

Mark

Thank you for your email and including me for feedback. I really appreciate it.

There are serious issues with availability for wheelchair accessible vehicles and it's something I have been working on for another of months to try and secure more wheelchair accessible vehicles in our fleet. We've even purchased two of these types to vehicles to rent to drivers due to their expense.

I do not believe adding more wheelchair accessible Hackney plates will help. Customers who need to travel in this type of vehicle will require to be arranged in advance and not hail one from the street. However, moving all hackney carriages to disabled friendly may work as it may push these drivers to then work for an operator to increase their income.

I think working with larger operators, Radio, West Quay and Door 2 Door would benefit in providing and adequate level of Wheelchair accessible vehicles. Maybe if there was a grant for drivers to move to Electric / Wheelchair these London type taxis are perfect for this.

- What is the demand for wheelchair accessible taxis in Southampton? – In your view are there enough wheelchair accessible taxis in Southampton? **There is a huge demand for this, and there is not enough wheelchair accessible taxis in Southampton.**
- Thoughts with regards to encouraging an increase in the number of wheelchair accessible taxis in Southampton and, if supported, how this could be achieved? **Possible grants to move to wheelchair accessible. Both PH and Hackney.**
- Plans to increase the number of wheelchair accessible vehicles within your fleet? **We are trying to increase our fleet all the time, and lower our fees to entice them to join us, due to the large costs involved in purchasing a vehicle.**
- Thoughts on Southampton City Council following the approach taken by Cheshire West and Chester Council and requiring all licensed hackney cabs to be wheelchair accessible by a set time? **This is a great idea, but it would help if there was grants for drivers to switch due to the costs involved.**

Would more than happy to work with Southampton City Council coming up with ideas in which we can provide better transport for those less able.

Kind regards

Simon May
Chief Executive Officer
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Mark,

I found your correspondence on accessible taxis very interesting. Before I answer your questions, I would like to give you some background information that you might be unaware of?

Southampton as a council was one of the first councils on the south coast in December 1989 to issue eight hackney carriage licences for purpose built wheelchair accessible vehicles. I was one of those fortunate recipients but due to an accident (not my fault) in 2018 I had to sell my wheelchair plate. However, I am still in the trade as a private hire operator but also as chair of the SHPHA representing the hackney carriage trade.

Between February 1990 and June 1990, these eight vehicles were put on the road in Southampton, all fitted with ramps which were stored in the boot. Three of the vehicles were the MetroCab constructed of glass reinforced plastic (GRP) fitted with the Ford transit engine. The remaining five were the famous London style taxi, which was called the Fairway and that was introduced in February 1989 as the first disabled hackney carriage (fitted with a Nissan engine)

If you visit my wedding website, www.hallsweddingtaxi.co.uk, you will see my white fairway taxi that I use for weddings.

Both designs of vehicles had either a yellow or red interior grab handle, with colour coded seats identifiable for the partially sighted and a hearing loop system for the hard of hearing (an intercom). We had restraining wheelchair straps to secure a chair in the back of the vehicle.

As a matter of interest, between 1989 and 2018 I had twelve disabled hackney carriages of different designs.

To answer your questions -

We now have seventy disabled taxis in Southampton, to the best of my knowledge none of the drivers have been on a disabled course to load and offload wheelchairs correctly? Some of the drivers have actually taken the ramps out of their vehicles because basically they do not want to do disabled work?

With the cruise industry starting up again, I do get calls from customers through our website www.southamptontaxis.org, (the 023 number goes straight through to my mobile) asking whether we can supply a wheelchair accessible vehicle to take them to and from the docks? Unfortunately, my reply is often, no we are unable to help, mainly because these customers need a ramp because they are in an electric wheelchair and you really need to pre-book.

Because of the pandemic if you wanted to put an order in for a wheelchair hackney carriage vehicle, you would have to order now to get one for March 2022 at the earliest.

The Southampton private hire trade should have more accessible disabled vehicles than we have at the moment. I do not think we should follow the approach taken by Chester Council and there has been an extension of Euro 5 WAV vehicles in Southampton before they have to be replaced.

If you visit Snows garage in Millbrook, Southampton, they are the agents for the LEVC which is fitted with a ramp. It is a hybrid vehicle and although there are other products on the market, the price of a LEVC vehicle is £56,000.

I hope my submission is of some assistance.

Regards,

Ian Hall

CHAIRMAN

Southampton Hackney and Private Hire Association (SHPHA)

Southampton Hackney Taxi and Private Hire drivers in our City

www.southamptonhackneyassociation.co.uk

Hi

Thank you for copying me into this email.

I'm wondering that why is it always the Hackney trade that are expected to have a high percentage of wheelchair accessible vehicles?

It was proposed a while ago that every private hire operator should have on their fleet a high percentage of wheelchair accessible vehicles but this never happened as I understand it Uber have very few if any such vehicles on their fleet.

If this City is serious about providing a good reliable taxi / private service to wheelchair users then the pressure should be on these bigger companies surely?

But I'd just like to add that I drove wheelchair accessible vehicles for many years in Southampton. I can honestly say that I would probably get flagged down maybe twice in a year by someone needing a wheelchair vehicle. I agree whole heartedly that people that are confined to wheel chairs should be able to call a cab whenever they need. I'd like to bet you that if you tried to book a cab from one of the bigger companies in Southampton in advance you'll be told to call back on the day.

Sorry but I'm quite passionate about this

Kind regards

Steve Paul

Clifford Cars Ltd

Dear Mark,

I am a taxi driver/taxi rep in Portsmouth and have been involved in the industry since 1976. I fit all taximeters in Portsmouth and our garage fits approx 75% of cctv in HCV and PHV. I drive my taxi on a for a few hours on a Saturday night and a longer shift on the Sunday during the day.

I am hands on 7 days a week I understand the needs of the industry the ups and downs and I know the majority of the drivers.

Portsmouth has approx 800 ph cars and 234 hacks (150 saloon and 84 Wav). once in a blue moon would I see a wheelchair customer go to a rank and I don't know if ever I have seen a WAV be flagged by one.

Southampton, in not sure of your numbers but I assume similar to Portsmouth, you state 25% of HCV are WAV's, I assume this would be somewhere in the region of 60/70, well if its anything like Portsmouth, some HCV's have gone years without having to use the ramps.....The need for HCV as WAV's is virtually non existent.

Like Pompey, if Wheelchair users went to a rank I'm sure there would be one available. Generally a Wheelchair user will make a phone call (this becomes PH work), I feel that you need to ask PH companies to increase their WAV fleet. But as we know some of these vehicles are cost prohibitive and work is restricted by not being able to carry some ambient disabled customers and indeed some customers request saloon car only.

The industry has been on its knees and much of the time is unsustainable without benefit top ups. Perhaps your good self could ask UBER how many WAV's they have access to?

In my opinion any increase in WAV's would dilute what little work the drivers have now, 99.9% of the time HCV/WAV's are used for normal run of the mill taxi work, not wheely jobs.

An old saying YOU MUST RETAIN QUANTITY TO RETAIN QUALITY, Sadly in Portsmouth if you get a HCV, unless you are going to a main road or hospital etc you will need to tell driver postcode.

You say in Chester they are 100% WAV, it would be interesting to know how the elderly lady with a frame or walking stick gets into say a Tourneo WAV or VX vivaro or similar?

Thanks for taking the time to read, and can you bring contents to all interested parties

kind regards

Viv

Viv Young

Hi Mark,

Answers below:

1. What is the demand for wheelchair accessible taxis in Southampton? – In your view are there enough wheelchair accessible taxis in Southampton?
2. Thoughts with regards to encouraging an increase in the number of wheelchair accessible taxis in Southampton and, if supported, how this could be achieved?
3. Plans to increase the number of wheelchair accessible vehicles within your fleet?
4. Thoughts on Southampton City Council following the approach taken by Cheshire West and Chester Council and requiring all licensed hackney cabs to be wheelchair accessible by a set time?

1. In the unmet demand survey for hackney carriages in 2018 the report notes responses from mobility impaired representatives said most “had an established relationship with a preferred supplier. There were few problems with availability. Most trips were booked in advance. Trips which required a wheelchair accessible vehicle were generally well catered for, by regular providers.” That said my contact with Spectrum suggests there are issues with obtaining a wheelchair accessible vehicle, particularly at school run times. My overall assessment is there is insufficient numbers of wheelchair accessible vehicles in the fleet.

2. It would be good to see an increase in the number of wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAVs) but there is no easy answer, is a national issue and becomes extremely complex when trying to resolve. We have capped the number of hackney carriages at 283, plates 214 to 283 are required to be WAVs. We have just adopted a hackney plate allocation policy requiring if any of the plates from 001 to 213 are not renewed and therefore become available as a new licence then any vehicle placed upon it will need to be a WAV. I do not expect very many plates to become available over the next few years. We have just adopted a slight change in our vehicle conditions to extending the need for any WAV with a Euro 5 diesel engine to not need replacing until 2024 compared to 2022 for a standard vehicle. This will allow 40 WAVs to remain licensed with us that would otherwise be lost. The purchase and running of a WAV is considerably more than a standard saloon vehicle, which is why we have such a low number of WAVs as private hire vehicles. Any move to require private hire vehicles to be WAVs will simply result in licence holders moving to another authority with no such requirement. As a comparison the requirement to have a Euro 6 diesel engine has resulted in a substantial number of licence holders going to a nearby authority with no age limit or engine requirements, these vehicles are Euro 5 diesel but continue to work in the city.

3. We have just adopted the two policies mentioned in item 2. See item 4 on why there are no other current plans.

4. This will be a significant change for the trade to contend with and will be fiercely resisted by them. The evidence to support this change will need to be robust as it is likely to be subject to a stern legal challenge probably by way of judicial review. The last unmet demand survey did not have evidence to support such a change, weakening any case to

approve this change. It is also likely to result in a number of licences being surrendered reducing the overall supply of hackney carriages in the city. Even with a long lead in time of 6 years the trade is likely to struggle to meet this. Requiring a proportion to be WAV is even more difficult, how do we choose which plates need to be WAV? Whatever is chosen again is going to be open to a legal challenge that is likely to be successful. The only route I can see that may be successful would be to increase the cap on hackney carriages and require whatever number we increase the fleet by to be WAVs. This will still attract a stern challenge from the trade and the unmet demand survey does not show any unmet demand so we would be asking people to invest into an expensive vehicle to purchase and operate in a business where it is recognised there is limited demand, this will be a hard sell to anyone financing such a scheme. My view is this will also attract a legal challenge probably by way of judicial review. I am in the process of organising the next unmet demand survey and can ask they look at this in more detail. The survey is likely to take place in April/May 2022, the timing is important and needs to cover when the cruise industry is operating and students are in the city.

Phil Bates
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