

# Licensing Committee

## Hackney Carriage Specification – Roof-sign requirements

7 April 2022

### Report of Licensing Manager

#### PURPOSE OF REPORT

As part of the new private hire and hackney carriage policy, vehicle specifications for both vehicles were updated. For hackney carriages, a standardised roof-sign was approved by Licensing Committee.

Since notification of this requirement a number of calls and e-mails had been received from hackney carriage proprietors questioning the reason for the changes to roof signs. The drivers that have contacted the licensing service have raised concerns about the cost burden that this will have at a time of increased fuel costs and before any new fare tariff has been agreed/implemented.

**This report is public.**

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) **It is recommended that members consider the representations made by the drivers and determine whether the financial impact is such that the requirement to replace existing roof signs to meet the new policy standard should be paused for a period of time and;**
- (2) **If the committee do decide to pause the policy change, to determine what period delay would be reasonable.**

#### 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 As members of Licensing Committee will be aware, when considering vehicle specifications as part of the private hire and hackney carriage vehicle policy, livery and signage were discussed, including the potential merits of a colour policy across the hackney carriage fleet and improved signage requirements. It was decided at a meeting of the Licensing Committee on 26 August 2021 that signage requirements were to be strengthened across the private hire and hackney carriage fleet and that hackney carriages must display a specified roof-sign.
- 1.2 The vehicle specification for hackney carriages which includes roof sign requirements is attached as **Appendix 1**.

## 2.0 Background

- 2.1 At a meeting of the Licensing Committee on 26 August 2021 members had the opportunity to view the roof signs and were satisfied they were in accordance with relevant British standards, were good quality and fit for purpose. The committee members also had the opportunity to consider the style and appearance and whether the change was proportionate and reasonable.
- 2.2 The rationale for introducing a new standard was to bring about consistency across the fleet, with the focus on public safety. Improving public safety is a key responsibility for the Licensing function of the Council. Disparities in appearance, quality and design in the 108 licensed vehicles was noted. Members wanted to create an element of uniformity, assisting the public with recognising a hackney carriage, capable of being flagged down by a member of the public.
- 2.3 The cost of the new roof signs is £90 and depending on whether the vehicle is inspected yearly, every 6 months or every 4 months, there is an option to spread the cost out over 1, 2 or 3 instalments as shown below:-
- Annual licence – 1 payment of £90  
6 monthly licence – 2 payments of £45  
4 monthly licence – 3 payments of £30
- 2.4 The installation of the roof-sign and cost associated will be the responsibility of the hackney carriage proprietor, as is current practice.

## 3.0 Consultation

- 3.1 At a meeting of the Licensing Committee on 18 March 2021 members approved a 12-week public consultation on the draft private hire and hackney carriage policy. The consultation period ran from Monday 12<sup>th</sup> March 2021 with the last date for representations being Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> June 2021. Each licence holder was sent a letter, encouraging responses to the online questionnaire and the option to provide a written response. An example of the letter is attached at **Appendix 2**.
- 3.2 Due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic no face-to-face consultation could be facilitated, instead the public was encouraged to review the draft policy and respond to the consultation via the Councils website and social media platforms, including Facebook and twitter. In addition, those with a specific interest in a section of the policy were signposted to relevant sections and encouraged to respond to proposals. For example, private hire operators were contacted, highlighting the updated conditions proposed in the policy document and asked for their views.
- 2.4 The consultation exercise resulted in 12 responses, with no feedback on livery or signage. Including roof-signs. In September 2021 the licensed trade was notified of some of the decisions to be taken regarding the policy in a trade newsletter, the newsletter is sent to all licence holders via our licensing email distribution list with a request for feedback, proposals to introduce a standardised roof-sign were included.

A copy of the newsletter is attached at **Appendix 3**.

### **3.0. Trade comments**

- 3.1 The licensing service sent a reminder to all licence holders renewing their vehicle licence in April, along with a copy of the updated vehicle specification for their attention as these were to be the first of licence holders affected by the policy changes.
- 3.2 Since then, the licensing service has received a small number of representations from hackney carriage proprietors. Comments received in response to the new roof signs covered concerns about the quality, whether they would be safe, the cost, objections to the requirement to change existing roof signs that did not comply, and that the introduction at this time of increased fuel costs.
- 3.3 Information regarding the roof-signs has been obtained from suppliers, Signs Express via Managing Director Lee Reynolds. Assurances are provided in terms of quality, design and safety of the approved roof-signs. This should alleviate any concerns from the licensed trade regarding safety and quality of the product.
- 3.2 This report has been brought to the Licensing committee at this time in order to consider whether a delay to the requirement to replace roof signs would be appropriate given that:-
  - a) Fuel costs have recently increased significantly in the last few weeks
  - b) Cabinet recommended further consultation with the licensed trade regarding a review of the hackney carriage fare tariff, hence a delay of approx. 3 months in an uplift in fares for the licensed trade.
  - c) Inflation is predicted to continue to rise for the next few months and maybe for the rest of the year.
- 3.3 It is not proposed to reconsider the broader private hire and hackney carriage licensing policy or the agreement to introduce the changes to hackney carriage roof-signs. This has previously been agreed by this committee following a period of consultation.

### **4.0 Conclusion**

- 4.1 Although the roof sign policy was agreed on the grounds of improving public safety, introducing a short delay at this time would not cause significant risk.
- 4.2 Members should be aware that in agreeing a new policy, discussions with a local supplier Signs Express to ensure availability of the roof signs resulted in the supplier committing £10,000 in advanced orders to ensure adequate supplies are available. The company has expressed concern that the decision to delay the policy change would have an impact on the business and they have asked for reassurance from the Licensing manager that the previous decision to introduce the changes will be honoured.

<p><b>CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT</b> <b>(including Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)</b></p> <p>[Click here and type conclusion of impact assesment]</p>
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**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Hackney Carriage proprietors will be required to purchase a roof-sign at a cost of £90 per vehicle, payment options are available dependent on the age of the vehicle. Installation costs will also be met by the proprietors (as is current practice).

There is also the potential for challenges by the trade to the change in policy, this may incur legal costs to defend any such challenge.

**SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS**

Not applicable

**LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

None identified

**MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS**

Not applicable

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Licensing Committee report and minutes 26 August 2021

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