

Note of Transport Committee site visit to observe roadside compliance check of taxi and private hire vehicles and drivers.

Present:

- Transport Committee Members: Valerie Shawcross CBE AM, Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM, Darren Johnson AM, Richard Tracey AM, Victoria Borwick AM
- GLA staff: Lucy Brant, Assistant Scrutiny Manager and Alison Bell, Communications Adviser
- TfL staff: Siwan Hayward, Deputy Director, Enforcement and On street operations (Surface Transport); Cliff Llewellyn, Compliance Manager, Taxi and Private Hire directorate; officers from compliance team
- Officers from Metropolitan Police Service and City of London Police

Overview of site visit

The visit comprised observing a roadside compliance check undertaken as a joint operation by TfL compliance, the Metropolitan Police Service Cab Enforcement Unit and City of London police. It included the inspection of both taxis and private hire vehicles and their drivers to ensure they are licensed and fit for purpose.

Observed activity

A section of road was coned off and targeted vehicles directed in by police officers with the drivers and vehicles then checked against the Taxi and Private Hire licensing system and the police database. Members and TfL compliance staff discussed the aims of this type of compliance check, the frequency of checks, how suitable locations were identified and selected, and were given a demonstration of compliance checks on different types of vehicle (licensed taxi and private hire)

TfL staff indicated that around 10 per cent of checks of this type showed evidence of non-compliance, most commonly vehicle safety aspects. Checks which did not yield compliance issues lasted between three and five minutes.

Private hire checks

Police identified private hire vehicles for checking based on presence of a TfL private hire roundel and/or whether a vehicle appeared to be carrying passengers. Upon being stopped, compliance officers checked the roadworthiness of the vehicle, the licensing status of the driver, whether they were wearing identification badges, and requested details of the pre-booking being undertaken and the destination, which were then cross-referenced by a telephone call to the private hire operator.

Licensed taxi checks

Once police had identified a licensed taxi, officers checked vehicle safety and whether facilities for disabled passengers were working and could be operated correctly by the driver. Members were shown the different facilities available in older taxis and the newer Vito taxis. Drivers also underwent a 'badge and bill' check of their licenses and ID badges.

Co-operation with checks

Compliance staff reported that in general, both passengers and drivers co-operated with compliance checks. For longer stops, compliance officers explained the activity to the passengers and gave them an option to have another vehicle supplied so they could complete their journey.

Contrast between day time and night time compliance activity

Members, TfL staff and police officers discussed the different aims, objectives and methods for night time compliance checks, explaining that there were a larger number of covert (plain clothes) operations at night than during the day as night time compliance was targeted towards activities such as touting and illegal plying for hire. Members discussed whether more visible night time enforcement (for example, against electric rickshaws) might increase perception that enforcement and compliance activity was being more widely undertaken. TfL confirmed that night time compliance activity took place every night of the week in central London.

Location of checks

Officers indicated that locations were selected through intelligence, and took into account factors such as traffic flow and availability of road space to minimise disruption. They also indicated that boroughs had the capacity to make a request for targeted compliance and enforcement activity if they were aware of particular problems in their jurisdictions.

Challenges of enforcement and compliance

Both police and TfL compliance officers were aware of challenges around carrying out enforcement and compliance activities that were both successful and highly visible. Specific challenges including the different powers available to the police and compliance staff; for example, only police have the powers to flag vehicles down. Officers discussed the potential for more technology and other resources to assist in enforcement activities.

Officers also referenced the role of the criminal justice system and the work being undertaken to try and educate sentencing officials on the serious nature of activities such as touting, in the hope that tougher penalties would act as a greater deterrent against illegal activity in the future.