

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

4th Meeting, 2022 (Session 6), Wednesday 9
March 2022

PE1856: Support the taxi trade

Note by the Clerk

Lodged on 24 March 2021

Petitioner Pat Rafferty on behalf of Unite

Petition summary Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to protect the future of the taxi trade by:

- providing financial support to taxi drivers;
- setting up a national stakeholder group with trade union driver representatives;
- reviewing low emission standards and implementation dates

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1856>

Introduction

1. The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on [1 December 2021](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to taxi owner associations, taxi driver unions and COSLA. COSLA advised that licensing information is held at local authority level, therefore the Committee wrote to local councils seeking figures on taxi licenses.
2. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee has received new responses from the following stakeholders –
 - Scottish Taxi Federation
 - Dundee City Council
 - East Lothian Council
 - Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
 - Glasgow City Council

- Orkney Islands Council
- South Ayrshire Council
- Fife Council
- East Renfrewshire Council
- Perth and Kinross Council
- Aberdeen City Council
- Moray Council
- North Lanarkshire Council

4. The written submissions are set out in **Annexe C**.
5. Written submissions received prior to the Committee’s last consideration can be found on the petition’s webpage. All written submissions received on the petition before May 2021 can be viewed on the petition on [the archive webpage](#).
6. Further background information about this petition can be found in the [SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.
7. The Scottish Government’s initial position on this petition can be found on the [petition’s webpage](#).
8. Members may wish to note that local authorities were asked for information about how many taxi licences were active before the pandemic and how many are still active. Responses highlighted figures for operator numbers and driver licenses. The tables below reflect the total taxi and private figures for operators and licenses that were provided.
9. Taxi and private operator figures:

Council	Pre-pandemic	Current
Dundee	763	679
East Renfrewshire	479	413
Perth and Kinross	343	333
Moray	120	155
North Lanarkshire	2043	1678
Total	3,748	3,258

10. Taxi and private drivers licenses:

Council	Pre-pandemic	Current
East Lothian	387	280
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar	93	86
Orkney	55	34
Aberdeen	883	648
Glasgow	2400	2043
South Ayrshire	618	499
Fife	1818	1592
Dundee	763	679
East Renfrewshire	703	506
Perth and Kinross	678	543
Moray	187	262
North Lanarkshire	2851	2176
Total	11,436	9,348

Action

The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

Clerk to the Committee

Annexe A

PE1856: Support the taxi trade

Petitioner

Pat Rafferty on behalf of Unite

Date Lodged

24/03/2021

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to protect the future of the taxi trade by:

- providing financial support to taxi drivers;
- setting up a national stakeholder group with trade union driver representatives;
- reviewing low emission standards and implementation dates

Previous action

We have been in contact with MSPs to press for support and raised these issues in discussions with Scottish Ministers and Government officials. Questions have also been asked in the chamber.

Background information

An online survey of taxi drivers has revealed the devastating impact on the trade with many harrowing stories from drivers who are struggling to financially survive. Many drivers are regularly working 16-17-hour days with a shift being determined as having been 'good' if £50 is cleared.

Unite Scotland has highlighted 'loopholes' in a number of Scottish Government schemes which have led to drivers being unable to access financial support.

The Unite Scotland survey shows that 30% of drivers have been unable to access any financial help from government support schemes. For those that have been able to access financial help from government:

37% report that it represents less than 25% of their average earnings;

18% report that it represents between 25% - 50% of their average earnings;

20% report that it represents between 50% - 75% of their average earnings;

25% report that it represents over 75% of average earnings.

The COVID19 crisis continues to have a devastating effect on the cab and taxi trade. Our members are reporting a 90% reduction in income. This is unsustainable and means that many owners and drivers are unable to cover their costs, let alone make a living to support themselves and their families.

We feel our members are the forgotten spoke in our public transport wheel, too many of our members are excluded from the government help available. This is leading to savings being exhausted, families forced in to poverty, bankruptcy and a mental health emergency. In our opinion, promises have been made to the trade that have been broken. The Scottish Government must act now. We are asking parliamentarians to support taxi drivers across Scotland and to deliver financial support to save the trade.

Our members demand:

- Access to business support, grants and loans;
- Additional funding for operators and drivers;
- A national stakeholder group to be set up to safeguard the future of the trade with trade union driver representatives involved as a key stakeholder;
- A review of Low Emission standards and implementation dates to give the trade additional time to adjust to Environmental targets.

Unite Scotland is asking the Scottish Government to adopt targeted schemes similar to those in Northern Ireland and Wales to support the taxi trade.

Annexe B

Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE1856 on 1st December 2021

The Convener: PE1856, which has been lodged by Pat Rafferty on behalf of Unite the union, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to protect the future of the taxi trade by providing financial support to taxi drivers; setting up a national stakeholder group with trade union driver representatives; and reviewing low-emission standards and implementation dates. When we last considered the petition on 1 September, we agreed to write to the Scottish Government to raise concerns highlighted by the petitioner and to highlight his suggestions that funding be extended and incentive levels increased for drivers to upgrade their cabs; that there be greater clarity on exemptions to the low-emission zones and for taxi cabs to be considered exempt from LEZ charges in line with other forms of public transport; and that the Energy Savings Trust should increase the current £10,000 grant for liquefied petroleum gas retrofit by £2,500. We also sought further details of the national stakeholder group and the timescales associated with establishing it.

In response to the committee's most recent correspondence, the Scottish Government states that, in relation to increasing the grant offering to taxi drivers, funding and budget plans have already been set for the current fiscal year, and future funding rounds will be subject to the usual spending review process. The Scottish Government also provided further information about LEZ exemptions, noting that LEZ-compliant taxis are "an important and valued part of the urban transport mix" and stating that funding is available in the current fiscal year for operators wishing to take up the support on offer.

Finally, the committee might wish to note that the petitioner has been put in touch with the relevant officials at the Scottish Government to discuss engagement between Transport Scotland and the taxi sector.

In light of the Scottish Government's most recent submission and further contact from the petitioner, do members have any comments or suggestions for action?

Paul Sweeney: Notwithstanding the Scottish Government's submission, I think that it would be appropriate to take further evidence directly from stakeholders in the sector, particularly taxi drivers. I understand from my casework that there are significant problems of lack of sufficient support and that that has led to the exit of a significant number of drivers from the sector, which, in turn, is having a substantial impact on the availability of taxis in Scotland's major cities and towns. On that basis, it would be worth conducting further investigation and seeking further submissions from relevant taxi owner associations and the relevant trade union branches.

Alexander Stewart: I agree with Paul Sweeney. There has been a mass exodus in some locations, with 20 to 30 per cent of the industry suffering through lack of resources. We have an opportunity to take some evidence and find out exactly what

is happening on the ground, and that will help us assess how we progress with the petition.

The Convener: I think that I am right in saying that taxi drivers operate under licences from local authorities, so we could write to the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities for an audit of the number of licence holders prior to the pandemic and the current number. That would indicate the strength of licence holders on the ground, which I think would be helpful.

I take Paul Sweeney's point, so I think that we will take evidence on this matter. It would be quite nice to get some geographical representation; I do not know whether the taxi associations will be able to give us a steer on this matter, but it would be useful to hear from the wider country. I realise that we cannot hear from every local authority, as that would make things quite busy. We will write to people in the first instance, but I think that we will end up taking evidence directly.

Annexe C

Scottish Taxi Federation submission of 6

January 2022

PE1856/M - Support the taxi trade

Background - Scottish Taxi Federation

The Scottish Taxi Federation was founded in 1984 and is the only truly representative body of the taxi trade in Scotland, with our members collectively transporting an estimated 100 million passengers annually.

Our members pride themselves in offering the people of Scotland with the provision of a fast, safe, reliable, and economical service by our thousands of experienced professional licensed taxi operators and drivers. It should be acknowledged that across our cities and towns, our members are the only transport provider operating 24 hours per day, 365 days of the year.

Taxi trade in Scotland is serviced by circa. 8,000 taxi operators and supports around 30,000 jobs across manufacturing, repairs, management, administration, and drivers.

The Scottish Taxi Federation is in principle supportive of the above Petition and provides the following comments on specific issues impacting the future sustainability of the taxi trade in Scotland.

Financial Support

During the engagement on appropriate financial support in response to Covid, the Scottish Taxi Federation repeatedly emphasised the need for government at all levels to understand the distinction between taxi operators and drivers.

Consequently, despite support for drivers, there has been inadequate support for taxi operators against the full academic evaluation of costs, namely:

- Vehicle Purchase
- Vehicle Maintenance

- Fuel Costs
- Licensing Costs
- Insurance Costs
- Dispatch / Radio System (if applicable)

National Level Representation

The Scottish Taxi Federation recognises there are several significant issues that are best served at a national level but are currently being left failing to be addressed at a local level.

Legislation

Our assertion is Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 is outdated and requires a significant review to ensure it encapsulates the modern trading environment of taxis and private hire, especially in respect of digital booking channels and the regulation of the 'Gig economy'.

Enforcement - Protection of Public Hire

Our members are increasingly despondent over the lack of enforcement of 1982 Act in particular private hire vehicles illegally picking up members of the public without prior bookings, which is now commonplace across Scotland's town and city centres.

This practice, commonly known as 'pirating' or 'seagulling', has been acknowledged by both Police Scotland and local authorities as an increasing problem but not being addressed. The lack of enforcement has led to a growing misconception in the public's perception and to serious concerns over the public safety.

Drivers

The average age of drivers is currently 57 years, and this is increasing year on year.

Active driver numbers have been devastated by Covid, with many licensed holders having decided not to return to the taxi trade in favour of other employment options. Despite the best efforts of our members, across multiple channels, have gathered limited interest.

Cited barriers to obtaining a driver's licence include:

- Topographical Test (i.e., irrelevant, route learning)

- SVQ Professional Taxi Driver Qualification (i.e., Cost)
- Speed of Application Process (i.e., licensing sections)

Local Authority Process

Our members cite interactions with their local authorities as generally being onerous, bureaucratic, and time consuming, with consistent issues:

Disparate / Siloed Council Departments

The taxi trade is particularly disadvantaged due to the lack of cohesion amongst the council departments e.g., licensing, planning, procurement, roads, economic sections etc.

Taxi Ranks

Our members are increasingly having to commit a disproportionate amount of time and resources into lobbying local authorities to prevent the removal of vital taxi ranks from high visibility areas and/or confinement to hidden side streets. Ranks that are appointed lack enforcement with Police Scotland directing complainants to the Local Authority as they wrongly believe the matter is now a civil one. Section 21(7) of the 1982 Act is clear that the matter is a criminal offence and remains under their jurisdiction.

Procurement

Our members observe inconsistent application of procurement rules locally.

Low Emission Standards

The introduction of the Low Emission Zones (LEZ) and beyond presents what is potentially the most significant challenge to the taxi trade.

Cost of Vehicles

An entry level LEZ compatible hackney vehicle is around £40,000 rising to £60,000 for an electric range extending hybrid. It should be noted that there are currently no fully electric vehicle options in the market, but once launched these are anticipated to be circa £70,000.

Retrofit Options

A number of retrofit options for hackney taxis are under development to extend the life of vehicles by means of updating the exhaust systems, with financial support available.

It should be noted that such vehicles can be up to 14 years old at the point of conversion, having previously been utilised in the London or elsewhere, and we consider this as a short term and counterproductive solution.

In our opinion the financial support would have been better directed towards replacing ageing vehicles with new Euro VI compliant vehicles, as [is being explored in Manchester.](#)

Our Request

Our submission is we are now at a critical point where ageing licence holders, in an ageing taxi fleet, must consider whether to invest and continue in the trade. With consideration of these and many other factors, the continuation of the taxi trade in Scotland is under threat over the next decade *i.e., death by a thousand cuts.*

In support of the Petition, Scottish Taxi Federation calls upon the Scottish Parliament to:

- Commission a comprehensive review and holistic assessment of all the issues affecting its financial viability & sustainability of the taxi trade in Scotland.
- Initiate a review of the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 to ensure its ongoing suitability in the provision of taxi and private hire services.
- Notwithstanding the necessary review of primary legislation, to:
- Ensure the maintenance & enforcement of the legal distinction between Public Hire and Private Hire by local councils, Police Scotland, and other agencies.
- Issue guidance to local authorities and licensing sections across Scotland to encourage consistency and good practice in respect of support for the taxi trade (e.g., ranks, topographical test etc.)
- Promote Taxis as a viable solution to reducing private car usage in Scotland.

- Consider the wider implications for taxi trade in any future development & expansion of Low Emission Zone (e.g., towards zero emissions).

Dundee City Council submission of 16 December 2021 PE1856/E - Support the taxi trade

The figures for Dundee are as follows:

- May 2019 – Taxi Operators 556 & Private Hire Operators 207
- May 2020 - Taxi Operators 529 & Private Hire Operators 192
- May 2021 - Taxi Operators 513 & Private Hire Operators 166

East Lothian Council submission of 16 December 2021 PE1856/F - Support the taxi trade

In response to your email of 16 December 2021 regarding PE1856:
Support the taxi trade, I can advise:

- a. How many taxi licenses were active in your local authority before the COVID-19 pandemic

In 2019, East Lothian Council granted and renewed a total of 387 taxi driver licenses

- b. How many there are currently

At today's date (17 December 2021), East Lothian Council have granted and renewed 280 taxi driver licenses

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar submission of 18 January 2022

PE1856/G - Support the taxi trade

As requested, please see the following data on taxi licences held by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar:

- a) how many taxi licences were active in your local authority before the COVID-19 pandemic; and - **93 taxi licences**
- b) how many there are currently - **86 taxi licences**

Glasgow City Council submission of 17 December 2021

PE1856/H - Support the taxi trade

Q1 How many taxi licences were active in your local authority before the COVID-19 pandemic.

A1: There were 1419 taxi licences in effect in Glasgow in March 2019.

Q2: How many are there currently.

A2: There are currently 1419 taxi licences in effect in Glasgow as of December 2021.

In addition, the Committee may wish to note information in relation to the number of taxi driver licences:

- As at March 2019, there were approximately 2400 taxi driver licences in effect in Glasgow.
- As of December 2021, there are currently 2043 taxi driver licences in effect in Glasgow.

Orkney Islands Council submission of 20 December 2021

PE1856/I - Support the taxi trade

In response to your request, I confirm that:

- a) there were 55 active taxi licenses in Orkney before the COVID-19 pandemic; and
- b) there are currently 34 active taxi licenses in Orkney

South Ayrshire Council submission 21 December of 2021

PE1856/J - Support the taxi trade

In response to your request of 16 December 2021 I confirm that the figures for South Ayrshire are as follows:-

- Taxi vehicle, 128 pre-pandemic, 107 current
- Taxi driver, 526 pre-pandemic, 411 current
- Private hire vehicle, 198 pre-pandemic, 163 current
- Private hire drive, 92 pre-pandemic, 88 current

Fife Council submission of 22 December 2021

PE1856/K - Support the taxi trade

1818 taxi drivers licences held as at 31.12.19

1635 taxi drivers licences held as at 31.12.20

1592 taxi drivers licences held as at 22.12.21

We have a cap on our taxi operators licences, this number has not changed in the pandemic, there are 481 taxi licences in Fife
We currently have 368 private hire licences in Fife. We cannot obtain the figures for these prior to the pandemic but I don't think there have been many licences returned to us.

Our taxi drivers licences allow them to drive private hire vehicles too.
One licence covers both.

I would also advise you that we constantly hear from our operators that they cannot get drivers so they are having to turn down hires on a regular basis.

East Renfrewshire submission of 24 December 2021

PE1856/L - Support the taxi trade

The number of licences current as of 01/03/2020 and current as of 17/12/2021

Taxi Operators - 57 down to 45 – a reduction of 12.
Taxi drivers – 76 down to 63- a reduction of 13.

Private car operators - 422 down to 368 – a reduction of 53.
Private hire drivers – 627 down to 443- a reduction of 184.

Perth and Kinross Council submission of 7 January 2022

PE1856/N - Support the taxi trade

How many taxi licenses were active in your local authority before the COVID-19 pandemic

In 2019, Perth & Kinross Council had the following:

678 taxi/private hire drivers
113 Taxi Operators and
230 Private Hire Operators

How many there are currently

At today's date, 07 January 2022 Perth & Kinross Council have the following:

543 taxi/private hire drivers,
101 Taxi Operators and
232 Private Hire Operators

Aberdeen City Council submission of 7 January 2022 PE1856/O - Support the taxi trade

Prior to the COVID 19 pandemic, there were 883 taxi licences in Aberdeen City.

There are currently 648 taxi licences in Aberdeen City.

Please note that the number of taxi licences in Aberdeen City has been falling by approx. 80 per year since 2016, likely due to downturn in the oil and gas industry.

Moray Council submission of 14 January 2022 PE1856/P - Support the taxi trade

As per your request for more information on the scale of impact the COVID-19 pandemic on the taxi trade. Specifically, your request for data on:

- a) how many taxi licences were active in your local authority before the COVID-19 pandemic; and**
- b) how many there are currently.**

As you have not specified whether you are looking for driver licences or Operator Licences (Vehicles) we have provided figures for both licence types.

The figures for Moray Council based on a comparison of valid licences on the dates January 10th 2020 (pre-Covid) and Jan 10th 2022 are as follows:

(Operators / vehicles)

Number of TXO/PHO – Licence Valid on 10/01/2020 – pre-covid - 120

Number of TXO/PHO – Licence Valid on 10/01 2022 – now – 155

(Drivers)

Number of TXD/PHD – Licence Valid on 10/01/2020 - pre-covid - 187

Number of TXD/PHD – Licence Valid on 10/01/2022 – now - 262

North Lanarkshire Council submission of 18 January 2022

PE1856/Q - Support the taxi trade

I refer to your letter of 16 December 2021 seeking data from North Lanarkshire Council regarding the numbers of taxi and private hire licences in existence before the pandemic and the numbers of those licences currently in existence.

Please see the requested information below:-

March 2020

Taxi Drivers - 1,189

Private Hire Driver - 1,662

Taxi Operators - 489

Private Hire Operators - 1,554

January 2022

Taxi Drivers - 984

Private Hire Driver - 1,192

Taxi Operators - 477

Private Hire Operators - 1,201

I hope the foregoing information is of assistance to you in assessing the impacts of the pandemic on the taxi and private hire trade.