

Suburban Action Plan 2015



Foreword

The Capital's taxis are iconic, recognised by Londoners and visitors alike as being part of the city's fabric.

Around 70 million taxi journeys are completed every year in London by 25,000 licensed taxi drivers. Of these, around 3,500 taxi drivers are licensed to work in one or more of the nine suburban sectors, providing valuable services to passengers in outer London. These drivers are known as 'suburban drivers', or yellow badge holders.

The vast majority of taxi journeys in the suburbs tend to originate from ranks or through pre-bookings via radio circuits and smartphone 'apps'. On-street hails are more common in central London. Taxi ranks are particularly important to suburban drivers and taxi passengers alike, principally at railway and Tube stations and other areas of demand such as shopping centres.

Taxis play a key role in delivering a door to door transport service throughout London and provide vital services to Londoners and visitors to the Capital. All London taxis are wheelchair accessible and have a range of other accessibility features. Alongside the London boroughs, TfL jointly funds the Taxicard scheme, providing subsidised door to door trips for disabled Londoners.

In recent years the Mayor and Transport for London (TfL) have received requests to consider what additional support can be given to suburban drivers.

The Mayor has made a commitment to identify and address the specific concerns of suburban drivers and create a sustainable suburban licensing system that benefits the trade and public. We undertook an in-depth review of suburban licensing with workshops attended by suburban drivers from each of

the nine suburban sectors. This was followed by a public consultation in 2014 to consider what changes could be made to help suburban drivers.

This plan sets out the steps we will take following this in-depth review.

Leon Daniels,
Managing Director Surface Transport



Background

London taxis ('black cabs' or 'hackney carriages') have been licensed since the seventeenth century, and the basis of the existing licensing regime was introduced in the mid nineteenth century. Taxi drivers could ply for hire anywhere within the Metropolitan Police District but in those days of horse drawn taxis and a much smaller city, taxi services were concentrated in what is now central London.

The expansion of London through the growth of the suburbs created a need for taxi services across a wider area. This was addressed in the 1930's through the introduction of suburban licensing where drivers would be licensed for a specific but small area ('sector') and limited to work in that area only. This improved the availability of taxi services across the whole of London.

Today, there are approximately 3,500 suburban drivers who are licensed to ply for hire in one or more of the nine suburban sectors. All taxi drivers are subject to the same compliance and regulatory obligations and licensed to the same standard with the exception of the

requirements for the Knowledge. On average, it takes an applicant over two years to complete the Knowledge for a suburban sector. A map of suburban sectors is provided in the Appendix.

A small number of taxi ranks that are situated in an All London area but close to a suburban boundary have been converted to become 'Island' ranks meaning suburban drivers from the neighbouring sector can ply for hire on the rank, for example in Finsbury Park. Similarly, two extension areas have been created and suburban drivers in the neighbouring sector can apply to do a short Knowledge test and ply for hire in these two areas which are Clapham and Hackney.

Suburban drivers are concerned about increasing pressures when trying to earn a living in recent years. This is due to a combination of reasons including the economic downturn, increased competition from local private hire (PHV) services and difficulty obtaining new ranks.

Many drivers have asked the Mayor and TfL to place a restriction on the number of drivers in each sector. However, we are obliged to issue a licence to any driver, operator or vehicle owner that satisfies the criteria. It would not be legal to withhold licences or refuse an applicant that meets our criteria because of concerns over the number of licensees. It is not within our power to set quotas or a limit to the number of licensees. That said, we have put on hold licence applications for three particular suburban areas pending the outcome of the suburban review.

Over the next 20 years, London's population is set to increase by almost one million people with employment expected to rise by more than 600,000 jobs. Given this, we believe demand for taxi services in the suburbs will increase in the coming years.



Suburban review process

The suburban review started in late 2012 with two workshops held with taxi trade representatives along with a selection of suburban drivers from each of the nine suburban sections:

Workshop 1 (September 2012) objectives

To understand the issues raised by suburban drivers and gather the thoughts and suggestions from the trade on how to address these issues.

Workshop 2 (December 2012) objectives

To present to the group a collated list of issues and suggestions to take forward to consultation.

Public consultation (January - April 2014)

We wrote to all taxi drivers to encourage responses to the consultation which considered a number of issues including:

- Suburban sector structure
- Whether the concept of suburban licensing should be discontinued
- Knowledge of London
- Driver numbers
- Island taxi ranks and licence area extensions
- Radio and app bookings
- Taxi ranks
- Improving the supply of taxis in central London

Over 4,000 responses were received to the consultation and within these responses there was a clear split between responses of All London taxi drivers, or green badge holders, and suburban taxi drivers. Analysis of the responses included:

- A shared concern amongst All London and suburban drivers that a restriction should be placed on numbers. However, it was felt this would not be effective without a similar restriction on All London drivers as well as private hire drivers
- Support for retaining the concept of suburban licensing
- Amongst some suburban drivers there was support for reducing the number of suburban sectors from nine to four (NE, NW, SE & SW)





- A suggestion that drivers should work together to increase passenger demand in the suburbs
- All London drivers were not in favour of suburban drivers entering the Knowledge at an advanced stage. Conversely suburban drivers felt there should be a fast track process to allow them to enter the Knowledge at an advanced stage
- Support from suburban drivers to introduce a formal island taxi ranks policy to determine whether a taxi rank in an All London area but close to a suburban boundary should be converted. However, All London drivers opposed this
- Similarly suburban drivers felt TfL should create more extension areas but All London drivers did not agree
- There was general support to the suggestion that we should increase the number of taxi ranks in the suburbs
- Suburban drivers support being allowed to accept pre-bookings outside their licensed area but All London drivers do not agree
- Some respondents requested an updated study on supply and demand in the areas to understand passenger demand.

Workshop 3 (December 2014) objectives

Following analysis of the responses, we convened a further workshop with previous attendees to discuss and consider the analysis of the consultation responses.

Actions

Although the economic climate has improved since this review began, we recognise the importance of working with the taxi trade to improve the situation for suburban taxi drivers and that more can be done.

The actions outlined in this section describe the steps we will take in the coming years, as we work with trade representatives, suburban drivers, the boroughs and other important stakeholders. This plan is also linked to the Ranks Action Plan where specific actions will help suburban drivers.



1. Taxi ranks and Night Tube

Taxi ranks – Through the taxi Ranks Action Plan we will pursue a 20 per cent increase in taxi ranks across London by 2020, including locations in suburban areas where there is passenger demand. We will work with the taxi trade, including suburban drivers, to identify priority locations.

We will work with local boroughs to implement new ranks or make changes to existing ranks at priority locations along the Night Tube network, including in suburban areas.

TfL has secured a budget of £600,000 to support the taxi Ranks Action Plan.

2. Island ranks policy

By summer 2015 we will implement and publish a formal Island Ranks Policy to set out the process for designating a taxi rank as an island rank.

Island ranks have already been appointed at seven locations across London including Finsbury Park station, Putney station and Garrett Lane.

The policy will set out clear criteria when considering whether to make an existing or new taxi rank, located within an all London area but close to a suburban boundary, an island rank. This will include a review of usage of the rank by passengers and green badge drivers, the location of the rank and stakeholder feedback.

3. Understanding the supply and demand

Driver diary studies run in 2003, 2006 and 2009 involving around 400 taxi and private hire drivers across London, including suburban drivers, who are asked to keep a record of their journeys over a specified period. Information from these studies is collated, analysed and used to provide a range of useful data on taxi and private hire usage in London.

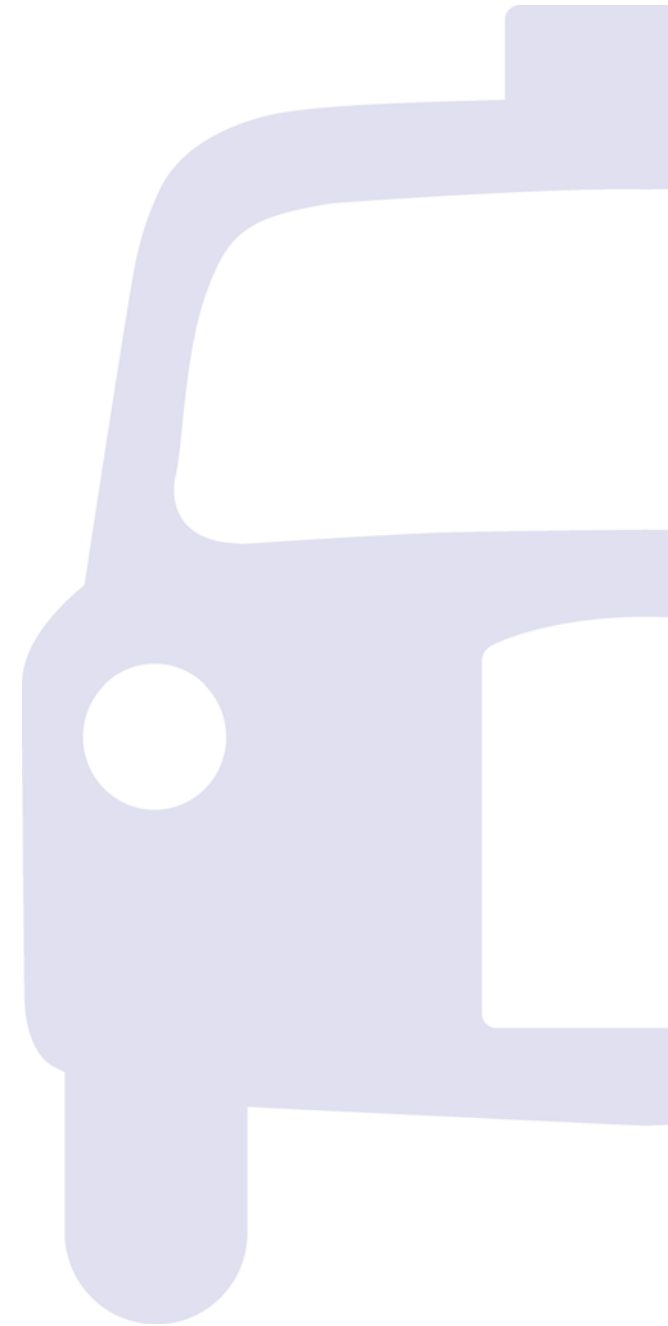
By autumn 2015 we will undertake a comprehensive driver diary survey to understand demand and supply across London, particularly in suburban areas, to assess rank demand and assist future policy. We will explore with the trade the potential to use technology to undertake this survey.

4. Suburban drivers forum

From summer 2015, we will establish a regular forum to discuss taxi issues with suburban drivers alongside the established trade representatives, who between them represent around a third of all suburban drivers. The forum will cover issues that are specific to suburban drivers and seek to resolve these issues locally.

5. Sector changes

Given there was no consensus to the consultation, we will not pursue making changes to the current sector structure at this time. However, we will continue to work and engage with suburban drivers and other trade representatives to keep this under review and if it becomes clear that sector changes are required we will discuss it further with the taxi trade.



Map of suburban sectors

