

TO CONSIDER THE USE OF WATFORD'S BUS LANES BY HACKNEY CARRIAGES

Report of the Network Manager

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek the panels views on allowing taxis (hackney carriages) to use the bus lanes in Watford.
- 1.2 Views from the panel will be fed into the forthcoming Highways and Transport Panel for consideration.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In April 2011, HCC received a letter from the Chair of Watford Hackney Carriage Drivers Association requesting that consideration be given to allowing taxis to use specific sections of the bus lanes in Watford.
- 2.2 Three sites initially highlighted by the Association:
 1. *Lower High Street/High Street/A411 Exchange Road junction – 'No Entry' to High Street from Lower High Street, except buses. (This is not a bus lane, but has a bus only restriction)*
 2. *Station Road bus lane - between Watford Junction and St Albans Road.*
 3. *St Albans Road bus lane – between Bedford Street and Station Road*
- 2.3 Following the request in April 2011, the Chair of the Association and South West Herts Network Management team met to discuss the issues in more detail and to investigate the options. The main reason cited by the association for allowing taxis to use bus lanes was:

'We have huge problems with congestion and fare disputes with passengers who are demanding that we should be able to use the bus lanes. On frequent occasions passengers are jumping out of Taxis without paying. This is a big problem and causing so much grief for drivers concerned.'
- 2.4 The request only applies to licensed hackney carriages. It is not suggested to include private hire vehicles in this proposal.
- 2.5 There are 289 hackney carriages registered by Watford Borough Council.

- 2.6 The Watford Hackney Carriage Drivers Association estimates that 40% of Watford’s registered taxis work during the day. The remaining 60% work during the night. A typical night shift is 6pm – 2am (6pm – 4am on Fridays and Saturdays).
- 2.7 The Association reports they experience loss of trade particularly during peak times, as taxis are forced to wait in queues with other traffic.
- 2.8 The Association suggest that if they were allowed to use Watford’s bus lanes, they could bypass congestion at key points in Watford to improve travel times, reduce fares and generally make travelling by taxi more attractive.
- 2.9 Improved travel times would improve the turnover of journeys and increase the number of fares that a taxi could potentially take during the shift.
- 2.10 Section 3.26 of LTP3 Volume 2 (Policy Document) refers to taxis and states:

Taxis form an important part of the integrated passenger transport network. They have a role to play in reducing dependency on the private car by providing a final leg in rail or bus journeys, and by providing an alternative to walking and cycling in inclement weather.

3.0 Traffic Surveys

3.1 Traffic surveys were carried out counting the numbers of taxis and buses during peak times at the locations below;

1. Lower High Street/Exchange Road/High Street;
2. Station Road (near St Albans Road);
3. St Albans Road (near Station Road);

3.2 The full results of the traffic surveys are shown below:

	Left Turn (Lower High Street to Exchange Road)		Straight Ahead (Lower High Street to High Street)	
	BUSES	TAXIS	BUSES	TAXIS
	Morning (7am – 10am)	4	15	40
Afternoon (4pm – 7pm)	2	20	39	2

Table 1: Lower High Street Traffic Survey

	Left Turn (St Albans Road to Station Road)		Straight Ahead (St Albans Road)	
	BUSES	TAXIS	BUSES	TAXIS
	Morning (7am – 10am)	52	29	2
Afternoon (4pm – 7pm)	43	16	1	56

Table 2: A412 St Albans Road Traffic Survey

	Left Turn (Station Road to St Albans Road southbound)		Straight Ahead (St Albans Road)		Right Turn (Station Road to St Albans Road northbound)	
	BUSES	TAXIS	BUSES	TAXIS	BUSES	TAXIS
	Morning (7am – 10am)	4	49	5	46	47
Afternoon (4pm – 7pm)	3	39	3	34	52	30

Table 3: Station Road Traffic Survey

4.0 Impacts

- 4.1 Traffic surveys of buses and taxis carried at the three sites showed varying levels of bus and taxi use.
- 4.2 Allowing taxis to use bus lanes will have some impact on buses, although the traffic surveys suggest this should not be significant.
- 4.3 Allowing taxis to use bus lanes would slightly reduce the number of vehicles using multi vehicle lanes, which may prove of some benefit to traffic. However, any changes to signal timings such as increased 'green time' to accommodate taxis through junctions is likely to have a negative effect on all traffic.

5.0 Options

- 5.1 Would the panel:
 - i. Prefer to retain the current position and only allow buses and pedal cycles to use bus lanes in Watford;
 - or
 - ii. Prefer to allow taxis (hackney carriages) to use some or all bus lanes and 'bus only' junctions in Watford;

6.0 Contact Officer:

Muthiah Gunarajah – Network Manager (SW)
01923 257060