

# Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

14th Meeting, 2022 (Session 6), Wednesday  
26 October 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 [9 March 2022](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Scottish Government. The Committee also agreed to invite the petitioner and the Scottish Taxi Federation to give evidence at a future meeting. At its meeting on 26 October the Committee will take evidence jointly, from Callum Anderson on behalf of Unite and from Murray Fleming on behalf of the Scottish Taxi Federation.
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 a new response from Transport Scotland which is set out in **Annexe C**.
4. 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](#).

5. Further background information about this petition can be found in the [SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.
6. The Scottish Government's initial position on this petition can be found on the [petition's webpage](#).

## **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 9<sup>th</sup> March 2022

**The Convener:** We will continue with the balance of item 1, which is the consideration of continued petitions. PE1856, on supporting the taxi trade, was lodged by Pat Rafferty on behalf of Unite. Members will recall that the petition 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.

At our last consideration of the petition, we agreed to write to key stakeholders and to seek information directly from people in the sector. In particular, the committee sought figures on the number of taxi licence holders prior to the Covid-19 pandemic and the current number.

So far, we have received responses from 12 local authorities and the Scottish Taxi Federation. Five of those local authorities provided details of taxi and private operator figures, which indicated that there were 3,748 operators before the pandemic and that the number has now fallen to 3,258 operators. That illustrates a reduction of 490, with four out of the five local authorities seeing a reduction in the number of operators in the area.

Twelve local authorities provided details of taxi and private driver licences, which indicated that there were 11,436 licences before the pandemic and that there are now 9,348 licences. That is a reduction of 2,088, or nearly 20 per cent, which is pretty significant, with 11 out of the 12 local authorities seeing a reduction in the number of driver licences.

The Scottish Taxi Federation's response highlights a number of issues for its members, including an ageing workforce—I think that I read that taxi drivers tend to be in their mid-50s or, increasingly, older still. Other issues include low-emission zones and their possible impact on the viability of the taxis that many owners have invested in and the high cost of low-emission zone-compatible vehicles. I imagine—although it has not been suggested in advance of today's meeting—that a very immediate challenge could well be the price of fuel, which we know will be affected by the current international situation.

In the light of all that, I certainly found the reduction in the number of taxis in my local authority quite significant, given the post-pandemic challenges in relation to the restoration of bus and rail services. With a 20 per cent reduction in the number of available taxis, they could become an increasingly difficult to obtain and even more expensive option. There are some really serious issues underpinning all of this.

Do colleagues have any comments or suggestions on how we might proceed?

**Paul Sweeney:** I will put on record a written question that I submitted to the Scottish Government: “To ask the Scottish Government whether it will consider providing grants to support taxi drivers to upgrade their cars to sustainable, low-emissions vehicles.”

I understand that one of the big issues that taxi drivers in Glasgow currently face is the imminent implementation of a low-emission zone in the city centre. Certainly, the petitioner, Unite—the trade union that represents taxi drivers in the city; I am a member of Unite, just to declare an interest—has indicated that the LEZ could significantly affect the already difficult situation that the taxi trade faces, reducing numbers further or killing the trade in the city altogether.

Anecdotally, I can say that it is very difficult to get a taxi in Glasgow, especially on weekends, when it is busy.

The Scottish Government response to my written question was: “The Scottish Government currently offers a number of funding schemes, through Transport Scotland, to support businesses (including taxi owners) make the shift to low and zero-emission vehicles. Applications for these funds can be made through the Energy Saving Trust who administer the schemes on our behalf.

Available support includes:

- the Switched-on Taxi Loan scheme which offers an interest free loan up to £120,000 to enable taxi owners and operators to replace their current vehicle with an eligible ultra-low emission vehicle.
- the Low Emission Zone (LEZ) Retrofit Fund for taxi owners operating within LEZs. This provides up to 80% grant funding to replace existing diesel engines to meet the Euro 6 standard for driving within a LEZ. The grant provides up to £10,000 per wheelchair accessible taxi installing re-powering technology, or £5,000 per taxi installing exhaust after-treatment systems.
- the Low Emission Zone (LEZ) Support Fund, which is available to eligible microbusinesses and sole traders (including taxi operators), operating within a 20km radius of Scotland’s LEZs. The fund provides a £2,500 grant towards the safe disposal of non-compliant vehicles as an incentive to take older, more polluting vehicles off the road.”—[Written Answers, 6 January 2022; S6W-05239.]

Those are the schemes that are available. The first one, the switched-on taxi loan scheme, sounds as though it would more than meet the cost of a vehicle replacement, but the other ones do not seem to come close to meeting the capital outlay that a driver might face in trying to replace a vehicle that does not meet the standard, so I think that there is a gap there that needs to be interrogated.

**The Convener:** One of the suggestions before us is that we might have an evidence session on the petition at a later date, which might allow us to bring that point in.

**Alexander Stewart:** I agree with that, convener. It is very important to have an evidence session.

I was surprised and shocked by the numbers across the local authorities. Obviously, the situation with the night-time economy and other issues in communities have had an impact, but there has been a massive erosion of the taxi industry. It would be really useful for us to collect some information from the federation and the petitioner. They could come and give us an update, because, if the industry is not supported, the demise of taxis could be a massive issue in some communities the length and breadth of Scotland.

**The Convener:** I would still like to hear from some of the other local authorities that we have not yet heard from, because there are some big local authorities involved in all of that as well.

**David Torrance:** I thank the 12 local authorities that responded to our call for evidence. However, out of 32 local authorities, that is a pretty poor response; all the local authorities have licensing boards in place.

I support the call for an evidence session before the committee. I would also like to write to the Scottish Government to highlight the 20 per cent decrease in the number of taxi drivers to see what the Government would be able to do. Will it monitor the situation and see what it can do to encourage people back into the taxi business?

**The Convener:** It would be useful to draw the attention of the Scottish Government to the evidence that we have received about that reduction. I agree with what you say. Given that there are local taxi licensing boards, I would have expected that we would get a fuller response.

We have quite a full schedule ahead but, as this will be an on-going issue, do we agree to seek to have an evidence session around the issues that are raised by the petition?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

## Annexe C

# Transport Scotland submission of 9 June 2022

## PE1856/R - Support the taxi trade

Thank you for your letter of 6 May 2022 requesting information on how the Scottish Government is supporting the taxi trade.

Throughout the pandemic, the Scottish Government has worked closely with stakeholders and local authorities to address the challenges faced by taxis and private hires, and we have provided over £107 million in grant support since the start of the pandemic. This includes the additional funding of up to £28 million made available to the sector as a result of the necessary public health measures we introduced to combat the Omicron variant.

We delivered our 100 day commitment to provide a second £1,500 payment to eligible taxi drivers and up to £15,000 for eligible taxi operators. As part of this, local authorities automatically made a further payment of £1,500 to all drivers who previously received a grant meaning eligible drivers will have received a total of £3,000. Grants of up to £15,000 were available for taxi operator firms based on the number of vehicle licences each owner/operator holds. This was on top of eligibility for the UK Self-Employment Income Support Scheme.

To support a just transition to net zero, funding is now being prioritised to focus on used electric vehicles, businesses and people living in rural areas, those operating light commercial vehicles as part of their business, in addition to the taxi sector. By providing interest free loans for used electric cars and for new light commercial vehicles and taxis, we continue to support our ambition to phase out the need for new petrol and diesel cars and vans by 2030.

Figures are published annually by Transport Scotland that provide information on licensing figures for taxi and private hire cars and their drivers and numbers of wheelchair accessible taxis. The data is collated from returns from the 32 independent licensing authorities and the latest figures for 2020 from the Scottish Transport Statistics is included in Annex A.



While Scottish Government monitor and publish taxi figures annually, it is for each licensing authority to manage the numbers of taxis in their local authority area.

I hope this information is helpful