

PRIVATE HIRE NEWS

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The news magazine of the Graded Private Hire Companies
Incorporating the London and Southern Private Hire Car Associations

Welcome to edition 35 of **Private Hire News**. As we published in the previous edition of the magazine, from **1st April 2006** all **New Private Hire Drivers** in London will need to undergo a **topographical assessment**, which is a necessary requirement under **Section 13 (3)** of the **1998 Private Hire Vehicles (London) Act**:-

The Secretary of State shall require applicants to show to his satisfaction (whether by taking a test or otherwise) that they possess a level (a) of knowledge of London or parts of London; and (b) of general topographical skills, which appear to him as appropriate.

The Secretary of State may impose different requirements in relation to different applicants.

The LPHCA and The Private Hire Board, had of course, successfully negotiated 'Grandfather Rights' for existing drivers and that covered all Drivers 'Licensed' or given a 'Temporary Permit' by TfL prior to April 1st 2006.

After a lot of hard work, negotiation and dialogue this year, followed by our stormy meeting at The National Union of Teachers in Saint Pancras at the end of January, we are delighted to say that sensible proposals, with a workable and an appropriate solution for the delivery of topographical assessments, has now been achieved.

This followed some important changes that revert back to the original concepts and proposals that we had all worked so hard for on The Private Hire User Liaison Committee (The PHULC) between 2000 and 2002.

We were originally very troubled to see that the original documentation had, in Alan Matthews words, been 'enhanced' from what had previously been agreed 'in principle' by The PHULC.

Some of the 'enhancements', which had caused so much misunderstanding, have now been removed. The LPHCA pointed out that it was never a requirement of the 98 Act to know the location of places like teaching hospitals or random landmarks, as many Private Hire Drivers will simply never drop at or visit.

So many thanks to Alan Matthews and The PCO for producing what is now far more appropriate for the industry via a topographical skills assessment specification that is realistic rather than unnecessarily onerous.

Once the specification had been clarified, it gave The LPHCA the opportunity to provide a 'High-Tec', 'Low-Cost' solution for delivery of these assessments by Licensed Operators.

In just three weeks The LPHCA has produced software in conjunction with a very old friend Alan Haslehurst who, with other founder members, when we were down to just a dozen member companies reformed The LPHCA into its current format.

Alan did most of the ground work for the first editions of Private Hire News and other projects, but due to the workload of running a North London Company, producing useful software for the Industry and having The IRA blow up two of his driver's cars in the early 90's, sadly he had to resign.

The good news is that in conjunction with The LPHCA and our Graded Member Companies, Alan has produced a fantastic piece of topographical assessment software that meets all the requirements of The PCO and much more.

This will enable every Graded Member of the Association, with the appropriate infrastructure to be capable of delivering the topographical assessments that are now required for all new drivers.

The LPHCA Topographical Assessment Software is fully reviewed and explained as the lead story in this edition of Private Hire News.

We also mentioned in our last editorial that TfL would be introducing into Parliament a

Private Bill covering many aspects of Transport in London.

After our AGM in January The LPHCA officially objected to the clause in this TfL Private Bill, which would have required *all drivers to carry a paper licence as well as wearing a badge.*

After a couple of visits to Parliament by Robin Hulf (our political advisor) and helpful dialogue between TfL Lawyers, Roy Ellis (Head of the PCO) and The LPHCA team, we secured the clause's removal. Details of our objection and the progress of the TfL Private Bill, which does have some very good news in it, are also featured in this issue of Private Hire News.

Since the last edition, we have had two members meetings on topographical assessments on The R S Hispaniola, two meetings at City Hall, two meetings at The Public Carriage Office, a visit to The Lambeth Minicab Forum and a successful planning appeal for Handicars at Lewisham.

I have also met up with several Graded Member Companies, who have had difficulties at PCO Inspection Visits. As a consequence I have also had a great deal of dialogue with our Lawyers and The PCO regarding legislation and the interpretation of Operator Regulations and Requirements.

It is my view in recent months, that the compliance visits by The PCO have lost their way.

Whilst I have had talks both 'on and off the record' with The PCO and Senior Officials about this subject, I think it is now time for a very public debate about Operator Licensing and its policing / enforcement. In particular we need to look at the purpose, interpretation and effectiveness of regulations and how compliance and enforcement are working.

I think there is also a statutory duty to have a look at the regulatory impact on Operators and their businesses alongside the associated consequences for the Travelling Public.

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