



Independent Health Concern



The Editor
The Shuttle
Kidderminster

10 June 2007

Dear Sir

The letter from John-Paul Campion, relating to the taxi issue effectively and eloquently sets out the Council line on this matter. Clearly the Council are attempting to justify their decision based on future Government guidelines, a desire to be seen to be at the forefront of change and a commendable desire to ensure disabled access. What their policy blindly fails to recognise, however, is the real cost to taxi users, who will be the losers in all of this as a consequence of these ill thought out and restrictive proposals.

Firstly, the Government guidelines initially did not come into force for “first tier authorities” until 2010, now deferred for some time due, as is usual with so many untried Government initiatives, to serious teething problems. Wyre Forest was not in this “first tier” of authorities so really hasn’t needed to run headlong into the unknown until the new arrangements were tried and tested – and probably amended - by Government. Bromsgrove is in the “first tier” and has not yet started planning the change!

The requirement for “disabled” access has been taken to mean only “wheelchair” access and a complete fleet of wheelchair access vehicles does not necessarily provide suitable access for many people with other ambulatory disabilities or the elderly who have problems with the high steps and “walking” into specialist built wheelchair access taxis. Indeed, we believe that Disability Action, the local experts, only want a 1 to 3 ratio of new cabs, recognising that all people with a disability don’t use a wheelchair and have varying access needs. The public need to be aware that this policy will very soon lead to an end of saloon cars being used as licensed taxis. Clearly, to cater for all potential users, proper arrangements should include a mixed fleet, still permitted under the Government guideline, and personal choice.

Cllr Campion says the cost is “slightly higher” for specialist taxis. He really needs to check his facts! A perfectly adequate low mileage second hand saloon car is available for £8000 or £9000. A custom built London taxi costs £32000 – 4 times the cost! Even a Fiat style converted “van” costs over £20000. The consequence of this is that instead of **increasing** the fleet through deregulation, which is the Council’s intention, the fleet will **decrease** due to the extortionate vehicle replacement costs for existing operators or new individuals wishing to enter the trade. Many potential new operators will not join the trade because of these costs so destroying one of the Council’s stated reasons for this policy – more cabs. This will ultimately lead to an increase of private hire cars trading in the area, many of whom may come from other towns, none of whom will give the quality of service or personal safety offered by our local taxi firms. The local demand will be left unfilled by our own taxis due to Council policy.

Finally, regarding Cllr Campion’s appalling comment about a cartel, so what? The Council set the taxi fares and all licensed operators charge the same, so who runs the taxis is irrelevant, the costs and standard of service are consistent. Private hire cars do not have a fee set by the Council and can charge what they want, seldom lower than the taxi fare. Is this what your Council wants, fewer licensed taxis – poorer service – higher costs? How does that help the public?

Yours sincerely

**Independent Health Concern Councillors – Wyre Forest District Council.
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