

LONDON

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Rt Hon Tessa Jowell MP
Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport
Department for Culture Media and Sport
2-4 Cockspur Street
London SW1Y 5DH

Date:

25 JAN 2005

Dear Tessa

The Royal Parks and Other Open Spaces Regulations 1997 - Amendment

It has recently been brought to my attention that officers of the Royal Parks Constabulary have been issuing Fixed Penalty Notices to licensed private hire vehicles passing through the royal parks. I do not challenge the right of officers to issue such tickets since the present regulations, The Royal Parks and Other Open Spaces Regulations 1997, do not allow private hire vehicles to pass through the parks. However, this development does concern me because of the negative impact on the travelling public and the newly licensed private hire industry. I am writing to you therefore to seek your assistance in resolving the issue.

Under The Royal Parks and Other Open Spaces Regulations 1997, there is a ban on vehicles used for trade or business other than three exemptions specified in the regulations. These are: taxis licensed under Section 6 of the Metropolitan Public Carriage Act 1869; vehicles used for transacting business with someone either residing in a Palace or Park or using land within the Park under licence; and vehicles used for the repair or removal of a vehicle broken down in the Park.

Evidently in the drafting of the Regulations in 1997 the case for London's taxis to continue to be allowed access to the Royal Parks was accepted. Since it was not until 1998 that the Private Hire Vehicles (London) Act 1998 was enacted there would have been no reason to consider a case for licensed private hire vehicles to be granted similar access and exempted from the regulations. However there is a need to consider such an exemption now.

The Private Hire Vehicles (London) Act 1998 provided for the licensing of London's private hire industry. The implementation of licensing is being carried out in three distinct phases, starting with operators, which commenced in January 2001 and was completed in June 2003. The licensing of drivers started in April 2003 and is scheduled for completion in April 2006. The third is the licensing of vehicles, which commenced in April 2004 and will be completed in April 2005.

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Once licensed, the private hire vehicle is required to display clearly identifiable licence discs in both the front windscreen and rear window. Previously it was impossible with any certainty to identify these vehicles unless they displayed advertisement/company names to confirm their use as trade vehicles. Ironically, the raising of private hire vehicle standards appears to have given rise to the problem.

London's licensed private hire trade is the other half of the capital's hire and reward industry, providing a door to door service, similar to that of taxis. There are an estimated 40,000 private hire vehicles and a similar number of private hire drivers against some 21,000 taxis and 25,000 taxi drivers, so you will appreciate that private hire's contribution to the public transport infrastructure is significant.

I am sure you will share my view that a properly integrated hire and reward industry is critical to the safety of the travelling public. It is in my view essential therefore that London's private hire industry enjoys the same benefits as taxis in the discharge of their business. To that end I seek your assistance by asking you to consider, as a matter of urgency, granting vehicles licensed under the Private Hire Vehicles (London) Act 1998 exemption from the 1997 regulations.

I understand from Transport for London that the Parks Authority and Constabulary have been very helpful in dealing with this matter since it arose. I am copying this to Charlotte Atkins (Department for Transport) seeking her Department's support to this proposal.

Yours sincerely



Ken Livingstone
Mayor of London

Copy to: Charlotte Atkins MP Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, DfT
Sir John Stephens Metropolitan Police Commissioner
William Weston Royal Parks Authority
Chief Supt Helen Ball Royal Parks Constabulary