

Defra & DfT consultation: Identification of taxis and private hire vehicles entering charging Clean Air Zones A consultation

October 2018

Question 1: In your view is the creation of a central database to collect and host specific taxi and Private Hire Vehicle data an appropriate way of addressing the difficulties associated with differentiating these types of vehicles from private vehicles in support of charging Clean Air Zones?

If not, then why not? Please provide any evidence in support of your answer.

A central database of taxi and private hire vehicles would be an effective way to ensure that taxi and private hire vehicles registered both by the CAZ city's licensing authority and by other local authorities (out of area vehicles) would both be charged when they enter a Clean Air Zone (classes A – C) if they do not meet Euro 4 (petrol) or Euro 6 (diesel). The current situation risks out-of-area TPH vehicles being incorrectly categorised as private cars, and therefore not charged, irrespective of their Euro standard. This would unfairly advantage out-of-area TPH drivers and operators and change parameters in AQ models.

We are not aware of any evidence detailing the percentage of non-compliant, out-of-town TPH vehicles likely to be entering a CAZ. We are therefore not able to estimate the resulting impact on air quality and whether the centralised database is a proportionate response to the problem.

However, we strongly support the introduction of the centralised database because it removes the possibility of introducing a further incentive for TPH to be licenced in a more lenient area but operate in another. Anecdotal evidence suggests this is already a problem, especially acute where there are large differences in the licencing requirements across a region, and without the centralised database, the situation would worsen.

These cross-border operations undermine the efforts of local authorities trying to increase the stringency of 'conditions of fitness' regulations. Such restrictions include vehicle age limits and requiring the adoption of EVs, and are therefore highly relevant to achieving air quality objectives. It remains a moot point whether the repeal of the clause of the Deregulation Act 2015 is also necessary, but the centralised database is a positive step.

Question 2: Do you have any comments on the proposed use of powers under the Environment Act 1995 to mandate all licensing authorities in England and Wales to provide the taxi and PHV data to the database?

No response.

Question 3: What do you see as the main technical barriers to successfully bringing together licensing data on taxis and PHVs into one national database? What evidence do you have, if any, of potential approaches that would address these barriers?

None.

Question 4: Do you feel the proposal that Las should provide taxi data on a weekly basis as a minimum are, or are not, appropriate? If not, what frequency do you feel is

an appropriate minimum (please provide any evidence you may have in support of your answer). Do you have any other comments on the frequency with which local authorities should provide taxi data to the database?

We support the idea of weekly reporting, at a minimum. To minimise the time burden on local authorities, any system which enabled a real-time or automated notification to the centralised database as a step within normal vehicle licencing processes would be positive.

Question 5: What additional vehicle data should licensing authorities be required to submit in order to validate the taxi and PHV data? What evidence do you have, if any, that this additional data would provide effective validation?

Based on the Energy Saving Trust's experience of reviewing hundreds of fleets and analysis of TPH vehicles for local authorities, we have found that VRN data is sufficient for most purposes, and that requests for data should be kept as simple as possible.

We estimate that there is about a 1% error rate where a number plate provided by fleet operator or local authority does not return a record from the DVLA. In our view, the errors are normally due to incorrect data entry (i.e. O or 0, S or 5) by the local authority, fleet or DVLA. Asking the licensing authority to provide additional vehicle information would not necessarily resolve this, or improve the effectiveness of the CAZ charging system. Ultimately, we expect the DVLA to ensure the accuracy of its data (i.e. returning correct vehicle information for the VRN).

However, we note that paragraph 16 (Consultation document) states that operator information will not be collected. We think this is an oversight as the Deregulation Act 2015 Section 11, sub section 55a) & b), requires that a TPH **operator** is licensed in both localities in order for the vehicle to be operating legally, regardless of its Euro standard, and any CAZ exemptions. In order to check compliance with this legal requirement, it would be necessary to also collect and share the name of operator with the centralised database. We appreciate that this extends the use of the database but there are few alternative enforcement mechanisms.

Lastly, a TPH may be used a private car out of the driver's working hours, but this has not been addressed in any CAZ proposals.

Question 6: What additional vehicle data do you feel should be collected in order to facilitate exemptions of certain types of taxi or PHV from a charge, if any?

EST recognise that there is a trade-off between encouraging the adoption of a cleaner TPH fleet, and ensuring sufficient numbers of TPH are wheelchair accessible. Relatively few electrified taxis are currently wheelchair accessible, and wheelchair accessible vehicles are harder and more expensive to replace. An CAZ charge exemption for wheelchair accessible TPH might therefore be justified until a greater range of EV models are available.

It is not possible to tell if a TPH is wheelchair accessible, based on its VRN and DVLA data. Such information would therefore need to be provided by the licensing authority to avoid incorrectly charging an out-of-area, wheelchair accessible vehicle that is below Euro 4 (petrol) or Euro 6 (diesel).

However, it should be noted that different licensing authorities apply different definitions of 'wheelchair accessible', so a 'yes/no' categorisation might not be appropriate. Additional information such as the physical dimensions of the vehicle, whether it is side or rear access, the turning circle (radius and kerb-to-kerb distances), might be necessary. To avoid this issue, the wheelchair access exemption could only apply to TPH operated by the licensing authority in the CAZ city.

The centralised database could be extended to cover other aspects of licensing, and ensure that TPH entering another local authority conforms to their conditions of fitness. This would enable licencing authorities to have greater control, but addressing the problem through a centralised database is unlikely to be an appropriate response as it would entail much greater range of information to be collected and managed.

Question 7: Do you agree with the assumptions made in the Regulatory Triage Assessment? If no, please provide supporting evidence.

We noted that the cost estimated may cover staff time for local authorities, but not the staff costs for managing the centralised database, and time for resolving complaints, for example. We also think that a specialised database will be required (i.e. not Excel), with associated cost implications.

Question 8: Do you agree with the resulting conclusions of the Regulatory Triage Assessment? If no, please provide supporting evidence.

No response.

Question 9: Are you aware of any additional data that could inform the Regulatory Triage Assessment? If yes, please give details.

No response.