

“WHAT’S IT REALLY LIKE?”

**THE AVAILABILITY OF
WHEELCHAIR-ACCESSIBLE TAXIS
IN BRADFORD**



**A REPORT CARRIED OUT FOR THE CITY OF BRADFORD
METROPOLITAN DISTRICT COUNCIL, 2006**

BRADFORD ACCESS ACTION



Contents

1 Abstract

2 Acknowledgements

3 Introduction

- 3.1 The Commission
- 3.2 Why we accepted the Commission
- 3.3 Why Taxis are important to Disabled People
- 3.4 Legal Background and the Council's Response
- 3.5 Our Concerns
- 3.6 Our Response
- 3.7 Scope of the Project

4 Methodology

- 4.1 General Limitations of our Methods
- 4.2 Method 1: The Questionnaire
- 4.3 Characteristics of the Focus Group
- 4.4 Limitations of the Questionnaire
- 4.5 Method 2: The Test
- 4.6 Limitations of the Test

5 Findings from the Questionnaire

- 5.1 Statistical Summary
- 5.2 Analysis of the Questionnaire

6 Findings from the Test

- 6.1 Statistical Summary
- 6.2 Additional Comments made by Testers
- 6.3 Analysis of the Test

7 Conclusions

8 Recommendations

9 Appendix

Bradford Case Study: Questionnaire Seeking The Views Of Mobility-Impaired Potential Taxi Users

1 Abstract

“Bradford Access Action” was concerned about the City Council’s decision in 2005 to restrict the number of Hackney Carriages in general and the number of wheelchair-accessible taxis in particular.

In response, Bradford Access Action carried out a questionnaire survey to gather disabled people’s views on the taxi service in Bradford and carried out a “mystery shopper” type exercise in Spring 2006 to find out how good or bad the service really is.

The questionnaire found that although most disabled people relied to a great extent on taxis, most preferred private hire vehicles to Hackney Carriages. They considered the former to be more reliable and cheaper and had built up a rapport with local firms and drivers. The main conclusion from the questionnaire was that, in contrast to non-disabled people, few disabled people dared to be spontaneous, needing to pre-plan in the absence of a reliable taxi service.

The “mystery shopper” exercise found that wheelchair users needed to wait on average 15 minutes for an accessible taxi to arrive, compared to non-disabled people who could get a taxi straight away. In fact, the majority of waits were over 20 minutes, the worst locations being the most popular ones, namely, the Interchange and the Kirkgate Centre. Waiting times were longer at peak times and the worst case recorded was a 30-minute wait at the Kirkgate Centre. During this time, 26 saloon taxis passed through the rank before the first accessible taxi arrived. There was also found to be a tendency for accessible taxis to congregate at Norfolk Gardens, using the rank as a “base” to which drivers at other ranks could radio when one was required elsewhere.

The exercise found a wide variation in the knowledge and quality of care offered by drivers, many not adhering to basic safety requirements. Bradford Access Action considers there to be an urgent need for drivers to undergo disability awareness training and urges the Council to ensure a consistent and professional service and to carry out checks to ensure that all drivers are legally licensed to drive.

The survey concluded that there are not enough accessible taxis currently operating in Bradford and that this discriminates against disabled people. The Council is requested to address this problem as a matter of urgency.

3 Introduction

3.1 The Commission

Towards the end of 2005, Bradford City Council invited local disability groups to identify issues that were of concern to them in answer to the question, "What's It Really Like?". Groups were asked to carry out research and report their findings to the Council's third annual access conference, "Easier Access 3" at the Ramada Jarvis (Bankfield) Hotel, Bingley in June 2006. Bradford Access Action accepted this invitation and investigated the availability of wheelchair-accessible taxis in the City. This report sets out the findings presented to the Conference in June. The numbers used in the report therefore reflect the situation at that time.

3.2 Why we accepted the Commission

Bradford Access Action was concerned about the accessibility of the City's taxi fleet. We did not think there were enough accessible taxis. We felt that the fault lay with Bradford City Council and that it was not doing enough to improve the service. The Council had made recent decisions that we felt were discriminatory against disabled people. We thought the Council had made the wrong decisions and we wanted to carry out research to find out what effects these decisions have had. We wanted to let the Council know "what it is really like".

3.3 Why Taxis are important to Disabled People

Part 3 of the 1995 Disability Discrimination Act came into force in October 2004. It requires service providers to make "reasonable adjustments" to their premises in order to ensure that their services are accessible to disabled people. And as the supply of accessible buildings increases, so too will the demand from disabled people to use them, i.e. more accessible buildings will generate more customers. Accessible premises are therefore only part of the equation. People need to be able to get to these premises from their homes and back again. Some disabled people drive their own cars while others rely on public transport or other people to drive them. Parking is not always available immediately adjacent to the entrance to premises and buses rarely have a stop right outside. Consequently, the most popular choice of transport for disabled people when a private car is not appropriate or available is the taxi (Source: Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee [DPTAC], 2002 "Attitudes of Disabled People to Public Transport"). Taxis are part of the public transport system, and for disabled people, they are the most important element of it as they are the only facility able to offer door-to-door service to any location at any time of day or night. Taxis are therefore a vital component in ensuring that disabled people are able to take a full and active part in society. Without an efficient and reliable taxi service, many disabled people would be housebound.

3.4 Legal Background and the Council's Response

We set out below our understanding of the law and how Bradford City Council has responded to its statutory duties.

In order to ensure that everybody has equal access to taxis, the Government intends to prescribe a technical specification for all licensed vehicles. This specification will require all vehicles to be wheelchair-accessible, unless an exemption can be justified. Research into the most appropriate specification is still being carried out. To accord with the requirements of Part 5 of the Disability Discrimination Act, the Government intends to issue this specification in the form of "Taxi Accessibility Regulations" in 2010 to 209 licensing authorities, including Bradford.

In 2002, due to the excessively long period of time (15 years) between the publication of the Act and the introduction of Regulations, the Government instructed licensing authorities to devise their own specifications as an interim measure. After 2010, the Regulations will come into force and supersede the interim specifications. Bradford City Council has recently consulted on its draft specification and intends to hold an "open day" when disabled people will be able to inspect those vehicles that meet the draft specification. The specification may then be amended to take account of comments received at this event. The outcome will set the criteria that a vehicle must meet in order for it to be defined as "accessible". A fundamental requirement will be that vehicles must be wheelchair-accessible, i.e. capable of transporting a wheelchair whilst its occupant remains seated in it. Bradford Access Action considers that this is the bottom-line requirement and we welcome the Council's initiative and the opportunity to be involved. Since the "quality" of vehicles is being addressed as part of this ongoing process, comments on the draft technical specification are not addressed in this report.

However, the Council's interim technical specification and the eventual Taxi Accessibility Regulations are only part of the equation. They only address the "quality" of the vehicles; they do not deal with the "quantity". Yet the two go hand-in-hand. Only when **all** taxis in Bradford are fully accessible, **and** there are enough of them, can disabled and non-disabled people have equal choice. At the time this study was commissioned, only around 5% of Bradford's taxi fleet were Wheelchair-Accessible Vehicles (WAVs). A year later, it is still only around 10%. Some licensing authorities have 100% WAVs, or are close to getting there, e.g. London and Sheffield, but not Bradford. We want to know why Bradford's citizens are not getting as good a service as those of other cities.

In 2003, the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) published a report arguing that the current practice of regulating the number of taxis (Hackney Carriages, as opposed to Private Hire Vehicles) should be scrapped. It said that such practices are anti-competition and artificially inflate the value of licences. There is clearly considerable and growing demand for taxis in Bradford, as evidenced by the disproportionate growth in the Private Hire sector brought about by restrictions on the number of Hackney Carriages. In Bradford, the number of Hackney Carriage licences has remained at 224 since at least 1989, whilst the number of Private Hire licences has risen by 130% from 1039 to 2399 over the same period to 2004, with 119 firms currently listed in Yellow Pages. Consequently, Hackney Carriage licences have a premium value, believed to be around

£60,000 each. Licences in Bradford have one of the highest values in the country and owners are understandably keen to protect their investments.

The OFT also concluded that regulation of numbers restricts the number of WAVs, as additional new accessible vehicles are unable to be added to the fleet and existing non-WAVs have licences that may last several years before they are required to be renewed and replaced with WAV licences (in Bradford this is 8 years). As with the number of vehicles in total, the Private Hire sector has also helped to make up some of the shortfall in WAVs, with around 90 vehicles for hire (though this still only represents a very small proportion of the total number of Private Hire Vehicles).

Although the Government accepted the principles of the OFT's recommendations, they were concerned about the potential adverse effect on traders' livelihoods that may occur if restricted numbers were suddenly lifted. Instead of a blanket ruling, they put the onus on each regulating authority to justify why it should continue to regulate. Around a quarter of authorities still regulate, including Bradford.

In order to justify continued regulation of numbers, Section 16 of the 1985 Transport Act requires that such licensing authorities carry out regular surveys of unmet demand. Though not legally prescribed, three-yearly intervals between surveys are accepted as the norm. The latest unmet demand study was carried out by Halcrow for the Council in 2003 and recommended that the number of WAVs be increased from 11 to 21 to achieve the same supply/demand ratio amongst the disabled population as the 224 did for the total population, i.e. 1 per 2171 population. In May 2005, the City Council considered a report addressing this issue, but deferred its decision until it had taken the opportunity to consult interested parties. The issue was reconsidered in August. In May, officers recommended that the authority should deregulate or issue 20 new WAV licences each year until the introduction of Taxi Accessibility Regulations in 2010. Following consultation with the trade, officers revised this recommended figure to 10 in the August report. In the end, the trade offered a compromise which was accepted by the politicians: namely, to surrender 10 existing non-WAV licences a year in exchange for WAV licences whilst maintaining the overall total of 224 Hackney Carriages. For each unsurrendered plate, an additional one would be issued. In addition, as a means of encouraging more WAV take-up in the Private Hire sector, the Council resolved to accept Private Hire WAVs up to 12 years old, as it already did with Hackney Carriage WAVs. This is in contrast to the 8 year permitted life of non-WAVs.

3.5 Our Concerns

Firstly, at the time we accepted this Commission, only about 5% of the Hackney Carriage fleet were WAVs. With such a small percentage, it is obvious that discrimination occurs. A mobility-impaired user could not turn up at a rank and expect a WAV to be at the front of the queue, nor could he expect to hail one in the street or book one immediately by telephone. Theoretically, at that time, only 1 in every 20 taxis was a WAV. A non-disabled person, by contrast, knew that he could use all 20. This is unacceptable and the Council's response to the problem is inadequate.

Secondly, we do not feel that Halcrow's unmet demand survey properly addressed the needs of disabled people and we are concerned that the Council has been persuaded by the taxi traders to defer undertaking a new unmet demand survey until a year after the Broadway redevelopment has been completed. This will extend the period between surveys to at least 6 years, far beyond what is normally acceptable under Section 16 of the 1985 Transport Act.

Thirdly, we are concerned that the Council's decision was made with little or no consideration of the needs of disabled people. The Council resolved in May 2005 to defer the report in order to carry out "further consultation with interested parties". "Interested parties" includes both traders and customers, not just traders, yet when the report came back in August, it made no reference to customers. Instead, it explained that the May report had been deferred "to allow more time for Hackney Carriage proprietors to consult with their members". This is clearly different to the May resolution and we believe the Council failed to carry out its commitment to consult **all** interested parties. The Council has offered no evidence that it has consulted disabled people, let alone considered our views.

Finally, we are concerned that the views of traders appear to have been given disproportionate weight compared to the needs and numbers of disabled people in the District. There are literally thousands of disabled people in the District, but just 224 Hackney Carriage operators, yet their voice has been heard and heeded above ours. When the issue was considered in August 2005, over 100 traders packed the Council Chamber, whilst only a single disabled person attended and spoke. This was intimidation and we feel it unduly influenced political impartiality. We feel that protection of the over-inflated value of Hackney Carriage licences is the true motive behind their owners' opposition to the enlargement of the fleet, not the lack of unmet demand. There clearly **is** demand, as evidenced by the steep growth during the last two decades in the number of Private Hire vehicles. In 1989, Private Hire Vehicles outnumbered Hackney Carriages by almost 5:1; by 2004, this had risen to 11:1.

In conclusion, we consider that the Council has let down its citizens, disabled and non-disabled alike, by failing to take the opportunity to improve the District's taxi service and has bowed to the pressure of a small number of traders.

3.6 Our Response

Our concerns were based upon anecdotal experiences expressed by Bradford Access Action group members and other disabled people. Our perception that things could have been done better was a hypothesis. In response to the Council's Commission, we carried out research to test this hypothesis, agreeing to report our findings to the Council.

3.7 Scope of the Project

In the true and complete sense, an accessible taxi is one that is accessible to all users. These include users who may have sensory or cognitive impairments and includes people at the extremes of the age range. However, it is considered that many of the features that would facilitate full access, such as audio-loops and coloured grab rails should be basic equipment included as part of the technical specification. Such features are addressed by the consultation referred to above, which the Council is separately carrying out and is not the subject of this report.

Our focus of attention, by contrast, was limited to the availability of those vehicles that the Council has currently defined as being wheelchair-accessible (WAVs). Our concern therefore was with their number rather than their specification, i.e. quantity rather than quality. Consequently, our focus was on mobility-impaired people, especially upon wheelchair users. Limiting our focus to this group of disabled people was in no way intended to diminish the concerns and needs of people with other types of impairment and such specific concerns will be addressed by us as part of our response to the Council's consultation on the draft technical specification.

We recognise that the bottom-line criteria used to define an accessible taxi are its basic dimensions, i.e. size and shape. If this is got right, then all other features can be added. A vehicle suitable for a wheelchair will have wide doors, a high roof and ramps and should therefore also be suitable for most other mobility-impaired people and for other users who need lots of space, e.g. shoppers with bags and parents with pushchairs. When this study was commissioned, the Council had 11 vehicles that met the bottom-line criteria. In the reports considered in May and August 2005, the Council made resolutions regarding the number of such vehicles it was prepared to licence in the future and therefore the scope of our project was limited to testing whether we considered the Council had got the numbers right.

We also recognised that there is a third inextricably linked element to providing a good service besides ensuring that vehicles are fit-for-purpose and adequate in number. That element is the quality of the drivers, specifically their knowledge and attitudes. Our original objective was simply to focus on the effects of restricting the number of accessible vehicles; it was not our intention to explicitly investigate the quality of drivers, but it soon became evident that despite the Council having a drivers' code of conduct, there was a wide variation in standards. This report refers to our findings in this regard.

This report does not consider the issue of infrastructure, i.e. the distribution and accessibility of ranks. This is partly because ranks need to be considered separately in the context of the City Centre redevelopment proposals and partly because WAVs have ramps and can, theoretically, therefore pick up and set down anywhere.

Finally, this report is only concerned with the Hackney Carriage trade, as opposed to all vehicles, including Private Hire. Strictly speaking, Private Hire Vehicles are complementary to, but not part of, the public transport system and their numbers are outside the Council's control. The Council's reports considered in May and August 2005 only set limits on the number of Hackney Carriages. This study therefore only reflects upon the merits of that action.

4 Methodology

4.1 General Limitations of our Methods

The methods used to conduct our investigation were necessarily limited to our logistical ability to carry them out. We only had access to the resource of a relatively small number of disabled people who were able to offer their time and services. Ideally, we would have utilised more people to ensure a statistically more valid sample. Nevertheless, our Focus Group and Testers gave, we believe, a very representative snapshot of the situation. Despite the small number of participants, we discovered significant findings. We doubt that a larger sample would have added much more to the quality of our findings.

4.2 Method 1: The Questionnaire

We assembled a Focus Group of fifteen people who had impaired mobility and asked each of them 43 questions about themselves and their experiences of using taxis in Bradford. The Focus Group members are listed in the Acknowledgements section. A copy of the Questionnaire is included in the Appendix. The objective of the Questionnaire was to find out disabled people's attitudes towards taxis. We wanted to find out if their experiences were good or bad and why they felt that way. The results of this Questionnaire, both quantitative and qualitative are described in the Findings section of this report. An abridged version of the Questionnaire was circulated to a sample of people with sensory or cognitive impairments to see if additional issues arose, but they did not. Their comments are not included in the findings.

4.3 Characteristics of the Focus Group

The group exhibited a wide variety of physical impairments affecting their mobility and they ranged from being mildly disabled to severely disabled. The reason for choosing a heterogeneous sample was because that reflects society. Disabled people are not all the same. They have diverse conditions and abilities and therefore have diverse needs.

Three of the group had become disabled as a result of traffic accidents, whilst others exhibited impairments due to ageing or medical conditions including cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, diabetes, arthritis, polio, spina bifida and Guillain Barré Syndrome.

Five members were dependent upon wheelchairs for their mobility, five used wheelchairs occasionally, whilst the other five did not, as yet, need to use a wheelchair. All of the ten members who were not wheelchair-dependent used walking aids; some had prosthetics. Some of the Group had been born with their impairments; others had acquired them through age, illness or accident. Some had impairments that were stable; others had progressive conditions. Some had one impairment; others had two or more that when acting together compounded and exacerbated their disability.

They all experienced the disabling effects of their impairments in different ways. Some were independent; others required the assistance of a carer. Some could not bend; some could not straighten. Some could not easily balance. Some suffered pain; others did not. Some suffered extreme fatigue. Some had reduced or no strength, movement or feeling in various parts of their bodies. Some will get worse over time, either through

ageing or progression of disease. Some will develop or acquire multiple impairments and some who do not currently use a wheelchair will need to do so at some point in their lives. Most of the people in our sample were not born with impairments; they acquired them. No one should take their abilities for granted, or assume that “it will never happen to them”. People can, do and will become impaired at any time in their lives; some will be permanently impaired, others will have only temporary conditions, such as a broken leg.

The point of illustrating this diversity is to stress to the Council how important it is to have a fully accessible taxi fleet which is suitable for everyone, whatever their needs, now and in the future.

4.4 Limitations of the Questionnaire

The limitations of the questionnaire are that the findings are anecdotal. They are opinion rather than observable evidence. Therefore the second part of the research was to carry out an “experiment in the field” or “test” to see whether the anecdotal findings were true in reality.

4.5 Method 2: The Test

The primary objective of the Test was to find out how long, on average, a disabled person needed to wait for the arrival of an accessible Hackney Carriage at a Bradford City Centre rank compared to how long a non-disabled person had to wait for a taxi. All our Testers were wheelchair users in order to ensure that a Wheelchair-Accessible Vehicle (WAV) was requested.

Our secondary objective was to uncover any evidence of inconsistent or discriminatory practices by drivers, such as overcharging or abuse. We wanted to test their “disability awareness” and their attitudes.

The Test was carried out by 3 Testers in the Spring of 2006. A total of 12 journeys were attempted from 4 City Centre ranks, plus one other. Half the journeys were attempted during the afternoon peak period when it was suspected that many taxis might be engaged in school contract work, whilst the other half were at off-peak times. Wherever possible, we used a second Tester immediately after the first had gone in order to deliberately place some strain on the service to test its response. As we wanted to test the spontaneity of the service, we ensured that two Testers never waited together. This denied drivers the opportunity to pre-arrange bookings. Pairs of Testers always went to the same destination in order to enable a direct comparison of fares and service quality.

4.6 Limitations of the Test

Inadequate resources (volunteers) prevented us from utilising more Testers and carrying out more Tests from more ranks in more locations. Nevertheless, despite the small sample, the quality of findings was exceptionally revealing.

Ideally, we would have carried out Tests in the late evening, as well as the times we did, in order to see how easy it was to get a WAV at night. But lack of volunteers and their fear of possibly getting stranded prevented this. This is a great pity, as disabled people,

like everyone else, enjoy an evening out at the theatre, cinema, restaurant or pub but do not have confidence in the taxi service. We would have liked to have tested whether this fear was justified.

Although limited resources prevented an assessment of a large number of ranks, we consider our focus on the City Centre to be justified, as it is the hub of the District's activity. Our choice of ranks was, we feel, a good cross-section in terms of distribution, facilities served and topography.

Tests were only carried out at ranks. These represented the start of return journeys. Our Questionnaire revealed that most people use Private Hire for their outward journeys. Ranks are few and far between outside city and town centres and therefore journeys that do not begin at ranks tend to be booked in advance.

5 Findings from the Questionnaire

5.1 Statistical Summary

Glossary	Group 1	= wheelchair-dependent
	Group 2	= occasionally use wheelchair
	Group 3	= never use wheelchair
	Y	= Yes
	N	= No
	?	= Not answered or Neutral
	HC	= Hackney Carriage
	PHV	= Private Hire Vehicle
	WAV	= Wheelchair-Accessible Vehicle

	Group 1			Group 2			Group 3			Total		
	Y	N	?	Y	N	?	Y	N	?	Y	N	?
Personal												
Are you able to drive?	2	3	-	3	2	-	3	2	-	8	7	-
Do you use local trains?	2	2	1	2	3	-	2	1	2	6	6	3
Do you use buses?	1	2	2	1	3	1	3	1	1	5	6	4
Do you use Access Buses?	-	3	2	1	4	-	1	2	2	2	9	4
Do you use HCs?	5	-	-	3	2	-	3	1	1	11	3	1
Do you use PHVs?	4	1	-	5	-	-	3	1	1	12	2	1
Quality of Vehicles												
Do you need a WAV?	4	1	-	-	4	1	-	4	1	4	9	2
Do you need other accessible features?	1	4	-	1	4	-	3	1	1	5	9	1
Should all HCs be WAVs?	3	1	1	3	2	-	4	1	-	10	4	1
Quantity of Vehicles												
Are more HCs needed?	3	1	1	2	1	2	1	1	3	6	3	6
Are more HC WAVs needed?	5	-	-	4	1	-	4	-	1	13	1	1
Would deregulation increase the number of WAVs?	-	5	-	1	2	2	2	2	1	3	9	3
Would deregulation make quality control harder to enforce?	4	1	-	4	-	1	2	2	1	10	3	2

	Group 1			Group 2			Group 3			Total		
	Y	N	?	Y	N	?	Y	N	?	Y	N	?
Quality of Service												
Do you prefer HCs to PHVs?	1	3	1	-	3	2	1	2	2	2	8	5
Do you use a favourite firm?	3	2	-	5	-	-	3	1	1	11	3	1
Do you usually use the same firm for both your outward and return journeys?	5	-	-	5	-	-	2	2	1	12	2	1
Do you normally pre-arrange your return trip?	4	1	-	4	1	-	3	1	1	11	3	1
Do you have confidence that you will be able to get back home by taxi?	5	-	-	2	2	1	2	1	2	9	3	3
Do you know which firms operate WAVs?	5	-	-	2	1	2	1	3	1	8	4	3
Do you find you have to wait longer for a WAV?	5	-	-	4	-	1	2	-	3	11	-	4
Is it hard to get WAVs at certain times?	4	1	-	3	-	2	-	-	5	7	1	7
Have you ever tried to hire a WAV at a rank?	2	3	-	1	4	-	-	-	5	3	7	5
Have you ever tried to hail a WAV in the street?		5	-	-	4	1	-	-	5	-	9	6
Is it reasonable to be charged more to use a WAV?		5	-	1	4	-	-	5	-	1	14	-
Have you ever been overcharged as a result of your disability?	3	2	-	2	3	-	1	4	-	6	9	-
Have you ever been refused carriage due to your disability?	1	4	-	1	4	-	-	5	-	2	13	-
Have you experienced any other sort of discrimination?	1	4	-	2	3	-	1	4	-	4	11	-
Have you ever complained about discrimination?	1	4	-	1	4	-	-	5	-	2	13	-
Are drivers' attitudes generally good?	3	1	1	3	0	2	1	-	4	7	1	7
Do drivers need better training?	5	-	-	5	-	-	5	-	-	15	-	-
Do you feel safe when travelling in a taxi?	3	2	-	3	1	1	4	-	1	10	3	2
Overall, are you generally satisfied with the service provided by HCs?	3	2	-	2	-	3	2	-	3	7	2	6
Overall, are you generally satisfied with the service provided by PHVs?	3	1	1	3	-	2	2	-	3	8	1	6

5.2 Analysis of the Questionnaire

Although the small sample means that too much should not be read into the actual percentages, the findings revealed some interesting opinion about disabled people's attitudes towards taxi travel.

The main findings are grouped as in the table.

Personal

- In line with national findings, the Questionnaire revealed that disabled people are more likely to use a taxi (both Hackney Carriage and Private Hire) than any other form of public transport.
- There was a slight preference for Private Hire.
- The Access Bus was the least used.
- More people used trains than buses.
- Dependence on taxis was greatest amongst the most severely disabled.

Quality of Vehicles

- The need for WAVs was less than the need for vehicles with other accessible features, but this reflects the fact that there were fewer wheelchair users in the sample than other disabled people.
- Most (67%) thought all vehicles should be both wheelchair-accessible and include other accessible features in a single design.
- 27% thought there should be 2 or more types of vehicle.
- The London-style "Black Cab" was not universally liked. 2 people expressed a preference for it, whilst 4 expressed difficulty using it.

Quantity of Vehicles

- There was uncertainty about whether there should be more than 224 Hackney Carriages (40% thought there should be more, 20% did not and 40% didn't know). But those in favour of more increased in line with the severity of their disability. This is likely to reflect their need for more WAVs rather than more taxis in general.
- 87% said there should be more WAVs, including 100% of wheelchair-dependant people.
- There was general misunderstanding or ignorance about whether deregulation of numbers was likely to have a good or a bad effect on overall numbers and quality of service. People wanted a good, reliable, numerically sufficient service; they wanted to be able to get a taxi whenever and wherever they wanted. They were largely unconcerned about how this objective is achieved; their concern was with the end result, not the means to that end.

Quality of Service

- Four times more disabled people preferred to use Private Hire Vehicles than Hackney Carriages, with a third having no preference either way. The main reasons given were that customers establish a trusting relationship with a particular local firm or driver, then tend to use that firm or driver most of the time. This removes uncertainty and anxiety. They also tended to pre-plan and pre-book, including return trips. This was particularly the case where the destination was in an area not served by ranks. Price was also quoted as a relevant factor, as was the paucity of numbers of Hackney Carriage WAVs. The tendency to rely upon particular firms or drivers and to pre-plan and pre-book was greater amongst the most severely disabled, reflecting their inability to dare to be spontaneous.
- Most disabled people used a favourite firm or driver.
- Most people, including all dependant and occasional wheelchair users, used the same firm for both their outward and return journeys.
- Most people pre-booked their return journey home.
- All wheelchair-dependant users expressed confidence in being able to make a round trip and all knew the contact details of the 11 available WAVs. This confidence was not shared by the other groups, suggesting that the more severely disabled a person was, the more pre-planning they did.
- Of those who used WAVs, the majority said they normally had to wait longer for one to arrive than a non-WAV. Most also said they had to wait even longer at certain times, such as when drivers are on contract work with schools.
- Few people had ever tried to get a WAV at a rank and no one had ever tried to hail one in the street.
- 40% claimed to have been overcharged at some time in the past due to their disability. The incidence of overcharging increased with severity of disability. Only one person considered it reasonable to be charged more for the “extra” service they received.
- A minority had experienced other forms of discrimination and 2 claimed they had actually been refused passage because of it.
- Only 2 people had ever complained about any of the discrimination they had experienced, the majority having reluctantly chosen to grin-and-bear-it.
- Although just 7 people said they thought drivers’ attitudes were generally good, only one person thought they were bad, the rest holding no firm view. Despite this, every respondent felt that drivers needed greater disability awareness training.
- Most people felt safe when travelling in taxis, but with some concerns, the most common being speeding.
- Although only a very small percentage expressed overall unhappiness with the service provided by either sector, as many people abstained from comment as expressed satisfaction. The strongest views, both positive and negative, came from the wheelchair-dependant users.

6 Findings from the Test

6.1 Statistical Summary

Glossary

General: n/a = Not applicable (journey not undertaken)
 Y = Yes
 N = No
 WAV = Wheelchair-Accessible Vehicle

Rank: BS = Bank Street
 Int = Interchange
 LW = Lower Westgate (Kirkgate Centre)
 NG = Norfolk Gardens (City Hall)
 5LE = 5-Lane Ends (Morrisons, Idle)

Destination: CBC = Carlisle Business Centre
 Idle = Idle village

Affiliated Company: CC = City Cabs, Great Horton Road
 CT = Central Taxis, Lumb Lane
 TT = Town Taxis, Morley Street

Test number	1A	1B	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9A	9B	10
Tester number	1	1	2	3	2	3	2	3	2	3	3	1
Date Test carried out	17/3	17/3	3/5	3/5	12/5	12/5	12/5	12/5	16/5	16/5	16/5	29/5
Time Test carried out	1200	1215	1500	1525	1225	1230	1500	1528	1440	1515	1525	1455
Peak (P) or Off-peak (O)	O	O	P	P	O	O	P	P	O	P	P	O
Rank	BS	NG	Int	Int	Int	Int	LW	LW	BS	BS	NG	5LE

Test number	1A	1B	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9A	9B	10
Destination	Idle	Idle	CBC	CBC	CBC	CBC	CBC	CBC	CBC	CBC	CBC	Idle
Taxi Plate Number	n/a	?	29	112	209	222	209	209	209	n/a	29	n/a
Affiliated Company	?	?	TT	CT	CT	CT	CT	CT	CT	CC	TT	?
Another driver radioed for a WAV?	n/a	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	n/a	N	n/a
Wheelchair faced front?	n/a	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	Y	n/a	Y	n/a
Wheelchair secured?	n/a	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	n/a	Y	n/a
Wheelchair occupant secured?	n/a	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	n/a	N	n/a
Fare charged (pence)	n/a	1000	450	400	430	500	390	430	400	n/a	410	n/a
Time waited for WAV (minutes)	n/a	0	20	26	5	20	30	24	5	(10)	3	n/a
Number of non-WAVs on rank before WAV arrived	n/a	0	9	11	3	9	26	24	3	(3)	2 (+1 WAV)	n/a

6.2 Additional Comments made by Testers:

- 1A** Non-WAV drivers waiting at the rank did not radio for a WAV to come to Bank Street. Instead, the Tester was advised to go to Norfolk Gardens. The Tester was told that that is where WAVs are located.
- 1B** Journey cost £10; normally it only costs about £7. Due to facing the rear, the Tester was unable to tell if the meter was running whilst being loaded and unloaded.
- 2** Clean cab. The polite and helpful driver gave assistance.
- 3** Clean cab. Efficient driver who knew how to operate restraints, but the ramp kept slipping out of its supports. 3 drivers radioed for WAVs.
- 4** *None*
- 5** Scruffy cab. There was only one pull-bar on each door. Seat belt was too short to use; driver's response was "don't worry, I'm a careful driver!". Journey started with £1.90 on the meter (rather than the prescribed £1.50).
- 6** The Tester was told that all WAVs were on the school run. Only the small wheels on the front of the wheelchair were secured; consequently, the wheelchair tipped forward when the driver braked. Ramp not secured because the driver had to load from the offside. Polite driver, but in need of training.
- 7** Wheelchair was only secured at the front; consequently it went backwards when the driver braked. The Tester had to insist on having the seat belt fastened. Polite driver, but in need of training. Journey started with £1.70 on the meter.
- 8** Same taxi as for Test Numbers 6 and 7, but with a different driver. He knew what he was doing.
- 9A** After waiting 10 minutes, the Tester was told that all WAVs were on the school run and that none would be available for 45-60 minutes. The Tester was advised to go to Norfolk Gardens. As with Test Number 1A, drivers did not radio for a WAV to come to Bank Street. Very unhelpful. As a WAV was soon acquired at Norfolk Gardens, the information given at Bank Street was untrue.
- 9B** *None*
- 10** The Tester was told that there were no WAVs operating on Bank Holiday Monday.

6.3 Analysis of the Test

The Test uncovered a number of issues related to the small number of WAVs available at any one time. The effects of low numbers were threefold. Firstly, Testers had to wait longer for a WAV to arrive at a rank than non-disabled people had to wait for a saloon. Secondly, availability was reduced at peak times and during holidays. Thirdly, some ranks were found to offer a better service than others. Testers also found that there were considerable variations in the quality of service offered by individual drivers, with some possibly guilty of discrimination, notably through overcharging. The following paragraphs examine these findings in more detail.

Ease of acquiring a WAV

- There was never the need to wait for a saloon, but in all but one case, Testers had to wait for a WAV. The average time waited was 15 minutes.
- If the Tester for journey 9A had waited 45 minutes at Bank Street instead of going to Norfolk Gardens after 10 minutes, the average wait would have been 18 minutes.
- Testers waited for over 20 minutes for a WAV in 5 of the completed 9 trips.
- The shortest wait was 5 minutes; the longest was 30 minutes.
- The worst locations were the busiest/most popular.
- At the Interchange (where a visitor gets his first impressions of the city), the average wait for a WAV was 17 minutes, with 8 saloons passing through the rank before the first WAV arrived. The longest wait was 26 minutes, preceded by 11 saloons.
- At Lower Westgate (outside the busy Kirkgate shopping centre), the average wait for a WAV was 27 minutes, with 25 saloons passing through the rank before the first WAV arrived. The longest wait was 30 minutes, preceded by 26 saloons.
- The saloon drivers' management strategy was to radio for a WAV from the rank. Only at Norfolk Gardens was this practice not always required. The success of this strategy depends upon the proximity of the nearest WAV. The system was unreliable (see comments above re journey 10) and open to abuse (see comments re journeys 1A and 9A).
- Waiting times for WAVs were longer at peak times of day. Anecdotal evidence from drivers was that WAVs were engaged periodically in contract work, e.g. schools. Waiting times for saloons were unaffected by peak periods.
- There was no guarantee that a WAV would arrive at all (see comments re journey 10).
- Although not fully tested, it is anticipated that the level of service will also decline during religious holidays and during the evening/night periods unless drivers operate shifts.
- There was strong evidence that the trade is using Norfolk Gardens as a WAV base. Saloon drivers waiting at other ranks radioed for WAVs. It is assumed that Norfolk Gardens has been chosen to act as a base as it is central to all other city centre ranks and is a relatively accessible rank itself, being wide and flat.

- Choice of Norfolk Gardens as a base may suit the trade, but it does not suit disabled customers. Apart from City Hall, it is not particularly near any of the main attractions in the city centre. Directing disabled customers to Norfolk Gardens is discrimination. Disabled customers were faced with a choice: go to Norfolk Gardens crossing dangerous roads, possibly in inclement weather, or wait at another rank until a WAV eventually became available. The trade's ability to operate this system is like bus drivers deciding which stops they will set down at. It is a system that suits the trade, but not the customer.
- The refusal of some drivers to radio for a WAV suggests that protective trade practices may be operating on different ranks.

Quality of customer care

- Standards of drivers' knowledge were considerably varied. Attitudes also varied, with some adopting a flippant approach to safety.
- Although wheelchairs were fastened on 7 out of 9 occasions, they were rarely secured properly or consistently.
- Only 4 times was the wheelchair occupant secured.
- Even when using the same vehicle, conditions were inconsistent, e.g. although equal journeys 6 and 7 were undertaken just half an hour apart in the same vehicle, one passenger faced forward, the other backward, only one passenger was secured and each was charged a different amount.
- In summary, out of 9 journeys, both the chair and the occupant were secured on 3 occasions, the chair only was secured on 4 occasions, the occupant only was secured once, and neither chair nor occupant were secured once.
- Although prices charged were rarely identical, the range was not great, being £3.90 to £5.00 for the 8 trips to Carlisle Business Centre.
- Although fares charged compared favourably to the prices charged by Private Hire companies on the Testers' journeys into the city centre, there was evidence of overcharging on 3 occasions, i.e. one third of all trips. This always occurred when the passenger was facing the rear and was unable to see the meter.

7 Conclusions

Although there was a general perception in the Questionnaire that the Hackney Carriage sector offered a more professional and better quality service than the Private Hire sector, the Test did not bear this out. The Questionnaire also showed that despite these perceptions, the majority of people depended on the Private Hire sector to meet their needs, especially on outward journeys from home. People cited greater cost (metered charges and call-out charges) and longer waiting times as negative reasons against the use of Hackney Carriages. These were coupled with positive reasons for choosing Private Hire, in particular, the establishment of trust in favourite drivers and firms and the suitability of particular vehicles. Return journeys were often pre-booked, especially if the destination was outside the City Centre, due to the scarcity of ranks elsewhere and lack of knowledge about the suitability of local Private Hire companies and vehicles. However, it is important not to assume that because the Private Hire sector meets the demand that the Hackney Carriage sector cannot meet that there is no need for the Hackney carriage sector to change. On the contrary, until the balance is changed, disabled people do not have real choice, they do not have the ability to be spontaneous and they do not have equality with non-disabled people.

The need for drivers to undergo disability awareness training was the only issue to get 100% support across the whole sample interrogated by the Questionnaire and was the greatest single concern due to experiences of discrimination and poor service, including failure to carry proper equipment or knowledge of how to use it. Whilst the attitude of most drivers was generally considered to be good, young drivers being the exception, their knowledge of disability issues was questioned.

The main conclusion of the Test was that it confirmed many of the anecdotal findings of the Questionnaire and despite the small sample, it uncovered some significant and interesting findings. Moreover, the findings were consistent. They were not merely one-off incidents; they were typical. One thing that should be of particular concern to the Council is that the perception in the Questionnaire that the Hackney Carriage sector is smart and professional by comparison to the Private Hire sector, did not hold up in reality. The service was found to be unreliable and fraught with problems, not least, the inconsistency in levels of service and knowledge of individual drivers.

By comparison to the equivalent experiences of non-disabled people, our disabled Testers had to suffer excessively long waits for a WAV to arrive. Sometimes there would be no WAVs available, particularly at peak times and there was a tendency amongst drivers to direct disabled customers to Norfolk Gardens to get a WAV or to summon a WAV from there by radio. These illustrate a poor service and inadequate numbers of WAVs to meet demand. In addition, Testers often felt unsafe whilst travelling, due to not being properly secured and there was inconsistency in charging. Inconsistencies were most notable when different drivers operated the same vehicle. This begs the question as to whether all drivers are legally entitled to be driving.

The important thing to note is that these problems did not appear in isolation; they often occurred simultaneously in various combinations. Not a single journey was satisfactory in every respect. This is a crucial finding. Disabled people face difficulties every time they take a taxi, i.e. there is always something not quite right. This does not happen to non-disabled people. They may experience a problem occasionally; disabled people, we found, experienced a problem every time.

It should also be noted that all the Tests were undertaken in fine weather in the Spring. The problems experienced would have been worse if the Tests had been done in the pouring rain or when there was ice on the ground, especially in hilly locations, such as the rank at Lower Westgate. Imagine a disabled person trying to catch a taxi after shopping at the Kirkgate Centre in the run up to Christmas in the snow. No wonder there has been a growth in online shopping!

The negative findings are not only bad for disabled people, they are bad for the local economy. Many of the problems encountered were tempered somewhat by the fact that all our Testers were local people. They all live in the Bradford area and have therefore come to “know the ropes” and plan accordingly. But the fact that they do this should not make the Council feel complacent. If a non-disabled Bradfordian takes a trip by rail to another town, he can be confident that he can utilise any taxi at his destination to complete his journey. By contrast, a disabled Bradfordian is only able to do this if he knows that the town he is visiting has a 100% accessible fleet. Towns with such provision know that they are popular locations and benefit from the extra patronage they get, not least from the considerable spending power of disabled people. Similarly, Bradford’s retail and leisure economies would benefit if disabled people from outside the city were able to arrive spontaneously at either of the two rail stations in the knowledge that there was a fully accessible taxi fleet awaiting them to enable them to enjoy the city’s facilities.

In summary, these issues, which are generally merely minor and irritating inconveniences to non-disabled people, are major problems for disabled people and prevent them from being able to be spontaneous and therefore participate fully and equally in society. Journeys have to be planned meticulously and in advance to ensure a relatively stress-free trip into the city centre. Consistency and reliability is something that the Hackney Carriage sector is currently unable to offer disabled people due to the paucity of WAVs. These are issues we feel the Council needs to address urgently, particularly in the light of the new Disability Equality Duty it is subject to.

8 Recommendations

Our main concern is the inequality caused by the paucity of WAVs. Their number needs to be increased as soon as possible. We are not experts when it comes to the nuances and practicalities of regulation versus deregulation. Obviously, the Council needs to fully consider the relative merits of either approach and, indeed, it has a legal obligation to do so. As a consumer group, however, our objective is to secure a satisfactory end result. We are concerned solely with the outcome. Consequently, we are largely unconcerned with the means to the end. How the end is achieved is a matter for the Council's officers, politicians and lawyers. We simply ask that the Council takes immediate action to increase the number of WAVs in Bradford.

Secondly, we urge the Council to remove inconsistencies in the quality of service given by drivers. We have uncovered evidence of ignorance and evidence of discriminatory practices. We urge the Council to ensure that adequate disability awareness training is given to all drivers and to penalise those who fail to adhere to the code.

There are other issues that need to be addressed in separate exercises, such as the distribution of ranks and the technical specification of vehicles. We ask that we be invited to participate in these exercises.

Our overall aim is to achieve equality of access and service. We want a level playing field. Equality will only be achieved when everyone can be spontaneous, when everyone can get into the first taxi on the rank and when everyone is treated with equal respect. We therefore ask the Council to put the needs of all its customers before the pecuniary needs of the trade.

9 Appendix

BRADFORD CASE STUDY: QUESTIONNAIRE SEEKING THE VIEWS OF MOBILITY-IMPAIRED POTENTIAL TAXI USERS

(NB. Not all questions will apply and none are compulsory. Only answer those questions you feel comfortable answering)

1. What is your name?
.....
2. In what way do you consider yourself to be disabled?
.....
3. What is the medical cause of your impairment / disability?
.....
4. Have you had this condition / these conditions since birth?
Yes.....
No.....
5. Is it / are they progressive?
Yes.....
No.....
6. Do you use a wheelchair?
No.....
Sometimes.....
Most of the time.....
All of the time
7. If you use a wheelchair, is it?
Propelled manually.....
Electric powered.....
Use both, but mostly manual.....
Use both, but mostly electric.....
8. What other artificial assistance do you need to get out and about, e.g. walking sticks, prosthetics, etc?
.....
9. Do you require a companion / carer to be with you?
No.....
Sometimes.....
Most of the time.....
All of the time.....

10. Do you normally drive your own vehicle?
 Yes.....
 No.....
11. Do you ever use public transport in Bradford (i.e. train, bus, Access Bus or taxi) to get out and about?
 No.....
 Sometimes.....
 Most of the time.....
 All of the time.....
 Why?.....
12. If you do use public transport, do you use trains?
 No.....
 Sometimes.....
 Most of the time.....
 All of the time.....
 Why?.....
- Do you use buses?
 No.....
 Sometimes.....
 Most of the time.....
 All of the time.....
 Why?.....
- Do you use Access Buses?
 No.....
 Sometimes.....
 Most of the time.....
 All of the time.....
 Why?.....
- Do you use Hackney Carriage taxis [*white livery with green stripe, white plates, metered fares set by the City Council, can be hailed in the street, uses ranks*]?
 No.....
 Sometimes.....
 Most of the time.....
 All of the time.....
 Why?.....
- Do you use Private Hire taxis [*any colour, yellow plates, can charge what they like, cannot be hailed in the street, must be prebooked*]?
 No.....
 Sometimes.....
 Most of the time.....
 All of the time.....
 Why?.....

13. If you use taxis, do you prefer to use?
 Hackney Carriage vehicles.....
 Private Hire vehicles.....
 Why?.....
14. Do you have a particular favourite driver / company who you usually use?
 Who?.....
 Why?.....
15. For your return journey, do you tend to use the same company with whom you make your outward journey?
 Not a concern.....
 Not usually.....
 Usually.....
 Always.....
 Why?.....
16. Do you usually prearrange your return journey to be sure / confident of getting back?
 Yes.....
 No.....
17. Do you feel confident when you use taxis in Bradford that you will be able to leave your starting location and reach your final destination and all stops in between without mishap?
 Yes.....
 No.....
18. If you use taxis and also use a wheelchair, do you require the vehicle to be wheelchair-accessible (i.e. capable of transporting you whilst remaining seated in your wheelchair), accessed via ramp, platform or hoist?
 Yes.....
 No.....
19. If you use taxis, what other accessible features designed for mobility-impaired passengers do you need the vehicle to have, e.g. swivel seats, high seats, high roof, low threshold, intermediate step, grab rails, etc?

20. Does the technical specification of the taxi make a difference to whether you are able to use it?
 Yes.....
 No.....
 Is there a type of vehicle that you prefer?.....
 What types are you unable to use?.....
21. When you call for an accessible taxi from home, or from some other usual place of origin, how long do you normally have to wait for one to arrive?.....
 How much longer is this than you would expect to have to wait for a non-accessible taxi?.....

22. Do you find that accessible taxis are more difficult to acquire at certain times of the day, the week, the year?
 Yes.....
 No.....
 If yes, when and why?.....
23. Do you know which companies in Bradford operate accessible vehicles?
 Yes.....
 No.....
 Some.....
24. If you are a wheelchair user, have you ever tried to hail a wheelchair-accessible Hackney Carriage in a Bradford street?
 Yes.....
 No.....
 If yes, what were your experiences?.....
25. If you are a wheelchair user, have you ever tried to acquire a wheelchair-accessible Hackney Carriage from a Bradford rank?
 Yes.....
 No.....
 If yes, what were your experiences?.....
 How long did you have to wait for one to arrive?.....
26. Bradford City Council has, for over a decade, limited the number of Hackney Carriages to 224. Do you think this number should be increased?
 Yes.....
 No.....
 If yes, how many should there be?.....
27. Do you think there should be more wheelchair-accessible Hackney Carriages in Bradford (at the moment there are just 11 out of 224)?
 Yes.....
 No.....
 If yes, what proportion should be wheelchair-accessible?.....
28. Do you think all Hackney Carriages in Bradford should have other accessible features, some of which are suggested in Question 19, to cater for people with other types of impairment, i.e. mobility problems not requiring a wheelchair, blind / visually impaired, deaf and learning disabilities?
 Yes, all.....
 No, only some.....
29. Do you think that issuing a fixed number of new Hackney Carriage licenses, whilst keeping the service regulated, is the best way to increase the number of wheelchair-accessible vehicles, or do you think that the best way is to deregulate and allow market forces to determine the number?

30. Do you think that if the service were deregulated, the increased numbers of taxis would make it harder for the City Council to maintain standards, i.e. increased quantity at the expense of reduced quality?
 Yes.....
 No.....
31. Do you think it is reasonable to be charged a higher amount if you require a wheelchair-accessible taxi and/or require additional assistance?
 Yes.....
 No.....
32. Do you consider yourself to have ever been overcharged by Bradford taxi drivers due to any extra requirements your impairment necessitates?
 Yes.....
 No.....
33. Has a driver ever refused to take you as a passenger due to your impairment?
 Yes.....
 No.....
 If yes, why?.....
34. Have you ever experienced any other inappropriate attitude or behaviour from a Bradford taxi driver due to your impairment?
 Yes.....
 No.....
 If yes, what?.....
35. If you have ever experienced discrimination on the grounds of your disability, did you make a complaint?
 Yes.....
 No.....
 If yes, what was the outcome?.....
36. Do you find the attitude and behaviour of most Bradford taxi drivers to be?
 Positive.....
 Negative.....
 Neutral / indifferent.....
37. Do you think taxi drivers require better training as a condition of license?
 Yes.....
 No.....
38. Do you feel safe when travelling in taxis?
 Yes.....
 No.....
 If no, why?.....

39. In general, how satisfied are you with Bradford's existing Hackney Carriage service?
 Not at all.....
 Not much.....
 Neutral.....
 Mostly.....
 Almost always.....
 Why?.....
40. In general, how satisfied are you with Bradford's existing Private Hire service?
 Not at all.....
 Not much.....
 Neutral.....
 Mostly.....
 Almost always.....
 Why?.....
41. If you tend to use a particular driver or company how satisfied are you with them?
 (You may wish to refer back to Question 14)
 Not at all.....
 Not much.....
 Neutral.....
 Mostly.....
 Almost always.....
 Why?.....
42. How, in your experience, does Bradford's taxi service compare with that in any other city you may be familiar with?

43. Finally, please add any other comments you wish to make in the space below

Thank you for you help

Your name and other personal details will not be disclosed without your permission