

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Head of Legal and Administrative Services

Licensing Committee – 7 June 2006

Subject: Survey of Demand for Taxis including Wheelchair Accessible Taxis

1. Purpose

- 1.1** To report on the outcome of the survey of demand for taxis including wheelchair accessible taxis which was recently undertaken.

2. Background

- 2.1** At a special meeting of the Licensing Committee which was held on 9 November 2005, consideration was given to a report on the issue of taxi accessibility within the Dumbarton and Vale of Leven Taxi Licensing Zone.

2.2 The Committee agreed:-

- (1) to accede to the request from the representatives of the taxi trade that an independent survey of the demand for taxis be commissioned;
- (2) that the study should consider the statutory test of demand in both the Dumbarton/Vale of Leven and Clydebank zones and the survey would also include an assessment of the demand for the services of wheelchair accessible taxis;
- (3) to note that the cost of the survey would require to be met by the taxi trade although that would not necessarily result in licensing fees having to be increased or the account for the survey being passed to the trade;
- (4) that the previously agreed implementation date of 1 January 2006 for commencement of the move towards 100% wheelchair accessible taxis in the Dumbarton/Vale of Leven zone be deferred to allow the survey to be undertaken and the findings to be reported to a future meeting of the Committee;
- (5) that the representatives of the taxi trade should continue to work to achieve their previously stated preferred option of having 25 wheelchair accessible taxis; this figure should be reached by April 2006 and the trade representatives should continue to liaise with officers in this connection, with any problems being reported back to the Committee; in the event of the trade failing to provide 25 wheelchair accessible taxis by April 2006, the

Committee may require to consider granting a number of new taxi licences for wheelchair accessible vehicles to bring the available number of such taxis up to 25; and

- (6) that officers be requested to provide a report to the earliest appropriate meeting of the Committee giving information on the anticipated timescale for completion of the survey.

2.3 A report was submitted to the meeting of the Licensing Committee which was held on 1 February 2006 advising that, following consultation with representatives of the trade, the Transport Research Institute Taxi Studies Group based in Napier University, Edinburgh had been appointed to carry out the study.

2.4 The Committee was informed that the methodology to be adopted by the consultants would include:-

- At stance observation survey of demand for, and supply of taxi services
- Public attitudes pedestrian survey
- Drivers survey at ranks
- Focus group of operators and licensing authority
- Disability accessibility surveys and consultation with local disability group representatives.

3. The Study

3.1 The study was undertaken during the period February to April 2006.

3.2 The study brief included a survey to establish the presence, or otherwise, of Significant Unmet Demand (SUD), a review of the appropriateness of supply to disabled passengers and an assessment of the ability of the current fleet to deliver appropriate transport supply.

3.2 After an initial Focus Group meeting involving representatives of the trade, the Police and officers of the Council's Licensing Section, the study team carried out observation studies at eight official taxi stance locations within West Dunbartonshire on the basis of both day and night observation and at a number of unofficial ranking places where night time pick up differed from marked ranks.

3.4 Pedestrian surveys were completed in both the Clydebank and Dumbarton and Vale of Leven Taxi Licensing Zones and provide detail of public attitudes and concerns in the supply of taxi services in West Dunbartonshire.

3.5 A further survey identifying the issues in supplying taxis was also undertaken. A questionnaire was sent to all taxi drivers licensed by West Dunbartonshire Council seeking information on work patterns, preferred times of operation and inviting comments on matters affecting their work.

3.6 An access survey questionnaire was distributed with the assistance of West Dunbartonshire Access Panel and provides details of concerns and experiences in the supply of taxis from those with specific access requirements. A further Focus Group meeting was held with representatives of this group.

3.7 The full report on the study by the consultants is appended for information and reference.

4. Study Findings

4.1 On the basis of the research undertaken in the study, the consultants have concluded that neither the Clydebank nor Dumbarton and Vale of Leven Taxi Licensing Zones demonstrate any extent of Significant Unmet Demand. This indicates that the current numbers of licences remain appropriate to the supply of taxis in both zones. In fact there are some indications that the current numbers of taxis exceed the level required to provide an appropriate level of service.

4.2 In relation to taxi accessibility, the consultants concluded:-

- (a) that taxi services performed well in carrying able bodied passengers in both zones and few delays were experienced in engaging taxis by this group;
- (b) that the needs of passengers with specific accessibility requirements were well catered for in the Clydebank zone and the study team observed few instances of significant delay in making use of accessible taxi types. Indeed the use of a fully accessible taxi fleet also appeared to benefit taxi users with shopping and with children's buggies and resulted in significantly faster access times than equivalent journeys in traditional saloon vehicles where the collapsing of buggies was necessary;
- (c) that observed use and reported issues in the use of saloon vehicles suggests this type of taxi is less favourable to those with specific access needs, as well as those with children's buggies or large amounts of shopping;
- (d) that identifiable benefits would exist were taxi services in the Dumbarton and the Vale of Leven zone supplied by accessible taxi vehicles; and
- (e) that an immediate need exists for 23 Accessible Taxis to be provided in the Dumbarton and Vale of Leven zone and consideration should be given to a move to a fully accessible fleet over time.

4.3 The study supports the concept that a graduated introduction of accessible vehicles represents the most appropriate method of achieving a fully accessible fleet, with vehicles being replaced with

accessible taxis at the time when they are due to be replaced due to their age.

- 4.4** The report also indicates that there would be merit in considering the long term benefit of moving to a single taxi licensing zone. In the opinion of the consultants, such a move would be logical where both zones have a fully accessible fleet.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1** The finding of the study that there is no SUD in either of the Licensing Zones justifies the policy which the Licensing Authority has operated for a number of years whereby no new licences have been approved.
- 5.2** The findings of the study in relation to the issue of accessible taxis in the Dumbarton and Vale of Leven zone also provides justification for the decision which was previously taken by the Council to require all taxis to be wheelchair accessible by 1 January 2009.
- 5.3** Should the recommendation of the consultants that there should be a long term move to a fully accessible fleet in the Dumbarton and Vale of Leven zone be accepted, consideration would require to be given to the timescale to be adopted.
- 5.4** At present, it is Council policy that the maximum age for saloon vehicles to be operated as taxis is eight years from date of first registration. Acceptance of the recommendation of the consultants that a move towards a fully accessible taxi fleet should be facilitated by saloon vehicles being replaced by accessible vehicles when they reach the maximum permitted age would ensure a more gradual move to full provision of accessible taxis.
- 5.5** If the consultant's recommended approach is accepted, it is considered that the requirement for vehicles to be replaced with accessible taxis which was due to come into effect on 1 January 2006, but which was deferred, should become effective after a short period of grace. In this regard it is considered that an implementation date of 1 August 2006 would provide the trade with adequate notice of the requirement.
- 5.6** On the basis of the recommended approach, the provision of a fully accessible taxi fleet in the Dumbarton and Vale of Leven zone would be achieved by August 2014.
- 5.7** As indicated in paragraph 2.2 above, at the meeting of the Licensing Committee on 9 November 2005 the Committee agreed that the trade should continue to work towards providing 25 wheelchair accessible taxis in the Dumbarton and Vale of Leven zone and that this figure should be achieved by April 2006. In fact, in the period from November 2005 to the present, there has been an overall reduction in the number of accessible taxis operating in the zone, from 12 to 11. This would

appear to cast doubt on the ability of the trade to fulfil any requirement which may be set by the Council on a self-regulating basis.

6. Recommendations

6.1 It is recommended that the Committee agrees:-

- (a) to note the finding of the study that there is no SUD in either the Clydebank or Dumbarton and Vale of Leven Taxi Licensing Zones;
- (b) to note the findings of the study in relation to the issue of accessible taxis in both the Clydebank and Dumbarton and Vale of Leven zones;
- (c) to accept the recommendation of the consultants that there should be a long term move to a fully accessible fleet in the Dumbarton and Vale of Leven zone;
- (d) that with effect from 1 August 2006, all taxis in the Dumbarton and Vale of Leven zone which are being replaced be replaced with fully accessible vehicles; and
- (e) that the matter of the two existing taxi licensing zones in West Dunbartonshire being amalgamated be the subject of further consultation with the trade and a report on the issue be prepared for consideration at a future meeting of the Committee.

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Head of Legal and Administrative Services

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Background Papers:

1. Report to special meeting of the Licensing Committee held on 9 November 2005.
2. Minutes of special meeting of the Licensing Committee held on 9 November 2005.

3. Report to meeting of the Licensing Committee held on 1 February 2006.
4. Minutes of meeting of the Licensing Committee held on 1 February 2006.
5. Report on Study of Taxi Supply in West Dunbartonshire by Transport Research Institute Taxi Studies Group, Napier University, Edinburgh.

Wards Affected: All Wards.

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