



Chelmsford City Council Regulatory Committee

11th July 2024

Hackney Carriage (Taxi) Trade Tariff Petition Proposal by Chelmsford Taxi Drivers' Association (CTDA)

Report by: Licensing Lead Officer – Daniel Winter

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Purpose

To consider a petition to Chelmsford City Councils Taxi Tariff on behalf of the Chelmsford Taxi Drivers Association to introduce a Call out/Booking fee for fares charged in respect of Hackney Carriages (Tariff charges).

Recommendations

Members are requested to consider the petition and determine whether to approve, modify or refuse the proposed changes to the Hackney Carriage fares (the tariff).

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Section 16 of 'The District of Chelmsford Bye-laws' approved on 22nd January 1975 - adopted the imposition of tariff charges in respect of fares levied by Hackney Carriages. Tariffs may be periodically reviewed, which is generally following an application by a licence holder on behalf of others and where previously this has been in the form of a petition

- 1.2 The most recent review of the Taxi Tariff took place on October 20th, 2022, following a petition from the Chelmsford Taxi Drivers Association (CTDA) requesting a tariff increase for multi-seater vehicles. The Regulatory Committee members agreed to conduct a public consultation on the petition, which was then presented to the committee on December 8th, 2022, and subsequently approved.
- 1.3 The CTDA proposes an amendment to the current Hackney Carriage (Taxi) tariffs to consider the introduction of a 'Call-Out/Booking fee' initiative. This initiative aims to address and enhance service levels, especially for residents outside Chelmsford city centre, improving overall service efficiency and customer satisfaction. Members should note that Hackney Carriage Vehicles, in addition to plying for hire, can legally be pre-booked. Please see details in full of the petition attached as **Appendix A**
- 1.4 Dead miles, which the Booking fee/Call-out fee is intended to cover, refer to the distance travelled by a Hackney carriage without a passenger. This primarily occurs when the taxi is operating privately and traveling to pick up a passenger, rather than being hailed on the street or picking up passengers from designated ranks.
- 1.5 The same approach is taken in Brentwood District Council which 'permits a booking fee up to a maximum of £20 may be added to the proper fare where a Hackney Carriage vehicle used for private hire is used within the district'. No other districts in the county permit a booking fee.

2. Implications

- 2.1 If the tariff change is agreed, the proposed table of fares will need to be advertised in the local paper for 14 days (from 18/07/2024 until 31/07/2024) and displayed in the Council offices and on the Council's website. It would also be the intention of officers to inform individual licence holders as part of this process.
- 2.2 Where there are no objections it is proposed that the changes take effect on 01/08/2024 subject to the production and distribution of the revised tariff card.
- 2.3 Where there are objections, the committee will need to consider the proposal further in the light of those representations, if following consideration, the tariff increase is approved it must come into effect not later than 1st October 2024

3. Options

- 3.1 Members may consider amending any part of this proposal and have the following options:
 - a) Support the proposed booking fee for Hackney Carriages as submitted and approve the changes for consultation and implemented in accordance with the proposed timescale where no objections are received.

- b) Modify the proposal booking fee and approve the modified change for consultation and implemented in accordance with the proposed timescale where no objections are received.
 - c) Not approve the proposed implementation of a booking fee to the current tariff.
- 3.2 In the event that an objection or representation is submitted after the consultation, the matter must be referred back to the Regulatory Committee for further consideration and where necessary, establish a further implementation date.
- 3.3 Committee members should be aware that if approved the new implementation date must be set within 2 months of the original date (1st October 2024)

Appendices:

Appendix A – The petition for a tariff change by adding a booking/call out fee for hackney carriages.

Background reading:

None

Corporate Implications

Legal/Constitutional: Introducing a booking fee may require amendments to existing regulations and bylaws governing taxi tariffs. The council will need to ensure compliance with legal standards and may need to conduct formal consultations and public hearings as part of the legislative process.

Financial: There may be administrative costs associated with implementing and monitoring the new booking fee. Additionally, there could be financial benefits from increased service coverage and higher fare revenues for taxi drivers.

Potential impact on climate change and the environment: Improved availability and efficiency of taxi services might reduce the number of personal vehicle trips, potentially lowering overall emissions. Conversely, an increase in taxi usage could lead to more vehicle miles travelled.

Contribution toward achieving a net zero carbon position by 2030: If the booking fee leads to more efficient taxi dispatching and reduced idling, it could contribute positively to reducing carbon emissions. However, this impact may be minimal unless paired with other green initiatives.

Personnel: The introduction of a booking fee might necessitate additional training for council staff and taxi drivers to understand and implement the new system.

Risk Management: There could be risks related to public perception, compliance issues, and potential disputes over the application of the booking fee. Clear guidelines and communication strategies will be essential.

Equality and Diversity: The booking fee could impact different demographic groups in various ways. For example, it may disproportionately affect low-income individuals who rely on taxis for transportation. Conversely, it could improve accessibility for disabled individuals by ensuring more consistent service.

Health and Safety: None specifically related to health and safety, aside from the potential for improved access to transportation for urgent medical appointments, particularly for disabled individuals.

Digital: The implementation of a booking fee may require updates to digital booking platforms and meter systems to ensure the fee is applied correctly and transparently.

Other: None

Consultees: The petitioners

Relevant Policies and Strategies: Taxi Licensing Policy

APPENDIX A

Hackney Carriage (Taxi) trade Tarif amendment proposal by Chelmsford Taxi Drivers Association (CTDA)

Proposal

To consider the current restrictions on Hackney Carriage (Taxis) affecting the service levels, which upon adjustment, could easily and greatly be enhanced for the benefit of members of the public.

Current Status

Drivers are currently hesitant to take booked (Telephone or App Booking) journeys outside the city center due to meter limitations, causing inconvenience for customers, especially wheelchair users.

The Association propose a solution similar to that introduced by Brentwood Council to instigate a 'Call-Out/Booking fee' initiative that could alleviate the problem.

This fee, quoted at telephone or App booking, allowing Taxi vehicles to efficiently serve distant locations, benefiting both customers and taxi businesses by reducing wait times without altering the final fare as shown on the meter.

The proposed approach provides transparency and control for customers, addressing the current challenges in the transportation system.

In detail

As you may be aware, Taxis vehicles have to run the meter for every job they undertake within the boundary of Chelmsford.

This makes perfect sense for all rank and flag down work in the City. Eg from the Station to Springfield. Private Hire (PH) firms are able to price trips at a price they deem fair for the job and in agreement with the customer at the time of booking.

Many Taxi vehicles can obtain work direct through their own phone or being sub contract from PH firms and undertake PH work as well as Taxi work. Primarily this occurs at peak times when the PH firm is very busy and wait times for customers increase that may be unacceptable to them. This for regular bookings and all wheelchair work.

The problem that is occurring is trips that do not start/finish or pass through the city centre where the Taxi vehicles are mainly based normally on Ranks.

For example. A resident in Great Waltham wanting to travel to Broomfield Hospital for an urgent requirement.

A PH firm would price that job at around £15 to account for the driver having to drive the 5+ mile trip to Great Waltham to drive just 2 miles back to the hospital. However, a Taxi driver would not be able to charge £15, he would have to meter the job at approximately £8.

This leads to the situation where Taxi drivers would not be given (or accept) these types of job received directly or from the PH firms. This means in peaks times the residents who need these type of trips (who may be happy to pay and would ultimately pay the £15 to the PH firms) have excessive wait times or not get there at all, as they do not have access to the overflow bank of Taxis waiting on Ranks in the city centre.

There are occasions when customers plead for taxis to come from the city centre, but the drivers are commercially unable, unwilling to take the job on.

Many a time customers will suggest they are willing to pay a premium to get to the destination/appointment that is urgent and or important.

This is particularly relevant to residents on the outskirts and the more rural parts of the Chelmsford district who need a taxi but aren't necessarily travelling to Chelmsford City Centre eg South Woodham Ferrers to Rettendon, Great Leighs to Boreham. The same can be said for areas closer to Town be it Galleywood to Gt Baddow, Springfield to Chelmer Village.

This situation, however, leads to a bigger problem for Chelmsford's disabled community who have special and at times urgent requirements.

As you know, the vast majority of wheelchair accessible vehicles in Chelmsford are Hackney Carriage - 100+ vehicles. In the scenario above where a wheelchair user from Great Waltham needs to get to the Hospital, they are now in the unenviable position of trying to find either a PH firm with a PH licensed Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle (of which there are very, very few) so they can pay the £15 fare to the hospital, or they can try and find and persuade a Taxi vehicle to do the fare for £8.

This is not a good situation for these vulnerable customers, and it is causing a lot of problems for them.

There is however an easy solution. In Brentwood, they have solved the problem by allowing a 'Call Out/Booking fee' to be added to the fare booked with a Taxi. The price would be quoted to the customer at the time of booking and would be either accepted or not by the customer. Eg the fare on the meter would be approx £8 with £7 call out as a vehicle will come from the City Centre.

Should the customer not want to pay the fee that would be their choice, either choosing to wait for an available PH vehicle or finding their own way to their destination or choosing not to go at all.

This booking fee would allow PH firms with access to Taxi vehicles to provide the best possible taxi service they can, with reduced wait times. This is a win, win situation for all.

The call out fee does not change what the customer will ultimately pay – which will always be £15 in the above scenario.

By allowing the customer access to Taxi vehicles (that are waiting on ranks) will substantially reduce the waiting time, and in the case of Disabled customers, it enables them to have access to an actual vehicle that is capable of taking them. Without this proposed 'call out' charge, many including Disabled customers are being left unable to obtain much needed transport when they want it, at the price they are willing to pay dependant on their particular need. Urgent or important or both in some cases.

This gives the customer the control they need.

Rate card to read

'A Call Out/Booking Fee charge maybe applied on Telephone or App bookings dependant on location to the value no greater then £30 plus the metered fare'

Ian Vernon
Chelmsford Taxi Driver Association (CTDA)

Glen Stafford Independent Driver