

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE: Licensing

DATE: 17 April 2012

DIRECTOR: Stewart Carruth

TITLE OF REPORT: Taxi Demand Survey- Rank Specific Recommendations
(Rank Review)

REPORT NUMBER: CG-12-23

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with the results of the consultation on the rank specific recommendations in the Taxi Demand Survey (the "Survey").

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

That the Committee adopts the following recommendations:

1) Union Square

- i. Transportation, Strategy and Programmes Officers further investigate the possibility of a rank at Palmerston Road;
- ii. if it is possible to create a taxi rank at Palmerston Road instruct Environment, Planning and Infrastructure and Legal and Democratic Services officers to commence the consultation and statutory procedures to introduce the rank;
- iii. report back to the Licensing and Enterprise, Planning and Infrastructure Committees.

2) Back Wynd

- i. Transportation, Strategy and Programmes Officers investigate and undertake amendments to signage as required; and
- ii. take no further action

3) Bridge Street

- i. Transportation, Strategy and Programmes Officers investigate and undertake amendments to signage as required; and
- ii. take no further action.

4) Union Street at Castlegate

the Committee takes no further action.

5) Hadden Street

- i. the Committee endorses the review and amendment of the directional signage; and
- ii. request that the wording “night time taxi rank” is included in all night time taxi rank signs in the City, subject to budget availability.

6) Aberdeen Railway Station

the Committee take no further action.

7) Citywide

the Committee endorse the recommendation of the Survey, which is to have a common standard of signage and street markings applied to all City taxi ranks.

8) Diamond Street

- i. Environment, Planning and Infrastructure and Legal and Democratic Services officers begin the rank revocation procedures; and
- ii. report back to the Licensing and Enterprise, Infrastructure and Planning Committees.

9) Exchequer Row/Castle Street

- i. Environment, Planning and Infrastructure and Legal and Democratic Services officers begin the rank revocation procedures; and
- ii. report back to the Licensing and Enterprise, Infrastructure and Planning Committees.

10)Frederick Street

- i. Environment, Planning and Infrastructure and Legal and Democratic Services officers begin the rank revocation procedures; and
- ii. report back to the Licensing and Enterprise, Infrastructure and Planning Committees.

11)Justice Mill Lane

- i. Environment, Planning and Infrastructure and Legal and Democratic Services officers begin the rank revocation procedures; and
- ii. report back to the Licensing and Enterprise, Infrastructure and Planning Committees.

12)Little Chapel Street

- i. Environment, Planning and Infrastructure and Legal and Democratic Services officers begin the rank revocation procedures; and
- ii. report back to the Licensing and Enterprise, Infrastructure and Planning Committees.

13)Rubislaw Place

- i. Environment, Planning and Infrastructure and Legal and Democratic Services officers begin the rank revocation procedures; and
- ii. report back to the Licensing and Enterprise, Infrastructure and Planning Committees.

14)Gilcomston

- i. Environment, Planning and Infrastructure investigate the possibility of introducing a rank at Rosemount Viaduct in terms of the Survey recommendations;
- ii. if it is possible to progress a rank at that location instruct Environment, Planning and Infrastructure and Legal and Democratic Services officers to commence the consultation and statutory procedures to introduce the rank in terms of the Survey recommendation; and
- iii. report back to the Licensing and Enterprise, Planning and Infrastructure Committees.

15)Southern stretch of Crown Street

take no further action.

16)Eastern end of School Hill

- i. Environment, Planning and Infrastructure investigate the possibility of introducing a rank at School Hill in terms of the Survey recommendations;
- ii. if it is possible to progress a rank at that location instruct Environment, Planning and Infrastructure and Legal and Democratic Services officers to commence the consultation and

- statutory procedures to introduce the rank in terms of the Survey recommendation; and
- iii. report back to the Licensing and Enterprise, Planning and Infrastructure Committees.

17) George Street

- i. Environment, Planning and Infrastructure investigate the possibility of introducing a rank at George Street in terms of the Survey recommendations;
- ii. if it is possible to progress a rank at that location instruct Environment, Planning and Infrastructure and Legal and Democratic Services officers to commence the consultation and statutory procedures to introduce the rank in terms of the Survey recommendation; and
- iii. report back to the Licensing and Enterprise, Planning and Infrastructure Committees.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

A budget will require to be allocated for any works that are instructed.

4. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Resources – The procedures being followed are effectively a rank review, which is being carried out as a result of the Survey recommendations rather than as a stand alone measure investigated by Enterprise, Planning and Infrastructure.

Consultation on the rank recommendations has taken place and significant further procedures are required to complete the process, which will be required to be carried out by officers of Legal and Democratic Services and the Environment, Planning and Infrastructure Service.

5. BACKGROUND/MAIN ISSUES

General Background

Members are referred to the Survey copies of which are available online at:

<http://committees.aberdeencity.gov.uk/mgConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=17214>

The Survey made a number rank recommendations that provide the Committee with specific rank by rank options to improve the operation of taxi services in the city. The Survey advises that these

recommendations should form part of a combination of measures, which includes the option of a taxi licence limit. This should have a greater positive impact on taxi services than applying individual measures.

The consultants who carried out the Survey were asked to what extent the rank and licence limit recommendations were interdependent. They advised that, although there is a relationship between the presence of ranks, their location and signage, and the levels of demand across the fleet, the (rank) recommendations could be considered as self standing.

This means that the Committee can consider the implementation of all, some or none of the rank recommendations as a separate matter to its taxi licence policy report.

The consultants advised that implementing the rank recommendations would likely have a positive effect for the taxi trade because more visible, better located ranks would be used more often by the public.

Members will note that the scope of the Taxi Demand Survey was the entire taxi rank provision in Aberdeen. However, the only night time rank recommendation was the revocation of the rank in Bridge Street. The Survey Team advised that: "Night time ranks allow for a higher concentration of demand at a small number of ranks and these do not demonstrate the same pressures on garaging, and appear to work well in the main part".

Consultation- Background

At its meeting on 23 November 2011, after considering the terms of the Survey, the Committee instructed officers to consult with: i) Transportation Strategy & Programmes, Aberdeen City Council ("ACC"); ii) Community Safety (ACC); and iii) Grampian Police in order to provide comments on the rank recommendations.

The consultation questions from the Survey and the consultees' responses are summarised below for ease of reference, and the full responses can be provided if Members wish.

Page references to the rank recommendations in the Survey are also included for Members' reference.

Consultation- Responses

Community Safety had few comments on the specific questions posed. However, they made a general statement regarding the benefits of the Union Street night time ranks and transport marshals, which can be viewed at Appendix 1. Transportation Strategy & Programmes Officers

and Grampian Police representatives provided responses to all of the questions.

The consultees' responses highlighted which of the rank recommendations could be agreed and which required further information. Further information was therefore sought from the consultants to clarify the questions raised by the consultees and has been included below as appropriate for Members information.

It appears from the consultees' responses that some of the recommendations are unachievable and this will limit the effectiveness of the package of measures recommended in the Survey. This may detract from the positive benefits to the trade and the public of any increased hires, which would result from rank optimisation.

Consultation was undertaken with the taxi trade during the Survey. The Committee instructed further specific consultation with taxi trade representatives from the Taxi Consultation Group on the proposed revocation of ranks (see part II below). For completeness, that consultation also invited comments on the proposed new ranks. The taxi representatives provided no comments.

At its meeting on 7 March 2012 the Taxi Consultation Group was reminded about the rank recommendations consultation, which had been emailed to its representatives; and given a further opportunity to comment. No responses have been submitted.

Part I- General Rank Recommendations

1) Union Square (p.7)

The Survey recommends the provision of a new rank at the rear exit (Market St) to serve the market for taxis at Union Square.

Consultee Responses

Police - The Police representatives are in favour of a new taxi rank located close to the other main exit at Union Square, Palmerston Road, provided sufficient CCTV coverage can be made available.

Transportation Strategy & Programmes -

They advised: "there have been extensive discussions between Aberdeen City Council officers, Hammersons and taxi representatives to determine a suitable location for a taxi rank in the vicinity of the Union Square development.

During initial discussions taxi representatives and council officers highlighted that the most appropriate location for a taxi rank would be

located within the existing Union Square car park. However, Hammersons indicated that there would be significant issues regarding permitting taxi vehicles to exit from the car park, if they had stayed in excess of a 20 minute period, as the barrier system could not differentiate between types of vehicles. Consequently, any vehicle parking for longer than 20 minutes would have to pay to exit the car park.

Taxi representatives were not willing to accept the possible car parking charge.

The access to the Palmerston Road area is not easily accessible for mobility- impaired users due to a stairwell being constructed leading from the Union Square development onto the northern footway of Palmerston Road.

There is space on Palmerston Road for the addition of a taxi rank but this would require the removal of existing parking restrictions that would require to be promoted through a Traffic Regulation Order process. No physical changes would be required to the footway and carriageway however it should be noted that Palmerston Road is a cobbled street and is not conducive for people who have mobility problems.

Existing provision for Union Square is provided at Aberdeen Rail Station which is located on the same level and accessed via automatic doors through the rail station concourse and is well lit and under cover. The site is also served by the bus station, rail station and ferry terminal and has more public transport links than any other shopping centre in Aberdeen.”

Analysis

There is an unmet requirement for ranking facilities to serve Union Square, with a majority of the public suggesting that a new rank should be located at the rear of the complex (Guild Street/Market Street end). This would serve a high demand for “big box” shoppers that is customers using Union Square facilities and returning with shopping.

It appears that it is unsuitable to locate a taxi rank at the Market Street exit to Union Square as none of the consultees were supportive of this measure for the reasons given.

The Police representatives recommended, as an alternative, creating a rank at the Palmerston Road exit. Transportation Strategy & Programmes Officers advised that it may be possible to create a taxi rank at Palmerston Road.

The Disability Advisory Group (“DAG”) similarly appears to have been considering problems with limited access to taxi services at Union Square for disabled and elderly persons.

Item 7 of the DAG minutes from its meeting on 24 August 2011: (<http://committees.aberdeencity.gov.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=11026>) advises that the access issues have been subject to ongoing discussions and were being progressed through a Working Group comprising of representatives from the DAG, Union Square, Rail Authority, Stagecoach, Taxi Operators and officers of Aberdeen City Council.

It is noted that officers advised: a) a rank at Palmerston Road would be inaccessible to the mobility impaired; and b) the rank at Aberdeen Rail Station already provides access to taxis at Union Square, is accessible to the mobility impaired, and is well lit and under cover. It appears Palmerston Road is the best option available and it could be particularly viable as a taxi rank for members of the public who reside to the south and east of the city. Therefore, it is recommended that this option is progressed.

2) Back Wynd (p.7)

The Survey makes two main recommendations for Back Wynd:

- i. provision of clearer signage and carriageway markings at Back Wynd. Signs should be erected to advise of closure hours and the location of the alternative night time ranks. The signs should be visible along the length of the ranking area of Back Wynd; and
- ii. provision of one marked disabled bay at the Back Wynd rank, located on the nearside (eastern pavement) at the junction of Union Street. It recommends signage indicating that the disabled bay can 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 Vehicle from the body of the rank when such a taxi is required.

Consultee Responses

Police – The Police representatives made no comment with regard to signage.

They advised that they were supportive in principle to allocating a bay for wheelchair accessible taxis. However, they were of the view that there is insufficient space for a bay as detailed in the Survey, without blocking Back Wynd to other road users or impeding pedestrians.

Transportation Strategy & Programmes -

They advised that “Back Wynd taxi rank has never had on-street road markings as it is not in-keeping with the aesthetics of the area. The area is covered by a special authorisation order, which required

Scottish Government approval, and has gateway signage installed at the access to Back Wynd. The gateway signage shows exemptions and additional waiting restriction signs are installed throughout Back Wynd.

Officers agree that a review of the visibility of the existing signage on Back Wynd should be undertaken and improvements carried out as required.

A preliminary assessment of the option to install a marked disabled bay on the eastern pavement at the junction of Union Street suggests that a reduction of at least 2 taxi rank spaces on Back Wynd would be required. The lay-out of the junction is integral to the perception of the area. By narrowing the junction, pedestrian priority is compromised and major engineering works would be required to allow the installation of the proposed disabled bay.”

Following further discussions with Transportation, Strategy and Programmes they have advised that there is insufficient space for a disabled access bay.

Analysis

Back Wynd is the busiest rank in the City and as such, it may be particularly desirable to optimise its layout and signage. Given its location and popularity it would also be important to facilitate and encourage accessibility for wheelchair passengers and correct loading of wheelchair accessible vehicles.

Signage/Road Markings - With regard to signage, it appears that Transportation, Strategy & Programmes Officers can investigate and undertake amendments as required, however, the existence of a Special Authorisation Order from the Scottish Government may be problematic.

Taxi Drivers' Concerns – Although there was no trade response to the recent consultation exercise, it is clear from the Survey that taxi drivers (p.46) consider the Back Wynd rank as not big enough to accommodate all vehicles that wish to wait there. They were also of the view that the allocation of the rear end of Back Wynd to disabled bays was unhelpful as it interrupted the taxi rank, and suggested that the entire road should be reallocated as a rank.

Wheelchair Access - The Survey advises the current layout at Back Wynd makes it difficult for wheelchair users to enter or exit taxis because it facilitates only side loading of wheelchairs, whereas the majority of wheelchair accessible vehicles are rear loading. The Survey advises (p.38) that some wheelchair users also have difficulty accessing taxis from ranks, due to driver approach, and the granting of exemptions from the requirement to carry wheelchair passengers. It is

presumed that driver approach means that not all drivers are helpful to disabled passengers. On p.39 the Survey goes on to mention that some drivers go out of their way to assist disabled taxi passengers, however, this approach was not consistently applied by drivers across the fleet.

Appropriate access for wheelchair users at Back Wynd is desirable. It is Aberdeen's busiest rank and is located in the town centre. Wheelchair accessibility would assist in terms of meeting the public sector equality duty in terms of disability.

The consultees are supportive in principle of the introduction of a disabled bay. However, they have advised that introduction of a disabled bay could only be done with a number of significant compromises due to the limited space available at Back Wynd.

The Committee has been advised by the Survey that there is potential discrimination against wheelchair passengers' access to taxi services at this rank. The matter therefore requires to be considered in terms of the public sector equality duty that the Committee must have due regard to when making its decision on the matter. Members are referred to Appendix 2, which sets out the duty in full.

In summary, a potential problem has been identified by the Survey. The current rank layout is having a detrimental impact on wheelchair users who are a protected group in terms of the Equality Act 2010. It has suggested a solution, which is the introduction of a wheelchair accessible bay. However, the consultees have advised the introduction of a wheelchair access bay could only be done with a number of significant compromises due to a lack of space at the Back Wynd rank to carry out the necessary amendments. This position was put to the consultants who conceded the argument that insufficient space is available for a disabled bay at Back Wynd. Their recommendation in the Survey therefore is not supported.

3) Bridge Street (p.7)

The Survey recommends 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 (i.e. vehicles departing in a westerly direction).

Consultee Responses

Police - they are pleased with current arrangements for night time ranks on Union Street and consider an additional rank is not required.

They were of the view that introducing a rank at this location on Union Street would obstruct traffic due to it being too close to the junction with

Bridge Street, and may also obstruct the recently introduced night time buses.

Transportation Strategy & Programmes -

Advised that "The Bridge Street rank was included within the TRO (Traffic Order) for closure of side ranks during hours of operation of night time ranks. This however left 1 hour unaccounted for between 5 am – 6 am and this is currently being promoted for removal through the Council's Small Scale Traffic Management Report to EP & I in January 2012. This will also have to be mirrored through the Licensing Legislation.

The Survey indicates little or no use of the existing Bridge Street taxi rank and therefore identifies no demand for a taxi rank in this area. We would therefore suggest that a further Union Street rank is not considered at this time. See comment above There would be limited rank space available at the proposed location due to the close proximity of the existing traffic signals at the Union Terrace/Bridge Street junction and the pedestrian crossing between the Trinity Centre and Belmont Street.

The suggested taxi rank is also located within the proposed Union Street pedestrianisation area. This would lead to the loss of the facility when the proposed pedestrianisation scheme comes into force."

Community Safety -

Welcomes the closure of the Bridge Street rank but are unconvinced of the need to open a new rank on Union Street. No funding is available to deploy transport marshals at a new rank. It would more desirable to maintain the number of ranks currently on Union Street at night.

Analysis

At its meeting on 17 January 2012 the Committee instructed Officers to proceed with the revocation of the Bridge Street taxi stance and this process is ongoing and is at an advanced stage.

The consultees all expressed views against the relocation of the Bridge Street rank to Union Street as an additional night time rank.

All appear to be of the view that the existing night time rank provision was sufficient. This recommendation in the Survey therefore is not supported.

4) Union Street at Castlegate (p.7)

The Survey recommends that the apparently contradictory blue finger signs are adjusted to reflect the actual position of the rank. Blue taxi rank signs should include detail of operating hours and use the wording “Night Time Taxi Rank” as appropriate.

Consultee Responses

Police - fully support improved signage in this area.

Transportation Strategy & Programmes – “The blue taxi rank signs will be reviewed and amended. Consideration will be given to include the wording “night time taxi rank” to the existing signage.”

Analysis

Consultees are supportive of this recommendation and it appears the amendments requested regarding the finger signs can be undertaken immediately. It is recommended therefore that this option be progressed.

5) Hadden Street (p.8)

The Survey recommends the provision of additional pavement space on the northern pavement between Market Street and Exchange Street to mitigate the negative impacts of tree planters.

Consultee Responses

Police - they are unaware of any problems in this area and therefore do not support the recommendation.

Transportation Strategy & Programmes -

“During the Green Townscape Heritage Initiative Public Realm Streetscape Works Project in 2010, Hadden Street’s northern footway was extended by approximately 1.2 metres in width. The width increase has improved pedestrian access and egress from the Merchant Quarter.

Any further increases on the northern footway would have a detrimental impact on delivery vehicles access and egress from the Green area and thereby have a significant impact on businesses operating in the vicinity.

The increase in footway width at this location would have no significant benefit for potential taxi customers”.

There is already sufficient road and pavement space at the head of the taxi queue, which provides room for any person wishing to enter a taxi, or any taxi driver wishing to open his doors to facilitate passenger entry. Therefore, it would be disproportionate action to remove at considerable cost (circa £20K) the planters located further down the queue as it would have negligible positive benefit for taxi drivers or their passengers, wheelchair users or otherwise. It is noted that the Green Heritage Project to introduce the planters was only recently completed also at significant cost.

Analysis

The Survey advises (p.98) that the Hadden Street taxi stance has been provided with large concrete tree planters along the length of the rank, and these have a mixed impact. Although the appearance of the street is enhanced by this provision, actual access to taxis is reduced because the planters block easy access to all, and eliminate accessible taxi access, particularly wheelchair access (see picture below p.98).



Therefore, the Survey identifies potential discrimination against wheelchair passengers seeking to use the Hadden Street rank. The matter therefore requires to be considered in terms of the public sector equality duty, to which the Committee must have due regard when making their decision on the matter. I would refer Members to Appendix 1 which sets out the duty in full.

Appropriate access for wheelchair users at Hadden Street is desirable for the following reasons. The rank is popular with taxi drivers as a waiting place and therefore results in very short waiting times (p.99 of the Survey). It could therefore provide a high level of certainty for

wheelchair passengers wishing to engage taxi services (p.38 of the Survey refers to problems wheelchair users experience at ranks with engaging taxis).

Members will note that the consultees do not support the Survey recommendation and were either unaware of problems at the Hadden Street rank or disagreed with its claimed extent. Nevertheless the Committee must consider the reason for the recommendation, in terms of the Council's public sector equality duty. The Committee must then decide whether or not it is necessary and proportionate to make the adjustment suggested by the Survey to enable taxi access for wheelchair users and persons with reduced mobility.

In the circumstances, it appears that: i) the extent of a potential issue is uncertain; ii) the cost of the proposed solution significant; and iii) the perceived impact of the solution likely be neutral in terms of addressing the protected characteristic of disability in relation public sector equality duty. It is suggested therefore that it would be disproportionate to follow the Survey recommendation and it is not supported.

Members may also wish to note for future consideration that the Survey (p.40) generally identified problems with offside loading ranks (e.g. Hadden St), cobbled road surfaces and the difficulty these caused with disabled access to ranks. These matters will be highlighted to the Committee in relation to future decision making on taxi rank improvements as these matters should be taken into account in terms of the protected characteristic of disability under the public sector equality duty.

6) Aberdeen Railway Station (p.8)

The Survey recommends 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. It also recommends the Council considers the use of timing and induction loops in combination at this site.

Consultee Responses

Police - supported the recommendation in principle. However, they were of the view that there should be further investigation and careful consideration of the impact which such a change could have upon the traffic management system for the rest of the traffic lights in that area.

Transportation Strategy & Programmes - advised that the traffic signal timings at Guild Street are being reconsidered with any changes due to be installed by April 2012.

Analysis

In view of the consultation responses, it is recommended that this option be progressed.

7) Citywide (p.8)

The Survey recommends that a common standard of signage and street markings is applied to all city taxi ranks. The consultants advised that ranks need to be visible and identifiable in all locations with sufficient visible information to inform users and potential users of operating hours and, where appropriate, alternative ranks. Standard signage should be extended, with agreement, to private rank locations (such as the railway station and airport).

Consultee Responses

Police - supported the recommendation.

Transportation Strategy & Programmes - advised that a review of all City taxi ranks was carried out in 2008 and the majority of the discrepancies with signage and street markings were rectified. However, if the Committee wishes the taxi rank signing and lining can be further reviewed and refined as appropriate by Officers. Any changes would likely have cost implications.

Analysis

Provided sufficient budget can be allocated the Committee may wish to follow this recommendation to review taxi rank signage and street markings throughout Aberdeen. Members should note that amendment to signs may require consent of building owners. It appears that reviewing signage and street marking should make ranks more easily identifiable, which is of benefit to members of the travelling public as well as the taxi trade and it is anticipated it could create more demand for taxi services. It is therefore recommended that this option be progressed.

Part II- Rank Recommendations- (Revocation of Unused Ranks)

The Survey recommends that unused ranks are removed- see 8-12 below (p.143)

A number of ranks appear poorly used or completely unused, such as the rank at Frederick Street. The Survey advised that underused or unused ranks are very unlikely ever to become used as a taxi rank.

Furthermore, unused ranks are not neutral in impact. An unused rank creates an expectation that the rank is served by taxis. This is particularly noticeable for visitors to Aberdeen who might, reasonably, assume a taxi service can be obtained from all marked taxi ranks. Their expectation would be disappointed at unused ranks, which are marked as taxi ranks but where services are not provided (p. 59).

8) Diamond Street (p.84)

Survey Observation- The rank at Diamond Street appears to be unused, and the report recommends it should be considered for removal.

9) Exchequer Row/Castle Street (p.91)

Survey Observation- The rank appears unused, and the report recommends it should be considered for removal.

10) Frederick Street (p.92)

Survey Observation- The rank appears unused, and the report recommends it should be considered for removal. There were private cars parked in the taxi ranks spaces.

11) Justice Mill Lane (p.99)

Survey Observation- The signed rank location on Justice Mill Lane appears to be unused as a taxi rank, and the report recommends it should be considered for removal.

12) Little Chapel Street (p.101)

Survey Observation- Little Chapel Street appears to be unused and the report recommends it should be considered for removal.

13) Rubislaw Place (p.103)

Survey Observation- The rank at Rubislaw Place does not appear to operate, although we have observed a very small number of taxis parked at this location. The report recommends it should be considered for removal.

Consultee Responses

Transportation Strategy & Programmes - the above ranks were previously recommended for removal following the taxi rank review carried out in 2008. The taxi trade was in principle against the removal of any ranks, therefore the Committee did not follow the recommendation. The previous rank review supports the findings of the recent Survey as the same ranks previously identified a number of years ago are still unused.

Traffic Regulation Orders and Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 procedures would require to be undertaken for revocation of these ranks. The removal of the ranks would re-allocate the road space within the City Centre. It appears, for example that the Frederick Street rank is already inaccessible as it is used unofficially as additional parking spaces.

It appears that the rank was originally introduced to serve customers attending the Gala Bingo Hall. However, the intended usage has never materialised. The Bingo operator was consulted and advised that they were not aware of a taxi rank outside their premises on Frederick Street. Their customers were of the view that the roads authority had removed the signs and that the rank had not existed for many years. Transportation, Strategy and Programmes thereafter confirmed that the rank is technically still in operation and the sign remains in place. However, the taxi rank road markings have been erased by vehicular traffic, which is a common problem on cobbled streets.

The Bingo operator further explained that their disabled customers park on the unused taxi rank spaces; and that members of the public also use them as if they form part of the adjoining pay and display parking area. The operator wishes to see the continuation of this alternative use of the rank spaces. They advised that "parking is now extremely limited in this area due to the closure of the Frederick Street and East North Street car parks".

Police – they preferred that the Diamond Street and Exchequer Row/Castle Street ranks remained as they were of the view that these ranks had occasional use.

With regard to Frederick Street they expressed a reluctance to revoke the rank due to the location of the Bingo Hall and changing dynamics in the use of that area, although they were not aware of the rank being used.

Likewise with the Justice Mill Lane rank they expressed a reluctance to revoke the rank due to the changing dynamics in the use of that area, although they were not aware of the rank being used.

In relation to the Little Chapel Street and Rubislaw Place ranks they made no comments.

Taxi Consultation Group- At its meeting on 23 November 2011 the Committee instructed Officers to consult the taxi trade on the unused taxi ranks identified in the Survey. The taxi representatives from the Taxi Consultation Group were subsequently consulted by email on 22 February 2012 and asked to provide responses by Friday 2 March 2012. No comments were received.

The TCG was consulted at its meeting on 7 March 2012 on the rank recommendations, particularly the unused ranks. Few comments were made on the unused ranks. Some of the representatives were of the view that certain of the other Survey recommendations were impractical, e.g. a new rank at South Crown Street or Gilcomston.

The representatives were again invited to respond to the emailed consultation. No comments were received.

Analysis

The Survey highlighted the negative impact of retaining ranks where they are unused by passengers and taxis. There is a particular negative impact of unused ranks on visitors/tourists, which could create a bad impression of Aberdeen if they wait for taxis at these unserved ranks. Moreover, the unused ranks take up road space that is at a premium in and around the city, and which could be put to another use. For example, there is a need for residential and business parking spaces in the locations occupied by many of the unused ranks.

The rank review carried out by Transportation Strategy & Programmes Officers in 2008 highlighted the same unused ranks as the Survey. It appears that these ranks continue to be unused 3 to 4 years after they were initially highlighted.

Despite the Police suggestion that Diamond Street and Exchequer Row/Castle Street had occasional use, the Survey evidence indicates that these ranks are unused (p.143).

Even if there is very occasional use, it does not justify maintaining a rank. When a rank is unused or rarely used it defeats the purpose of having a taxi rank at that location, because there is little or no demand for taxis there. Taxi ranks are only effective if they are used by the public and properly served by taxis.

It is recommended that this option is progressed (see recommendations 8, 9,10,11,12 and 13 above).

Part III- Gaps in Rank Provision (p.144, Survey)

The Survey identifies a number of gaps in provision of taxi stances, especially areas within the city centre that appear to be under-supplied namely areas of Gilcomston (sic, Rosemount Viaduct), the southern stretch of Crown Street, the eastern end of School Hill and George Street (p.55 onwards). The recommendation for a rank at the Market Street end of Union Square is considered at Q1 above.

The locations identified in the Survey were suggested based on evidence from the Survey observations, which pinpointed areas that may have a demand for taxi services due to footfall and business premises. The consultants advised that the precise locations should be assessed against traffic flow and street engineering concerns, which can be considered by Officers of Enterprise, Planning and Infrastructure.

The consultants also recommended that all new ranks should have a minimum of 3 taxi spaces, as smaller ranks tend to be ignored, as they do not give the impression of being a proper rank.

14) Gilcomston (sic, Rosemount)

Survey Observation- It appears there is a demand for taxi services in Rosemount.

15) Southern Stretch of Crown Street

Survey Observation- It appears there may be an unmet demand for taxi services on the Southern stretch of Crown Street due to the number businesses along the road supplying food, alcohol and accommodation.

16) Eastern End of School Hill

Survey Observation- The Eastern end of School Hill has a large number of smaller premises and entrances to the Bon Accord and St Nicholas centres. The location also serves the back end of Back Wynd. Road space is severely limited however, and this creates a problem in defining a practical location for a new rank.

17) George Street

Survey Observation- "George Street is a linear shopping street of some distance. Given the length of the street committed to retail premises it is difficult to identify the location with the greatest benefit to taxi users.

This said, locating a rank at an intersection has benefits as it draws from a wider potential catchment. We would consider such intersections to include George Street/Spring Gardens; or George Street/Hutcheon Street, although the latter has a significantly lower demand profile.

The consultants advised that they would not consider locations further north along George Street to merit significant consideration.

On balance we would feel it likely that the southern location; George Street/Spring Garden would attract a greater number of taxi passengers. A location approximately alongside house number 306 to the intersection with Craigie Street may be considered, subject to traffic flows. Locations further south may also be considered but these are more likely to feed into existing central locations.

An alternative serving the mid point to southern end of George Street may be considered in John Street, west of its junction with George Street, but we could not identify a location of sufficient size for a rank sufficiently close to the interchange in our review.”

Consultee Responses

Transportation Strategy & Programmes advised that if the Committee wishes they can investigate the locations and options.

It appears from their initial investigation that the suggestion of new ranks at Rosemount Viaduct and George Street is the most viable in terms of road space. Schoolhill may also be possible. However, the Southern stretch of Crown Street appeared to be unsuitable for a rank due to narrow road layout.

Police - supported the introduction of a Gilcomston (Rosemount) rank. However, they wished to know the exact location of the rank before they could comment further.

They felt that the recommendation to introduce a rank on the Southern stretch of Crown Street was unnecessary as a taxi could easily be called to less busy locations slightly outwith the city centre if required.

They supported the Survey recommendation to introduce a rank at the Eastern end of School Hill, provided a suitable location could be found. They were of the view that it may be a positive step in terms of alleviating some of the congestion caused by taxis waiting on Back Wynd, although the Survey made the recommendation purely on the basis of demand, which the Survey team had identified in that area.

They also supported the recommendation for a rank at George Street due to the area being busy with retail premises during the day.

The Taxi Consultation Group was also consulted by email and at a meeting. No response has been received.

Analysis

Further investigation and specific locations would be required before ranks could be introduced in these areas. It would be beneficial to taxi drivers and passengers in Aberdeen if new ranks were introduced in areas where there is an unmet demand. It is therefore recommended that further work be done to identify suitable new ranks in areas of Gilcomston, Schoolhill and George Street.

6. IMPACT

Corporate – The Council's city centre policies will benefit from improvements to taxi rank provision in the City. Successful implementation of the recommendations would support the Council's duty towards the public as the licensing authority in terms of the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982.

Public - Members of the public who use taxi services in the city would positively benefit from optimisation of taxi ranks in terms of the achievable recommendations.

Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment – The recommendations will not disproportionately impact on persons with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 compared to persons without protected characteristics.

Implementation of the recommendations may be of benefit to older people, those people who are mobility impaired and wheelchair users as they are intended to improve access to taxi services in the city centre.

The Survey identified potential problems, which could be faced by wheelchair users with side loading taxi ranks and cobbled streets. Two of the most popular city ranks, Back Wynd and Hadden Street, are cobbled and only permit side loading of wheelchairs.

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Aberdeen Taxi Demand Survey- November 2011, Taxi Studies Group, Edinburgh Napier University

(If Members cannot access the Survey electronically they may wish to contact Members' Support to request that a copy is downloaded (ref. Committees' web page of the main Aberdeen City Council website, under the Licensing Committee meeting of 23 November 2011).

8. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

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Consultation Response- Community Safety

“Thank you for consulting me on this matter.

I do not have comments for the specific questions posed. I would like to make a general statement that Union Street night time ranks should be the only ranks operating in the very heart of our City Centre at night. The locations of these ranks have been selected because they are well lit, have sufficient breadth of pavement, are covered by CCTV and support monitoring by police. At weekends, transport marshals are deployed at these ranks to help maintain order.

The strategy of introducing night time taxi ranks along with transport marshals has been critical in reducing crime and antisocial behaviour and turning around negative perceptions of safety in the City Centre so that it is now recognised as being amongst the safest nationally.

Creating any additional ranks would reduce community safety because the safeguards offered at the Union Street ranks would be reduced.

I would welcome the closure of the Bridge Street rank at night but am unconvinced by the need to open a new rank on Union Street. No funding is available to deploy transport marshals at a new rank. It would more desirable to maintain the number of ranks currently on Union Street at night.”

149 Public sector equality duty

- 1) A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—
 - a. eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - b. advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - c. foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 2) A person who is not a public authority but who exercises public functions must, in the exercise of those functions, have due regard to the matters mentioned in subsection (1).
- 3) Having due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to—
 - a. remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic;
 - b. take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
 - c. encourage persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.
- 4) The steps involved in meeting the needs of disabled persons that are different from the needs of persons who are not disabled include, in particular, steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities.
- 5) Having due regard to the need to foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to—
 - a. tackle prejudice, and
 - b. promote understanding.
- 6) Compliance with the duties in this section may involve treating some persons more favourably than others; but that is not to be taken as permitting conduct that would otherwise be prohibited by or under this Act.

- 7) The relevant protected characteristics are—
age;
disability;
gender reassignment;
pregnancy and maternity;
race;
religion or belief;
sex;
sexual orientation.
- 8) A reference to conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act includes a reference to—
- a. a breach of an equality clause or rule;
 - b. a breach of a non-discrimination rule.
- 9) Schedule 18 (exceptions) has effect.