

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Hackney Carriage Vehicle Limits

There is **no evidence of any significant unmet demand** within the survey results observed. The current limit on the number of hackney vehicles is possible to defend in Court against any action taken by those wishing to claim there was significant unmet demand. It appears that the effect of the recently introduced 10 plates has been effective, but that no further issue is required at this point in time.

The WAGN set limit at the station does not appear to be restraining supply and so creating any significant unmet demand at this location. It is very important that the Council continue to ensure the development of this rank is not harmed by decisions made by WAGN.

6.2 Vehicle Composition, Age and Disabled Accessibility

The vehicle fleets seem to be very similar between hackney and private hire. A generally good mix of vehicle type is provided and this needs to continue to be encouraged. The provision of wheelchair accessible and high occupancy vehicles is relatively good and gives no cause for concern.

6.3 Public Needs for the Current Service

It appears that most public needs for the current service are met. The only issues regarding under-supply relate to the maximum of 6 hours per week heavy demand at Danestrete and, more significantly, the Leisure Park. There is need, however, to try to involve more disabled people in consultation as few comments were received.

The Swingate rank is relatively well located with respect to the Shopping area. However, there are no signs within the Shopping Centre for the rank, and some of the signing outside the Centre fails to mention the rank. Signing of the Shopping and Town centres should be revised to ensure that potential customers can be confident in being led to the rank by the shortest possible route. This might raise the level of use of this rank, which appears to be low for such a location.

Consideration must be given to the safety of the current arrangements at the Railway Station. There are times when public vehicles significantly affect the operation of the rank, and jeopardise public safety. This issue should be discussed between the trade, WAGN and the Council. One possible suggestion was to restrain traffic leaving from being able to join the far traffic lane, which results in long waits and low capacity exit from the area. Thought should also be given to splitting the public vehicle area from the rank to ensure that sufficient manoeuvring space is always available for the taxis, and this could be linked to an attempt to ensure taxis were given priority in leaving the area.

Demand at Danestrete is relatively light, but can lead to both long waits and people walking to the other ranks. Discussions should be held between the Council, the Trade, and the club at this location to try to obtain a better service for the clientele.

Demand for the official rank at the Leisure Park is very heavy. The shelter is mainly abused and many passengers shun it and spill out within the general traffic and taxis. The location of the rank means that the majority of passengers have to cross through traffic and consideration should be given to provision of two ranks along the club frontages. It could be possible that a private taxi access could be developed using the gate which is currently closed at 23:00, but matters related to access through the site (why the gate is shut) would need to be carefully considered.

6.4 Issues regarding Taxi Policy

The current Council policy of maintaining a limit on the number of hackney licences does not appear to be disadvantaging the public in the Council area. The present level of vehicles is relatively high compared to other similar areas (except where no limit was applied even since the 1985 Transport Act). There is some concern, however, that the lesser number of vehicles available on Saturday evenings is having a clear negative effect on service, and the issues surrounding this need to be addressed.

6.5 Development of a Taxi Quality Partnership

Whilst the lack of significant unmet demand implies no need for an increase in the number of white plates on issue, the study has highlighted a number of ways in which the Stevenage taxi industry can provide enhanced service to the area.

Development of the industry, including ensuring that taxis are operating as a key part of an integrated transport system, needs to be undertaken in a manner which seriously grasps the issues identified and draws together all involved parties to work in partnership. The underpinning issue must be for the Council to develop and agree a thorough and agreed policy and strategy. This can best be achieved by the establishment of a taxi quality partnership.

The idea of taxi quality partnerships has been suggested for a number of years. The idea grew from the successful application of Bus Quality Partnerships (BQP) (see "Quality Bus Infrastructure – a manual and guide", TAS Partnership, 2000). This reference defines a BQP as "an agreement, either formal or informal, between one or more authorities and one or more bus operators for measures to be taken up by more than one party to enhance services in a defined area". This definition is relatively easily translated to the taxi environment. It is clear that the 'defined area' must equate to a licensing area in general, although it could also cover a wider area if cross boundary problems were identified.

Aims are as follows:

- Ensure expenditure is cost-efficient;
- Secure best value for money;
- Not inhibiting competition;
- Working to clearly stated policies and objectives.