

Report to: Licensing and Environmental Regulation Committee

Date: 12th March 2020

Report of: Director of Place

Report No: LER/06/2020

Contact Officer: Principal Licensing Officer
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Report Title: **HACKNEY CARRIAGE UNMET DEMAND SURVEY**

Non-confidential:

This report does **not** contain information which warrants its consideration in the absence of the press or members of the public.

Purpose:

To invite the Licensing and Environmental Regulation Committee to:

1. Consider the comments and recommendations in the unmet demand survey report.
2. Consider if a restriction to the number of hackney carriage vehicle licenses should remain.

Recommendations:

The Committee is asked to:

1. Consider the unmet demand survey findings and determine whether a restriction to the number of hackney carriage vehicle licences should remain?
2. Consider whether to accept, consult on and develop any of the other unmet demand survey recommendations?
3. Confirm that the cost of the survey will be recovered from the hackney carriage licence holders by including the cost in the next fee review.

Background (Doc's):

Bolton Council Hackney Carriage Unmet Demand Survey Final Report
February 2020

Summary:

No summary.

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 The Committee will be aware that the Council retains a limit on the number of hackney carriage vehicles it will licence. The Department for Transport (DfT) Best Practice Guidance states that where restrictions are imposed, this should be regularly considered by way of a survey into whether there is any unmet demand and whether the restriction of the number of hackney carriages should remain.

1.2 The Council previously considered the restriction in 2016 when the survey concluded that the number of hackney carriage licences be maintained at the current level of 108 as there was no unmet demand.

1.3 In April 2019 Licensed Vehicle Surveys and Assessment (LVSA) were appointed by the Council to undertake a further independent 'Hackney Carriage Unmet Demand Survey' in line with the DfT guidance, in order to determine whether the decision to restrict the number of hackney carriage vehicle licences remains appropriate.

1.4 The study included public, stakeholder and trade consultations together with rank surveys. This report outlines the findings and recommendations of the survey. A full copy of the survey report is attached as an Appendix.

2. MAIN FINDINGS

Ranks usage:

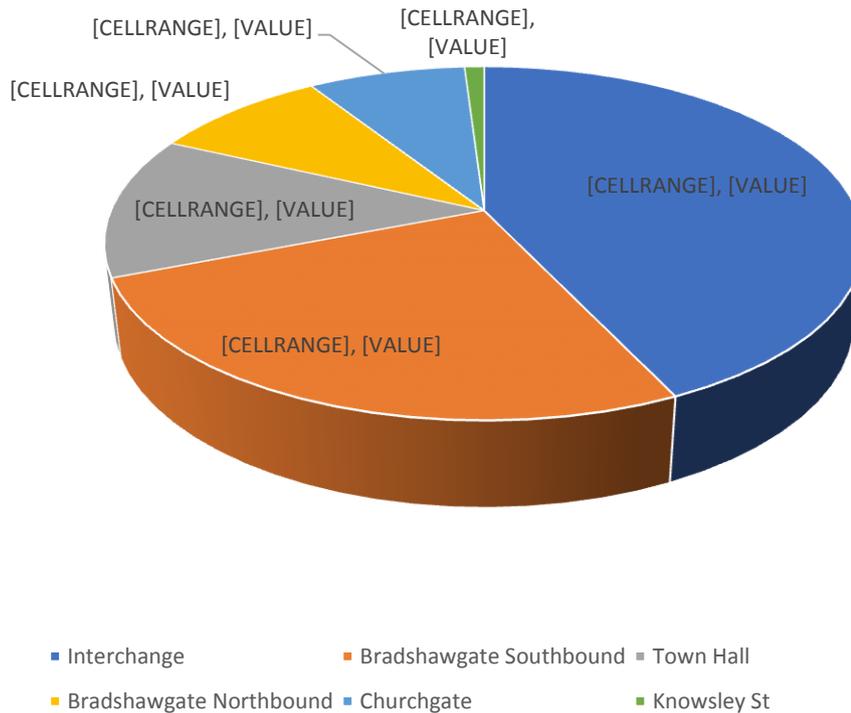
2.1 A rank survey programme was undertaken resulting in 186 hours during which some 2800 vehicle movements were seen at or near ranks, of which:

- 54% were hackney carriages (a decrease from 75% in 2015)
- 20% were private hire vehicles
- 23% were private cars (an increase from 5% in 2015)
- 2% goods vehicles
- 1% police or emergency services

Rank misuse was worst at Knowsley Street.

2.2 The following diagram shows average weekly rank usage across Bolton's ranks. The interchange rank has the highest demand followed by Bradshawgate Southbound which is focussed on night-time demand. Midnight on Saturday is the busiest time for hackney carriage vehicles. The Town Hall rank has now been reopened and is being used, peak times being daytime on Thursdays and Fridays. The other ranks are used but to a lesser degree.

Average weekly rank usage, passengers, Bolton 2019



2.3 The data was interrogated to identify all hours when passengers had to wait for a hackney carriage to arrive, even for a brief period. From the 186 hours of observations, just six had any average passenger delay at all. There were five hours with average delays a minute or more, and just one hour with average delays less than this. The longest wait by any passenger was 21 minutes, followed by 13 minutes.

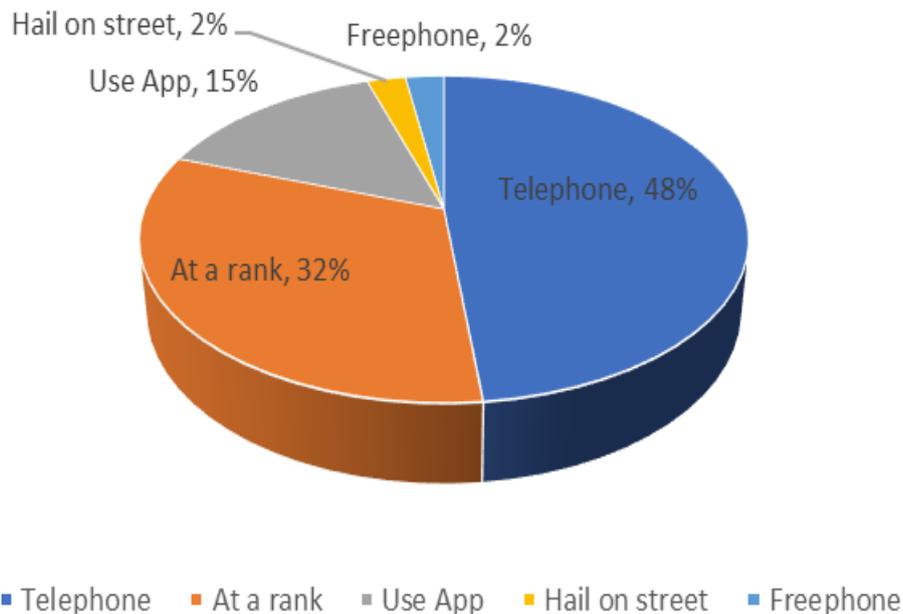
2.4 The latest survey identified some 12 passengers accessing ranks in wheelchairs, a big increase from 2015, when three people were observed. 58% were at the Town Hall rank with the remainder at the Interchange. This is a very good usage and suggests there could be opportunity for such service elsewhere. Eight other passengers appeared to be visibly disabled and received assistance into vehicles. Here, most (63%) were at the Interchange rank, 25% at Town Hall and the remaining 12% at Knowsley Street.

Consultation:

2.5 Public consultation was carried out with 211 people in and around Bolton Town Centre. This sample suggested people are now overall using licensed vehicles slightly more than in 2015.

- 56% of responders had used a licensed vehicle in the Bolton area in the last three months. The following diagram shows the normal method of getting a licensed vehicle in Bolton.

Normal method of getting licensed vehicle in Bolton



- 40% of those responding felt local hackney carriage fares were fair, though 32% said they felt they were expensive.
- 97% felt safe using hackney carriages in the daytime and a marginally reduced 91% at night. 71% of the small response commenting on safety said better security would improve their feeling of wellbeing, with a further 14% specifically naming CCTV addition to vehicles.
- Half of those responding said what might encourage them to use hackney carriage vehicles more - better vehicles, better drivers, cheaper fares and available by phone.

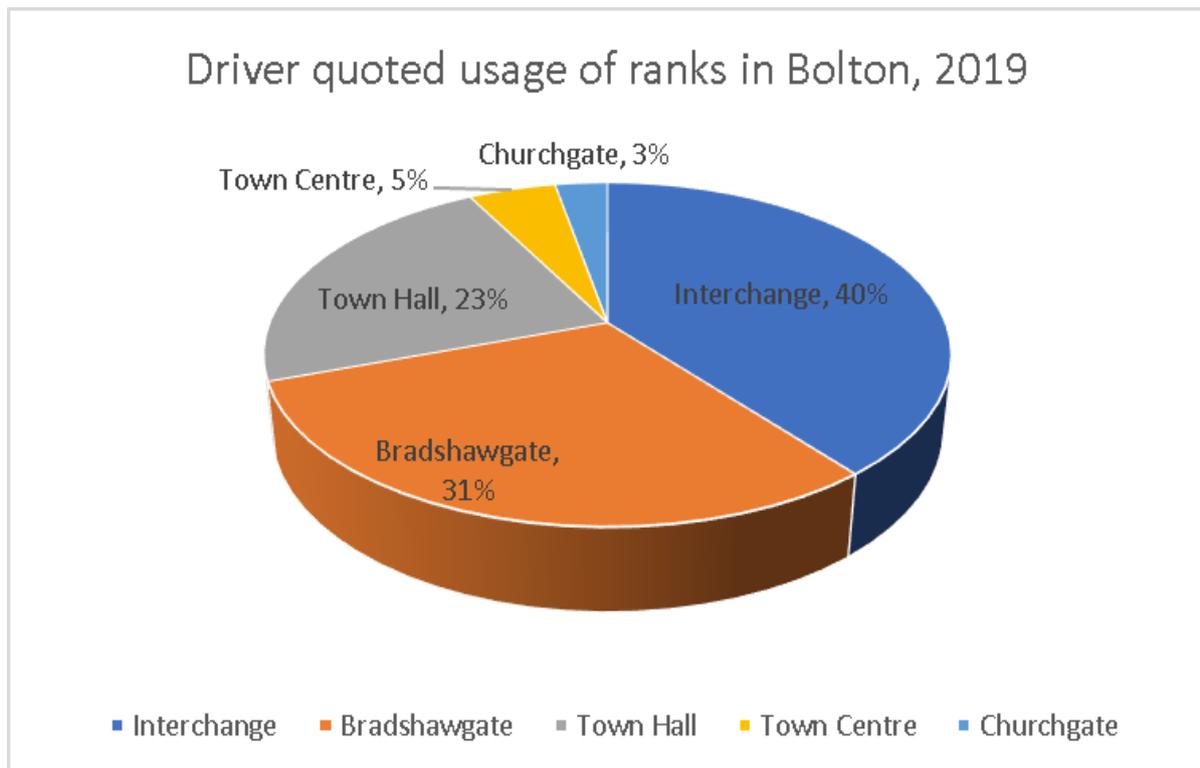
2.6 Stakeholder consultation was in accordance with DfT best practice guidance, with supermarkets, hotels, night time economy, hospital, restaurants, rail operators, police, disability representatives and other council contacts. (There were no responses received from the hospital, rail operator, disability representatives or highways).

- Supermarkets, restaurants and the night time economy said they mainly used the services of private hire companies.
- A representative from the local police told us that both hackney carriage and private hire were currently working very well to clear late night demand for licensed vehicles in central Bolton. A key factor was the support from marshals, who he suggested would be focussing vehicles on the best locations for pickup, hence the increase in use of the southbound Bradshawgate ranks. The main issue related to how licensing laws had widened the hours that locations were open, meaning some did not close until 06:00 or 07:00 the next morning. Steady

flows were experienced mainly between 02:00 and 05:00 but there were usually people still wanting to get home later than this. Private hire seems to operate more in the outer areas and have more issues there with their security, but the central hackney carriage operation seems to work effectively and well.

2.7 Trade consultation was conducted via a postal questionnaire and covering letter. A total of 136 letters and questionnaires were sent and there were 19 hackney carriage, 2 private hire and one dual responses. This is a 14% response for hackney carriages but a very small response for private hire, as is usually the case.

- The main factor affecting when drivers chose to work was family commitments (33%) followed by avoiding heavy traffic periods, preference and working busy times. One person focussed on contracts whilst another two said they worked when they felt best able to get passengers.
- 91% owned their own vehicles and none said that anyone else drove the vehicle they used.
- There was an even split between those that accepted bookings and those that did not. 71% of bookings came via phone links, with one person saying emailed bookings and another simply 'private customers'. Five different radio circuits were named.
- The following diagram shows usage of ranks:



Compared to the last survey, this was an increased proportion of drivers saying they serviced the interchange (30% last time), the Town Hall (20% previously) and Bradshawgate (was 20%).

- 75% said their main way of getting fares was from ranks. One had school contracts (a private hire vehicle) and another used an app (one hackney carriage).
- All those responding to the question said there were enough hackney carriages in the Bolton area. 41% felt fares were about right, 47% said they needed to be increased and 6% said they needed to be reduced. The remainder said 'other' but did not define what they meant.
- In this survey, 95% said retain the limit, compared to all agreeing it should be retained in the previous survey. 56% said they would leave the trade if the limit were removed or increased. About 14% said they would give up and claim benefits as unemployed.
- Two reasons scored equally for the benefit of having a limit. 43% felt it reduced pollution and congestion and a similar number felt it meant taxis were always available.
- Various other comments were provided. Most were requesting more ranks near key generators, including the hospital, near a large hotel and at supermarkets. Some also asked that the Town Hall rank be returned to its former capacity and location.
- Reviewing the days and hours worked, over two thirds, the highest proportion, worked 2330-0500 on Saturday nights into Sunday morning. Between 53 and 58% worked Monday-Wednesday 0500-1300 and Tuesday 1300-2000. Hardly any worked on Sundays, and very few during Saturday daytimes. There was very little cover from 2000-2330 other than on Friday and Saturday nights.
- One member of the trade contacted us and reported they had spoken to the hospital trust about a possible rank in the main entrance lay-by. The contact they had spoken to advised they should try to 'get the council on board'. They are concerned that the potential for servicing those needing disabled accessible vehicles is not being met.

Report Conclusions:

2.8 The current situation for hackney carriages in Bolton is presently more favourable than it has been for some while. However, there is significant need to seek to take actions that will take advantage of this to the benefit of the public and trade alike.

2.9 At the present time there is no evidence of the unmet demand observed being significant in terms of Section 16 of the 1985 Transport Act. However, there is concern from the rising level of latent demand as well as seeing some delays in off peak arising possibly from vehicles moving towards private hire style service rather than waiting at ranks off peak.

2.10 Given that the current level of unmet demand arose from a lesser number of vehicles being available, the view could be taken that the currently unissued plates be extinguished and a new limit set either at the current level of plates or perhaps one or two above that level to leave scope for some new blood to be introduced were people willing to invest.

2.11 An option that could be considered is reducing the formal level of the limit on hackney carriages to 102, with the other three available plates only being for environmentally friendly vehicles, to be defined by local research taking into account availability of infrastructure.

2.12 If further plates were handed back, the agreement might be that every second plate returned was kept available but similarly only for environmentally friendly vehicles.

2.13 Were the latter view to be taken, there should be consideration of requiring any new plates to be as environmentally friendly as possible, possibly for fully electric or hybrid vehicles, although it is acknowledged these are currently very expensive and that recharging facilities may yet to be fully developed.

2.14 A way needs to be found to attempt to develop a rank at the hospital, be this by trade / hospital discussion or with some input from the Council (however this might be possible). This could only occur if a specific working group was set up to focus on this issue. Although this is not the remit of the licensing service, the opportunity should be taken to try to facilitate discussions between the trade and landowner regarding provision for hackney carriages there, with the focus on the fact all such vehicles are wheel chair accessible.

2.15 Some thought needs to be given to how the current fleet could be developed and upgraded, particularly with the current pressures towards improving environmental credentials. This may need action in conjunction with Greater Manchester Combined Authorities work. (NB. This work is ongoing with GMCA and common minimum standards)

Report Recommendations:

2.16 On the basis of the evidence gathered in this hackney carriage unmet demand survey for Bolton, our key conclusion is that there is no evidence of any unmet demand for the services of hackney carriages either patent or latent which is significant at this point in time in the Bolton licensing area. The Committee is therefore legitimately able to continue the present policy limiting hackney carriage vehicle numbers, and retain this at the present level. This decision could be supported if challenged.

2.17 An option exists whereby the current trade could be supported by reduction of the numerical limit to the presently existing number of hackney carriages.

2.18 There is an alternative option that reduces the limit but leaves a small number of licences available which could be available perhaps to those willing to invest in more sustainable vehicle types.

2.19 As far as possible, action needs to be taken to attempt to help development of an active rank at the Hospital.

3. Recommendations:

The Committee is asked to:

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