

8th August 2007
Councillor Christopher J Williams
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Department for Transport
www.dft.gov.uk/LocalTransportBill

By Email

Dear Sir

Local Transport Bill

I refer to your invitation to comment on your published Draft Local Transport Bill. The Council's Cabinet has considered the Draft Bill and I have been authorised to respond to yourself as Cabinet Member for Planning and Transportation.

This Council recognises the need and welcomes the changes in the legal framework to enable the reduction of road congestion and improvement of the quality of local bus services, and would ask that you take the following comments into consideration:

Senior Traffic Commissioner

The Council welcomes the proposed additional powers for the Senior Traffic Commissioner as it is viewed that a more constructive partnership will evolve as a result. However, there is a concern that the Wales Traffic Commissioner is not sited in Wales and therefore may not be as familiar with the local issues relating to individual geographic areas, limited competition and general local problems.

It would be extremely helpful if more direct contact between the Councils and the Traffic Commissioner's Office was forthcoming on a regular basis. For example, a duty on the Traffic Commissioner's office to advise individual Councils at an early stage when bus operators are being investigated, and by giving guidance on whether vehicles are fit for purpose immediately after they have been checked, would allow Councils to react to any issues long before any Inquiry date was scheduled, therefore enhancing safety.

Quality Partnership Schemes and Quality Contract Schemes

The Council supports the recommendations within the draft Bill, in particular the regulation of fares and giving more flexibility with regards to the reason a scheme is introduced. However, it has concerns that within the competition test, bus operators may use the appeal system to cause indefinite delays to any aspirational quality contract schemes.

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The Council welcomes the opportunity to make Traffic Regulation Orders, with the consent of the Welsh Ministers to provide facilities within any quality partnership scheme that may be agreed in the future.

Bus Contracts

Extending the length of contracts from five years maximum to eight years is welcomed.

Private Hire Vehicles

Under the current Private Hire vehicle legislation, The Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1976 a booking for a Private Hire vehicle MUST be made in advance and via a Private Hire Operator licensed by the same Council.

Failure to pre book could result in the vehicle being uninsured during the booking.

This Council has a policy of allowing Hackney carriages (referred to in the draft Transport Bill as taxis) to be clearly visible by allowing large company livery on the vehicles and requiring that they are white with a black bonnet, fitted with a roof light and in addition recently have Council issued door signs.

Private Hire vehicles are required to carry signs on the front doors clearly indicating that they can only be pre booked.

This policy, which has been developed over time, provides protection for the public and maintains separation and stability between two distinctive trades.

It is the view of this Council, based on long experience of dealing with both aspects of the taxi trade, that if the Private Hire vehicles are allowed to operate as indicated in section 26 of The draft Transport Bill, the protection to the travelling public would be reduced. There would also be an increase in the risk of conflict between two distinctive trades and a cause of some confusion to the public using the normal taxi trade and the restricted PSV service.

Community Transport Drivers

This Council welcomes the suggested change to enable Community Transport Drivers to be paid for their services.

If you require further clarification or information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully

Councillor Christopher J Williams
Cabinet Member for Planning and Transportation