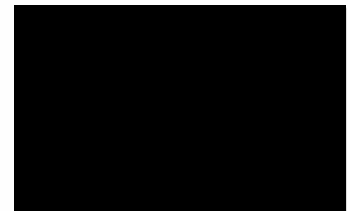


RECEIVED
11 SEP 2013
SECRETARIAT



10th September 2014

Transport committee
London Assembly
City Hall
The Queens Walk
London SE1 2AA

Sir/Madam,

Re: The London Taxi Trade

Thank you for the opportunity to give my views on the Parlous State of the London Taxi Trade, (the first time ever!!)

Firstly, the so called regulation and non-enforcement of the law regarding illegal activities of the mini cab industry. Why is the so called enforcement only on the out of London group, when every Friday and Saturday evening they run riot over the regulations that are strictly enforced upon us, the licensed black cab trade?

Secondly, regarding the fifteen year rule on operating cabs, three thousand cabs have now been forced off of the road, even though they have cleaner emissions and less soot exhaust than the new cabs. Does anybody at TFL acknowledge this fact? If the new breed of greener cabs and electric vehicles are so important to all our futures, why cannot TFL or The Mayor's Office offer some financial help to our trade, before we are all forced out of business?

Getting back to emissions, if the so called traffic engineers keep tinkering with traffic lights to keep them longer on red and roads are being constantly restricted and narrowed forcing vehicles to remain stationary, is anybody really surprised that emissions are rising? I invite you to have a good look at Oxford Street and Regents Street, for a large proportion of the day they are full of empty buses, which is not so good for the air we have to breathe.

Thirdly, why do we have to make a charge to customers using credit cards? Surely we could receive some help to reduce the costs of using the credit card system.

Pedi cabs? Where on earth are the regulations for this form of dangerous transport and their drivers?

The Uncoordinated roadwork's which are causing enormous delays and even more pollution.

As I try to do my job as efficiently as I can, I am finding it increasingly difficult to explain to people, especially foreign business men, exactly what is happening to this great city, and just who is in charge?

Thanks again for this chance to express my thoughts and I hope it will be of some use to you.

Yours faithfully,

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature and name of the sender.

07 JUL 2014

Dear Mrs Pidgeon

RE: Taxi & Private Hire Consultation.

With regards to your decision to investigate how TFL regulates the 'cab trade', may I offer some options.

- 1/ All Black cabs should be obliged to accept Debit/Credit cards (a they should be in working order - if not, the cab comes off the road)
- 2/ All new black cabs should be only black, a private hire cars can be any colour other than black.
- 3/ All Private Hire cars should have signage on the front doors to indicate the company from which the customer has ordered is the car that has arrived.

Carl

4/ Have Marshals at all the major ranks at all times to ensure a dress-code for black cab drivers.

Sadly, some drivers are not sure whether they are going to work, or the beach!

- My suggestion would be that no Sports Shorts, no flip flops or loose sandals.

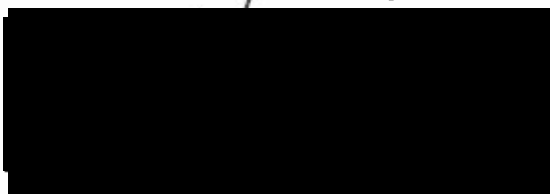
5/ Charge an additional £25 to each licenced driver to pay for additional compliance officers & use 'crushers' to instantly take illegal taxis, drivers & vehicles off the road (obviously only the car should be crushed!)

6/ Lastly, take back, in house, the testing of the Private Hire Drivers, it seems strange that the likes of Addison Lee 'test' the drivers they are then going to employ.

Having the topographical test at 'Palestine' (using retired Police officers, Fireman etc.) will bring about a degree of fairness within the testing procedure.

Thanking You

Yours Faithfully



RECEIVED

15 SEP 2014

SECRETARIAT

9th September 2014

Dear Sirs

Taxi and Private Hire transport committee survey 2014

When I began the knowledge of London, it gave me the immediate impression of the most daunting undertaking I could ever attempt to complete.

As I took my seat in Penton Street prior to [REDACTED] delivering my acceptance talk, I looked around at my fellow students, fear written across their faces, as they awaited entrance into the unknown. As [REDACTED] began relating the enormity of the task which lay ahead of us, one thing stuck instantly in my mind. He informed the assembled gathering (the total number in attendance stood at ten), that seven of them would not complete the task which lay before them. A collective sharp intake of breath followed, as the congregation began to digest this fact. On hearing this statistic, I decided there and then that I would be in the 30% who would complete this seemingly Herculean task and obtain the coveted green badge. Indeed, a siege mentality was adopted from that very moment. I left the room with a steely resilience, determined to complete this topographical colossus.

I steadily worked my way through the task, mixing days out on my scooter, calling over with my partner and working shifts in my job. My hard work and determination paid off and on the 22nd April 2008, I was presented with my green badge at the Carriage Office. As I looked at my prize, a mixture of pride and emotion took over my body. This small metal badge represented 5 years of my life. 5 years of hard work and sacrifice. 5 years of learning about London, its streets and its history.

This process taught me so much about many different things. Adherence to task, the value of hard work, revision of your topic and the fact that a person can achieve anything they want if they put their minds to it.

After qualifying, one then enters the arena of work. It only took a short period of time to realise how valuable the Knowledge is when you begin to navigate the streets of London during the course of your day's work. This stringent, arduous, intense process is a fundamental tool to a driver if they wish to enjoy a successful career, driving in the metropolis. The knowledge must remain in place in order to over prepare men and women who wish to ply their trade behind the wheel of an iconic London black cab. I could not imagine doing my job without having completed the knowledge.

In order to ply one's trade, one needs a marketplace. Therefore, sufficient ranks need to be located at all major terminuses, shopping venues, places of entertainment etc.

These ranks need to be visible and easily located by people wishing to travel by hackney carriage. We do not need ranks over run with unlicensed mini cabs touting for business nor indeed the increasing amount of rickshaws. The latter seem to be growing in numbers at an unprecedented rate, without any visible attempt at control. These rickshaws gather on zigzags and other busy junctions. They park dangerously and cause chaos on already congested, sometimes narrow streets. I find it very difficult to quantify their presence on London's streets and I am at a loss to

understand the value, if any they bring to the capital. I am also curious as to how they are allowed to operate, seemingly without any type of regulation. I would welcome a response from TFL, informing me how they are allowed to operate and what value if any they contribute to the capital and its travelling public.

Both unlicensed minicabs and rickshaws, draw animosity from the trade and rightly so in my opinion, because they appear to be able to operate with impunity. I fully support the licensing system and the safety net it offers the travelling public via CRB checks etc and feel all efforts must be made to eradicate all forms of unlicensed transport from the streets, for the benefits of all parties concerned.

Another area which I feel needs to be addressed is when drivers have to renew their bill/licence. I recently had to renew my licence and I completed my CRB check and sent my completed form off to TFL with the relevant fees and documents. It took over four months for my application to be processed and returned to me. I find this quite staggering that a task which seems quite straightforward takes so long to complete. I am lead to believe this process has been outsourced and what I would be interested to know is do TFL feel that this delegation of work is beneficial to the drivers, whose livelihoods depend on swift completion of their applications in order to have continuity of work. Is the cost of keeping the administrative process "in house" much more expensive than outsourcing? This seems such a complicated process for something so simple and something central to a driver's ability to earn a living.

My belief is that the black cab trade bring an immense amount of value to London in many ways. Our topographical knowledge is a major asset to the travelling public and allows us to transport people from A to B with maximum efficiency, in a safe and professional manner. Another valuable asset is that the vast majority of drivers have an extreme fondness and interest in the history of London. I class myself in this category and indeed, after I gained my green badge I undertook "a postgraduate cab guide course" which was run by the Worshipful Company of Hackney Carriage Drivers. This course gave me an even broader knowledge of the capital's history and I share this information with my passengers which they seem to enjoy.

I would love to see the cab trade and TFL worked together more harmoniously together to promote standards in London. TFL should harness the skills we possess and use them as a benchmark for anyone wishing to embark in similar activity in the capital.

Every person who has completed the knowledge has the right to be proud of their achievement and also the right to be treated with respect and to feel valued by their regulatory authority. We are so proud to serve this fantastic city; we are natural communicators and wonderful ambassadors for London. We have filled this role since 1654 and I'd like to think we can continue in this vein for at least another 360 years. I would love to join any focus group or committee working on this project and I feel that through dialogue and mutual respect we can continue to produce a first class taxi service for this wonderful vibrant city.

Thank you for taking the time to read this and I welcome your comments and suggestions. My email address is [REDACTED] and my mobile number is [REDACTED].

Kind regards,

[REDACTED]
Green badge driver.

29.8.14.

RECEIVED

Sep
01 AUG 2013

SECRETARIAT

Dear Transport Committee.

With reference to your flyer in relation to investigations of Taxi and Private Hire Services in London, can I report the following.

There is no regulation + enforcement of illegal mini cabs and touting offences at all in central London.

There are no Police Officers to be seen on foot patrol after dark.

With regard to one location, The Home House Club at 20 Portman Square, W1. it appears that every night after 10pm up to 6 mini cabs arrive + openly tout for business at the venue. The drivers stand on the street + quote fares using Sat Navs!! This is illegal touting, but no action is ever taken. These mini cabs treat the location as their private business pick up places! If they are mini cabs they are only pre booked vehicles. How can they be at the same location every night!

The registration numbers are

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Are these vehicles insured for Private Hire, taking Pre Booked bookings only? I doubt they are.

I have reported these activities 10 times to T.F.L. and no action has been seen.

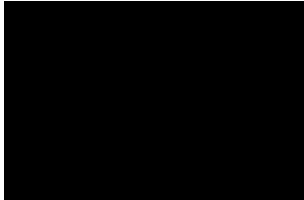
There are numerous Taxi + Private Hire services acting according to the Law, but I question the safety & Legality of illegal hawking mini cabs.

I agree that credit card for Taxi Drivers is needed, & I take credit card payments.

T.F.L. is not investigating offences or being seen to do so. They are not Fit for Purpose.

Yours Sincerely,

Transport Committee,
London Assembly
City Hall
The Queen's Walk
London SE1 2AA

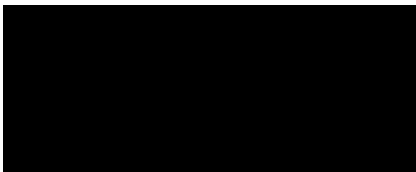


9th September 2014

For the attention of Ms Valerie Shawcross CBE

RECORDED DELIVERY

Dear Madam



After reading your advert in the Taxi Globe Trade Newspaper I would like to raise some issues that I am having.

Firstly I enclose a copy of a letter that I have written to Ms Helen Chapman, Mr Moffatt, Mr Hendy and Mr Leon Daniels all recorded delivery.

As you can see this letter was sent on the 30th July 2014. I have received no written reply I have also left voicemails and messages with their secretaries still no reply. I am growing used to this type of treatment as I sent 3 recorded delivery letters to Sheffield regarding my driver licence and never had no replies to them.

The reason why a mistake was made over the 28 days to book an overhaul was because all the telephone lines were down in Enfield and Enfield was not sure that whether they were stopping overhauls and bringing in 2 MOT's a year instead so because of this a mistake was made in booking my taxi in. I then went to Palestra House and spoke to [REDACTED]. The rest of my problems regarding this are explained in my letters dated 30th July 2014.

They are going to tell you that I have already had an extension. They are not going to tell you that I have been cheated that is why I have come up against a wall of silence. My main problem is that I am not in the LTDA and cannot get the backing of their solicitors and barristers as I am unable to afford this.

The treatment I am being given is appalling as it is of no fault of mine. Any dealings I had with the public carriage office in Penton Street run by the police went completely smooth as I never had one problem in 42 years. I lost three months work and earnings this year due to the complete fiasco on issuing the driver licence. I was even threatened by [REDACTED] dated 2nd May 2014 to take my licence because they had lost and would not admit that they had lost all my documents. They then sent me a new application form told me to go to the post office and pay another £249 and start again with my application 7 months after I had already done it. I had to go to Palestra House and beg them to send someone down to photocopy all the documents they had lost. I had also made numerous telephone calls at an hour wait at a time to explain this but no one took any notice. I then had to spend hours on the telephone calling all sorts of offices at the post office to try and locate a signature of all my recorded delivery letters. One was a check and send that guaranteed delivery. If I had not recorded delivery these letters I would have no proof whatsoever of my £249 payment I would have to reapply and pay again and probably wait another 7 months to get a licence so I would then have been out of work for 10 months. Why was it my responsibility to sort all these problems out. The stress that this has caused me what with being cheated out of a extension to my cab which other people are getting cannot be right. The main crux of the matter appears to be the withholding all the information regarding my so called extension. I have now found out that I should have been offered the option to take my cab off the road thus enabling me an extension this year.

If the 15 year rule stood then all cabs would be off the road. You would not have at least 20 cabs still on the road leading up to 17 years. It cannot be one rule for them and one for another surely this is discrimination. Is is a secret between certain parties on how to keep your cab on the road for another year? No one wants to discuss it but when you see other R registration cabs on the road you do wonder.

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]






30th July 2014


Recorded delivery

Dear Mr Leon Daniels,



I am writing to you to tell you how upset and disappointed I am in dealing with Palestra House over my application for an extension to give my taxi an extra year that would have taken my taxi  up to nearly 17 years old.

I came to the reception area of Palestra House in 2013 because a mistake had been made over my 28 days to book an overall. For some reason I was a day or two short in time.  came down to deal with me. I explained my position to him showed him my log book which has the date of the first registration 15.7.1998.  told me that it was no problem all I had to do was write a letter to Palestra House which he helped me with by telling me what to write. We both wrote the letter together in the reception area. The letter asking for an extension is in your possession. I obviously thought this meant it would take my taxi up to nearly 16 years old. I did not envisage this would take away my rights to extend my taxi to nearly 17 years of age. I genuinely believed that all taxis had to come off the road before they were 16 years old. This is what is wrote in the taxi magazine printed by the LTDA. I think that this is the view of 99 per cent of all London taxi drivers unless you belong to the LTDA.

Three weeks ago I saw a taxi in London registration  and this taxi has been licenced to 2015 I was really shocked how could an R registration still be on the road to 2015 I thought this was impossible. I spoke to the driver and he said he had a bad back and this is why his licence has been extended to nearly 17 years. As you will see from my medical reports I have also got a bad back and do not work many hours due to my medical condition and age.

I wrote a letter dated 17th July 2014 to ask for an extension and was very surprised to be told you have already had an extension. I went to the reception area again at

Palestra House and was lucky enough to see [REDACTED] again. I explained to him last year was not really an extension it was purely some type of cover for the very short period to cover the error of the overall date. [REDACTED] said that he was going to check the registration date on the log book and will let me know because it was on a Friday night. Over that weekend I was over the moon and 100 percent sure I would get my extension as I had fulfilled the medical and hours that I worked criteria and things were looking very promising. [REDACTED] telephoned me on Monday and explained to me that I had already had an extension. So I wanted to know what was the difference between [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] told me what I should have done when I went to see him in 2013 was to take the plates off my cab immediately and re overall the cab again. This would have allowed me my extension this year. I asked [REDACTED] why did we write a letter together asking for an extension when I did not need one. Its obvious I would have liked my cab to last me 17 years because it would have taken me up to retirement age. I went to Palestra House the governing body for advice and help last year and am extremely unhappy what has happened to me. I feel that I have been cheated. This would have been avoidable with the correct advice. [REDACTED] should have told me in 2013 to take my plate off the taxi that day straight away as this was the more honest route to take rather than sit and help write a letter to take my rights away. He intentionally withheld information. This appears to me to be very deceitful. [REDACTED] was aware that the taxis would be allowed an extension of time because he said to me in 2013 "do not think you can come back next year for another extension". I thought this a very strange thing to say at the time, but now I fully understand what this means. I feel that I was mislead because [REDACTED] said to me that there was in fact two different routes to take but he could not tell me which one to take but he did not give me the option or explanation of the two routes. Had he explained the two routes to me it is very obvious even if I did not know at this time about extending the cabs life to 17 years it would have been far easier without having to write a letter simply take the plates off of the cab and get my overall done early before the date on the log book. [REDACTED] said that I can't tell every taxi driver that comes up here how to get an extension up to 17 years, but why cant he tell an individual when someone from Palestra House has told the LTDA's 20 members so far what to do. They are obviously getting their information from Bob Oddy who is a board member for Transport for London. This must equate to discrimination to non LTDA members. So because of my misguided advice and I do not belong to the LTDA and do not mix with taxi drivers why should I have been penalised. Why should I lose out on a years extra life on my taxi due to withheld selective advice. You already owe me £2,400 in loss of earnings due to the fiasco surrounding the renewal of my Taxi Driver Licence which took three months longer than it should have done. [REDACTED] has arranged a refund to me as a gesture of goodwill for the application fee on the 18th June 2014. I am still not in receipt of this. As a gesture of goodwill because of the 3 months loss of earnings and extreme stress because of this maybe [REDACTED] would allow another gesture of goodwill by giving me my year extension which I have been denied due to lack of correct advice.

When giving advice on very important matters such as licencing advice must be given in full and all options given and fully explained so it is up to the person asking for advice to make the decision not giving only one option as though it is the only option available

I would be grateful for your prompt reply in this matter.

Yours fraternally



London Assembly Transport Committee Investigation into Taxi and Private Hire Services in London

RECEIVED

19 SEP 2014

SECRETARIAT

Date 17th September

Caroline Pidgeon, and chair of the committee and scrutiny committee

I sincerely trust and hope that the copy enclosures will help towards the team's investigation into Taxi and Private Hire services in London.


With all due respect to John Mason and Helen Chapman of the PCO I was some what surprised and disappointed that they could not give me the time of day to have responded with an acknowledgement to my enclosed letters, yet the Law commission were more than grateful of my contributions including my letter to the PCO. The fact that I did not even receive at the very least a courteous reply, perhaps it might be taken as meaning that the PCO is in fact transparent and that a drivers comments are not worthy of such a response of replying to an experienced driver views of the industry.

More to the point that if it was not within their résumé or their directive perhaps it might have been polite to have informed me of where and who I should have directed my letter to. I found their none committal strange to say the least and contemptible that the head of the PCO could have acted in such a transparent way as though the many issues that I raised were perhaps unfounded and not important enough and worthy of a reply.

I sincerely hope that my contributions will be of interest and hope that after the team's investigations your conclusions will be for the betterment of the Private Hire industry and its drivers. Also I hope that it will help to create a better future for not only the consumer but also for its silent drivers who deliver the service. What the industry needs is greater transparency and recognition for its drivers providing them with a more sustainable and secure future.

Yours truly,

Enc; introductory letter, main letter, Law commission, reforming of the Law



27th September 2013

Director PCO/TFL John Mason
Taxi & Private Hire
Palestra,
197 Blackfriars Road
London SE1 8NJ

Dear Mr Mason / Ms Helen Chapman

I am writing regarding the Law Commissions pending consultation and would like to make my views known to you as to date I have not received any formal acknowledgement from a letter sent to [REDACTED] forwarded to [REDACTED] (copy letter enclosed) dated 4th October 2012 giving my views on this consultation.

I would further like to bring to your attention of the March addition of the PHC Publication, which you are featured amongst others debating industry related issues and although I consider that this may be productive regarding the issues discussed, I feel that what the industry should be debating are far more reaching and disturbing issues that should be the priority of the industry, that in my opinion are not being ear marked for discussion and taking seriously or accepted as the real plague of the industry.

Drivers need to know what the industry is going to do for its drivers. There are too many grey areas that the industry has failed to recognise and would like to bring to your attention these important issues that need to be addressed.

It is my opinion there are only two main issues that should be tabled for discussion at this present time that should be dealt with as a matter of urgency and far more important at this moment in time, which is the **over saturation** of drivers and the **unfair practices by operators** and more importantly the drivers who are non existent and unsupportive in every issue. The industry is a wash with drivers and the operators have capitalised and exploited the situation by taking on more and more drivers which is forcing drivers out of the industry because they simply cannot earn a reasonable living. We are just a bye product of the whole bureaucratic system and are simply sheep being led without any transparency or recognition, no rights no say. It is about time that the industry wakes up to the reality of the use and abuse and exploitation by all concerned that the drivers are being subjected to. We are like lambs being led to the slaughter and what appears on the surface is in fact a far cry from the truth

As an individual driver of twenty years in the industry I thought that I would write to you giving my views and thoughts of what I think and feel of the current situation within the

industry. You may or may not agree of what I am going to explain to you in the following paragraphs, but nevertheless it may be of some help of what an experienced driver has to say about its industry and perhaps give you an insight into the real world of being a Mini Cab driver means of how I feel the industry has failed to protect its drivers against the unfair practices by its operators.

You are aware that the Law Commission is in the process of carrying out the biggest consultation since its inception of the early sixties, which I have contributed towards (enclose a copy for your attention) and sincerely hope that my views will not go on deaf ears and taken on board of what I have expressed. I have read the basis of the consultation and disappointingly I did not see anything that takes into account the drivers, **who are the industry** and provide the service and the end product.

This industry has been allowed to be **high jacked by the operators for the operators** and has nothing to do with the drivers because the conditions of operation are far too heavily weighted in favour of the operators. To give you example of this, I know of one particular office where they have approximately 130 plus drivers and only have work for possibly 80 drivers and have testimony from many of them, that they are barely getting a living, needless to say they are angry frustrated and worried that they cannot meet their liabilities. This situation has been allowed to fester for far too long unabated and that many of the issues that I have raised need to be addressed as a matter of urgency on behalf of the industries drivers for them to have a more secure and stable future.

We are a 67000 silent army of drivers who are invisible without a voice or say who cannot be seen or heard!!!

The question needs to be asked? How can any consultation of this importance be finalised without the interests of its drivers taken fully into consideration regarding the many human related aspects that we have to endure on a daily basis.

It is my contention and belief that it appears to me that the driver's conditions and views have not fully been taken into account and as a 67000 strong army should have been given the opportunity to have been consulted, for this consultation to be fair and democratic for the betterment of the drivers and the industry. As you are no doubt aware there exists an apathy amongst drivers simply because **they are transparent** and do not have a united voice or any kind of leadership to fight our corner and to express our views and arguments.

You will appreciate that although you have an open forum I felt that it would be very difficult for me to have expressed all that I felt at a given session and needed to put pen to paper in order to put things into to a more collated perspective, which I felt needed to be absorbed and thought about more carefully, so that the importance of my point would not be lost and to clarify how my fellow drivers really feel about our treatment by the industry.

What the industries drivers would like to know is? **what is the industry going to do for its drivers** or do we have to wait further **fifty years** before our conditions and rights are recognised? I beg to ask is it the operators who are the industry!!! , (I do not think so) they are only greedy over paid agents who flout our earnings and human rights of engagement and only see their own self indulgence to profit as their priority at our expense.

Yes it is time to take a good hard look and put the industry under the microscope and step back and see the fought lines on behalf of the industries drivers and take a responsible review.

I will start by saying that since the recession it has **become an operators business and a one sided industry and the drivers are simply cannon fodder, a commodity, rent and a driver number** and the operators are basically landlords who receive guaranteed weekly recession proof rents come rain or shine. Whilst the drivers are like sitting tenants without any rights or say and the operators call all the shots and are dictating and **stock piling** drivers regardless of the work that they are able to provide. What this means is in the majority of offices there are too many drivers and not enough work, because of the surplus of drivers making the job count for each driver less, all this achieves is a dilution of income and why the majority of drivers are struggling too earn a reasonable living. This is the main argument and the real cause of why drivers are leaving the industry and not the recession and why there is a high turnover of drivers in the industry.

There was an article published by the PHC magazine last year stating that 47% of drivers who were invited to renew their licenses, did not renew them and a similar amount of new applicants received licenses which offset the ones leaving which substantiates the argument. What this tells us is that the drivers incomes are not sustainable and why they have left the industry because before you can start to earn a living you have to find a minimum of approximately £300/350 in expenses per week and to achieve this, you have to put in a minimum of 70/80 hours per week because of insufficient work, because as I have said, "too many drivers and not enough work".

If you look into a copy of the PHC magazine you will see many operators advertising for drivers promising and showing many encouraging bonuses and incentives and free rent periods for joining etc, in reality these incentives are simply to set a trap to catch a mackerel tactics and in many instances misrepresentation. You will also see that these glossy recruitment adds project a spectacular image of professionalism and credibility of the industry and its operators as being squeaky clean, but this is an example of how the industry is being hood winked and is only a delusion by its operators for industry consumption as a smoke screen and a deception of the reality.

The industry is losing its experienced drivers who had knowledge and experience and did not have to rely on Satellite Navigation and have been replaced with a new generation of Sat Nav drivers, who have a poor comprehension of basic English, who take longer to get

from A to B to the annoyance of the passengers and have to say this cannot be good for our credibility and reputation as professional drivers.

I like many drivers are seriously considering leaving the industry because of the current climate in the industry that exist at present due to the fact I do not believe that any section of the industry really recognises this plight and its related problems, of what is really going on within the industry and more importantly is anyone really interested, as long as the gravy train keeps rolling because of the constant influx of drivers coming into the industry thinking that it is a viable industry and believe that they will derive a realistic living.

Whilst the PCO/TFL continue to allow and fuel the over saturation of drivers, all you are achieving is encouraging the greedy unscrupulous operators to take advantage of the current situation **giving them cart blanche and the green light to profiteer**, which is damaging the drivers ability to earn their livings and contributing towards them having to work longer hours just to make ends meet. We are the forgotten foot soldiers who provide a very important service across the capital but are not given the time of day regarding their hardships and ever increasing expenses and feel that we deserve a better deal.

On top of this we have restrictive logistics when picking up customers and are constantly being penalised with PCN penalty notices for parking and waiting when we are a public service and feel we should be given more scope and understanding by councils to be given designated areas where it is save, convenient and legal to set down or wait like the Black Cabs are allowed to do, who do not have the additional financial burden of receiving parking fines, whilst it adds further expense to an already demoralised Mini Cab industry trying to survive with escalating costs compounded by insufficient work.

Another highly controversial situation is the cut throat discount and price cutting of fares by operators to get work and appreciate that our industry is highly competitive and is a free market to compete for work. As an example of this is the ridiculous cut pricing of airports which the operators claim is to provide more work, we argue although that this may provide more work, it is a ploy to take on more drivers and is counter productive and lines the operator pockets further and have no choice but to cover these under priced jobs on behalf of the office, which does not effect their pockets and is at our expense. To illustrate this point as an example, a pick up can take up to 3 hours and a typical charge might be £36 of which £12 will be fuel cost leaving £24, making it approx £8.00 per hour and this net figure does not take into consideration the additional daily expenses of lets say £50 per day on average and the fact that the daily take gross fare income may only be £90 for a 10/12 hour shift which demonstrates a net income of £40.

The operators seem to be a law to themselves with a attitude of take it or leave or put up or shut up knowing full well that there are another five or more drivers cueing up to come in and this is the same in every office, therefore the drivers have no option but to put up with what is going on because we do not have any choice but to accept the current situation, which in my mind is control of drivers and a form of monopoly by operators to exploit them, who are unable to complain or question their unfair practices. What they

have is a license to dominate and rule without question which is destroying the drivers mentally and financially. What this all boils down to is, drivers are having to work longer hours for less income whilst the operators are enjoying an unprecedented free hand of exploitation and control to profit.

What the industry has failed to recognise and the reason for the high turnover of drivers is simply down to the process of churning drivers, which has been orchestrated by the recession and the flood of E U members entering the labour market for work, causing over saturation of drivers to the industry and compounded by the ever increasing cost of fuel and car insurance premiums. The resulting factor to all this is that what you have is a non sustainable industry **constantly churning** drivers with high costs and declining incomes made for operators to exploit whilst the drivers struggle with static fares and less work.

Although I have touched on what I feel are some of problems Mani festering within the industry regarding how the operators are manipulating and taking advantage of its drivers, I just feel at this juncture there exists a misguided understanding of what is really going on and feel it is the drivers who are getting a raw deal, who need to be protected against the **unfair practices and profiteering** by the operators, who in my opinion are equally to blame together with the industries bodies, who are just turning a blind eye and have to take responsibility for what is going on.

Another issue that I would like to touch on is account work and credit card payments of which the operators promote and exploit for greater profits to the detriment of its drivers which can be paid up to 2 weeks in arrears. On account work the operators are deducting anything up to 40% commission and in many cases the driver receives less than the basic price for the job, for example if a job was £40 he will receive £28. With credit card work the operator may charge up to 10% from the customer for this service and will then charge and deduct a further 10/20% to the driver and then have to wait a week or longer to be paid. The contractual arrangement between driver and operator is that the driver pays a fixed rent for work and the operator's obligation is to supply such work, how the operator gets his work and at what cost is his liability, so why are operator allowed to deduct commissions from the drivers for such services. This is a very lucrative income that the operators exploit and take advantage of whilst the drivers will receive less money than the going book value for the job and at the same time have to wait to be paid.

The only way to best describe the deducting of commission by operators regarding account work and credit card payments is simply **ripping the drivers off**, to justify these charges the operators claim it is for administering the account work whilst the drivers claim that a charge has already been applied to the account customer of between 10% to 30% for the service. I think that the only way that I can best describe the industries operators is like being in the hands of a bunch of **blood suckers** who are not interested in operating ethically, with honesty and integrity, but only interested in maximising their own self interests and using their power of control to profiteer. It is also true to point out that not all operators are tarred with the same brush and to further say that many of the above practices fall below the ethical scale of fairness and honesty. On the surface you

cannot see the cracks that are developing within the industry and if you were to ask the drivers what they are experiencing you would hear a completely different story entirely, regarding the plight of its drivers.

The reality of all this is that you have an operator who is running his own business who supplies its agents with work and at the end of the day he sees it as his own business and the fact that drivers are self-employed, has no consequences to him whatsoever and will determine and dictate the state of play regardless of any ethical standards, drivers are basically a commodity that are used as a form of stock count.

How does this affect the drivers when having to wait to be paid one to two weeks in arrears for the discounted account and credit card work? Well it does not affect the operators as it is not an inconvenience to them at all as they receive a constant influx of guaranteed weekly rental income, therefore do not have any cash flow problems and can meet their commitments and do not have to wait for any money, as it flows in weekly as they receive a weekly cash mountain from weekly rents, so they can easily service their business activities and do not have the burden of debt to worry about and by contrast the drivers do have cash flow problems whilst the operators hold their money back.

So I think you can understand the reason why I have expressed that the industry is one sided and in free fall and the drivers are **victims and open to exploitation** and abuse by unfair practices by its operators.

My final thoughts are that we need greater **transparency** to stop the rot to give the drivers job security and acknowledgement of our importance and rights to protect us against the unfair practices that are the enemy of the industry by the operators and not the recession.

What we are asking for is a level playing field and not a business made for operators and the industry to acknowledge that we are a **bigger industry than the Black Cabs** and therefore give us the recognition that we rightly deserve by doing more for its drivers.

On the subject of Black Cab industry! What is the pending consultation all about? I thought that the idea and thinking was that the industry was draconian and out of date and needs to be brought into the 21st century. If this is the case I feel that the industry has failed to appreciate a major route problem or even given consideration to the following argument: There are approximately 67000 Mini Cab drivers in comparison to the 25000 Black Cabs and that tells you that we are a far bigger industry than the Black Cabs and provide a much needed and respected service through out London. If this is the case why is there so much disparity between the two tiers of service? Why are we treated like second class citizens without a voice or say and taken for granted? Why are we treated with such contempt as though we do not exist, whilst the Black Cabs enjoy all the privileges? why is it that they are they able to control our future, **I rest my case**, that is what you call draconian and feel that the industry needs to take this on board.

We are shackled by red tape of regulations and freedom to set down and penalised and exhausted with ever increasing overheads and manipulated by operators, whilst

our income has declined because operators have a free hand to stock pile drivers at will, it is no wonder drivers are leaving the industry in numbers because it is no longer sustainable or viable to be a Mini Cab driver because of the wholesale exploitation and control by the operators.

I have heard the expression used that the industry is draconian and needs change for the 21st century and beyond but to be brutally frank and honest unless some of the things that I have outlined, I cannot see any future for the beleaguered drivers having any hope for its future. **We are at the cross roads of change** and now is the time and opportunity to take on board the drivers views and arguments and it would be a lost moral obligation and a **travesty of justice** by all concerned to miss this golden opportunity, not to take on board the drivers views and opinions in acknowledgement and recognition of their importance to the industry as their right to be consulted at this crucial point

So why are drivers so concerned about the future of their industry? and why have so many left or thinking about leaving the industry? If I have not made it clear by now, perhaps the best way to put it all into perspective, is to simply say that in the last five years since the recession started, what has transpired and had a major impact on the industry are the following contributing factors that have taken place, which has changed the face of the industry which are as follows:

The grey areas that the industry needs to address and the need to introduce a code of practice and accountability for the industries driver force regarding the unfair practices by its operators.

- **Over saturation of drivers**
- **Cut price fares in order to stay off competition to hold onto rental incomes**
- **Constant churning of drivers by operators**
- **Extortionate rising overheads.**
- **Static fares remain the same as five years ago.**
- **Drivers having to work longer hours to try to compensate their incomes.**
- **Operators taking advantage of the flood of drivers in the market place and stock piling drivers in excess of the work they can provide.**
- **The unfair practice by operators of cut throat devaluation of fares because of over competition.**
- **Abuse of account work and credit card payments by operators.**
- **Bidding for work by operators via internet sites is a form of exploitation for operators to except fares that are devalued in order to expand their driver base at the expense of the drivers.**
- **Working longer hours for less money**
- **Operators indiscriminately taking on more drivers whilst decreasing fares**
- **Restrictive pick up and waiting areas resulting in penalisation of PCN's**

The result of all this is that incomes are not sustainable resulting in a declining industry. It is clear to me that the PCO/TFL and its licensed operators can and **do exercise their control and power over its drivers** whilst the industries drivers do not have any say or defence against the exploitation and unfair practices by its operators.

The industry has been allowed to become like a **twentieth century sweat shop** for operators to **squeeze the life out of its drivers** and in my opinion their control by many is not fit for the purpose of a modern day Mini Cab industry. What we have is an over saturated market of drivers being dominated by operators whilst the PCO/TFL stand idle and toothless to act responsibly. What I find draconian and out of date is the disregard by the very people that manage our industry is the lack of vision and understanding of what is needed to take us out of the dark ages of the fifties and replacing it with old for new.

The industry has spoken about the radicalisation of change for the future of the industry and it is my belief that it is now time for the industry to consider implementing **fixed metered pricing in line with the rest of the industry**. The necessity and reasoning for this is clearly because of the abuse by operators to exploit the **devaluation and control of fares** because of over competition at the expense of its drivers to hold onto their ever growing army of rents. What significance, impact and importance would this have on the industry?, fixed pricing per mile would take away the control by operators to **fragantly abuse and cut price fares** in order to stay off competition which has destroyed the drivers ability to earn a relative living and why they are having to work longer and unacceptable hours. It is the operators that are running the show who are enjoying a stable living whilst the drivers are carrying the burden for the industry and is one of the few industries where operators continue to have an unparalleled lucrative guaranteed weekly residual income in a recession.

The operators are dictating and determining the future of our industry by control of fares and the exploitation of its drivers, this to me is a ridiculous situation and why the industry is being held back, coupled with the fact that we have saturation of drivers is compounding the market place by over competition, is the reason why operators are having to cut price fares and are fighting to feed their drivers to hold onto them and it is the drivers who ultimately are paying the price. What we have at present is the survival of the fittest regime, dog eat dog and the blind leading the blind whilst the industry stands idle like lame ducks to act, like horses with blinkers without a clue or answer and simply doing nothing is not an option to make the fundamental changes that are needed. What we have at present is a free for all by operators to control and exploit and no directive from the **PCO/ TFL to take control**, because everything that I have argued and sighted is transparent and not recorded.

The benefit of fixed metered fare structure would firstly stop the unfair devaluation of fares to bring them in line to a fair and guaranteed acceptable level that will take away the wholesale degradation by operators to set prices that only benefit them in order to hang on to as many drivers/ rents as they can because of competition. At present the drivers are earning less than five years ago and working longer hours whilst the operators

receive a guaranteed residual weekly income, at the same time it will also eliminate over charging by some drivers. In contrast to the Black Cabs industry, there income is guaranteed by a fixed meter price structure and is increased in line by the rate of inflation.

We are the largest industry by far, but no attention is given to this deplorable decline of our driver force as though we do not exist and are led by operators who do not care a dam of the demise to its drivers, that allows the operators to determine our lively hoods without question, **that is what I call draconian** and yes it is time to reshape our tired and **out of date industry** and its time to give the drivers greater consideration, which is well over due to stop this control by indiscriminate operators who are destroying and mismanaging our industry.

As a final note I will be writing to the Mayor of London, Boris Johnson as he is head of Transport for London who is passionate about the efficiency of our transport services and the environment, with the same concern as I have expressed in the hope that the future of the Mini Cab industry will be **properly and seriously investigated** and fairly managed for the betterment of all concerned and hopefully have our interests heard and a balance of interest found, not just for the general public and its operators but also for its none represented silent drivers and hopefully they might too be able to contribute and be consulted on the importance of the consultation, that is in process for the right to express their views and have their say of their future heard, regarding the issues that I have raised for our army of **67000 transparent** un protected driver force.

As Boris Johnson is passionate about Transport for London I think that I am equally as passionate about the drivers to whom I would like to see given equal rights about their grievances to be known and a right to be heard by its industry, regarding its future and not to be swept to one side as a recognition of our existence. This may be one drivers crusade and although I am near to retirement and have served 20 years in the industry, nevertheless I will continue to fight for the existence and recognition of the industries drivers because what I have experienced and seen in the last few years has made me radical to believe that the drivers are in my opinion the blood of the industry, who deserve a better deal and repeat again that there needs to be **greater transparency** and fairness against the unfair practices of its operators, **who are transparent** in what they get away with because drivers have no procedure for complaints for individual complaints to be heard and if they do, they are **victimised by operators or made to leave**.

I sincerely believe that for the industry to have any future as a recognised professional body it needs total reform or some form of regulated process of the way it treats its drivers and needs to lay down guide lines, of fair play to its operators towards its drivers, who pay their wages and who provide them with a very lucrative recession proof residual guaranteed weekly income and constant yearly profits.

A copy of this letter will be also sent to the Law Commission for them to hopefully review and consider some of the points I have raised and although the in take for the

consultation has now closed and the findings are due to be published September 2013, I sincerely hope that it might raise a few eyebrows and reconsider the plight of its drivers in the light of what I have explained.

I also intend to send a copy of this letter to Boris Johnson head of TFL to make him aware of the situation regarding its drivers for him to appreciate and hopefully take an interest of what I consider a **miscarriage of justice**, regarding our driver force and hopefully he will intervene and ask some questions as I feel that the industry is failing in its duty and responsibility to see the industry for what it really is, a one sided industry made for operators to control and dictate and are asking the industries bodies to get there act together and not just see us through rose tinted glasses.

The question that needs to be asked in this day of high technology, do we really need operators to run offices on behalf of the drivers? All their function is to log and dispatch work and are merely agents with power, is that something so complicated and important that it cannot be executed by a central command call centre. The industry would be far better off without them as they are the real enemy of the industry combined with the uncontrolled amount of drivers flooding into our industry, which is making it counter productive and taking away the incentive to work which is de motivating its drivers.

To summarise what the drivers would like is understanding and an industry who are **prepared to listen** to their grievances and greater transparency and recognition of our importance as the blood of the industry, who can demonstrate that they will give us a level playing field and rid the industry of the male practices and mismanagement by its operators to protect us from this abuse and to implicate at the very least, a code of practice for operators and to consider a drivers complaints procedure where he can register his complaint for consideration and without his concern that he will not be **victimised by his office for doing so**.

I have to ask the question to you, did you see anything in the pending consultation that has touched on the drivers terms and conditions to operate or anything mentioned of there very existence or there importance to the industry, that is the point of my letter that the industry just cannot see the drivers and why the industry is failing in its responsibility to see the real issues. The industry is not draconian it simply does not have the **vision or foresight** to recognise the true reality of what is happening as they are on the other side of the counter.

What I see as the underlying problem from within, is that I feel that you are perhaps to busy running an over loaded system and cannot see the wood from the trees and need to step back and take a fresh approach.

These are the core issues that I feel need to be examined, which I feel will help the industry to progress and thrive for a better future on behalf the industries drivers.

- 1. Control of the number of drivers entering the industry**
- 2. Control by operators to devalue and determine fares and the exploitation and over charging on account work and credit card commissions deductions**
- 3. The introduction of fixed price metering**
- 4. Introduce a code of practice and accountability for its operators**
- 5. An understanding that there needs to be greater transparency regarding the driver related issues which need to be un earthed regarding their exploitation and treatment by operators**
- 6. The recent advent and introduction of some app platform bidding sites to be investigated for the unfair cut pricing of fares by desperate operators in order to create more work, simply to try to retain drivers in order to profit**
- 7. There are many rules and conditions for drivers but the operators appear to be able to act with impunity with a free license to exploit their drivers and therefore there is a need to implement a set of rules for operators to protect its drivers.**

The purpose of this letter is to try to **expose the injustices** that have been manifesting for far to long on behalf of the industries drivers and to make the industry aware and **stand up and listen** and recognise that we drivers are not just humane cargo, but in fact the most important party who provide the main service and should be entitled to a greater say and should be protected against the unfair practices by its operators regarding all that I have expressed.

A new phenomenon has been created with the introduction of the app platforms to assist the general public to find a cab using mobile phones and via the internet which in turn gives the operators the opportunity to compete for more work, with the introduction of Cabie and Anycab etc. These Apps give the public and operators the opportunity to compete on price and time and availability. On the surface these apps are basically a window of opportunity for the operator to create more jobs and in turn to take on more drivers ultimately, but in order for the operator to get this work the operator has to compete on price and in many instances has to under cut the book price to win the work.

Added to this, these jobs can be out of the area of the office which means the drivers has to drive dead mileage before pick up, for example a job book price might be £5 but must drive 3miles to go 1 mile, or as another example a driver might drive 5 miles for a £15 pick up fare to drive the customer 6.5 miles then return to the office base another 10 miles making it a total journey of 21.6, adding a further 10 miles to the journey.

To summarise the fare cost, the driver has driven 21.5 miles in total for a fare of £15 that was cut priced from say £19 with an extra 10 miles added to the journey that must be deducted as a loss to the job. From a drivers perspective what do these under priced fares

actually mean, is simply drivers are being forced to under take jobs that are uneconomical at their expense to satisfy the operator's need.

Just another tool for the operator to drive another nail further into the coffin, adding more misery, hardship and further expense to an already devalued service. It is a 'win win' situation for the public and the operators but always at the driver's expense and is only further fuelling the continuous exodus of drivers from the industry.

The initial idea of these sites was a quick and convenient way for the public to find a cab but what some of these sites have created is a devaluation of the service on price, once again to the detriment of the drivers and is only creating a price war for the desperate operators who need to feed their over stock of drivers in order to keep and maintain their rental incomes. I see it as a form of gambling to compete for work and the drivers are the losers and believe that these sites should be investigated and **some band**, because they are only adding further misery to an already over competitive devalued service.

I sincerely hope that you will see fit on behalf of the industries drivers appreciate our concerns and the validity of our grievances to investigate our claims and arguments to expose this one sided industry where might is not right, in hope that the industry will give greater consideration to all that I have expressed to secure a more stable future for its drivers.

The figures below are a reflection of why drivers are leaving the industry, because the hours and effort that drivers have to work do not justify the return?

It is estimated that the following basic statistics of the average income in most offices is £500 per week for a 6/7 day working week and having to work between 60/80 hours per week, with an estimated £300 in expenses per week including provision for income tax and replacement vehicle every 4/5 years.

Although I cannot claim to be a representative body or union member I have not seen in all my years in the industry any organisation who has expressed on behalf of its drivers the many issues that I have raised and feel it is about time for the industry to reflect on the issues that I have highlighted and investigate the seriousness on behalf of its transparent driver force.

In conclusion and in the light of what I have expressed on the many issues that I have raised, I believe it is now time for the industry to take stock and the necessary steps to overhaul a **tired and draconian industry** and give it a new bill of health. I feel very strongly that the operators need to be given guide lines of fair practice regarding how they are taking advantage of their drivers and profiteering by indiscriminately engaging too many drivers and abusing account work and credit card payments and zealous control of cut pricing of fares.

What I would like to see for the future of the industry is an industry that cares for its drivers and has the will to force the drastic changes that I believe are needed to drive our industry forward into the twenty first century and beyond. As previously stated we are the

biggest industry by sheer numbers and no less professional than the Black Cabs but are treated as inferior and not acknowledged as equal by the huge service that we provide and our importance is possibly greater in transportation values than the Back Cabs. What I and my fellow drivers would like to see is for the industries watch dogs to demonstrate that they have the strength and teeth to take the industry by the scruff of the neck and radicalise us from the way the industry has been allowed to be manipulated by the operators and that you mean business. The operators are only over paid agents who are basically administrators who have had it far too good for to long without any questions being asked regarding their unscrupulous treatment and mismanagement towards its drivers, I feel its time to move on and take control once and for all.

I would like you to ponder over this simple thought!! Who is it that funds our industry at the end of the day and provides the money and wages for the PCO and its operators, quite clearly it is the hard working **drivers who pay licensing fees and rents for the industry to function** and that is why we deserve a better deal from the very people who I believe have benefited most from our toil.

Quoted in Februarys addition of the PHC magazine, TFL advises that between 30th July and 2nd November 2012, there were 2613 new applications were made. The current number of licensed London private drivers is around 66,700 (**The flood gates are open**)

Please find enclosed **few samples** of texts of the many drivers who have contacted the PHC Private Hire & courier magazine with their comments relating to unfair practices by its operators.




Enclosures:

The Reforming of Taxi and Private Hire Services
The Law Commission Ms Jessica Uguccioni & Ms Hanna Gray
HPC Magazine Driver sample Text Cuttings

Intended News Feature in preparation for Media Publication

Dear Sirs,

I refer to the enclosed attachment and hope that you will find it worthy of publication to your readers. Of course you will need to confirm my account by investigative research and I think the best way would be to perhaps talk to 1000 or more drivers to verify with them their own experiences to determine the facts. I have confirmed in my letter that I will be sending this letter to the head of TFL, the Mayor Boris Johnson and the Law Commission for their perusal in the hope that they to will take on board the issues that I have raised and to ask questions in hope that they will look into this matter. I sincerely trust and hope with your help we can make the difference for the future of the industry and its drivers, **where might is not right.**



26th September 2013

The Law Commission

For the attention of Ms Jessica Uguccioni & Ms Hanna Gray

I refer to the recent LPHCA conference and this month's article in the PHC magazine regarding the interim statement of the Law Commissions consultation.

We are a 67000 silent army of drivers who are invisible without a voice or say who cannot be seen or heard.

There has been a great deal of speculation and controversy regarding The Law Commission pending consultation with many differences of opinion over the many issues regarding the future of our industry. What I find disappointing and makes me angry, that the industry cannot be so naive in its evaluation where many of the problems lay, which have been allowed to fester without check, is beyond my comprehension and disbelief.

Many of the issues and arguments that I have highlighted are what drivers have to endure on a daily basis and the reason why there needs to be greater transparency on behalf of the industries drivers.

I appeal to the Law Commission team, that before you deliberate with your final decision process can I ask you to look more closely at the arguments and issues that I have provided in my attached letter (email) to the PCO/ TFL before concluding any final judgement of the consultation.

It appears to me that everyone is scurrying around about cross border technicalities, office records, plying for hire etc, but nobody wants to discuss the human aspects of the drivers who are on the ground and in the front line of the industry, the work force who have not been given any thought of what might be best for them and I believe are once again being side lined as a (closed shop culture) by the industry.

My personal view is that one of the ways forward is to introduce (meter fixed pricing which will stop the control by operators to devalue fares because of competition, at present fares have remained static over the past 5 years since the recession and have not risen in line with inflation whilst costs have spiralled and have had to be absorbed by the drivers. I realise that the Black Cabs will be up in arms and will veto this possibility, but surely they do not have a monopoly to be able to determine our future.

As I have pointed out in my letter to the PCO/ TFL that we are a far bigger industry than they are, therefore we must be freed from this stigma of them being able to hold our industry to ransom from the progress that is needed. It is an injustice to think that the Black Cabs enjoy a stable and fixed fare structure and naturally increase them in line with the rate of inflation and in contrast our fares have declined with an over saturated market of drivers with escalating and extortionate overheads.

I think that we have a bonafide and legitimate argument that needs to be **challenged on the moral grounds of restrictive practice**. So if you ask me what is wrong with our industry I have to say that not only do our drivers have the operators controlling and restricting our progress, we also have the Black Cabs that are pulling their weight over us and I think it is time to free us from all this bureaucratic idiocy and to take off the hand cuffs.

I refer to the enclosed copy letter which I have forwarded for your attention and perusal and trust that you will find the time to read and hopefully it might unlock some of the transparent aspects of our very complex and some times complicated industry issues. I am some what concerned that the industry might lose the significance and importance of this enormous opportunity to make the right decisions that will affect the future of the industry in the years to come.

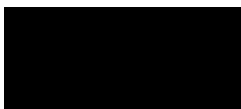
As far as the operators are concerned the outcome of this pending consultation will not have a great affect on their rules of engagement to operate and will carry on business as usual with a licence of impunity of total control, but as far as the drivers are concerned there will not be as far as I can see anything that will improve our conditions on the issues that I have raised.

I appreciate that I have raised many issues that some might consider as controversial but nevertheless feel that they are relevant to our industry and trust that it might help you to view all these related issues from a different perspective and feel that the pending consultation should consider these legitimate issues and arguments and sincerely hope as **quoted by yourselves** that everything is still on the table and not set in stone.

I understand that you are near to completion of your findings but feel that this consultation has to understand and incorporate the seriousness of the many driver issues that exist and trust that these will be taken into account before your final delivery of such an important document that I feel have missed vital issues. It would be a travesty of justice if we were not included as benefactors as the main provider of the service to our industry of this whole process.

What I feel is vital to this consultation and has been overlooked is accountability by the operators and a need for greater transparency and moral understanding towards its 67000 drivers, regarding how the operators and the industry treat its drivers and this must be taken into consideration.

If I can be of any further assistance please do not hesitate to contact me,
I thank you in anticipation and look forward to your response.



4th October 2012 (COPY LETTER)

Dear Sirs,

Reforming the law of Taxi and private hire services

I have been a Mini Cab driver for the past twenty years and feel that my experience, knowledge and views of the present state of the industry, will I hope, contribute towards the changes that I believe are necessary for the future of the industry. I have read the proposals of the proposed consultation and would like to express other areas that I feel have not been given sufficient consideration.

It is true to say that the industry is draconian and has hardly moved on since its inception from the early sixties except that we are now authorised and licensed by the PCO/TFL but other than that we still need to be brought into the 21st century as a professional and creditable service industry, therefore to be more respected by the general public.

I would first like to talk about the drivers who I am sure you will agree are the most important party in all the issues that are proposed as it is the drivers who are in the front line and provide the end product.

I truly believe that not enough consideration has been given to the drivers and if we are at the cross roads of change I sincerely believe that the following issues have to be considered on behalf of all drivers, after all, we are the industry, we are 50,000 strong and hard working drivers who are not appropriately represented and should be given the opportunity to have their say, express their views and to have their grievances heard.

In the past 3 years since the recession, the industry has been in decline and in crisis as many drivers are disgruntled with the present state of the industry and by what has actually taken place. In a recent publication of the PHC magazine, it was stated that 47% of driver applicants that were invited to renew their licenses did not renew them and a similar amount of new drivers applied and entered the industry.

What this demonstrates is simply that experienced drivers have recognised that it is no longer economical or viable to remain in the industry because of the high overheads, long and unsocial hours, which is further compounded with the new 10 year car replacement rule and ever increasing saturation of more and more drivers entering the industry. If you analyse this scenario it indicates that the experienced drivers know better and the new drivers are naïve enough to believe that they can derive a sustainable income, which is no longer the case, particularly for the new wave of drivers entering the industry because they lack the experience.

The constant influx of new drivers coming into the industry has caused fundamental changes and has created an abundance of SATNAV drivers which can only be to the detriment of the general public because they have to rely too heavily on navigation than actual road knowledge, therefore taking longer to get from A to B. Also the ease in which foreign drivers are able to obtain a Private Car Hire Licence has added to the abundance of inexperienced drivers. Not only are they totally reliant on Sat Navs but many lack the ability to speak English and the question has to be asked how did they manage to obtain their licence?

There also exists major issues between drivers and Operators which in my opinion is a more serious issue than the SATNAV issue, but combined is the main cause of the present crisis.

The industry has become an Operators business as they are virtually landlords receiving guaranteed residual weekly income without restriction, which makes it a recession proof business, whereas the drivers' income is in decline, unpredictable and not guaranteed.

Concisely the drivers have no choice but to absorb all the extortionate overheads, whilst the Operators receive a guaranteed recession proof income. How can it be considered as fair and reasonable when the majority of Offices are simply stock piling drivers in excess of the work that they can provide? Carrying more drivers than they have actual work for, which is the case at present, cannot be justified. The consequence of Operators being allowed to engage as many drivers as they wish (in order to profiteer on the back of these hard working drivers), dilutes the drivers ability to earn a reasonable income.

What has been created by the recession is an over supply of drivers due to people being made redundant and deciding to become Mini Cab drivers and in addition foreign workers coming into the UK looking for work. Operators have capitalised and taken advantage of the situation at the expense of the drivers who are paying the price and struggling to get a living. To me this is unacceptable and grossly immoral and unreasonable. The real cause of why experienced drivers are leaving the industry is because they are struggling to make a living due to the over saturation of new drivers coming into the industry and greedy Operators exploiting the opportunity.

I believe that before any consultation is concluded every driver should be contacted in person giving them the option to express their views and dissatisfaction of what they feel about the current state of the industry and what changes they might like to see for the future of their industry. This is a serious matter to be considered and feel very strongly that as the drivers are in the front line and it is they who deliver the service they should have the opportunity to have their say.

At present the drivers do not have any rights or say and now is the time to at least give them the full opportunity to express their democratic point of view and the way they feel as drivers about how the Operators and industry are treating those who at the end of the day execute the service

If you were to ask the majority of drivers how they feel at present I am confident that they would tell you that they see very little hope for the future whilst the Operators are stock piling drivers and exploiting them for profit and the drivers are struggling to make a living having to work 60 - 80 hours per week.

I have to emphasise that it is not the recession that is the main cause for the lack of work and incentive for the drivers. It is the greedy Operators exploiting the situation due to the infiltration of excessive drivers in the market place. Allowing Operators to carry far too many drivers has created declining incomes which is the real cause of the present crisis. Every office carrying far too many drivers is why earnings have fallen and not kept pace with rising costs.

It has often been stated many times over the years how the majority of Operators are seen to be unscrupulous and unfair towards their drivers. They have a 'take it or leave it attitude', because

they know that they can replace any driver that does not like the way many operators take advantage of their drivers and run their businesses. They simply work on a basis of churning over drivers, five out and ten in. The Operators call all the shots and have all the rights in a one sided industry which somehow must start to protect the drivers and listen and hear what they have to say.

The operators exploit and abuse their drivers for profit. An example of this is with account work. They will charge the driver 10 -20% commission of the fare and then charge a further 10 -20% to the customer. The contract between driver and Operator is on the basis that a driver will be charged a given rent and in return the Operator will supply the customers. Why should the operator be able to charge the driver an additional amount when it is his duty and obligation of contract to supply the work for the rent received? We are told by the Operator that the reason for charging commission on account work is for administering the account work. If it is the Operator's contractual duty to supply the customers, how he gets the work and what it costs him is his liability, so why are they able to charge the driver commission for account work? It is common practice for Operators to exploit account work.

Another common practice by Operators is to cut price fares because of competition.

The Operators claim this is to create more work for the drivers when in reality whilst this practice of discounted fares will attract more customers it is of no benefit to the drivers because the Operator will simply take on more drivers. Consequently the drivers have to accept discounted fares at a financial loss so that the operator can expand his business at the driver's expense.

To conclude as far as the Operators are concerned the drivers are simply a commodity that can be manipulated, abused and controlled for gain. It might be difficult for outsiders to understand the real issues that I have raised regarding the way the industry is allowing its drivers to be treated and how it affects the present day drivers and the service that they deliver to the public.

At present the average hours that the majority of drivers are forced to work are between 60 - 80 hours a week, which incorporates having to work weekends to earn a realistic living. The reason for this, as I have already stated, is because their income is being diluted because the Operators are carrying far too many drivers and therefore are forced to work longer hours to compensate.

I would finally conclude that the above issues that I have raised have a direct effect on the drivers who are disgruntled, disillusioned and frustrated because they are working longer hours and struggling to earn a relative living. At present there is a lack of incentive and motivation for drivers, which in turn has an adverse affect on the general public.

I feel that the above is a true reflection of the way that the majority of drivers feel at present and sincerely hope that my views will be considered and help to contribute towards any final proposals for the future of our industry.



RECEIVED

24 SEP 2014

SECRETARIAT

**LONDON ASSEMBLY TRANSPORT
COMMITTEE INVESTIGATION
INTO TRANSPORT FOR LONDON AND
LICENSED TAXI AND PRIVATE HIRE.**

Dear sir/madam,

I am writing this letter in response to your request for all licensed london taxi drivers to share their views & concerns regarding the operations of transport for london (TFL) and licensed taxi and private hire (LTPH)

I am a licensed london taxi driver and have been for almost eight years. Everything that I have written will be of my own personal views/opinions, my own wording and do not have any association with any trade organisations/bodies associated with the london taxi trade.

I will list the topics I wish to talk about in no particular order.

LICENSED LONDON TAXIS;

I have been a london taxi driver for almost eight years and will, without any hesitation, say that I am still immensely proud to be a part of what is widely regarded as the best taxi service in the world. We offer a service that I think is fair to say cannot be bettered anywhere in terms of our professionalism, integrity, our purpose built vehicles and our extensive knowledge of london. Our world famous knowledge is what makes us different from any other service presently on offer to service the general public in our great city of london. All taxi drivers must undertake a series of very hard oral examinations over a number of years to be able to qualify for a licence to then gain the much coveted 'green badge' and drive a london taxi.

Becoming a taxi driver was something I dreamed of doing as a young boy. To drive a black taxi was always regarded as special and honourable and it was something I knew I would one day make happen. I was never under any elusion that undertaking the knowledge was going to be easy, totally the opposite. I knew that it would involve a lot of hard work, endless hours of studying and numerous examinations in order to achieve my goal but it was something I was prepared to do to fulfill my childhood dream. Make no mistake, there were days when I wanted to give it up and throw in the towel. The constant studying, driving around london on a moped in all sorts of weather day and night, not knowing if or when I was ever going to driver a london taxi and all the while I was in a full-time job. But I pushed myself, funded myself and got through what was without doubt the hardest task in my life to date but also my biggest achievement. Nothing could ever prepare me for the task that I chose to undertake but I am glad I chose it and saw it through to the end.

The day that I finally received my licence and green badge was the proudest day of my life and a moment I will cherish forever. Why? Because I had fulfilled my childhood dream of becoming a world famous london taxi driver, respected my many but undertaken by so few and recognised throughout the world as being the best!

Since becoming a taxi driver I have noticed many changes, and not all for the better. The main change that I have never felt was right was for us to be removed from the licencing of the metropolitan police/public carriage office. The rules and regulations were much stricter and the people running it knew how the taxi industry worked and should be operated. Since it was transferred to TFL, I feel that some rules and regulations have been lessened, standards have been dropped and it is being run by people that basically have no idea of how to run the taxi industry efficiently.

My biggest fear is that if sufficient measures are not undertaken to secure and ensure the longevity of the knowledge and the london taxi trade then we will almost certainly become extinct and london will have lost two of the last great bastions of the british empire. Our taxi service/trade is steeped in history and tradition and it would be almost unthinkable for a city like london to be without the iconic london black taxi!

I hope that for as long as im alive, I will never see the demise of my wonderful profession that I am so proud to say I am a part of.

The taxi industry is represented by men & women of all cultures, races & religions and does not discriminate against anyone from wanting to become a london taxi driver. We are not, as some corners of the media would like to portray us, a 'cartel' or 'freemasons' type industry where only 'certain people' are allowed to become a london taxi driver. On the contrary, anyone can become a taxi driver just as long as they work very hard in undertaking the knowledge just like everybody else before them.

LICENSING;

LTPH's licensing procedure is something that needs addressing to enable a fast and efficient process when issuing new or renewed taxi licenses.

It has become common knowledge that drivers have been made to wait months after the expired date of there original licence. This has meant that drivers have been unable to work and therefore unable to earn a living wage to pay there bills. For an organisation the size of LTPH, this is totally unacceptable and need to be addressed immediately.

SAFETY;

The licensed london taxi trades safety record is second to none and our customers feel safe using a london taxi because they know that the driver is fully regulated, insured and has a thorough knowledge of london so that the passenger can be taken to there chosen destination with the minimum of fuss.

Women passengers in particular feel safe using a taxi especially late at night for the same reasons mentioned above. Sexual assaults and serious assaults are virtually non-existent when it comes to the safety records of londons taxi industry.

We also, as a standard requirement, have to go through a criminal records bureau check to make sure that we are who we say we are and that we have no criminal records or prior convictions that would deem us unfit to service the general public.

LTPH;

Over the past few years, we have become very disillusioned with the way our industry is being run by TFL & LTPH. Although we have been constantly told by the mayor of London, TFL & LTPH that we are vital to London's transport infrastructure, we feel that this quite simply is not the case. There is a lot of worry and distrust from the taxi industry towards the operating and licensing authorities due to their very pro-stance towards the private hire minicab industry. They also don't really seem to want to listen to our thoughts and concerns regarding all matters concerning the London taxi trade and transportation system.

It is because of this lack of support from the above mentioned authorities, the taxi trade as a whole feels that eventually London taxis will become a thing of the past and resigned to the history books unless something drastic is done to change the way in which the authorities operate.

In my opinion, the most obvious option would be for the licensed taxi trade to be run and regulated by an independent body, like the old carriage office which was run by the Metropolitan Police, that focuses solely on how to operate and maintain a service with strict guidelines, rules & regulations which EVERYONE must follow without any exceptions.

One example of TFL & LTPH lowering the standards is that they have been issuing licenses to drivers of the London taxi trade and private hire industry who have very little or no understanding of the English language. How can drivers of either format be allowed to transport passengers around London and the suburban areas if they can't communicate with the general public properly and efficiently? Passengers want and need to feel comfortable, confident and safe in the knowing that their driver is knowledgeable of where they are going and any instructions being given out by a passenger are understood fully. This is an example of the licensing authorities giving out licenses without being thorough as to whom they issue them to and as a result, lowering the standards of both the taxi trade & private industry.

It should be a standard requirement for ANY driver of both the London taxi and private hire trades to have an acceptable grasp and understanding of the English national language.

I will give two true examples of the authorities lowering the standards;

1. My father is a licensed private hire driver. On one occasion when he was renewing his licence at the old carriage office in Penton St, a person of another ethnic origin was applying for a licence at the window next to him. The man was unable to communicate with the staff at the window and had an interpreter with him as he spoke little or no English whatsoever.

2. On the evening of the 6th September 2014 a lady flagged me for hire on New Kings Rd SW6. When she got in my taxi, she told me that she turned away a taxi she flagged before me as the driver spoke hardly any English. In her own words, she said to me "it's such a shame that London taxis have lowered their standards".

Personally, I felt sickened and saddened that a regular taxi user would have such an opinion of us.

In my honest opinion, TFL & LTPH are only issuing licenses on the large scale that they do because of the money generated from them. They seem to care more about profit than standards and public safety.

The law commission recently suggested that it should become law and acceptable for a vehicle with a private hire licence to be freely sold with the licence still registered to it. So basically they are saying that if a person buys a vehicle with a private hire licence affixed and registered to it, then the person selling the vehicle doesn't need to surrender the licence and the person buying the vehicle doesn't need to apply for a licence as it is already registered to the vehicle. How then do they expect to know whether the person buying the vehicle has no criminal record and is safe to operate as a private hire driver? Who then is to say that that person won't allow a 'friend' to go out and work as a minicab driver for the night because the licence is only registered to the car, not the driver?

This will mean that the authorities have no idea as to whom is driving a vehicle that they have licensed to operate on the streets of London. The repercussions of this will no doubt lead to an increase in serious and sexual assaults and further increase the risk to public safety.

This issue alone is irresponsible and needs to be addressed and amended without any hesitation.

Private hire licenses are also being issued to vehicles solely for the purpose of the owner not having to pay the central London congestion charge. This again is another example of a licence being issued to a person who is not registered to a private hire operator.

TFL & LTPH seem to have forgotten that they have a duty to ensure that rules, regulations & standards are continuously met and abided by for everyone to follow so that London is serviced efficiently, effectively, professionally & safely by two of the transport systems that they govern.

In a city as vibrant and historical as London, standards should NEVER be compromised.

A complete review/overhaul into the running of TFL & LTPH is required to ensure the above such issues are addressed and rectified so that they never happen again.

AVAILABILITY;

There are presently around 26 thousand licensed London taxi drivers operating day and night in and around central London servicing many different levels of business. During the day our custom is mainly made up of businessmen, shoppers and everyday commuters. During the night, our business is made up mainly of people going out to social events of all types and this in turn leads to a higher demand for taxis. This then means that customers may wait a little longer than normal but they eventually do get a taxi to safely transport them to wherever they want to go. The notion that there isn't enough taxis simply isn't true. It just seems like this is the case but due to higher demand people may wait a little longer than normal.

If for example you suddenly decided to put an extra one thousand taxis on London's streets, you will then find London will have a very large surplus of empty taxis during the day and night, especially at quiet times, all driving around unable to find work, unable to get on a taxi rank and in turn causing increased levels of pollution and congestion. This will also lead to even lower levels of income for a driver to pay his or her bills.

To licence more taxis than necessary would be un-cost effective and very detrimental to the already high pollution & congestion levels in London.

TOUTING;

On a daily basis, we witness all sorts of goings on in and around London, namely illegal toutting and illegal rickshaw activities.

No matter how much we complain or voice our concerns over these activities that are fundamentally a danger to the general public's safety, we still see nothing being done to eliminate these issues regardless of how much the authorities tell us that they are.

Quite simply, I feel that we are being either lied to or the authorities simply cannot get a grip of the situation.

A major factor to consider is the large number of licenses issued to private hire drivers who are NOT registered to a private hire operator. Surely if a driver that requires a licence to be able to accept pre-booked jobs, then he/she needs to be registered to a private hire operator to accept and carry out a pre-booked job?

As I work nights, I can tell you that this is quite simply not the case as for many years now I have seen a major increase in the number of touts standing outside venues or driving along the streets blatantly approaching people and toutting for business. I don't care how insistent the authorities are that enforcement officers are out on the streets trying to combat this epidemic, that fact remains that toutting is of an unacceptably high level and could be addressed if drivers were registered to a licensed operator and the number of licences issued were capped.

TYPES OF VEHICLES;

Our vehicles are purpose built to be able to carry 5 or 6 passengers including luggage and are also designed to accommodate, be user friendly and easily accessible to wheelchair users.

As of 2020, all london taxis are required to be zero emission vehicles. This is a good idea as it will no doubt reduce pollution levels in the capital but the cost of the vehicles that are planned to be available to us are believed to cost anywhere between £40 & 50 thousand pounds. For drivers to be able to afford these vehicles at such a high price would mean our fare prices would need to be increased and this would potentially mean customers looking for other means of transport and a loss of business for taxi drivers. If the mayor wishes to enforce this requirement on us then it would be advisable for him to subsidise the cost of these vehicles. As im sure you know, we are very limited in the choice of vehicle we drive because they are purpose built for our customers needs but expecting us to pay such a huge amount for these vehicles could potentially price us out of business.

A cheaper alternative would be for taxis to be fitted with diesel cleaner kits which have been proven to dramatically reduce harmful diesel emissions. The mayor had previously implemented an age limit on taxis for emissions reasons but it has been proven that the newer taxis that have the required euro5 & 6 emissions specifications are in fact MORE pollutant than the older, perfectly good working taxis that have been/being scrapped. This has meant drivers have been forced to buy new taxis unnecessarily and pollution levels are infact higher because of this huge mistake.

The mayor is clearly determined to reduce londons pollution levels and rightly so, but he has or is being advised very poorly by those who he seeks advice from, particularly when it comes to london taxi issues. I dont really think that he fully understands some of the repercussions of his actions and decisions that can potentially have a detrimental effect on the licensed taxi trade.

TESTING;

Our vehicle testing procedure was unnecessarily watered down from being probably the most strict and stringent vehicle inspection in the country, even the world, to what is now divided into two 6 monthly mot testings which take place literally side by side with private hire vehicles. This was obviously done as a cost cutting measure and in my opinion is totally unacceptable. This is not to say our vehicles are unsafe, far from it, but we have always prided ourselves on being the safest mode of transport in london and I feel that this 'watered down' approach devalues and undermines our reputation.

TAXI RANKS;

Taxi ranks have a very important role to play in connecting taxis with passengers. Taxi ranks are situated in or outside most train & underground stations and are a convenient way for passengers to get a taxi to take them to their destination. Taxi ranks are also situated outside many of London's hotels, theatres, nightclubs & restaurants and taxis use the ranks to service these establishments with great success. But, as London is ever changing and new premises are opened for business i.e., nightclubs etc, more often than not, new taxi ranks are required to service these businesses. This process goes through a ranks committee who then make applications to local councils and LTPH for permission to be granted. For whatever reason, this process can take months, even years to be concluded but in the meantime, private hire vehicles are allowed to freely illegally ply for hire at these venues without any rejections from the authorities, why?

The general public want to know that when they leave a venue there is a taxi rank with taxis servicing it ready to safely take them home without being harassed by an opportunist minicab tout.

Why the procedure of appointing a taxi takes so long is a mystery to me and on some occasions, when a rank is finally appointed, it is normally situated in a position that is neither convenient for taxis or passengers to connect. I believe that these rank appointments are undertaken without proper consultations with the taxi ranks committee, trade organisations and most importantly, the drivers. More often than not these types of decisions are made by people who have little or no knowledge or experience in these matters and therefore give approval to things that end up being an inconvenience or simply don't work instead of listening to those that do have the experience that's needed in these matters.

This way of dealing with the whole process needs to be changed for the benefit of taxi drivers and most importantly the passengers.

FARES AND PAYMENT;

Our fares and charges are something that are governed, implemented and regulated by TFL. Our tariffs are based on the present day costings of running a London taxi i.e. vehicle purchase/hire, maintenance, insurance, road tax etc and are annually increased in line with price indexes and costings. We are not allowed to charge extras on basic fares except over the Christmas and New Year periods when a small extra charge is added but only on permitted days.

With the meter system, a customer knows exactly what they are paying for a journey without any hidden charges.

We have two methods of payments for customer and driver convenience, cash or credit/debit card payment.

E-HAILING;

As technology changes, so do people's needs and in particular, the way people book taxis. It is now more common than ever for customers to book a taxi by using a smartphone so that they can be collected conveniently from wherever they may be. This method has proved hugely successful for customers as they know that they are getting a taxi from their location and, in most cases, the app that they have booked the taxi with already has their credit/debit card details in the system so that they don't have to worry about not having money in their possession and the driver knows that they are guaranteed the fare payment.

This goes along way to prove that the licensed taxi trade is moving with times and is not stuck in the dark ages.

One issue with e-hailing is that it is also being used by the private hire industry, which I believe goes against the rules of an 'instant hail'. If a booking is made by a smartphone, it is deemed an instant hail as the whole process from the customer hailing and driver receiving the hail is instant. But, private hire are only allowed to accept pre-booked jobs and an e-hail is not pre-booked. A booking must be made through an operator with an address, time and name of the passenger in order for the driver to then be able to carry out the booking.

This I believe is something that TFL and the mayor are fully aware of but for some reason or another have done nothing to address. Surely if a rule is put in place then it must be followed to the letter of the law by all concerned?

FINALLY;

May I take this opportunity to thank the transport committee for allowing the licensed taxi trade and its drivers the opportunity to express there thoughts and concerns regarding the taxi trade, private hire, the mayor, TFL & LTPH. It is probably one of the only times that we will have an independent body willing to listen to us and our grave concerns.

From a personal point of view I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to express my thoughts, opinions and concerns regarding the london taxi trade, private hire, the mayor, TFL, LTPH & londons tansport system. Ive waited a long time for an opprtunity like this to arise where I can express my thoughts and concerns to an independent body without fear of being ignored. I hope that this mail gives you something to think about and goes someway towards showing you what a mess londons transport system and licensing authorities are in. The way in which they operate needs to change quite drastically if it is to provide london and its public with a safe, efficient and workable transport syystem not just for now, but for the future of our great city.

And I will reiterate, the licensed london taxi trade is ESSENTIAL to londons future.

kind regards

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of the sender.

licensed london taxi driver