

16th May 2013

T Nichols
Head of Licensing
Brighton & Hove City Council
Norton Road
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Dear Mr Nichols

Accessibility Policy Review

We have a number of observations and suggestions in respect of the Accessibility Policy which is in preparation. The on-line consultation questionnaire did not permit of detailed comment so we expand our views herein. We did note that the on-line consultation was labelled 'for hackney carriages' but assume it will also cover Private Hire.

There are global issues:

- Mention is made of research commissioned by the DfT into taxi design and subsequent issue of guidelines which "have been used to inform the suggested content for the accessibility policy..."

This tends to confirm our assumption that the on-line consultation was, in effect, an initial draft for the proposed policy. However, we have been unable to trace a source for a copy of either the initial research report or of the DfT guidelines issued. As you will see below, the consultation wording presents anomalies which may or may not be consequent upon the guidelines. There are also dimensions quoted for various elements but without reference to their source or to any underlying research which gives rise to them. Could you provide this information to us?

- Much of the 'draft policy' is culled – or even copied directly – from the Rugby Borough Council Licensing and Wheelchair accessible policies (v1.2 2012). Whereas these policies are already in force, it seems odd that an Authority licensing a fleet of substantially smaller than in Brighton & Hove would 'take the lead' in an issue of this importance. This becomes significant because of the anomalies discussed below.

In this regard, it may be that the Rugby policy alone is the source of the questionable dimension requirements. Perhaps you can clarify this?

- This relates to a public consultation. There should be information already available relative to numbers of disabled – ambulant and wheelchair bound – and (perhaps less so) of elderly infirm. Many in these categories may not be conversant with or internet aware. Have any direct consultation been made with representative organisations for these groups – or, indeed, taxi drivers – directly as being a more informed representation than the wider general public may be expected to be?

With regard to the topic areas, for present purposes, it seems easier to follow the layout of the on-line consultation questionnaire; however, observations sometimes relate across topics and these are referenced in the text.

Accessible Vehicles:

The case for setting a 60:40 proportion of rear loading (RL) to side loading (SL) vehicles is not argued and cannot be seen as valid without justification. Anomalies in the draft policy are also highlighted below and may be used to reconsider the emphasis on RL.

Purchasing a new vehicle is a business decision involving many factors including initial cost and anticipated return. It may also be influenced by personal circumstances or specific requirements – either business or domestic. The arbitrary setting of limits restricts this freedom of choice and is unwarranted.

As the basic policy specification follows Rugby BC, should it be inferred that BHCC will propose to adopt the Rugby BC list of acceptable WAVs?

**See also: 'Getting in and out of the vehicle'
'Inside the vehicle'**

Getting in and out of the vehicle

The case for a preference of RL is not argued and cannot be seen as valid without justification.

The sliding door open warning is already a licensing requirement and is superfluous.

The proposed specification for a single ramp will exclude already licensed vehicles with twin ramps. Further, restricting ramp length to 1m will debar those already licensed with longer ramps.

Level entry from a kerb rather depends on the height of the kerb. In all likelihood only the high kerbs at bus stops will permit this. This becomes even more likely with a ramp length restriction to 1m. RL vehicles are unlikely ever to pick up from a raised kerb to allow anything approaching a level access but are more likely to be picking up from the road. A quick calculation suggests that, with a 1m ramp, a vehicle would need ground clearance of less than 150mm (6") to achieve a maximum ramp angle of 7°.

Steps – attempting a 'one size fits all' policy inevitably will introduce contradictions. For example, the proposal as worded would automatically debar the new E7 with its electronic step. There is also no guidance or recommendation for the depth (i.e. front to back) of the step.

The proposed requirement for additional grab-bars to aid access is unclear and ill considered. While the aim may be laudable, the application needs to be considered in terms of the potential loadings on the fixing points either inside or outside of the vehicle. Is there any research available to support this requirement? Along with powered doors, the issue of additional fixtures to assist access needs to be addressed with vehicle manufacturers.

Is it intended that these foregoing limitations will result in existing licences being revoked or that the policy will be for newly licensed vehicles only?

See also: 'Inside the vehicle'

Inside the vehicle

The RLs currently licensed for four passengers, in the majority of cases, cannot carry a wheelchair passenger and two others; only in rare circumstances would it become possible. Further, when carrying a wheelchair, luggage space separated from passengers becomes greatly restricted – the capacity to carry luggage for four persons would not exist. As these vehicles meet present licensing requirements, what is the justification for changing the conditions to preclude their use?

The comments on grab bars are the same as under **'Getting in and out of the vehicle'** above

There are neither suggestions nor indications of allowable practices for **'highlighting important features...etc'** to aid the visually impaired or others and further guidance will be necessary.

How is it proposed to achieve the lighting requirements proposed? Equally, how is it intended that this element be enforced, bearing in mind that the majority of passenger events will occur either in daylight or under street lit conditions?

There are seating considerations unsupported by evidence or citation (as indicated at the outset) and similarly for interior dimensions. Equally there is no comparative data for presently licensed vehicles.

CCTV is a licensing condition and is superfluous in this policy

See also: 'Getting in and out of the vehicle'

Requirements, training and guidance for drivers

This section is inadequate, being incomplete and, in places, misleading. Further, it fails completely to consider issues of driver safety and legal responsibility.

Streamline have addressed fully all of the issues involved in assisting and carrying elderly, infirm, ambulant disabled and wheelchair-bound passengers by preparing a prospective training program for drivers. The very basic elements may be covered in the present BTEC qualification required for new drivers and the course is primarily intended for WAV drivers. A preliminary view of the draft module was presented to you and it is hoped to make a further presentation to the Licensing Committee in June.

As a member of PATS, Streamline insists that all WAV drivers on the circuit are personally instructed by our own PATS Certified Trainer. We would hope that our proposed training module is adopted by the Council as a requirement for drivers under Blue Book requirement 29.4 and that, unlike the draft policy, training should be mandatory for both hackney and private hire WAV drivers.

We trust that the foregoing will assist in formulating and finalising the Council's Accessibility Policy and welcome the opportunity to present these observations.

Yours sincerely



Leslie Paine
Director

