

Member Briefing

Number: 1126

Title: Consultation on the licensing of rear loading wheelchair accessible vehicles as hackney carriages (taxis)

Summary: All Cheshire West and Chester hackney carriage vehicles (taxis) are required to be wheelchair accessible. Currently, the Council only licenses purpose-built vehicles with facilities/equipment to load wheelchair users from the side. The Council has received a request to change policy to permit the licensing of hackney carriages that load wheelchair users from the rear of the vehicle. A consultation exercise is to be undertaken following the request to change policy.

The Statement of Licensing Policy for Hackney Carriages, Private Hire Vehicles, Drivers and Private Hire Vehicle Operators (the policy) only permits the licensing of side loading wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAVs) as hackney carriages. Hackney carriages are available for immediate hire from a hackney rank or by hailing them in the street.

The specification and models of vehicle permitted to be licensed as a hackney carriage are set by the policy. Currently, only side loading WAVs that are capable of loading and carrying a passenger while they remain in their wheelchair can be licensed as a hackney carriage. In addition, there are a number of other requirements to assist the carriage of disabled passengers. These include hearing loops, high visibility grab handles and seat flashes, additional steps at the side and a permanent partition between the driver and rear passenger compartment.

The request to license rear loading WAVs relates solely to the Vale Royal hackney carriage zone. However it is possible that similar requests for other zones (Ellesmere Port and Neston and Chester) could be made in the future.

Three manufacturers' vehicles are being considered: Ford, Peugeot and Volkswagen. If you would like more details on the each of the models please contact Peter Willett.

There are no restrictions on side loading WAVs being licensed as private hire vehicles. These licensed vehicles must be pre-booked, and they cannot use a rank or be hailed in the street.

The principal advantages and disadvantages of licensing rear loading WAVs as hackney carriages are below. The full list will be included in the consultation.

Advantages

- Many wheelchair users use rear loading vehicles in their personal lives (e.g. through the Motability scheme) and will be confident and comfortable using them. Rear loading vehicles may be their preference.
- They are easier to load/unload in some locations compared to side loading vehicles (e.g. private drives and locations where there is no kerb).
- They are easier for the driver to load as some models can be fitted with a winch.

- There is no need for the driver to turn the wheelchair 90 degrees inside the vehicle which can be difficult for many drivers.
- More suitable for some people using larger, heavier electric wheelchairs.

Disadvantages

- Where there are no dropped kerbs it could be difficult or uncomfortable to move a wheelchair user passenger off a kerb on to the road.
- Loading in the road puts passengers and drivers at greater risk for other road users.
- There is no additional space on most existing ranks to accommodate rear loading vehicles (up to 3000mm space is needed for rear loading).
- In most cases rear loading vehicles are smaller and carry fewer passengers than side loading vehicles.
- A wheelchair user would be positioned in the crumple zone at the rear – with a greater risk of injury in an accident.

A consultation based on the advantages/disadvantages start today, 21 December, and will run until 4 March 2018.

inside.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/get_involved/consultations/rear_loading_wheelchair_accessible_vehicles_way_for_use_as_hackney_carriages_within_the_vale_royal_hackney_carriage_zone_consultation

The primary consultees will be the bodies representing the elderly or those with mobility issues and the hackney carriage vehicle owners in the Vale Royal area. The public (in general) will be invited to comment via public web information. Several of the vehicles were recently inspected at a by the Corporate Disability Access Forum (CDAF). The feedback from this meeting will be incorporated in to the consultation process.

The consultation will be used to gather evidence/views to gauge if rear loading WAVs are appropriate to be licensed as hackney carriages. The results of the consultation will be considered by the Licensing Committee that has delegated authority set this policy.

For further information contact: Peter Willett

Telephone: (01244 9)72941

Email: peter.willett@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk

Responsible Committee, Cabinet Member: Licensing Committee, Councillor Louise Gittins

Date: 21 December 2017