

Private Hire Board



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Chairman Private Hire Board

Driver Licence Renewals

The first licence renewals for some drivers have arrived, including mine. The Public Carriage Office (The PCO) is now sending out renewals for the early licensed driver allowing just 21 days for the return of the application.

Very worryingly they state,

“If you fail to return the application by this date you run the risk of temporarily losing your right to work as a London Private Hire Driver”.

I find this statement to be very worrying as what happens if a driver is on holiday when the form arrives? Worse still, like mine the documentation arrives incomplete! As I am over 45 and the PCO know this, they should also know that I require a medical, but as you probably guessed there is no medical form enclosed.

Believing this to be a minor problem I simply phone **The Public Carriage Office** however I then spend all day long getting the ‘Oh you’re a **Private Hire Driver**, there’s no one to talk to you’ message. That meant all day Friday was wasted as I cannot even phone my doctors for an appointment, who in fairness is probably slower than the **PCO**.

At best that means it will be Tuesday at the earliest that I receive the form, most likely Wednesday, assuming that on Monday someone at the **PCO** will actually answer a Telephone. I then have just 16 days to send the form back.

Once I get the form I can then phone the doctor, knowing the average appointment time is two – three weeks wait for a medical, so at best I will get the form back with a day to spare. If I happened to be a full time driver my family starves for a week assuming that the **PCO** only take the eight weeks they have allowed for them to process the application.

Fortunately I am here and not on holiday otherwise there could be only a week to complete the application process.

I have spoken to **Roy Ellis Head of The PCO** and asked for him to address the situation, as Taxi licensing allows them to work on a temporary license while their renewal application is processed.

No driver should be stopped working while bureaucracy runs its slow course. Yes there must be a date to get the application in by, but please give us a realistic amount of time to process the renewal.

Topographical Assessments

On a far more positive note I started doing the first driver topographical assessments this week and although I had been approved for my own paper based system I decided to use the brilliant new **LPHCA** software to deliver the test.

The **LPHCA** software, which is only available to **Graded LPHCA members** and **affiliated LPHCA partners**, gives every operator with the infrastructure and a basic computer, the ability to do what we all worked so hard for – have the right to assess drivers for topographical skills.

My company registered early, realising that this requirement was on its way and it only required us to do what we had always done, assess a driver’s ability and suitability to be a **Private Hire Driver**.



Alongside a dozen of so other **LPHCA Graded Companies** I had registered as a beta tester, so I had already used the software, which is easy to use and improving with every release. **Alan Haslehurst** came over with the latest version and it does everything that it says on the tin, or rather in the manual.

We decided to prepare drivers by issuing (prior to the assessment); open learning / self help material, which sets out what the driver needs to know, including comprehensive documentation on reading and indexing the **Geographers A-Z Master Atlas**, route planning, etc.

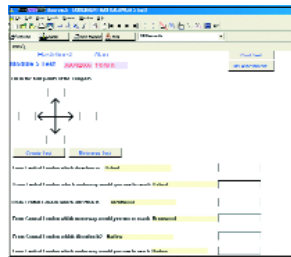
The software was brilliant but the first problem arrived when the driver hadn’t brought any form of identity or his driving licence, even though we had emphasised this point when the driver made the booking. As a company we shall in future ring drivers either on the day or on the evening before the assessment to make sure they bring the correct documents.

The first driver had travelled quite a long way to get to us, so I decided to do a test run, firstly to put the driver at ease before he returned with his documentation and secondly to see how the system worked with someone new from outside the industry.



The Driver requested the E1 postcode, which is not in our normal area of operation but as soon as we entered the postcode area the system popped out with a full test based on E1. The driver handled short medium and long routes with confidence and it all looked plain sailing, however as we started *module 5* the driver seemed to struggle on the counties part of the assessment.

As this was a practice and *module 5* is not mandatory, it seemed to be an ideal opportunity for everyone to learn and as always customer feedback is vital to any situation.



The driver was of Bangladesh origin and although born in U.K. he could not grasp what was required. I point this out so that those who are delivering the topographical assessment can make sure that questions are written so that people from outside the trade can understand the meaning.

A quick training session followed and some homework and open learning material was given to the driver, which enabled him to return the next day and complete the assessment without problem.

In my view you should ideally allow at least two to three hours for the assessment process, (although some drivers will be quicker) as by the time you have checked the documentation, filled out the necessary forms and made the candidate comfortable, you will have used this time.

As a company we have made the decision to assist drivers at this stage by filling in and checking the PCO application. We do this to hopefully speed up the process when the documents arrive at the PCO for the issue of temporary permit.

In my view, very often a few minutes of time spent checking the documents can save days of difficulties later. With four assessments completed inside the first three days, two first time certifications were achieved with two further certifications following return visits.

Formalising a process that we have always carried out with new drivers and bringing them into the industry with a greater knowledge of how to use maps, mapping and route planning processes, will make life easier in the long term.

The LPHCA software makes this process very easy and when it is developed further it will no doubt be used to train as well as assess drivers.

Lambeth Minicab Forum

Attending the **Lambeth Minicab Forum** recently I was sadly reminded at how apathetic many people are within the industry. I heard drivers and operators moan about the difficulty of picking up and dropping off and much more including the "weather" but when the forum made a good suggestion about getting passengers to sign up to say how much they had been inconvenienced by red route rules, etc., only one forum member company with its drivers had actually bothered.

Come on everyone if you want to have parity with **Taxis** you need to have a strong lobby and get motivated to help get things done. We all need to work together, supporting forums, trade associations and **The Private Hire Board**. Less moaning and more action please.

On the positive side I have been invited to sit on the red route forum and represent **Private Hire** so at long last we shall have representation about these routes. I will keep you informed as we progress.

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