

BRISTOL CITY COUNCIL

PUBLIC SAFETY AND PROTECTION COMMITTEE

7 June 2022

Report of: Executive Director, Growth and Regeneration

Title: Consideration of lower age limit in respect of Hackney Carriage vehicles and current global impacts

Ward: Citywide

Officer Presenting Report: Abigail Holman, Licensing Team Leader

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RECOMMENDATION

The committee are recommended to either:

- (1) consider the proposal to allow officers delegated powers to determine applications which depart from the age limit for Hackney Carriage vehicles OR
- (2) Consider making a temporary change to policy concerning the age limit for Hackney Carriage vehicles

Summary

1. Hackney carriages play an integral part of the local public transport infrastructure. They provide a flexible form of public transport and play an important role in improving accessibility as the whole fleet is wheelchair accessible.
2. In July 2021 the Council introduced its revised Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy. The policy brought together in a single document the separate vehicle and driver policies and replicated the existing vehicle policy with few changes.
3. The policy in respect of Hackney Carriages details a number of specifications that all new or replacement Hackney Carriages must comply with.
 1. *Any vehicle presented for licensing on the first occasion, that is not replacing an existing licensed Hackney Carriage, must be an Ultra-Low Emission Vehicle (ULEV) as well as meeting the specification*

set out in the remainder of this policy. Vehicles presented for licensing on the first occasion, which are replacing an existing licensed Hackney Carriage (that is not a ULEV), do not have to be a ULEV. Replacements for existing licensed Hackney Carriages that are a ULEV must also be a ULEV.

Note: A ULEV is a vehicle with tailpipe CO2 emissions of 75 g/km or less

Age Limit Policy

- 2. Vehicles presented for licensing on the first occasion shall be EURO 6 or higher standard and less than three and a half years old from the date of registration or, in respect of vehicles that have been imported other than as new into the United Kingdom, less than three and a half years old from the date of manufacture (In the remainder of this policy reference to date of first registration with regard to vehicles which are imported should be construed as date of manufacture).*
4. This means that any application for a Hackney Carriage vehicle which is replacing an existing vehicle must be less than three and a half years old, and may be diesel, petrol, hybrid, or ULEV.
5. A request has been received from trade representatives which requests that the initial age limit for replacement vehicles is reconsidered. A copy of their concerns is included at Appendix A.

Context

6. The policy was originally introduced in 2017 with a number of factors in mind. It was recognised that older more polluting vehicles were adding to the concerns about air quality standards within Bristol and requiring all newly licensed vehicles to meet a higher Euro standard would assist with reducing pollution in the areas of highest concern. Alongside this the Council introduced a maximum age limit for vehicles of three and a half years when they were first licensed, recognising the cost burden that a requirement for a brand-new vehicle would place on the trade.
7. The Department for Transport Best Practice Guidance acknowledges that vehicle licensing policies should support local environmental policies and acknowledges that this is significant in designated Air Quality Management Areas, which in Bristol includes the city centre area.

8. In March 2022 the DFT produced a draft update of their best practice guidance. The Council responded to a consultation on this document and the results have not yet been published. The guidance is non-statutory and the Council is not required to have regard to it, however it has been a useful document to outline best practice in a number of areas. In respect of vehicles age limits and emissions the draft guidance states:

8.28 The frequency of testing required (see 'frequency of vehicle tests' above) to ensure the ongoing safety of vehicles is a separate issue to the setting of maximum age limits at first licensing, or maximum age limits beyond which an authority will not licence a vehicle. The setting of an arbitrary age limit may be inappropriate and counterproductive and result in higher costs to the trade and ultimately passengers. For example, a maximum age for first licensing may have adverse unintended consequences; a five-year-old used electric vehicle will produce less emissions than a new Euro 6 diesel or petrol fuel car – enabling the trade to make use of previously owned vehicles will assist it to transition more rapidly to zero emission vehicles and improve air quality

8.29 Licensing authorities should not impose age limits for the licensing of vehicles but should consider more targeted requirements to meet its policy objectives on emissions, safety rating and increasing wheelchair accessible provision where this is low.

9. In relation to environmental considerations the draft guidance states:

8.51 Taxis and private hire vehicles that operate predominantly in urban areas can be significant contributors to poor local air quality, if not properly maintained and regularly checked, due to their higher usage. This might suggest that emissions testing for vehicle that use petrol and diesel (including hybrids and range extenders) should be carried out more frequently than the annual MOT vehicle test/inspection.

8.52 Local authorities should carefully and thoroughly assess the impact of vehicle emission requirements to enable the sector to plan for the future. The short-term objective should be to mitigate the harm from internal combustion engines through the setting of high EURO emission standards e.g. EURO 6 but, in the long-term, the trade will have to transition to zero emission vehicles. Licensing authorities should set out their long-term plan as soon as possible.

8.53 In response to local air quality concerns, many licensing authorities are considering how to support the use of ultra-low or zero emission vehicles given the growing range of vehicles available. As stated in the 'Vehicle age limit' section', greater flexibility regarding the age of vehicles licensed can result in more rapid improvement in air quality than mandating new 'clean' internal combustion engine vehicles.

10. There have recently been worldwide delays on shipping and producing the components that are used in many types of vehicles for a number of reasons. Bristol City Council licensed Hackney Carriages must be wheelchair accessible and have European Community Whole Vehicle Type Approval, which limits the range of vehicles available to applicants.
11. A shortage of electronic chips has curtailed production on vehicles, meaning new wheelchair accessible vehicles have been in limited supply, fuelling demand on the market for second-hand wheelchair accessible vehicles, not just in the taxi trade. Additionally other local authorities have been amending their vehicle policies to move towards emissions-based standards, again increasing demand for certain types of vehicle.
12. All of these factors, combined with the age limit on the age of the vehicle when first licensed, is significantly limiting the number of second-hand vehicles available to applicants.

Other Considerations

13. Clean Air Zone
Bristol City Council is introducing a clean air zone in the city centre area on 28 November 2022. The clean air zone is being introduced to ensure Bristol meets the legal limits on pollution as soon as possible. The clean air zone requires all diesel vehicles to be Euro 6 or better, and all petrol vehicles to be Euro 4 or better, in order not to be charged daily for entry into the area.
14. The current number of licensed Hackney Carriages is approximately 400. Approximately 100 of these are Euro 5 vehicles, most of which are diesel and will not be clean air zone compliant. Around 35 are approaching the upper age limit of 10 years and will need to be replaced in the next year. Some vehicles are not near their upper age limit, and whilst licence holders are not obliged to replace their vehicle before the clean air zone comes into force, they will of course be charged the daily fee if their vehicle is not compliant.
15. School transport

Bristol City Council provides home to school transport for a large number of students and carers every day. A number of these journeys require a wheelchair accessible vehicle in order to safely transport those students with disabilities, or additional needs. If there were a reduction in licensed vehicles this would put the home to school transport service at risk of having insufficient vehicles to fulfil their obligations. They have already experienced some shortages due to the decrease in taxi and private hire drivers occurring across the country in the aftermath of the pandemic.

16. The Service has conducted extensive research and can verify there is a significant lack of second-hand and new WAV compliant vehicles meeting our specification- this includes speaking with the specialist vehicle converters. If the age limit of 3 ½ is lifted this does increase the availability of second hand, CAZ compliant vehicles. There is no recommendation to increase the upper age limit of 12 years.

Recommendations

17. Officers request that the committee consider the information presented, and either:

Determine whether it is appropriate for delegated authority to be given to the Licensing and Trading Standards Manager and Licensing Team Leader to determine any Hackney Carriage applications which:

- a. Depart from the policy in respect of initial age
- b. Are clean air zone compliant and Euro 6 or better, and replacing a vehicle which is not clean air zone compliant.
- c. Are compliant with the Hackney Carriage policy in all other respects

OR

Consider making a temporary change to policy concerning the age limit for Hackney Carriage vehicles which would require a consultation exercise to be carried out

Appendices – As links or attachments

Appendix A – Request from trade representative

Request from Trade Representative

I have a list of drivers that are having difficulty sourcing new or second hand cars and there are many more out there. Cab Direct, our main Taxi retailer, is out of cars and is not taking orders because of a world wide shortage of parts, second hand Wheelchair cars up to three and a half years are scarce.

This is going to have a huge impact on drivers who want to change to **Euro 6** to avoid CAZ charges as the charges are £9 a day. Other drivers have cars coming to the end of life and have to change.

A bit of background information

Hackney carriages built after September 2015 were given a 12 year life to drive taxis as they were **Euro 6**.

Hackney carriages built before September 2015 were given a 10 year life to drive taxis because they were of a lower **Euro 5** standard. This latter group are the vehicles on our list. The owners of these vehicles have had only as little as 7 and half years use for vehicles that have ended up costing them over 30 thousand pounds and now they have to change to avoid charges. You may imagine it's hard to sell these blue painted Cabs on the second hand market as they don't interest buyers and are worth very little.

Many of these drivers may continue to drive through the Caz zone continuing to pollute Bristol's atmosphere so I believe a solution should be looked into to help both our environment and drivers.

I do understand that there is a 4 grand grant but that is not enough to make many taxi drivers change nor does that solve the availability problem.

Drivers that I have come across have stated they have little interest in the LEVC as it will cost over 70k and has an impractical real life electric range of only 45 miles which in turn takes 45 minutes to charge, a full charge is £14 electric that is equivalent to only 32mpg and hardly economical.

They will be forced out of a job if we are made to buy the LEVC. We recently had a fare rise and to keep in competition with app firms we opted to kept our basic meter fares low at £2.20 per mile, LEVC taxis would require London Rates which are currently about £4 a mile and are not something customers would welcome but that is only if the council is even willing to pass those rates.

We are waiting for up to date eclectic Wheelchair Taxis from VW and Peugeot but it will take 18 months for dealers to get them in stock as they are in the early stages. These advanced electric vehicles will have a 200 mile range and take only 30 minutes to charge. These cars will definitely attract drivers and are much cheaper.

The help needed

We ask your help if you could increase the replacement vehicle age limit from 3 and a half years to 5 years, these vehicles will be **Euro 6** compliant. There are many 4 and 5 year old wheelchair cars on the market that have less than 20 thousand miles that would make great cabs. Please do not see this as a lowering of policy standards as it will be helping clean up pollution and give help to drivers that lost money on **Euro 5** cabs. This move will

actually help modernize the fleet by making drivers get rid of **Euro 5** vehicles and move to **Euro 6**. As mentioned the only reason drivers are asking is there is a shortage of cars.

It is more about we have little other choice rather than a money saving one, I really don't want to see more Hackneys leaving the trade. I believe help should be given because the number of hackneys is dwindling, we used to have 802 in 2013, now the number is 354 or less, to lose another 60 or 90 cars is going to greatly affect wheelchair users. Many of these drivers work with booking companies that need our service for disabled customers and there is a reliance on blue cabs as we cover most of the wheelchair work for booking firms in Bristol.

Saif Hussain Chairperson
BBLTA, Bristol Blue Licensed taxi Association