders, which could be provided by telephone if a user would like to know their balance at the last month-ending.

It should be technically feasible to provide low-cost read-only personal card readers to display the remaining stored value. This will be investigated further through the procurement process.

Q. Would the card work on trains and buses?

A. The only train service where tokens are officially accepted is the hourly service between York and Poppleton. Although we have not yet made any approaches to the rail industry, in theory, one card reader each at York & Poppleton stations would suffice providing Northern Rail were amenable to participating in the taxicard scheme (the taxicard could be used to purchase a full-fare single/return ticket at the station ticket office before travelling, so would not require revenue protection staff to be trained to recognise the taxicards).

It has never been the intention of the York token scheme to subsidise any form of travel outside the City of York area.

Although bus operators have long accepted tokens, the Council's opinion is that anyone capable of travelling by bus would receive far greater value from an English National Concessionary Bus Pass. It will be possible to use the taxicard on Dial & Ride services, which are intended for those unable to use local service buses.

Q. Would the taxicard be susceptible to misuse?

A. The taxicard provides a far more secure and accountable payment system than tokens. Indeed is one of the principal reasons for the Council to introduce the card.

All taxicard transactions will be logged and a monthly report provided to the Council. There will be a maximum amount per journey which can be deducted from the card, and a short time delay of 5 minutes following a transaction during which the card cannot be debited again to prevent duplicate transactions. Any taxi operator suspected of irregular use would be subject to investigation.

Q. What would happen if a fitted taxi is not available?

A. The intention is to ensure that any taxi operator wishing to participate in the taxicard scheme fits their entire fleet with card readers, so any available vehicles sent out by a participating taxi company would be guaranteed to be capable of accepting the taxicard.

Q. Will the taxicard fit in with the new Taxi Accreditation scheme?

A. Once the accreditation scheme is running smoothly, the Head of Licensing may be amenable to incorporating the taxicard into this scheme.

Q. Would there be a wider scope to launch the card as a commercial product?

A. The current technology does not allow the card to operate on a pay-as-you-go basis. The card could however, in theory, be sold commercially as a pre-loaded product, possibly incorporating a modest discount as an incentive to take-up.

Each taxicard issued is intended to have a 3-year lifespan, but there is no reason why a shorter-term card could not be issued (albeit at a higher overall cost per user).

It should be noted that the Transport Planning Unit does not presently have any mandate to launch the taxicard as a commercial product.

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Q. Will there be a central location for taxi operators to download their stored value cards?

A. Operators would be more inclined to participate if the Council set up one or more locations where drivers could download their stored value cards for immediate reimbursement. This could potentially be any vehicle-accessible council site, for example the larger Park & Ride site offices. The additional equipment cost would be £300 per site (not including staff costs).

Q. Would it be possible to power the card reader from batteries to reduce in-car clutter?

A. Card readers with a rechargeable battery (instead of taking power from the cigarette lighter) would be useful to reduce clutter for some drivers who already have a number of in-car electronic devices. Whilst the card readers currently on offer do not have built in batteries, rechargeable mobile power packs are available commercially for around £15 per unit.