

I have read the consultation document and below are my thoughts on it.

Terry Hill (Proprietor of Castle Cars since 1995)

Probation Drivers Badge.

I am in favour of and fully support this

Colour of Hackney Carriage Vehicles.

Although in Favour of tighter colour specifications I also feel that the committee could look at other options rather than restricting the colour of vehicles such as having the Car Bonnet a different colour. This is easily and cheaply done now by vehicle wrapping and would make TMBC licenced vehicles easily recognised. This would also mean that vehicles from other boroughs / unlicensed vehicles would also be more easily recognised. It would also stop the practice of TMBC licensed cars being used illegally in other areas, something which I know is going on.

Signed conditions for each applicant

I am in favour of and fully support this

Enforcement

I feel that there should be maximum enforcement of the regulations, both by visible and covert means, with the strongest possible penalties for continued breaches of regulations

Medicals

I do not believe that a medical every three years is necessary until the age of 50. I believe this should stay 'as is'

Age limits for licensed vehicles

I am strongly against the age limits as proposed and for the following reasons and explanation.

Until two years ago my company bought brand new vehicles at a cost of between £16000 and £30000 per vehicle. The cost of these vehicles had to be financed over a four year period at around £450pm per vehicle. My vehicles do an average of 80,000 miles per annum, meaning that after 4 years they would have done in excess of 300,000 miles. Obviously the maintenance costs on a vehicle of this mileage would also be very high. By the time they were just over 4 years old they would effectively be sold for scrap value or not much more.

Because of the recession and the need to try and save money in order to stay afloat I stopped buying new vehicles, instead opting to buy used cars around 6-10 years old but with mileage of around 40-80k and full service history. I could buy cars like this in very good condition for between £3000 and £5000. After between one and two years use they would still have a mileage of no more than 200k and I could then sell them on for around £500 to £1000 in good condition and at lower mileage than my previous 'new' cars. No car is now kept for more than two years. My maintenance bills were

lower and the mechanical condition of the cars was far better. Despite using older cars my maintenance bill has come down by around 25% and I am also saving many thousands on the cost of the vehicles. For the first time in 18 years my company is now making a small profit, and in a recession.

If we are forced to buy newer vehicles at higher cost then we are going to be forced to use them for longer periods, and there will be temptations among some to try and save money by skimping on maintenance. I feel it would be far better to allow these older vehicles but with tighter controls and more regular MOT's on them. I would propose testing every 4 months on vehicles between 6 and 10 years old and for no vehicle older than 12 years to be permitted. I would also ask that the maximum age for first time licensing be 8 years and not 6 as proposed. I would welcome an inspection by any member of the committee on my vehicles to show that some older vehicles are indeed in better condition than many newer ones.

Other suggestions

I have long been suggesting that all Hackney and Private Hire vehicles also have their plate number below the TMBC logo in large letters. This would make it easier for any member of the public to take this number should they have an issue that they wish to refer to yourselves. The direct dial number for the Licensing Dept should also be visible. The current system with just a small number on the windscreen and below the rear number plate does not make it easy to take these details.

I suggest that future testing of vehicles should include the internal condition of the cars. A recent discussion with the MOT tester that I use highlighted the fact that he tests many vehicles that have ripped and dirty seats, torn carpets and grubby roof and door linings. He is powerless to fail these vehicles as this is not part of the MOT or compliance test. I feel that there should be a minimum standard applied to this, and in addition that all vehicles should be presented with the interior clean of litter etc.

My drivers and office staff get numerous complaints from passengers that they have had other taxi's where the driver has been unable to either speak or understand basic English. This has made it difficult for them to explain where they wish to go, and that when they have a problem (often regarding the fare) that the driver then 'does not understand'. We need stricter controls on this and all drivers should have to speak fluent English.

I know that the councillors sitting on this committee lead very busy lives and give up a lot of their time for our benefit, but could I also suggest that they occasionally make themselves available to accompany enforcement officers on random visits to the boroughs taxi ranks. They could then witness first hand the issues that they are on this committee to deal with. I feel it would help to give them a better understanding of the trade. Over the past 3 years I feel that the gap between 'them and us' has closed considerably, with some giant strides being made in the right direction. I hope that this can continue.

Terry Hill