



**Aberdeen Taxi Demand Study 2011  
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Completed by the Transport Research Institute, Edinburgh Napier University

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The TRI Taxi Studies Group has been commissioned by the Aberdeen City Council (the Licensing Authority – the Authority) to undertake a review of taxi services across Aberdeen. Our work is focused on the demand for taxis and allows for identification of optimal conditions for taxi supply. The work is consistent with the requirements set out in the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 (CGSA) and Best Practice Guidance (BPG) issued by the Scottish Government (Scotland, 2007), similar guidance from the Department for Transport (DfT, 2004, 2006, and 2010).

We have summarised the background to demand studies, the methodologies we have used and our conclusions in this document, with a full description set out in our main report. Statistical analyses and copies of the surveys used are included in a separate appendices document.

As a result of our work we recommend that the Authority consider changes to rank use to ensure that ranks are suitable and well placed in relation to demand. We recommend that the Authority consider placing a licence cap on the numbers of Taxi Licences (Hackney Carriages), and put in place a review process to take place every three years or more often. We also recommend that the Authority consider linking reviews of taxi tariff to those of supply, and base tariff reviews on regular consideration of the full production costs associated with operating a taxi.

### *Background*

Taxi demand reviews, sometimes called taxi surveys, are regularly carried out to inform policy decisions, particularly in relation to taxi licence restrictions, or licence caps. The most common reviews follow a standard methodology expressed as an Index of Significant Unmet Demand (ISUD) with a threshold value (ISUD = 80). Values above the threshold are considered to indicate an under supply of taxi services, below the level taxis may be suggested to meet market demand. The Aberdeen value (ISUD = 14.82) is well within the threshold levels, and on this basis alone it may be considered that Aberdeen does not demonstrate SUD. The SUD measurement is most commonly used in relation to a single element of taxi control, that of quantity control, and can be applied in support of a licence cap, change in licence numbers, or the removal of an existing cap. We do not consider, however, that the market for taxi services is limited to the constituent elements of

ISUD alone, and should rather be considered against a range of measures, which, in combination, enhance passenger services.

### *Methodological Approach*

Our approach is based on three primary elements: a review of the observable market for taxis; a review of the patterns of demand; and a review of the physical conditions in which services are supplied, including rank locations, accessibility and the relative performance of taxi suppliers in serving all passengers. The study also developed a Geographical Information System (GIS) framework, which we have used to measure and highlight the location of taxi ranks, primary trip generators, and gaps between demand and supply.

### *Market Overview*

On the basis of our study, it is our view that current demand for taxis in Aberdeen is well catered for. Daytime supply of taxis appears to serve ranks well, and we have seen limited evidence of delay to pre-booked or hailed journeys. Night time supply demonstrates peaks in demand coinciding with pub and club closing times, particularly at weekend night times, with a number of issues apparent in the location and use of taxi ranks in central Aberdeen. The highest levels of unmet demand occur in the city centre at weekend nights, with peaks in observed at the Union Street night time ranks, with some instances of more significant delay

The case for quantity control is finely balanced between the ability of the market to define a level for supply, and the stated wish of some to introduce a licence cap. We have undertaken a detailed analysis of the issues including a framework assessment, detailed in the main report. Whilst we feel there to be little evidence of any harmful effects arising from controls being applied, it is equally true that the application of such controls is unlikely to result in the (positive) impacts to the trade that form the basis for calls for such controls.

Specific issues at individual rank locations can also impact on the market by reducing traffic flow and accessibility. A rank audit was included in our detailed review allowing for specific recommendations in a number of cases.

We also noted that some areas appear poorly served by taxis, including Union Square, and we have included development of new ranks in our conclusion.

### *Recommendations*

We have identified a number of issues that we consider appropriate for recommendation, set out below. As the market for taxis is comprised of inter-related factors we have included recommendations specific to each. We strongly advise these be considered as a part of a “package” of measures that, in combination, enhance the supply of taxis in Aberdeen.

### **TAXI LICENCE CAP (Quantity Control)**

The case for quantity control is very finely balanced, and strong views were expressed to us both for and against quantity control in the course of our work.

On balance we consider there to be benefit from quantity control. Benefits arise specifically in relation to subsequent market reviews, a requirement currently defined in the CGSA. As regular reviews provide detailed quantifiable market information to the Authority, so the Authority is better placed to respond to issues arising in the supply and optimisation of the taxi fleet. On this basis we consider the application to result in benefits to the travelling public, and consequently recommend that a licence cap is considered, to be set at the current numbers of Taxi licences.

We would underline the need to review the market regularly, and to ensure that no negative impacts arise in the future. We feel this also relates to ensuring no additional value accrues to the ownership or transfer of plates.

We recommend that the application of a taxi licence cap is accompanied by, and conditional upon, regular and frequent reviews of the operation of the taxi market. We recommend that market reviews associated with the application of a licence cap be undertaken in full knowledge of fare reviews and, wherever possible, undertaken together.

We recommend that new Taxi Licences remain restricted to Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles (WAV), and that the Authority reviews its definition of WAVs to ensure they are accessible and appropriate to use.

## RANK OPTIMISATION

We recommend that the Authority address a number of rank specific issues, both in terms of current provision, rank design and enhancement. These are detailed by rank below:

- *Union Square*

We recommend the provision of a new rank at the rear exit (Union Square Market) to serve the market for taxis at Union Square.

- *Back Wynd*

We recommend the provision of clearer signage and carriageway markings at Back Wynd, in common with other ranks across the city. We recommend that signs be considered to set out closure hours and alternative night time ranks. Signs should be visible along the length of the ranking area of Back Wynd. We recommend the provision of one marked disabled bay at the head of the Back Wynd rank, located on the nearside (eastern pavement) at the junction of Union Street. We recommend signage indicating that the disabled bay be used to pick up and drop off, and agreement be reached with the trade that the bay be served by the next available Wheelchair Accessible Taxi from the body of the rank when such a taxi is required.

- *Bridge Street*

We recommend the relocation of the Bridge Street night time rank to a new location on Union Street, to be located on the southern carriageway directly to the east of Bridge Street (ie: vehicles departing in a westerly direction).

- *Union Street at Castlegate*

We recommend that apparently contradictory blue finger signs are adjusted to reflect actual position of the rank. Blue taxi rank signs should include detail of operating hours. We recommend use of the wording "Night Time Taxi Rank" where this is appropriate.

- *Hadden Street*

We recommend the provision of additional pavement space on the northern pavement between Market Street and Exchange Street to mitigate the negative impacts of tree

planters.

- *Aberdeen Railway Station*

We recommend that traffic signals located at the junction of the railway station roadway and Guild Street be retimed to extend the departure time available to taxis from the station. We recommend the city consider the use of timing and induction loops in combination at this site.

- *Citywide*

We recommend that a common standard of signage and street markings be applied to all city taxi ranks. Ranks need be visible and identifiable in all locations with sufficient visible information to inform users and potential users of operating hours and, where appropriate, alternatives. Standard signage should be extended, with agreement, to private rank locations.

We recommend that ranks that are unused be removed.

## **TAXI TARIFF**

We consider that the sufficient relationships exist between taxi tariff and taxi demand to include taxi tariff into future demand assessment. We recommend that the Authority apply a bottom up review of production costs in its future taxi fare reviews, and these be incorporated in demand analysis in future reviews.

Full detail of the analysis undertaken and recommendations are set out in the accompanying report documents.