

Greater London Assembly: Transport Committee

Investigation into taxi and hire car services in London

Submission by London Forum of Amenity and Civic Societies

1. The London Forum of Amenity and Civic Societies is the main umbrella forum representing London's amenity and civic societies.
2. The London Forum welcomes this investigation by the Transport Committee. However we are surprised that environmental issues are not mentioned in the documentation that the Committee has so far issued about the scope of its investigation.
3. In the London Forum's view it is impossible to separate environmental considerations from those concerning service to customers and passenger safety, the latter two issues being those mainly highlighted in the documentation so far issued.
4. This is because both the numbers of taxi and hire cars and the nature of the vehicles used or permitted have significant environmental impacts, especially on air pollution in London, which is currently a matter of considerable concern, with taxis being a significant source of air pollution.
5. For example:
 - a) Generally the older the vehicles that are driven as taxis or hire cars, the higher the levels of air pollution that they will be generated. The Mayor has made some moves to recognise this, with the maximum age limit for taxis of 15 years that is now in force, though there is a good case for lowering that limit further.
 - b) Diesel vehicles cause significantly more air pollution than petrol vehicles; the great majority of taxis are currently diesel powered. The failure of recent EU standards for diesel vehicles to lower polluting emissions from vehicles as much as expected has exacerbated this problem.
 - c) The larger the number of taxis and hire cars being driven on the road the worse pollution will be; this is especially an issue in much of Central London, where taxis constitute a high proportion of vehicles on the road.
6. Consequently, if measures are taken in the name of improving consumer service or passenger safety, including as a result of any recommendations of the Committee, either to increase the numbers of taxis or hire cars on the road, including those plying for hire without passengers, or to allow vehicles with worse pollution, then pollution will be worse in London even though on some scenarios services for passengers could have been improved.

7. Conversely if opportunities are taken from this investigation to improve services for passengers while simultaneously incentivising a switch from more to less polluting vehicles, there would be both consumer and environmental benefits.
8. Examples of such measures would be to place conditions on any additional vehicles permitted if this were necessary to improve service or safety to passengers, which would ensure that only those operating to the highest standards would be permitted. Alternatively, or as well, financial incentives could be provided which would have a similar effect. In particular we would urge that the Committee's recommendations are targeted at securing a reduction in the number of diesel powered taxi and hire cars on London's roads as part of improving the service
9. The London Forum therefore strongly urges that environmental considerations, especially in relation to air pollution, are factored into the Committee's consideration.