Report of the Sheffield Taxi Safety Camera Pilot Study

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Acknowledgements

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- South Yorkshire Police – Sheffield City Centre SNA
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- Sheffield Confederation of Private Hire Companies
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We would also like to express our special thanks and appreciation to Mr Mahboob Hussain of Malting Garage, who greatly assisted with the realisation of this project.

A Black Cab fitted with a CCTV camera

Pictured left to right: Andy Christian (Sheffield City Council), Mahboob Hussain (Maltings Garage), Hafeas Rehman (Sheffield Taxi Trade Association), Mohammed Yasin (Sheffield Private Hire and Taxi Trade Association), Chief Superintendent Paul Broadbent (South Yorkshire Police), Shahbaz Ramzan (Sheffield City Council).
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Executive Summary

This report is about assessing the effect on taxi driver safety by fitting digital cameras in Sheffield taxis.

There are 2000 licensed taxi drivers in Sheffield and 1765 licensed taxis made up of 723 black cabs Hackney Carriages and 1042 Private Hire – mainly saloon cars. Of the drivers, 87% have a BME heritage; most, if not all, are self-employed; and less than 10 of the taxi drivers are female. There has been concern for a number of years about racial abuse, threats, assaults etc. suffered by Sheffield taxi drivers. In 1992 Sheffield City Council conducted a research project: “Problems faced by Asian Taxi Drivers at work in Sheffield”: A Research Report. During the late 1990s and early 2000s an increasing number of manufacturers were offering digital safety cameras designed for taxis. The results of pilot projects outside Sheffield indicated that fitting a camera significantly improved taxi driver safety, but few, if any, of the projects were formally assessed. In 2003 Sheffield City Council Licensing Department in conjunction with interested parties, drew up a policy on taxi safety cameras.

The taxi driver safety issue was raised again in August 2005 in a BBC Radio Sheffield, Asian Radio phone in programme, following on from the ‘7/7 London Bombing’. A working group was formed including: the two taxi driver associations, Sheffield Confederation of Private Hire Companies, SCC Taxi Licensing, Sheffield Police and the SCC Racist Incident Officer. A number of options for improving driver safety were considered. It was decided to run a pilot project to assess improvements for driver safety by fitting cameras in a sample number of Sheffield taxis. Funding of £7,000 was secured from the Sheffield Safer Communities Partnership – Violent Crime Theme Group, and thirty-three taxis were equipped with cameras – eight black cab Hackney Carriages and twenty-five Private Hire saloon cars. Participating drivers were selected by the taxi driver associations and were asked to keep records of their experiences with fares, both before and after the cameras were fitted.

The pilot was run in December 2006, which included the Christmas period. Data collected showed that fitting a camera led to a massive reduction in incidents of abuse etc. towards taxi drivers; from a problem with 1 in 7 fares on average, to a problem with less than 1 in 100 fares – the most significant fall being in connection with incidents involving violence and threats. These results were subjected to statistical testing and found to be ‘significant’. The next phase is to encourage a wider take-up by the remaining taxi drivers, probably through a ‘trade fair’. Self-employed taxi drivers can claim any camera installation costs against tax, as a business expense.
Introduction

This report is about a multi-agency project, funded by the Sheffield Safer Communities Partnership, to pilot and evaluate the safety benefits of fitting CCTV cameras in Taxis.

Taxis provide an essential public service, especially in the evenings when the availability of other forms of public transport is reduced. There are 1765 taxis in Sheffield comprising 723 Hackney Carriages – mainly black cab and 1042 Private Hire – mainly saloon cars. Almost all of these vehicles are operated by self-employed owner-drivers, 87% having a black or minority ethnic heritage.

Unfortunately, it is quite common for taxi drivers to be subjected to verbal and racial abuse, to be coerced into providing transport for ‘drug runs’, to have their vehicles damaged and to have angry disputes with customers over fares. Whilst less common, it often happens that taxi drivers are threatened with violence, are robbed and assaulted, sometimes resulting in serious injuries. Although not occurring in Sheffield, a taxi driver was murdered by his fare in July 2006 in Huddersfield and a similar murder of a taxi driver occurred in Rotherham in December 2000.

The Project

Initiation

In a follow up to the London Bombings, on 13 August 2005 the BBC Radio Sheffield, Shawkat Hasmi Asian Radio programme ran a feature about an increase in concern of hostility towards Muslims. Andy Christian, the Council’s Racist Incident Officer was invited to take part. After a feature on increased hostility towards Leicester Taxi Drivers, Mohammed Yasin, a local taxi driver and committee member of the Sheffield Private Hire and Hackney Carriage Association rang into the show and asked why the Council hadn’t done anything about fitting CCTV cameras in taxis to improve driver safety. Andy Christian said that he was aware of the abuse and violence suffered by taxi drivers but that it was his understanding that a lead was already being taken on this issue. Mr Yasin was clearly unhappy with this response and arrangements were made for them to meet and discuss the issue further.
Andy Christian did some research and was told that although a number of grants had been made locally, no application had been made for permission to fit a taxi camera.

The research also revealed that the Council had conducted a survey on taxi driver safety in 1992 (“Problems faced by Asian Taxi-Drivers at work in Sheffield”: A Research Report – see Appendix 1), which disclosed a number of safety concerns. During the late 1990s and early 2000s an increasing number of manufacturers were offering digital safety cameras designed for taxis. The result of pilot projects outside Sheffield indicated that fitting a camera significantly improved driver safety, but few if any projects had been formally evaluated. In 2003, the ‘Sheffield City Council Taxi Camera’ policy was developed by a working group included in which were the two taxi driver associations and the Sheffield Confederation of Private Hire Companies (Appendix 2).

**Preparation**

Following free ranging discussions with Mr Yasin and his colleague Mr Khan, a meeting was arranged for the 24 November 2005, attended by representatives of: the two taxi driver associations; the Sheffield Confederation of Private Hire Companies (Chris Frayne RCA Taxis); Police Superintendent John Brennan and other police officers and Professor Bill Kapila (who gave a presentation on his research into the abuse of Asian taxi drivers in Bury). Ibrar Hussain, a City Councillor and active taxi driver was invited but was unable to attend. Out of that meeting the Sheffield Taxi Drivers Safety (STDS) group (membership list at Appendix 3) was formed to progress action on the issue of taxi driver abuse and Professor Kapila was invited to prepare a tender to research taxi driver issues in Sheffield.

The next meeting of STDS took place on 2 February 2006 when Professor Kapila's proposal was considered. Whilst it was a comprehensive research outline the group felt that his fee of £20,000 was beyond any finance they might be able to raise. Given that previous research had been done (SCC 1992 *supra*) the group felt that they had sufficient knowledge to develop a multi agency (Drivers Associations/Police/SCC Licensing) strategy to address driver abuse, an element of which would be a pilot project to evaluate the effectiveness of installing CCTV cameras using a sample number of taxis. Andy Christian secured £7,000 funding for this project from the Violent Crime Theme Group of the Sheffield Safer Communities Partnership.

Research was conducted with seven local authorities and police outside South Yorkshire (Southampton, Middlesborough, Keighley, Gosport, Hartlepool, Corby and Chester) who had cameras fitted in their licensed taxis (see Appendix 4) and a review was conducted of potential suppliers.
A group decision was made to strive for a balance between maximizing the number of taxis to be included in the project (for the purposes of a reliable assessment) but including both main types of taxi vehicle in use i.e. the ‘TX’ type black cab Hackney Carriage, and Private Hire saloon cars. After completing the negotiation and tendering process, it was agreed to equip eight black cabs (Cygnus Systems) and twenty-five saloon cars (Autocab systems) – a total of thirty-three vehicles. Participating drivers were selected by the two taxi driver associations and in exchange for a ‘cost free’ camera installation, they were asked to keep record sheets for three weeks before the camera was fitted and for a further three weeks after the camera was fitted. The information asked for included the ‘shift’ they had worked, the number of fares carried and the number of problems encountered (specimen record sheet at Appendix 5).

The Autocab system had one camera, with no sound recording facility and was mounted on the windscreen, near to the rear view mirror.

The Autocab system is unsuitable for black cabs as the infrared light from the camera reflects off the polycarbonate security screen. This problem is addressed by the Cygnus system which has two cameras – one in the forward section and one in the rear passenger compartment.

Both systems capture digital images of passengers in the interior of the vehicle and are constantly recording those images at short time intervals. If an incident occurs, the driver activates a button which causes a number of images to be ‘saved’ prior to the button being pressed and a sequence of images after the button was pressed. The images are held on a secure medium which requires decoding software to view. The decoding software is only available to the Police and Council within the terms of the Sheffield City Council Taxi Camera policy.

Also within the terms of the policy, camera equipped taxis have to be fitted with signs, visible from outside and inside the vehicle, to alert passengers and potential passengers to the presence of the camera. Both manufacturers provide their own signage (included in the price) on high visibility stickers, which although acceptable to the seven Local Authorities surveyed in preparation for the project, were not acceptable in terms of the specification and
content, contained in the Sheffield City Council Taxi Camera policy. The project was unable to negotiate round this problem and had to have specific signs printed (Appendix 6) – this added £279 to the cost of the project (see Appendix 8 for a project cost breakdown).

**Installation**

Installation commenced on 13\(^{th}\) December 2006. As the Malting Garage, Chippingham Street, Sheffield was an agent for Cygnus (black cab system) all eight black cab installations were carried out there. It had been hoped that the Private Hire (Autocab) installation could have been carried out, at no cost, in a covered but unused parking area in the grounds of the Pakistani Muslim Centre, Woodbourne Road, Sheffield. Unfortunately, the Centre’s charges would have caused budget over-run, so we took up the very generous, cost free offer from the manager of Malting Garage, Mr Mahboob Hussain, to make space available in his commercial premises. As a result, all twenty-five Private Hire vehicles were also equipped in the same week.

At the time of installation, all drivers completed a ‘camera installation’ permission application form and signed a contract accepting ownership of the camera – this meant that ownership of the equipment passed to the driver and that Sheffield City Council no longer had any responsibility for it. Any issues would have to be taken up by the driver, directly with the supplier under warranty. Drivers were also given a second ‘camera fitted record sheet’ and asked to keep records of their experiences with fares for the next three-weeks (which included Christmas).

The project received good ‘launch’ publicity in the local press, and was also featured on Radio Sheffield and BBC TV Look North ([http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-1/hi/england/south_yorkshire/6203007.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-1/hi/england/south_yorkshire/6203007.stm)).

A sample of local press cover is included in Appendix 9.
Evaluation

Data evaluation is included in Appendix 7, which is summarized below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prior to camera fitted:</th>
<th>328 incidents = 14.9% of all fares monitored</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2202 fares monitored</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>128 Verbal Abuse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 Threats of violence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Assaults</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>108 Fare disputes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52 Run off without paying fare</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Damage to taxi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>After camera fitted:</th>
<th>8 incidents = 0.9% of all fares monitored</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>897 fares monitored</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 verbal abuse – after the fare had got out of the taxi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Fare disputes - but disputed in a reasonable manner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Damage to taxi - caused by a person involved in a fight outside of the taxi and not a fare</td>
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</table>

The results show a massive reduction in incidents from an average of 1 in 7 fares to less than 1 in 100 fares, with a very significant reduction in incidents of threats and violence.

These results have been subjected to statistical testing (Chi Square) and are shown to be statistically significant. In addition to the benefit to drivers there has been some anecdotal positive feedback from passengers, particularly lone females, who say that they feel safer when there is a camera installed. These findings and comments mirror anecdotal reports of the positive effect of taxi cameras in other parts of the country.

The project recognizes the need for ‘control data’ to rebut any proposition that this apparent improvement in passenger behaviour, is due to a significant change in ‘all taxi fare’ behaviour, which just happened to coincide with the timing of the project. We do not have data for the experiences of other taxi drivers not involved in the project and so we have drawn down data of incidents reported to the police by taxi drivers – which cover a range of behaviours including: abuse, threats, assault, damage, and ‘run offs’. This data is also presented in
Appendix 7 and shows a rising trend between February 2006 to end of January 2007 – with an upturn through December 2006 and January 2007. We are therefore confident that the ‘project’ improvements were independent of any other ‘taxi passenger behaviour’ trend.

Again, in our initial research, comment was made that the cameras were especially welcomed by female taxi drivers. As women make up 0.5% of Sheffield taxi drivers, the equipment could assist in encouraging women into the trade, improving the occupational gender balance and associated equality issues.

Where do we go from here - Recommendations

Whilst we can claim with confidence that the project’s aim of reducing abuse, threats and violence towards taxi drivers had been a success – there does of course remain the issue of the other 1732 taxi that don’t have cameras. If funding were sought to equip the remaining taxis in the same manner as ‘project taxis’, we would be looking at a cost well in excess of £0.5M. Add to that maintenance, vehicle transfer and replacement, cost could quickly soar towards £1m with an indefinite future financial commitment.

Recommendation 1 – Taxi Drivers to progress the initiative

The most practical way forward is for taxi drivers and their representative organisations, to take responsibility for further camera installation. Advice provided to the project is that as the vast majority, if not all Sheffield Taxi drivers, are self employed, any camera costs can be claimed back against tax as a business expense – which means that ‘in the long run’ the camera would cost the driver nothing. Of course, drivers would have to find the initial purchase ‘lump sum’ which could take a year to claim back. We are conscious of this and in our discussions with suppliers about finance, some are proposing a weekly rental or hire purchase system - which again would be claimable against tax.

The option of claiming cost back against tax appears to have been received, with at best, a ‘lukewarm’ response from some drivers who are reluctant to ‘engage with the taxman’.  We
do not feel that this is sufficient reason to seek finance from the ‘public purse’, or ‘charity purse’, for camera installation.

In our preliminary research, a comment from a Gosport taxi driver on camera purchase cost was “no problem, just put it through your books”.

Additionally, a Keighley driver said that he had obtained a 15% reduction in his taxi insurance premium following camera installation. With annual taxi insurance cost being between £1,000 and £2,000, financial benefits could be significant.

The pilot project has shown the way and proved the effectiveness of cameras. Contacts have been made and the ground prepared for the taxi drivers to continue and develop this safety initiative. To this end, we will canvass the degree of interest amongst taxi drivers and if it is sufficient, a local ‘trade fair’ will be arranged where suppliers and taxi drivers can be brought together. Many suppliers have already indicated an interest and we are confident that a range of systems and finance packages could be available.

**Recommendation 2 – Consider making cameras a taxi licensing condition**

The project has also considered the idea of making camera installation compulsory i.e. making it a licensing requirement. We included a question about this in our initial research and whilst all local authorities had considered it and some thought they would move to it eventually (probably through a phased introduction), none had it as part of their current policy. This might be an issue for consultation and discussion within the taxi licensing ‘orbit’.

**Recommendation 3 – Reconsider policy specification on taxi camera signage**

We feel that the Sheffield Taxi Licensing body should reconsider its policy on specific signage. All suppliers provide signage with their cameras, which has been acceptable to all of the seven local authorities we surveyed. Insisting on Sheffield specific signage will complicate the supply/installation process and, we feel, will dampen enthusiasm for a wider take-up.

If the licensing authority feels that signage is a specific issue to be within their control, then perhaps it would be better and give consistency, if they printed generic signs, which could be sold to drivers and included as part of the installation cost.
Recommendation 4 - Police Downloading to be mainstreamed

During the pilot, downloading images and formatting replacement memory cards (Cygnus system) has fallen to the Sheffield City Centre Safer Neighbourhood Area (SNA) and one police officer in particular. This is unacceptable as a long-term arrangement. We are already discussing with the police an option of placing that duty on the police Audio Visual unit which could provide a twenty-four hour call out facility if necessary. Interestingly, one supplier is offering a twenty-four hour downloading facility for his own equipment, which, whilst it has obvious attractions, will have to be explored in detail.

This report has been written and compiled by:

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