

BUS LANES or PUBLIC TRANSPORT LANES?

The LPHCA launched its formal campaign to get the use of London's Bus lanes in January 2004.

This article starts the process of setting out the overwhelming case for bus lane usage by Licensed London Private Vehicles in London.

Before setting out the case for bus lane usage we need to change the mindset of what a bus lane is, what it is there to do and why the name bus lane should be confined to history.

On the road network there are various modes of Public Transport – Bus, Coach, Taxi and Private Hire.

The only mode that is a true provider of real 'door to door transport' is the Private Hire Vehicle that exclusively can only be pre-booked to take people 'door to door'.

Bus lanes at first were just for buses, great idea but other public transport modes were effectively slowed down in the traffic displaced by the bus lanes.

Soon the Taxi Industry and their passengers were up in arms because journey times, and as a result fares, were increasing because of this discrimination. Rightly, forward thinking regulators and authorities allowed use for licensed taxis in bus lanes. Eventually more and more authorities realised it was quite discriminatory and wrong not to allow Private Hire Vehicles into these lanes to enable the whole of the passenger moving transport to get the public moved around.

As delivers of people to shops, hospitals, schools, work, transport termini and their homes, it is essential that Private Hire Vehicles will be allowed into 'bus lanes'.

Where Taxi and Private Hire has been allowed into the 'bus lanes', journey times have been reduced and the cost to the customer has fallen on metered fares. Other benefits are reduced pollution and a much greater incentive to leave the private car at home.

A private hire vehicle can do 20 to 30 short link-up journeys in a day and this means a great reduction for car usage for those who choose to leave their cars at home. It also means that passengers can be met far more easily and the scope of where a PHV can travel to and pick up from is much increased.

The case for usage of bus lanes becomes complete for London's Private Hire Industry when the final vehicle is licensed and identifiable as a PHV next year.

We mentioned earlier that the name bus lane should become redundant as taxis and PHVs are already using them. We think the term Public Transport Lanes is more appropriate.



Future Testing and Training for Taxis and PHVs

The LPHCA was invited at the end of March, to an evening meeting in London with two Government Ministers – Tony McNulty, Transport Minister and Ivan Lewis, Minister for Skills and Vocational Education.

It is difficult to get meetings with any senior Minister due to their heavy workloads, so when you get an invite to have dinner with two of them you have to attend.

The reason the two Ministers were needed was because their respective portfolios of transport and vocational education cannot fail to cross paths. In London and elsewhere there will certainly be a great deal of interest in what qualifications, if any are required in The Taxi and Private Hire Sectors in the future.

Between these two Ministers their respective briefs cover a whole range of sectors and the meeting was attended by a host of very big players in the Transport sector. Bus, Coach, Taxi, Rail, Air and Marine were all represented, so with training and testing coming our way soon, there was much to glean.

Ed Thompson Director of Taxi and Private Hire was present, with Dennis Conyon representing the National Taxicab Association.

Whilst Ed looks at matters from the regulators point of view, Dennis expressed great concern at how training and testing should be required and delivered, to what in the main, is a self-employed workforce.



Tony McNulty



Ivan Lewis

There is also a 'who qualifies who with what' debate going on at the moment and at what cost. Go skills has formally applied for the licence to be the recognised Sector Skills Council (SSC) for the Passenger Transport Sector. Their remit is to raise the level of skills and learning across passenger transport industries, including Private Hire and Taxi.

From our perspective there is a lot of work to do in this area and Ministers appeared to be cautious about which direction qualifications, training and awarding will go.

The LPHCA is very concerned that the Board for Go Skills is appropriately represented in our interests, and that as a predominantly self-employed sector, Taxi and Private Hire are appropriately supported and funded.

This meeting was informal but very useful and we would like to thank both Ministries for the invite. With training and testing a looming hot topic in London we will be keeping a watching brief on developments in this area and making sure that gravy trains are not created to test for testing sake at little or no benefit to the industry or the travelling public.