South Ribble Council

Hackney carriage demand survey

March 2023

Executive Summary

This Hackney carriage demand survey has been undertaken on behalf of South Ribble Council following the guidance of the April 2010 DfT Best Practice Guidance document, and all relevant case history in regard to unmet demand. This Executive Summary draws together key points from the main report that are needed to allow a committee to determine from the facts presented their current position in regard to the policy of limiting hackney carriage vehicle licences according to Section 16 of the 1985 Transport Act. It is a summary of the main report which follows and should not be relied upon solely to justify any decisions of a committee but must be read in conjunction with the full report below.

The current survey of hackney carriage unmet demand and operation in South Ribble was undertaken between July and December 2022. It included all aspects of data collection normally undertaken to provide the authority with a database of evidence regarding the level of demand for hackney carriages across South Ribble.

The area only sees ranks in Leyland. The nature of provision is that nearly all Leyland booked licensed vehicle travel tends to be provided by hackney carriages, with very few of the South Ribble private hire being public-facing. Further, the servicing hackney carriages, most of which operate for one large company, tend to wait at ranks to receive bookings. This benefits those wanting to take hackney carriages from ranks by more vehicles being available than the observed demand implies. However, there are times that the demand for bookings and direct hire from ranks might clash, leading to potential unmet demand as a passenger arrives when all vehicles have left to undertake bookings.

The overall rank-based hire market is very small and would only support a very small hackney carriage vehicle volume. The recent demand for saloon hackney carriage plates definitively did not arise from any classic significance of unmet demand, and there is very clearly no further unmet demand related issues that would justify any further plate issues.

The recommendations in the report provide guidance on more detailed actions that could be taken to help develop the local service further.

Contents

1 General introduction and background

South Ribble Council is responsible for the licensing of hackney carriage and private hire vehicles operating within the Council area and is the licensing authority for this complete area. Further details of the local application of Section 16 of the 1985 Transport Act with regard to limiting hackney carriage vehicle numbers is provided in further Chapters of this report. Hackney carriage vehicle licences are the only part of licensing where such a stipulation occurs and there is no legal means by which either private hire vehicle numbers, private hire or hackney carriage driver numbers, or the number of private hire operators can be limited.

This review of current policy is based on the Best Practice Guidance produced by the Department for Transport in April 2010 (BPG). It seeks to provide information to the licensing authority to meet section 16 of the Transport Act 1985 "that the grant of a hackney carriage vehicle licence may be refused if, but only if, the licensing authority is satisfied that there is no significant demand for the services of hackney carriages within its local area, which is unmet." This terminology is typically shortened to "no SUD".

Current hackney carriage, private hire and operator licensing is undertaken within the legal frameworks first set by the Town Polices Clause Act 1847 (TPCA), amended and supplemented by various following legislation including the Transport Act 1985, Section 16 in regard to hackney carriage vehicle limits, and by the Local Government Miscellaneous Provisions Act 1976 with reference to private hire vehicles and operations. This latter Act saw application of regulation to the then growing private hire sector which had not been previously part of the TPCA. Many of the aspects of these laws have been tested and refined by other more recent legislation and more importantly through case law.

Beyond legislation, the experience of the person in the street tends to see both hackney carriage and private hire vehicles both as 'taxis' – a term we will try for the sake of clarity to use only in its generic sense within the report. We will use the term 'licensed vehicle' to refer to both hackney carriage and private hire.

A review, reported in April 2019, of South Ribble licensed vehicle policy focussed on encouraging improved transparency to the public as well as a more future proof vehicle policy. This included proposed change to how both hackney carriage and private hire vehicles were distinguished, with the latter felt to be too close to private cars for the safety of the travelling public in the area.

Recent legislative change

The most recent changes in legislation regarding licensed vehicles have been enactment of the parts of the Equality Act related to guidance dogs (sections 168 to 171, enacted in October 2010), the two clauses of the Deregulation Act which were successful in proceeding, relating to length of period each license covers and to allowing operators to transfer work across borders (enacted in October 2015), and most recently enactment of Sections 165 and 167 of the Equality Act, albeit on a permissive basis (see below).

The Deregulation Act 2015 saw two clauses related to taxi licensing – length of driver licences (Section 10) and allowance of operators being able to transfer work across borders (Section 11), both enacted in October 2015. This latter clause led to the current issues with large numbers of private hire vehicles working away from their formally licensed authority.

In November 2016, the DfT undertook a consultation regarding enacting Sections 167 and 165 of the Equality Act. These allow for all vehicles capable of carrying a wheel chair to be placed on a list by the local council (section 167). Any driver using a vehicle on this list then has a duty under section 165 to:

- Carry the passenger while in the wheel chair
- Not make any additional charge for doing so
- If the passenger chooses to sit in a passenger seat to carry the wheel chair
- To take such steps as are necessary to ensure that the passenger is carried in safety and reasonable comfort
- To give the passenger such mobility assistance as is reasonably required

This was enacted from April 2017.

Regard must also be had to the Statutory Taxi and Private Hire Standards July 2020 that represented a milestone in transportation regulation bringing the safeguarding of children and vulnerable people right at the heart of the taxi licensing system. It predicated a wider review of the full April 2010 Best Practice Guidance discussed elsewhere in this Chapter.

Two Acts impacting on overall licensing were enacted in 2022. The "Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles (Safeguarding and Road Safety Act) (31 March 2022) made it mandatory for any licensing authority in England that has information about a taxi (hackney carriage) or private hire driver relevant to safeguarding or road safety concerns must share that information with the authority planning to issue any driver licences.

The "Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles (Disabled Persons) Act (28 June 2022) further amended the Equality Act to place duties on taxi and private hire drivers and operators giving any disabled person specific rights and protections to be transported and receive assistance when using such vehicles and without being charged extra to do so.

Limiting vehicle numbers

The legislation around licensed vehicles and their drivers has been the subject of many attempts at review. The limiting of hackney carriage vehicle numbers has been a particular concern as it is often considered to be a restrictive practice and against natural economic trends. The current BPG in fact says "most local licensing authorities do not impose quantity restrictions, the Department regards that as best practice".

Recent reviews of this policy, often considered to be restrictive and against natural economic trends, were by the Office of Fair Trading in 2003, through the production of the BPG in 2010, the Law Commission review which published its results in 2014, the All Party Parliamentary Group on Taxis deliberations in 2018 and the recently concluded consultation on review of the full Best Practice Guidance document (not yet approved). None of these resulted in any material change to the legislation involved in licensing, and only marginal change to any guidance provided.

With respect to the principal subject of this survey, local authorities therefore retain the right to restrict the number of hackney carriage vehicle licenses. The Law Commission conclusion included retention of the power to limit hackney carriage vehicle numbers but utilizing a public interest test determined by the Secretary of State. It also suggested the three- year horizon also be used for rank reviews and accessibility reviews.

A more recent restriction, often applied to areas where there is no 'quantity' control felt to exist per-se, is that of 'quality control'. This is often a pseudonym for a restriction that any new hackney carriage vehicle licence must be for a wheel chair accessible vehicle, of various kinds as determined locally. In many places this implies a restricted number of saloon style hackney carriage licences are available, which often are given 'grandfather' rights to remain as saloon style.

Within this quality restriction, there are various levels of strength of the types of vehicles allowed. The tightest restriction, now only retained by a few authorities only allows 'London' style wheel chair accessible vehicles, restricted to those with a 25-foot turning circle, and at the present time principally the LTI Tx, the Mercedes Vito special edition with steerable rear axle, and the Metrocab (no longer produced). Others allow a wider range of van style conversions in their wheel chair accessible fleet, whilst some go as far as also allowing rear-loading conversions. Given the additional price of these vehicles, this often implies a restriction on entry to the hackney carriage trade. This is even more so were a stipulation towards sustainable fuel vehicles also implied.

Some authorities do not allow vehicles which appear to be hackney carriage, i.e. mainly the London style vehicles, to be within the private hire fleet, whilst others do allow wheel chair vehicles. The most usual method of distinguishing between hackney carriages and private hire is a 'Taxi' roof sign on the vehicle, although again some areas do allow roof signs on private hire as long as they do not say 'Taxi', some turn those signs at right angles, whilst others apply liveries, mainly to hackney carriage fleets, but sometimes also to private hire fleets.

Derivation of unmet demand

After introduction of the 1985 Transport Act, Leeds University Institute for Transport Studies developed a tool by which unmet demand could be evaluated and a determination made if this was significant or not. The tool was taken forward and developed as more studies were undertaken. Over time this 'index of significance of unmet demand' (ISUD) became accepted as an industry standard tool to be used for this purpose. Some revisions have been made following the few but specific court cases where various parties have challenged the policy of retaining a limit.

Some of the application has differed between Scottish and English authority's. This is mainly due to some court cases in Scotland taking interpretation of the duty of the licensing authority further than is usual in England and Wales, requiring current knowledge of the status of unmet demand at all times, rather than just at the snap-shot taken every three years. However, the three year survey horizon has become generally accepted given the advice of the BPG and most locations that review regularly do within that timescale.

The DfT asked in writing in 2004 for all licensing authorities with quantity restrictions to review them, publish their justification by March 2005, and then review at least every three years since then. In due course, this led to a summary of the government guidance which was last updated in England and Wales in 2010 (but more recently in Scotland).

The BPG in 2010 also provided additional suggestions of how these surveys should be undertaken, albeit in general but fairly extensive terms. A key encouragement within the BPG is that "an interval of three years is commonly regarded as the maximum reasonable period between surveys". BPG suggests key points in consideration are passenger waiting times at ranks, for street hailings and telephone bookings, latent and peaked demand, wide consultation and publication of "all the evidence gathered".

The Law Commission conclusion (Law Commission, Taxi and Private Hire Services, Law Com No 347, May 2014, ref CM8864) included retention of the power to limit hackney carriage vehicle numbers but utilizing a public interest test determined by the Secretary of State. It also suggested the three-year interval encouraged for review of unmet demand levels also be used for rank reviews and accessibility reviews.

Unmet Demand Case History

In respect to case law impinging on unmet demand, the two most recent cases were in 1987 and 2002. The first case (R v Great Yarmouth) concluded authorities must consider the view of significant unmet demand as a whole, not condescending to detailed consideration of the position in every limited area, i.e. to consider significance of unmet demand over the area as a whole.

R v Castle Point considered the issue of latent, or preferably termed, suppressed demand consideration. This clarified that this element relates only to the element which is measurable. Measurable suppressed demand includes inappropriately met demand (taken by private hire vehicles in situations legally hackney carriage opportunities) or those forced to use less satisfactory methods to get home (principally walking, i.e. those observed to walk away from rank locations).

In general, industry standards suggest (but specifically do not mandate in any way) that the determination of conclusions about significance of unmet demand should take into account the practicability of improving the standard of service through the increase of supply of vehicles. It is also felt important to have consistent treatment of authorities as well as for the same authority over time, although apart from the general guidance of the BPG there is no clear stipulations as to what this means in reality, and certainly no mandatory nor significant court guidance in this regard.

It should be noted that the 2010 Best Practice Guidance stated "Most local licensing authorities do not impose quantity restrictions; the Department regards that as best practice. This is restated in the currently draft new Best Practice Guidance.

The new draft Best Practice Guidance also adds para 9.3 quoting "The Competition and Markets Authority was clear in its 2017 guidance "Regulation of taxis and private hire vehicles: understanding the impact of competition" that "Quantity restrictions are not necessary to ensure the safety of passengers, or to ensure that fares are reasonable."

To summarise, the Department for Transport Best Practice Guidance only references 'quantity restrictions' and that not imposing them is regarded by the Department as 'best practice'.

However, the Law Commission eventually retained the option of having limits as it could not be certain that removing them would provide clear benefits compared to their retention.

Summary of licensing

In conclusion, the present legislation in England and Wales sees public fare-paying passenger carrying vehicles firstly split by passenger capacity. All vehicles able to carry nine or more passengers are dealt with under national public service vehicle licensing. Local licensing authorities only have jurisdiction over vehicles carrying eight or less passengers. Further, the jurisdiction focusses on the vehicles, drivers and operators but rarely extends to the physical infrastructure these use (principally ranks).

The vehicles are split between hackney carriages which are alone able to wait at ranks or pick up people in the streets without a booking, and private hire who can only be used with a booking made through an operator. If any passenger uses a private hire vehicle without such a properly made booking, they are not generally considered to be insured for their journey.

Drivers can either be split between ability to drive either hackney carriage or private hire, or be 'dual', allowed to drive either kind of vehicle. Whilst a private hire driver can only take bookings via an operator, with the 'triple-lock' applying that the vehicle, driver and operator must all be with the same authority, a hackney carriage driver can accept bookings on-street or by phone without the same stipulation required for private hire.

Recent legislation needing clarification has some operators believing they can use vehicles from any authority as long as they are legally licensed as private hire. At first, under the 'Stockton' case, this was hackney carriages operating as private hire in other areas (cross-border hiring). More recently, under the Deregulation Act, private hire companies are able to subcontract bookings to other companies in other areas if they are unable to fulfil their booking, but the interpretation of this has become quite wide.

The ‘triple lock’ licensing rule has also become accepted. A vehicle, driver and operator must all be under the same licensing authority to provide full protection to the passenger. However, it is also accepted that a customer can call any private hire company anywhere to provide their transport although many would not realise that if there was an issue it would be hard for a local authority to follow this up unless the triple lock was in place by the vehicle used and was for the area the customer contacted licensing.

Further, introduction of recent methods of obtaining vehicles, principally using ‘apps’ on mobile phones have also led to confusion as to how ‘apps’ usage sits with present legislation.

All these matters can impact on hackney carriage services, their usage, and therefore on unmet demand and its significance.

Coronavirus

The serious Covid-19 virus took hold in the UK during March 2020. Whilst life carried on almost as normal until mid-March of the same year, formal lockdown was applied from Tuesday 24th March 2020 until 24th February 2022 when final restrictions were removed. Significant reductions in movement had begun to bite from the previous week. The last dates in 2020 when on-street and rank surveys occurred in other areas were effectively Sunday 16th March 2020. Up to that point regular review on the three-year timetable had begun to be much more widely accepted.

The licensed vehicle trade was one of a few industries permitted to continue to operate throughout the pandemic and various lockdowns, albeit in a range of different ways due to reduced demand.

The lockdown began to be eased on 13th May 2020 in some sectors, with people encouraged to return to work if they were not able to work from home. Restrictions on outdoor exercise, golf courses, tennis courses and socialising at distance, with restart of construction also allowed. From 15th June 2020, bars, restaurants and hairdressers were allowed to return to a ‘new normal’. The next wave of easement occurred on 4th July 2020.

However, a range of different re-restrictions were applied in various locations as cases began to rise again. Schools were re-opened in September, but a new ‘rule of six’ was introduced shortly after reducing the ability of people to socialise as rates of infection rose again, together with a 22:00 hours close time for all hospitality venues. In general, new restrictions tended to be introduced with a few days lead in but this ended with a new lockdown from Thursday 5th November2020 ending on Wednesday 2nd December 2020 that year.

After that, new Tiers were introduced (to try to minimise restrictions in parts of the country where the virus was less dominant) and then again another national lockdown was applied from early January 2021 but with the start of vaccinations providing some hope of an eventual overcoming of the impacts of the virus.

As levels of vaccination increased and infection / hospitalisations and deaths reduced, a new road out of lockdown was announced and implemented. The final stage, removal of most English restrictions, was delayed about a month but was finally instigated towards the end of July 2021. The Government focus has since then been on 'coping with the virus' although as Winter 2021 progressed infection levels tended to move upwards.

Later in Winter 2021 appearance of a new variant led to further concern and encouragement to partake in a booster vaccination programme as well as taking further care about interaction. Mask wearing was returned to being a legal requirement at the start of December 2021 in many, but not all of the previous circumstances. The situation around Christmas 2021 was very tense. Working from home was reinstated towards the end of 2021.

Early 2022 saw more confidence that the 'omicron wave' could be survived although in early January 2022 there was pressure on many industries arising from staff isolating. Various methods were being considered to minimise the impact of need to self-isolate. On 24th February 2022 all legal restrictions in England were removed with the focus clearly moving to 'living with the virus' although unintended consequences of rising fuel and other prices from the reopening of the economy were also exacerbated by the still ongoing issue of the Ukraine occupation.

At the time of the rank surveys collected for this report (early September2022) there was a high level of COVID infection but the link between infection and serious illness appeared to have been broken, although the need to keep levels of immunity to severe disease may well lead to further immunisation as time proceeds. Another booster injection was starting to be rolled out as part of the vaccination strategy.

Overall, the pandemic led to a significant period of lack of business for both hackney carriage and private hire vehicles, in various ways as the pandemic developed. Some of the impacts of this are discussed in public and driver attitude chapters below, as well as review of impact on demand in the rank chapter.

More significant was the reappraisal of many as to their involvement with the taxi industry, and the general job market churn that was instigated not just in the taxi arena. In many areas there is clear knowledge that many who planned to retire brought that date forward whilst others found that the certainty of income from delivery driving was preferable to the vagaries of taxi passenger demand.

Various contract work appears to have remained a constant during the pandemic however (school transport, health transport and so on). However, airports were particularly badly hit. Yet others found the shortage of private hire drivers meant more requirement on hackney carriages in the daytime, in turn meaning they could earn more in the week, and not be reliant on servicing less-preferable customers in the early hours of Saturday and Sunday morning.

A further issue we have observed is that even pubs, restaurants and night venues are now reducing their opening hours or days in reaction to rising costs and staff shortages. This can lead to taxi demand in an area becoming peaky or peakier with such change. This means spikes in passenger demand for licensed vehicles, which is always harder to meet in a timely manner for a given level of vehicles particularly in the later and night-time economy hours.

Further, the impacts of the developing war in Ukraine and other economic changes partly arising from Brexit is again putting pressure on costs of providing licensed vehicle services. Rising fuel prices have also added to the issues, albeit counter balanced with an increase in fare charges in some authorities.

The days when the main aim of a demand survey was checking if passenger demand had changed to see if supply remained sufficient have now been replaced by a much wider research need to identify both demand and supply side changes (such as drivers working shorter weeks, more time by drivers undertaking contracts or diversifying as delivery drivers changed passenger use of ranks and locations arising from matters such as reduced rail travel, etc). Even long-standing areas with limited hackney carriage vehicle numbers have been impacted by having spare hackney carriage vehicle licences available for the first time in decades.

2 Local background and context

Key dates for this Hackney carriage demand survey for South Ribble Council are:

- appointed Licensed Vehicle Surveys and Assessment (LVSA) on 8 July 2022
- in accordance with our proposal of June 2022
- as confirmed during the inception meeting for the survey held on 11 July 2022
- this survey was carried out between July and December 2022
- On street pedestrian survey work occurred in December 2022
- the video rank observations occurred in July 2022
- Licensed vehicle driver opinions and operating practices were obtained by an all-driver survey issued by the Council and returned to us available from August to December 2022
- Key stakeholders were consulted throughout the period of the survey
- A draft of this Final Report was reviewed by the client during February 2023
- and reported to the appropriate Council committee.

South Ribble Council is one of twelve district and two unitary authorities within the Lancashire County Council higher tier authority area. The authority has a current population of 111,000 using the 2021 initial census results (albeit for 2021 levels). This estimate was very similar to the 2021 estimate from the previous survey.

In terms of background council policy, South Ribble Council is a district council with many powers held at the higher, County level. This includes transport policy as well as highways. However, the County works in conjunction with the district on establishing ranks as part of an overall parking strategy or review, but the local district is also able to provide taxi bays under their special provisions which allow such to be provided under local authority auspices with consent from the County. Typical options use bays with limited daytime waiting for ranks at night, very helpful when new night venues open and need urgent action on rank provision. For the 2019 report, the County confirmed the provision of ranks at that time. We are not aware of any change since (but see Chapter 3).

The area has a large number of very small settlements and several other moderate sized settlements. A lot of economic activity relates to Preston, which is a separate licensing area, with many regularly visiting Preston from this area for work, leisure or personal business.

Many have the option of travelling to Preston by train but the Borough itself only has three stations, the largest of which is Leyland. Services there are three trains per hour per direction at peak, but are not equally spaced which militates against a regular taxi service being easily and cost-effectively provided.

A further matter which impacts on the hackney carriage licensing for the area is that the school and social services transport function is also undertaken at County level, providing contracts to both the hackney carriage and private hire industry of the area, some of which go beyond the district boundary, and some of which can be provided cross-county rather than at district level. This can provide places where local policy ends up superseded by County policy, further discussion of which follows. In 2019 there was one large private hire operation focussed on school contracts.

With respect to the background Transport Strategy, the local Transport Plan remains that produced to run from 2011 to 2021. This is supported by the Fylde Coast highway and transport masterplan, agreed after public consultation in 2015. This sees focus on improving access to Fleetwood principally by new highway links from the new M56 junction, as well as taking advantage of the improvements offered with the electrification of the route to Blackpool North. It is also believed there will be gains as the tram extension to Blackpool North station improves linkages from Fleetwood to the national rail network.

The Local Transport Plan encourages taxi operators to work with transport authorities to ensure staff respect the needs of all travellers. However, being a strategic and County-led document, the focus is less on local taxi operating principles and more on higher level national strategy. Transport interchanges are likewise seen to be important, but again the higher-level focus leaves them not mentioning specifics of local taxi operation.

South Ribble undertook an unmet demand survey in around 2000. This found no passenger queues in off peak hours which meant the overall index of significance of unmet demand (ISUD) was zero. For the record, average passenger delay was 0.07 minutes (4 seconds), and the proportion of people travelling in hours when there was an average passenger delay over a minute was 0.25%. The delay profile was not peaked. Following this report, a decision was made that any new hackney carriage vehicles added needed to be wheel chair accessible. Saloon vehicles were given grandfather rights to remain as saloon. It is understood since that decision that just a single hackney carriage plate had been issued.

A detailed report was presented to the 7th December 2021 Licensing and Public Safety Committee identifying changes needed to the grandfather rights policy with regards to licensing new hackney carriage vehicles. The main objective of the grandfather rights policy in 2015 was to restrict the amount of saloon hackney carriages but increase the number of WAV operating within South Ribble

Current proprietors in possession of a current hackney carriage vehicle licence issued to them on or before 21st October 2014 could replace their vehicle with either a WAV or a saloon. Since that time the only way to licence a new hackney carriage was to present a WAV for licensing. In 2015 the main focus was to address the small level of WAV in the fleet.

It was suggested that times had now changed and that the council should be aiming its age policy to promote clean air zones whilst still meeting its requirements for WAV vehicles under s165 of the Equalities Act 2010.

However, an unintended consequence of the policy was that numbers of hackney carriage vehicles were depleted compared to 2015. New drivers were not taking opportunity to take vehicles from South Ribble because they were not able to gain a hackney carriage vehicle licence as they did not see a WAV as being viable. At that time 14% of hackney carriages were owner-driven with the rest owned by operators who undertook both pre booked and some rank work with these vehicles. It was felt that the release of more saloon plates would increase hackney carriage vehicle numbers and reduce drivers going to other authorities.

The overall aim was that the change from a grandfather rights policy to a capped policy would create a controlled balance of WAV and saloon style hackney carriages that are greener and compliant with required CO_2 levels whilst still complying with s165 Equality Act 2010 obligations.

Consultation with the trade found that the change from grandfather rights to cap was supported by 78% of trade responses.

At the Licensing and Public Safety Committee meeting of 6 April 2022, the licensing manager reported that the council did not currently cap the number of hackney carriage vehicles that meet the age criteria and are wheelchair accessible.

However, the council does cap the number of non-wheelchair accessible hackney carriages to 100. This number would only be increased if the market demands through evidence of significant unmet demand from the public supported an increase.

Applications would be assessed by officers with priority given to proprietors of currently licensed private hire vehicles or a proprietor of a currently licensed wheelchair accessible hackney carriage who did not possess legacy rights to change that vehicle to a non-WAV. Those proprietors in possession of a non-WAV licence issued to them before April 2022 may continue to replace their vehicle with WAV or non-WAV under their holding of legacy rights.

The change was hoped to ease issues surrounding cross border working and make it easier to licence vehicles through South Ribble as opposed to neighbouring authorities. Drivers could still licence WAV with no cap on how many would be licensed. The current situation was that drivers could only licence saloon vehicles as hackney carriages if they were licensed prior to 2014. Resulting from this policy numbers of saloon vehicles had naturally diminished as proprietors were unable to replace them with the required WAV.

The Licensing Manager confirmed the numbers of saloon (hackney carriage) vehicles licensed would be monitored and reviewed with the Chair every six months with a report presented to committee yearly for noting.

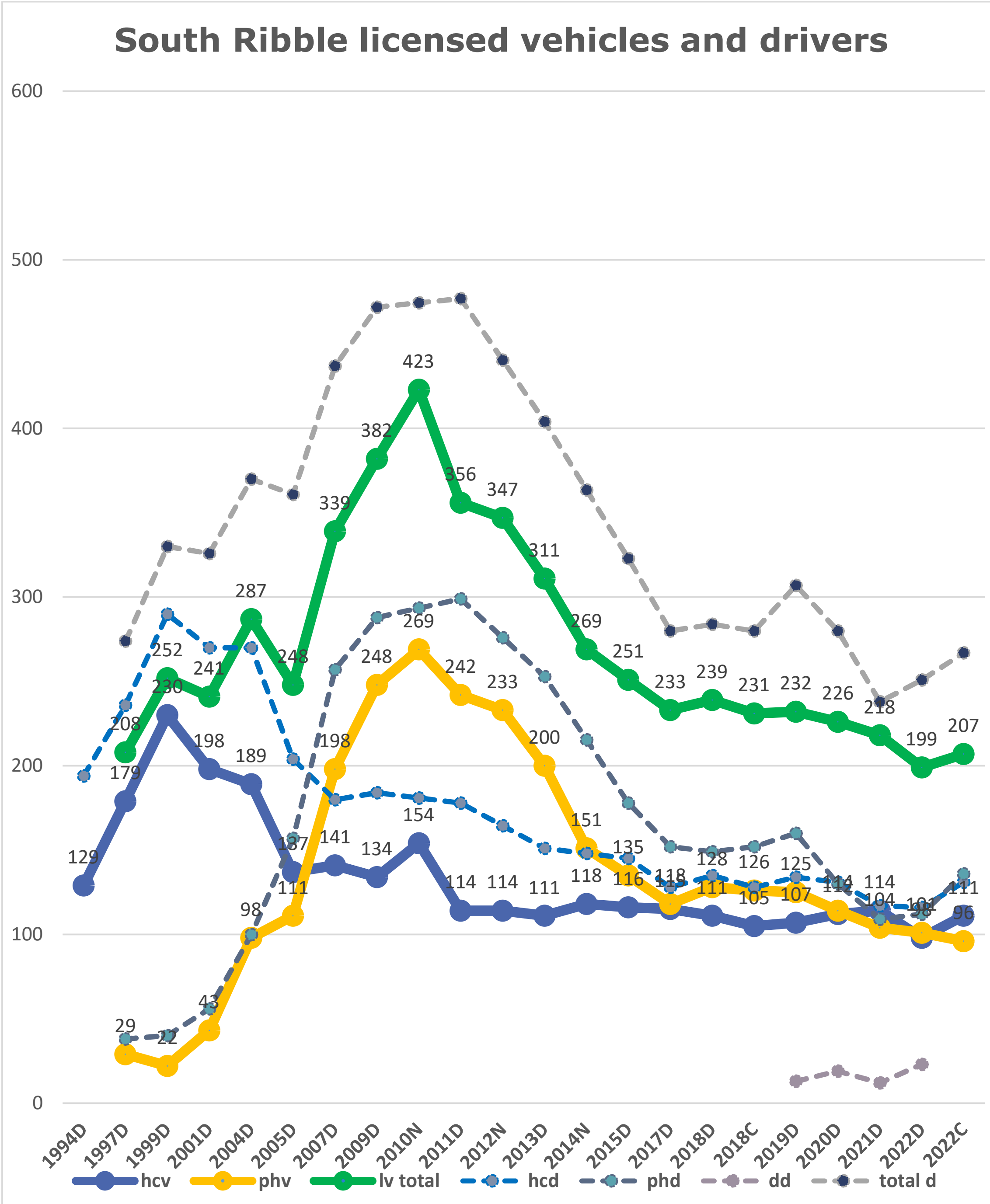
This survey was put in place to check the position in regards to unmet demand and its significance during late Summer 2022.

Further discussion of fleet development follows below.

All licensing authorities have full powers over licensing the vehicles, drivers and operators serving people within their area within the strictures above.

South Ribble Council has had a quality limit (requirement for WAV vehicles for any new hackney carriages) until very recently but now has a limit on the number of hackney carriage saloon vehicles set at 100.

By drawing together published statistics from both the Department for Transport (D) and the National Private Hire Association (N), supplemented by private information from the licensing authority records (C), recent trends in vehicle, driver and operator numbers can be observed. The detailed numbers supporting the picture below are provided in Appendix 1. Due to the comparative size, the operator figures are shown in the second picture.



Licensing Statistics from 1994 to date

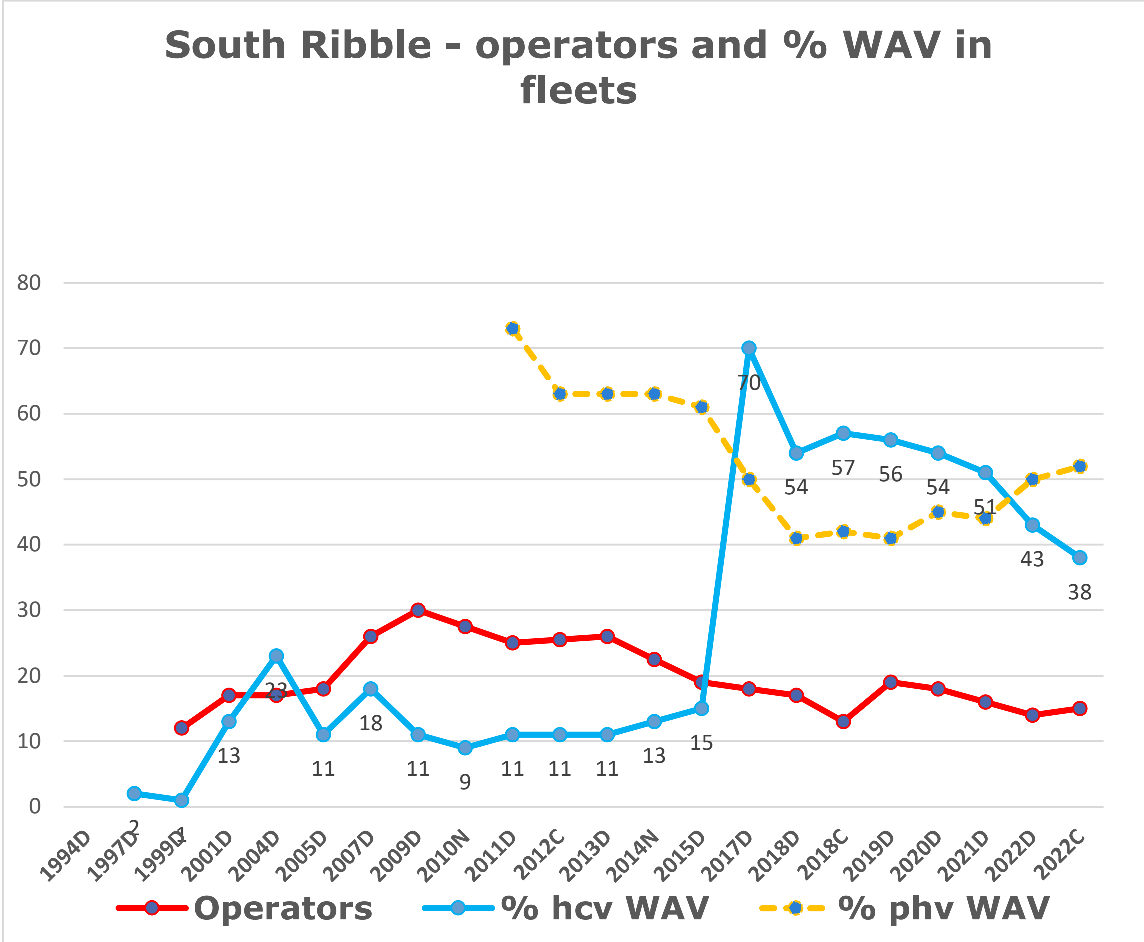
Hackney carriage vehicle numbers in South Ribble rose strongly from 1994 to a peak of 230 in 1999. After this, numbers declined with a small resurgence in 2010 and a general plateau from 2011 to 2021 at around 115 vehicles. The pandemic appeared to show a marginal increase back to this level from a slump to 105 in 2015, although the DfT figures for 2020 and 2021 appeared to double count the WAV style vehicles.

2022 saw a reduction in the formal DfT values after which numbers have begun to increase again with the release of the ability of proprietors to obtain saloon hackney carriages once more.

Private hire, however, initially dropped but then grew strongly to a level of some 269 in 2010 (at the same time as the hackney carriage peak of 154), after which they have been declining apart from some small growth in 2018. Since that point numbers have slowly declined and continued to do so to bring them to a very similar level to hackney carriages around the start of the pandemic. At the time of the rank surveys their numbers were lower than hackney carriage and were still reducing.

Drivers remain separated between hackney carriage and private hire although a small number of dual drivers were recorded since 2019. Overall driver numbers reduced to the start of the pandemic from a hackney carriage peak in 1999 and a private hire peak in 2010 to lows at the end of the pandemic of 116 and 109 respectively. The period from the DfT 2022 March data to the time of reporting in January 2023 saw relatively strong growth to some 131 and 136 at that time.

Information is also available from these sources to show how the level of wheel chair accessible vehicles (WAV) has varied. It must be noted that in most cases the values for the private hire side tend to be much more approximate than those on the hackney carriage side, as there is no option to mandate for private hire being wheel chair accessible. In some areas, to strengthen the ability of the public to differentiate between the two parts of the licensed vehicle trade, licensing authorities might not allow any WAV in the private hire fleet at all.



Operator numbers and levels of WAV provision in the fleet

The figures above show a major increase in hackney carriage WAV in 2017, followed by a general reduction of numbers after that peak; now down to around 38% of the fleet. Private hire wheel chair accessible vehicles are principally for schools contracts and have seen reduction from a very high level in 2010 but more recent increase again so that there are now more phv WAV than hcv – but again related to school contracts and rarely if ever being available to the general public.

Operator numbers are small and decreasing from a 2009 peak although more recent numbers have seen a slight increase again.

South Ribble Council undertook a demand survey around 2000 and a policy review with some data collection (but no rank data) in 2019 but generally has not undertaken regular hackney carriage demand surveys given the principal control in this regard has been quality in terms of new vehicles needing to be WAV style.

There was a further survey in 2019 which considered various aspects of the service usually undertaken in an unmet demand survey, but without any review of levels of service or demand at ranks as that was not a key focus at that time. That was a legitimate move given that at that time the authority had a 'quality' control requiring new hackney carriages to be WAV style and grandfather rights for saloons put in place up to 2014.

Fleet ownership structure

At the end of January 2019, the South Ribble licensed vehicle fleet comprised 105 hackney carriages and 126 private hire vehicles. On paper, this provides a split of 45% hackney carriage and 55% private hire. However, the actual public facing split was different to this (see below). At the time of the 2022 survey, there were 111 hackney carriages and 96 private hire, almost an exact reversal of the numbers seeing 54% of the fleet hackney carriage.

The operating practice that a large number of the hackney carriage fleet are owned by operators (and principally one large operator) continues and if anything has strengthened since the last survey. At quieter times these vehicles take private hire bookings through the operators, although sometimes sitting on ranks in between booked jobs. At peak rank demand times vehicles can become available for this work.

Since the last survey the main development has been that both hackney carriage and private hire vehicles from other authorities have been increasingly used in the area working for local companies who sub-contract to other offices they have based in other licensing areas. It is understood that this reduces operating costs by allowing use of older vehicles allowed under less-stringent age restrictions in other authorities.

It is also understood that some bookings undertaken this way also draw and use the fully-WAV Preston hackney carriage fleet into service of demand in South Ribble.

The 2019 survey identified that just 14% of the hackney carriage fleet were owned by independent owner-operators. It was found that the largest private hire operator actually owned 80% of the total hackney carriage fleet (93% of the non-independent hackney carriage fleet). They also owned 19% of the total private hire vehicle fleet and were therefore very dominant within the vehicle fleet of the area.

In 2019 there were two smaller mixed-vehicle fleets with two hcv and eight phv and three hcv and two phv respectively.

There were a number of smaller private hire operators with pure private hire only vehicle fleets with the largest with eight vehicles and around three one-man bands.

The private hire operator who is not public-facing had 52% of the private hire fleet which was not publicly available. This reduced the private hire fleet available to the public to around 60 vehicles at that time. At that time even the few smaller operators were specialists for airport services.

In 2019 it was also found that the top three small shopping centres of Bamber Bridge, Lostock Hall and Penwortham all had their own operators with clearly presented booking offices (albeit mainly above shops rather than at ground level). These were in fact the three largest of the small operators, with just one having a mixed fleet, which also happened to be the largest of these three. This suggest little operational demand for hackney carriages in either Bamber Bridge or Lostock Hall assuming all operations are undertaken legally (with no evidence this is not the case). However, at least one of these operators used out of town vehicles, one of which was identified as an out-of-town WAV hackney carriage. As noted above, we believe this use of non-South Ribble vehicles has increased since 2019.

In Leyland, there is one fairly obvious booking office and at least two, if not more, free-phones, and relatively little footfall apart from the largest supermarket, these features suggest that phoned-for vehicles are the most likely way people will get licensed vehicles from an observation point of view (see synthesis section), even if many of these will arrive as hackney carriage vehicles.

The present situation has been further complicated since the last survey in that the number of operators who have operator licenses in South Ribble but also in other licensing authorities, particularly Preston, who now subcontract work to their Preston-based fleet has increased. This has the unforeseen impact that local custom is serviced by older vehicles that are not licensed in South Ribble but in Preston where they vehicles can be of older age than would be otherwise allowed for South Ribble registered licensed vehicles. Phone apps may well lead to response by Preston private hire vehicles or even Preston hackney carriages depending on which driver responds to the app request. This can make enforcement difficult if problems occur. This feature may be related to the drop in private hire numbers of vehicles registered in South Ribble in recent years.

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3 Patent demand measurement (rank surveys)

As already recorded in Chapter 2, control of provision of on-street ranks in South Ribble Council is principally in the hands of the County authority, with limited provision for the local district to provide mainly night time provision in relatively shorter time frames, if required.

There have been no real changes to ranks since the last survey, with two principal sites (Tesco Leyland and the Railway Station, Leyland) both still on private land. In the former case, there is also a private hire booking phone provided which means that the bulk of departures from Tesco by licensed vehicle are now booked by customers. However, many of the vehicles servicing this location can be hackney carriages that operate for the private hire company operating the free phone.

There are plans to revise the location of Hough Lane to provide a better facility albeit no longer on the main road, in a similar type of location to the current Thurston Road rank. The Towngate rank is also believed to be superceded by use of in-store booking facilities for the nearby main supermarket it is near to.

In the 2019 review, there were three locations, one in each of Bamber Bridge, Lostock Hall and Penwortham, where private hire booking offices did have potential waiting areas in front of them that could appear to be ranks. There has been no change in this situation and only one of the three companies has any hackney carriages in any event.

For 2022, it was determined that a full set of typical observations were needed at the ranks in Leyland in order to understand current usage of hackney carriages and activity by passengers at ranks. This included both private ranks and the three other ranks remaining marked.

Usage of ranks in a typical week

The information from the 2022 rank observations was used to estimate current typical week passenger flows from each location. This information is compared to that for the previous survey.

The table is listed with the highest number of estimated passengers at the top of the table, progressing with reducing demand although the listing to the bottom of the table has no specific order. The observations were undertaken from Thursday to Sunday 14th to 17th July 2022, before school holidays began.

Rank (all Leyland)	Passengers per week 2022 survey	Proportion of vehicles leaving rank empty	Passengers per week 2000 survey
Tesco (private)	235 (40%)	20 / 3	
Leyland Railway Station (private)	161 (27%)	59 / 64 / 56	
Hough Lane	156 (26%)	58 / 75 / 66	
Thurston Road	40 (7%)	81 / 84 / 86	
Total	***592***	***59%***	

The total level of estimated weekly patronage using hackney carriages from ranks in the area is very low, just 592 estimated for a full week. Further, this is total passengers so the actual number of fares this implies has to take into account the average occupancy of 1.5 persons per vehicle which implies in the order of 400 fares per week. If this is then shared between the 111 hackney carriages this implies just under four fares per vehicle per week which is clearly not viable.

Despite being principally booked trips, the main location where people were observed boarding hackney carriages was at Tesco. Nearly all these boardings occurred near the store frontage rather than in the hackney carriage rank, with very few vehicles noted entering the area using that rank access route. 40% of the total of observed passengers were at this location. In reality these trips could be excluded from the observed hackney carriage demand as they would be undertaken by private hire otherwise. However, we have continued this report considering them as hackney carriage demand.

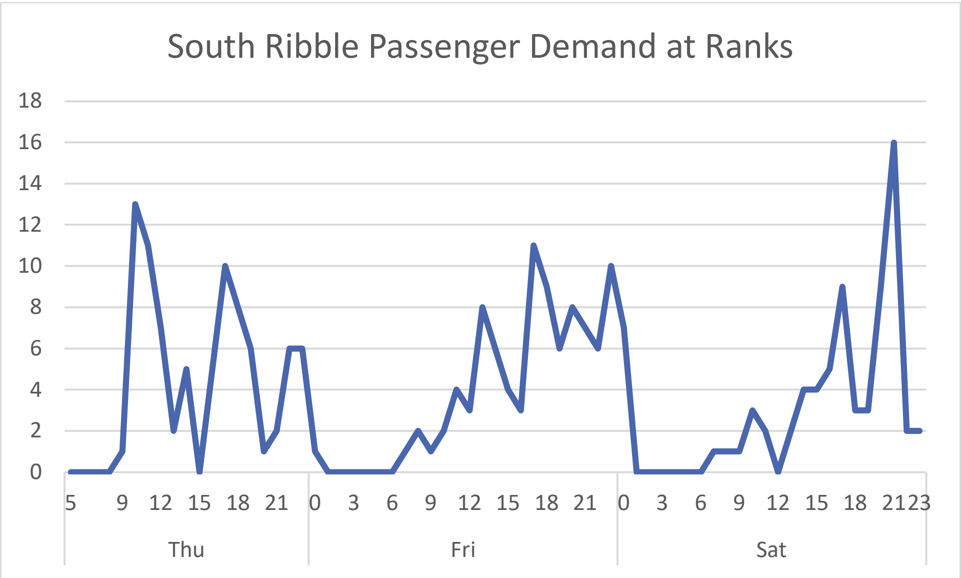
The next busiest location for observed passengers was Leyland Railway Station where some 161, or 27% of the estimated weekly flow were observed. Hough Lane saw about the same, 156 passengers, 26%, whilst Thurston Road saw about 7%, or just 40 passengers estimated for the week.

What is more telling is the levels of vehicles leaving ranks without passengers. Overall all four observed ranks, the level was 59%, i.e. nearly three fifths of all hackney carriages arriving at ranks left without passengers. Even this high value masked a variation, with the levels at Thurston Road never below 81%, whilst the Tesco location saw most vehicles leave with passengers, commensurate with these being booked trips.

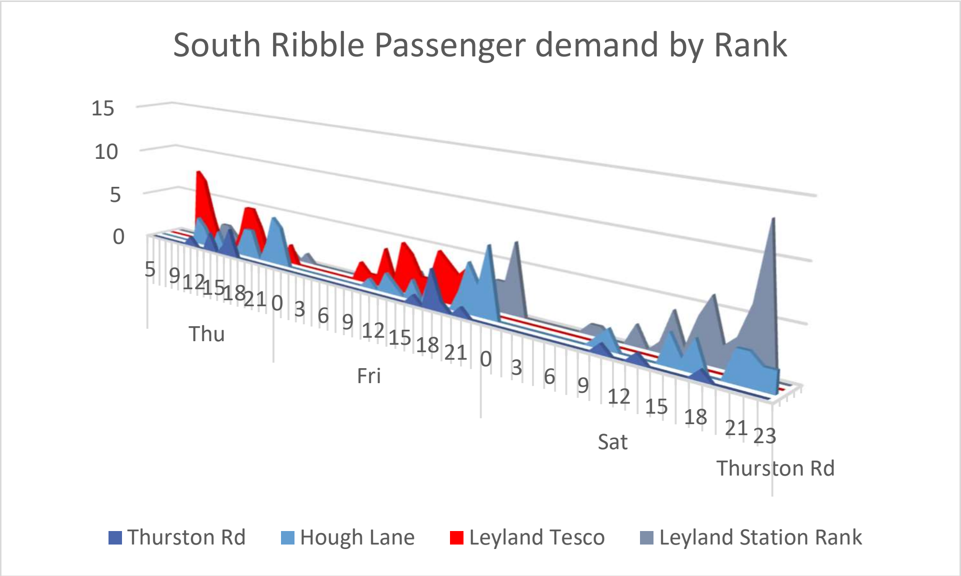
The two other ranks saw between 56 and 65% (station) and 58-75% (Hough Lane) leaving empty. This suggests that the principal use of the two council and the Railway Station rank are as waiting places for vehicles to receive bookings via their offices or other methods.

Surveyed rank usage

The actual surveyed rank usage is presented below in graphical format.



The total vehicle graph shows three completely different profiles for each day. Further, the small nature of demand means the profile is relatively 'jagged' ' i.e. very variable. Thursday seems to have a downward trend from morning to evening, Friday the reverse, and Saturday a low build up to an evening peak. There is no rank-based demand overnight at all.



The graph by rank demonstrates the general dominance of Tesco albeit this is known to really be booked demand – although little demand was observed on the Saturday (the videos were not observed in full for that reason). Thurston Road sees the lowest flows and principally in daytime hours whilst Hough Lane is clearly the night rank. However, the Saturday seeks peak demand at the station on the Saturday.

Average rank-based passenger flows are 3.2 Thursday, 3.8 Friday and 3.4 Saturday per hour – very low. The peak hour only sees 16 passengers, at 21:00 on the Saturday night, most of which came from Leyland Railway Station rank. There are just four other hours with 10 or more passengers. The second highest peak flow is 10:00 Thursday, split between Tesco and the Railway Station with just 13 passengers.

This suggests effectively that rank operation in South Ribble can only be a small part of the work undertaken by hackney carriages. There does not appear to be anywhere sufficient demand to substantiate any vehicle making a living purely from rank-based passengers. The fact that many vehicles wait at ranks for bookings may be the principal reason that any of the ranks remain active at all.

Further implications of this are discussed in the synthesis chapter.

Vehicle activity at ranks

During the observation of the rank recordings, the types of vehicles seen at or near ranks were also recorded. Some 1,872 different vehicle arrivals or departures were observed. Of these, just 43% were hackney carriages. 45% were private cars, 8% goods vehicles, 3% private hire and 1% other taxi like vehicles.

A further review was undertaken observing the plate numbers of hackney carriages active at key locations around the area, near to principal ranks. The observations covered four hours on each of the Thursday, Friday and Saturday of the survey, at Tesco and along Hough Lane. A total of 117 different movements were recorded, including private hire vehicles. The records provided observed plate numbers and a classification if the vehicle was a hackney carriage or private hire from the area.

Initially, the observations identified just five hackney carriages and 112 that were considered to be private hire vehicles. A list of valid plate numbers was obtained to validate the observations. This identified 18 records that were not matched with local hackney carriage or private hire, which were assumed to be out of area vehicles. 38 records were noted as private hire but only appeared as hackney carriages in the listing – these were assumed to be hackney carriage. The remaining records were recorded as private hire and were also checked and found to be legitimate private hire vehicles.

During the course of the observations, on the basis of the changes made to observations, 17% of the hackney carriage fleet and 25% of the private hire fleet were observed at least once over the three days. The numbers of vehicles seen in each separate day were insufficient to provide analysis at day level. However, there was sufficient information to analyse the observations by hour observed (each covering the three different days).

The highest proportion of different both hackney carriage and private hire were observed in the 22:30 to 23:30 period. 10% of all hackney carriage and 18% of all private hire plates were observed along Hough Lane in that hour. Other percentages were lower- the highest being 10% of the private hire fleet observed in the 00:30 to 01:30 periods on the three days. Other periods only saw 6-7% of plates, with the evening seeing the least private hire (4%).

Unmet demand and its extent
Formal evaluation of the significance of observed unmet demand is discussed separately in Chapter 7 below. However, the rank observation information provides an opportunity to review the locations and times where unmet demand has been identified in South Ribble at this time.

Some 244 hours of rank activity were observed in the present survey. Of these hours, 9% had average passenger delays of a minute or more. These hours included 20% of the passengers observed, although not all of these actually experienced any delay. A further 1% of hours saw average passenger delay ranging up to 59 seconds. The estimation of significance uses a slightly different evaluation (see later).

There were seven passengers who had to wait 11 minutes or more. Three waited between six and 10 minutes. 42 had waits of five minutes or less, with many of these being just a minute.

A review of the longest waits identified that the top five of these occurred in times when those having to wait were in fact the only passengers within that hour. These were all periods of very low demand at a range of locations, and occurs when people get used to knowing that if they go to a rank a vehicle will eventually arrive without them needing to make a phone call, or possibly that people went to a rank to wait for a booking they had made. The 'jagged' nature of demand arising from the low levels is another sign of what has been termed 'thin demand'. This kind of demand is notoriously hard to provide by hackney carriages effectively.

Disability and rank usage

With respect to hackney carriages, 21% of the vehicles observed appeared to be wheel chair accessible style. This is much less than the proportion in the fleet and suggests that many WAV style vehicles may well exist principally to service contracts rather than servicing rank-based demand.

A further check was undertaken of those actually observed accessing vehicles in wheel chairs at ranks. There were no such passengers. There were five passengers at Hough Lane and one at Thurston Road who appeared to have some disability that meant they needed to be assisted into the vehicle.

4 General public views

It is very important that the views of people within the area are obtained about the service provided by hackney carriage and private hire. A key element which these surveys seek to discover is specifically if people have given up waiting for hackney carriages at ranks (the most readily available measure of latent demand). However, the opportunity is also taken with these surveys to identify the overall usage and views of hackney carriage and private hire vehicles within the study area, and to give chance for people to identify current issues and factors which may encourage them to use licensed vehicles more.

Such surveys can also be key in identifying variation of demand for licensed vehicles across an area, particularly if there are significant areas of potential demand without ranks, albeit in the context that many areas do not have places apart from their central area with sufficient demand to justify hackney carriages waiting at ranks.

These surveys tend to be undertaken during the daytime period when more people are available, and when survey staff safety can be guaranteed. Further, interviews with groups of people or with those affected by alcohol consumption may not necessarily provide accurate responses, despite the potential value in speaking with people more likely to use hackney carriages at times of higher demand and then more likely unmet demand. Where possible, extension of interviews to the early evening may capture some of this group, as well as some studies where careful choice of night samples can be undertaken.

Our basic methodology requires a sample size of at least 200 to ensure stable responses. Trained and experienced interviewers are also important as this ensures respondents are guided through the questions carefully and consistently. A minimum sample of 50 interviews is generally possible by a trained interviewer in a day meaning that sample sizes are best incremented by 50, usually if there is targeting of a specific area or group (e.g. of students, or a sub-centre), although conclusions from these separate samples can only be indicative taken alone. For some authorities with multiple centres this can imply value in using a higher sample size, such as 250 if there are two large and one moderate sized centre.

It is normal practice to compare the resulting gender and age structure to the latest available local and national census proportions to identify if the sample has become biased in any way.

More recently, general public views have been enlisted from the use of council citizens' panels although the issue with these is that return numbers cannot be guaranteed. The other issue is that the structure of the sample responding cannot be guaranteed either, and it is also true that those on the panel have chosen to be there such that they may tend to be people willing to have stronger opinions than the general public randomly approached.

Finally, some recent surveys have placed an electronic copy of the questionnaire on their web site to allow interested persons to respond, although again there needs to be an element of care with such results as people choosing to take part may have a vested interest.

For this survey, a total of 199 people were interviewed across the South Ribble licensing area. There were 50 interviews in Bamber Bridge (as in 2019), 13 in Lostock Hall (23), 51 in Penwortham (77). 24 at Leyland Market (50) and 61 in central Leyland (100). Numbers were reduced compared to 2019 principally due to continued reticence of people to be interviewed in the streets.

The sample was reviewed against the latest available information from the 2021 census. This was information on overall proportions of age groups and sex from initial data albeit for 2021 and not 2022. Across the area we interviewed 56% females compared to 51% in the census. This was similar to in 2019 when again men were under-represented.

For age groups (with a specific council requirement for a larger number of groups than we normally use) the closest match was to the proportion of 20-39's (26% interviewed compared to 23% census). Up to 19 and 80 plus were both under-represented (2% compared to 22% (not unexpected since many of this group would not be interviewable) and 2% compared to 5% respectively). The two other groups saw more interviewed 38% for 40-59 compared to 28% and 32% compared to 22% for the 60-79 group. This result was again similar to 2019 albeit less groups being used then, suggesting the results from both surveys should be generally comparable in terms of the input groups.

With respect to where interviewees lived, 9% came from outside the area (6% last time). 37% said they lived in Leyland, 25% Penwortham, 22% Bamber Bridge and 8% Lostock Hall. 71% of those from outside the area were from other PR postcodes, with 11% from FY5, 6% from M26 and 6% from B19.

From this full sample, 57% said they had used a local licensed vehicle in the South Ribble area in the last three months (strongly reduced from the 87% in 2019). Interestingly, usage levels were lower in the Leyland sample (51%) to the other area sample (59%).

When split by type of vehicle, the highest proportion – 43% overall, 41% in Leyland and 44% in the other areas – said usage was by private hire vehicle only. Hackney carriage only usage was very low – just 1% for Leyland and 5% for the other areas (4% overall), with use of both hackney carriage and private hire not much higher – 9%, 10% and 10% respectively.

When asked about frequency of usage of licensed vehicles, 21% said they never used them, with a higher proportion of 24% in the Leyland interviews.

The average level of usage was 1.5 trips per person per month, with a much higher level of 2.3 for the Leyland sample and lower (1.0) for the rest of the area. In 2019 the overall value was 7.8, which was very high.

People told us how they normally got a licensed vehicle in the area. 71% said they telephoned – the same as 2019. 17% said rank (18% 2019) 10% app (3%) 1% freephone (5.5%) and 2% (2.5%) hailed. Despite the large reduction in quoted recent usage, methods of getting vehicles appear similar apart from an apparent transfer from use of free phones to using an app. Standard telephone, rank and hail use do not appear to be significantly impacted by the increased app usage.

Comparing the two areas, the proportion for ranks was, as would be expected, higher at 21% for Leyland compared to 13% for the other areas. This share was mainly taken from phone bookings that reduced in Leyland.

People were asked to name companies they contacted if they booked vehicles. 72% of those responding provided at least one name. Of those responding, 65% named just one company, 27% two and 8% three companies. There were a total of 207 mentions made, a lot less than the 437 given in 2019.

14 (22 in 2019) different company names were given. Eight of these were different names for four specific companies meaning effectively just 10 companies quoted by respondents. There were just four companies for the full area that received 10% or more of the responses. Another gained 7% for the two names quoted. All others received 2.4% or less of responses, with two just getting one single mention (one was an app-based operator and another clearly a one-man band or hackney carriage).

Five of the top six companies named were clearly identified as current private hire operators for South Ribble. The other, with 13% of mentions (and therefore fourth highest), was a Preston-based operator. They received 14% of non-Leyland quotes (fourth in order) and 12% of Leyland (second largest share).

Ten of the current operators were not mentioned by people interviewed. Discussion with licensing confirmed:

- three are principally airport operators (one does local rural trips at weekends for a niche clientele)
- two are exclusively school contract operators
- two are purely corporate operators
- one is a single one-man one-vehicle operator
- one has no vehicles at present and focusses on psv style work
- another has an office in South Ribble but does most of their work in another district

The top two companies gained 28% and 20% across the area, but both were dominant in only either Leyland or the other areas. The top company obtained 71% of all mentions in Leyland (albeit using two names), whilst the second company obtained 28% in the other areas. The top company was the only one to receive similar levels of quotes in 2022 and 2019 across the area (23% 2019). The second quoted company only saw 3% of quotes in 2019 so has clearly expanded.

People were asked their level of usage specifically of hackney carriages. Across the area, 24% said they could not remember seeing a hackney carriage (12% last time). As might be expected, this value was much higher in the other areas (34%) rather than in Leyland (11%). 53% said they could not remember the last time they used a hackney carriage (similar to the 56% of last time). In this case, the level in the other areas (46%) was lower than that in the Leyland area (63%). 10%, the highest proportion for using hackney carriages, said once or twice a year (12% other, 8% Leyland). None said three or more times a week.

When converted to trips per person per month this equates to just 0.13 trips per person per month, very low. The variation between the two areas saw 0.14 for Leyland and 0.12 for the other areas. Compared to total licensed vehicle usage, this implies 8% of trips overall are made by hackney carriage, with 6% in Leyland and 12% in the other areas.

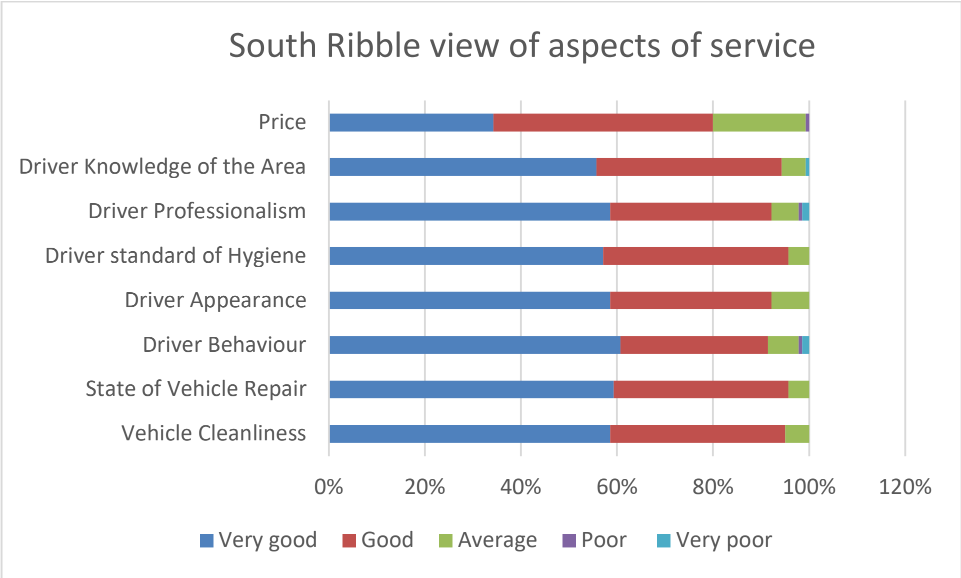
47% of those interviewed named up to three ranks they were aware of, and also said if they used them or not. Just one respondent gave three ranks, 24% two and 74% one rank. Overall, 44% said they used the ranks they named, a value that was only marginally different between areas (slightly less used ranks named in the Leyland interviewees). Rank knowledge this time was much better, given that in 2019 people only named Tesco and William Street, with most other named ranks in Preston.

Top rank named, using two names, was Hough Lane with a total of 34% of responses. 40% of these said they used it. Tesco Leyland obtained 25%, 43% used it. Leyland railway station only obtained one mention, who then said they did not use that rank.

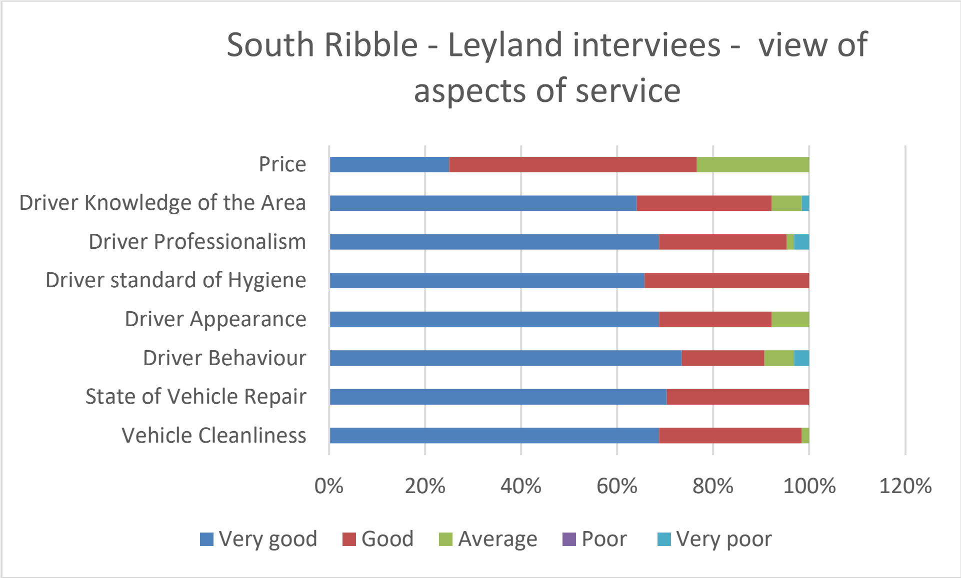
Preston ranks made up 57% of mentions for the non-Leyland interviews, with Preston Railway Station (22%), then Church Street (21%) and then Preston centre (14%). The Station and Church Street obtained small numbers of mentions in the Leyland interviews (3% and 2%). Over the whole sample, 50% said they used the Preston centre ranks, 77% Church Street and 47% Preston railway station rank.

Two of the non-Leyland sample mentioned William Street but said they did not use it (a private hire booking office parking area). Three mentioned Station Road (presumably the booking office near Morrisons, now possibly gone), though a third said they used it (one person).

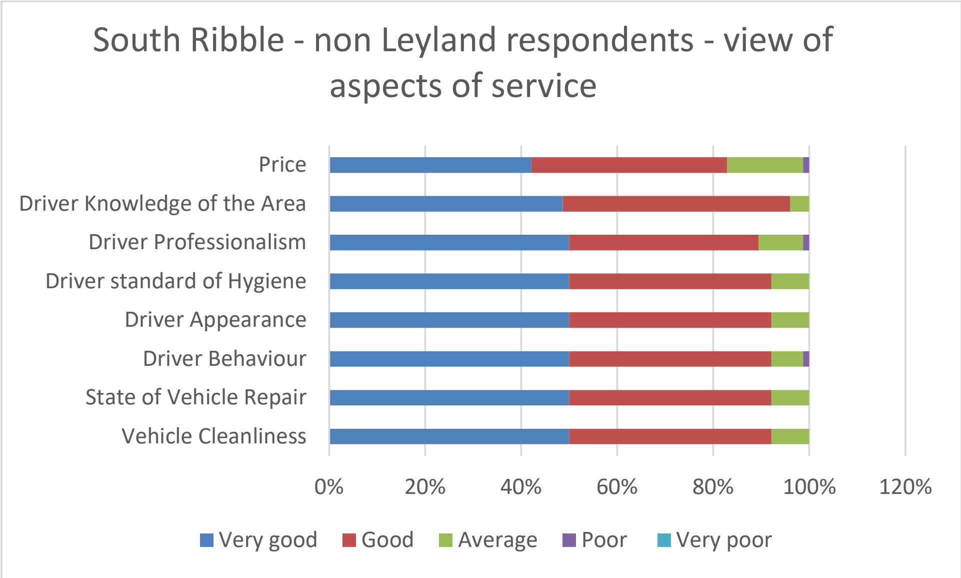
People were asked to rate levels of service for their last trip in a licensed vehicle in South Ribble. 70% responded across the area, with 75% responding in Leyland and 67% in the other three areas. The results are shown below:



Across the area, the largest scores are for very good, followed by good. This appears to be better than in 2019. As is usual, price fares worst with 'good' being the dominant score. However, this time there were just three elements that saw one or two people scoring 'very poor' whereas there were no poor or very poor scores in 2019. One person scored driver knowledge as very poor (with no 'poor' score); two each said very poor for driver behaviour and driver professionalism, with both also having one 'poor' score quoted. However, driver behaviour got the highest 'very good' score of some 61%, with all other very good score levels being 56% or more, apart from for price.



The principal difference for the Leyland scores is how much worse price performs here. There are just 25% saying 'very good'. However, none said poor or very poor with the highest score of 52% good. The 'very poor' scores mentioned above were all in this part of the sample, but there were no 'poor' scores recorded. These three 'very poor' all came from the same person, an older female who also made comment about 'poor attitude'. They were a user of the Hough Lane rank although they also said they could not remember when they last used a hackney carriage. The other two 'very poor' were also from another person, who said the driver 'drifted at the wheel', but again they said they could not remember when they last used a hackney carriage so this must be a private hire trip. They were an app user, quoted two companies and said they used a licensed vehicle once or twice a year.



The respondents from the three other areas provided 49% to 50% very good for all categories but price, whose score was the closest to the others at 42%, suggesting less issue with price in the other areas. This could be due to the higher levels of competition there. There were no 'very poor' but three 'poor' scores. All aspects apart from driver knowledge scored the same 50% 'very good', giving high consistency.

When asked about what might encourage people to use hackney carriages or use them more, people provided multiple responses. For the whole area, the highest response was 36% saying if they were more affordable (44% in 2019). This value rose to 43% for Leyland respondents but was lower at 30% across the other three areas. Second, highest in the other areas (28% compared to 17% Leyland, 23% overall, but 36% in 2019) was more hackney carriages that could be phoned for. More hackney carriages on street or at ranks scored 11% overall, but 16% in the other three areas (where there are no ranks) and just 5% in Leyland. This suggests some interest in people seeing ranks introduced in the outer areas.

For the full area 17% said nothing would encourage them to use or use hackney carriage more (22% Leyland, 13% other three areas), whilst 8% across the area (7% an 9% respectively) said they did not need to use hackney carriages at all.

77% of all respondents said they did not need, nor know anyone who needed an adapted licensed vehicle to travel. Of those needing an adapted vehicle, the highest proportion said they, or someone they knew, needed a wheel chair accessible vehicle but a small proportion said they needed some other adaptation. There was slightly less requirement in the other areas although there the WAV need was marginally higher. This value was reduced from the 85% of 2019 suggesting greater need for adapted vehicles now.

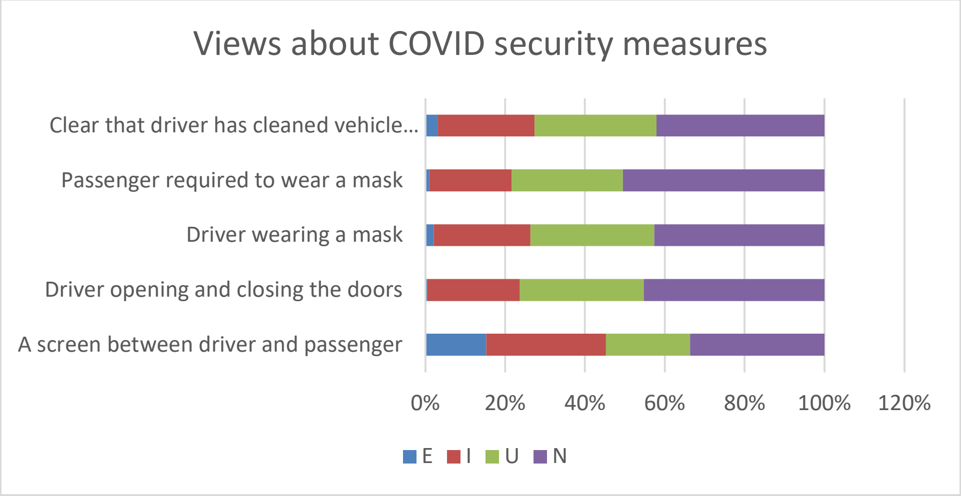
There was just one person in Leyland who said they had given up either waiting for a hackney carriage at a rank, nor when hailing one in the area, providing a latent demand factor of 1.012 which given there are no other area ranks would apply to the full rank sample. The person said they had given up waiting 'in Leyland' two weeks before they were interviewed. They called a friend to take them onwards. There had been no-one giving up in the 2019 survey in South Ribble.

People were asked if they considered there were enough hackney carriages in the South Ribble council area at this time. Across the area just 38% felt there were. The value was higher in Leyland – 44% and lower in the other three areas – 35%. However, in all three sets of responses a third of respondents said they did not know any answer. This implies that considering there were enough was the largest response in all cases, but not by a high margin. However, this was strongly reduced from 2019 when 94% felt there were enough overnight.

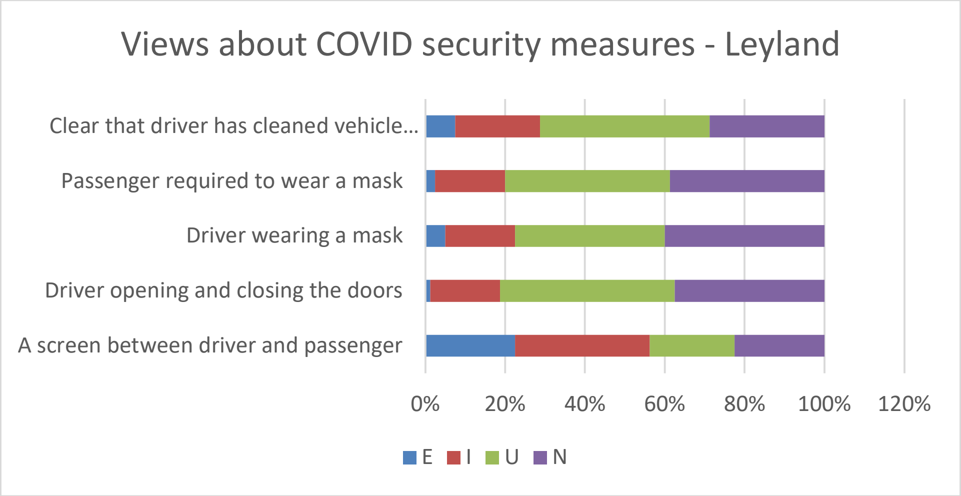
80% across the area said they used both hackney carriages and private hire about the same comparing now with pre-pandemic. This value rose to 87% in the Leyland respondents but was 75% for the other three areas. For the full area, 2% said they now used hackney carriages more, but 3% said less (a net reduction of 1%) whilst for private hire the values were 13% and 3%, net 10% up. For Leyland the values were 0% more, 5% less net -5% for hackney carriages and +3%, -5% net -2% private hire; for the other three areas the results were 3% more and 1% less, net 2% more hackney carriage and 19% more, 2% less, net 17% more for private hire. This suggests overall increases in use of private hire in the three other areas, but for Leyland both uses reduced although only by small amounts compared to those saying they had not change levels of usage.

Future usage levels saw even more using about the same, 92% in the Leyland interviews and 84% in the other areas (net 88%), with net 1%, 3% and 2% respectively gains for hackney carriage and net gains of 1%, 9% and 13% for private hire. This is encouraging for the trade.

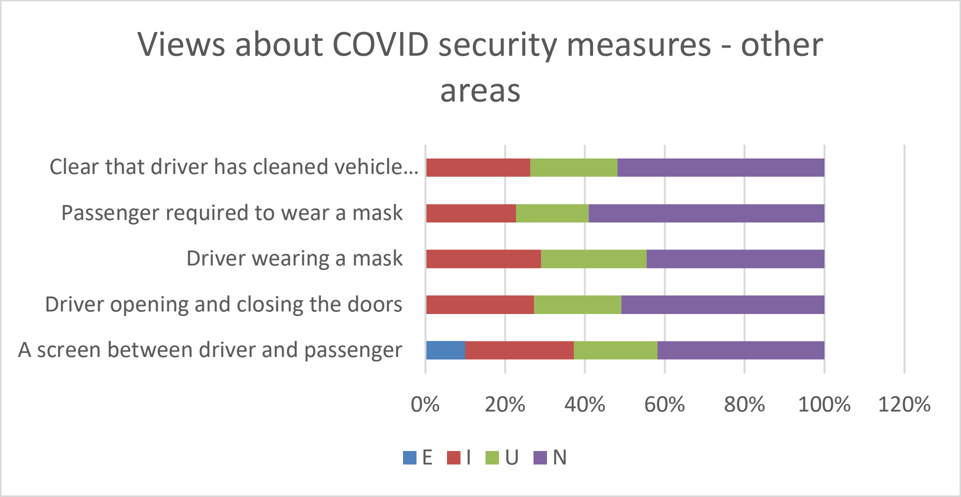
People were asked about what elements of COVID 19 security measures remained essential, important, not important or useful to them. The diagram below summarises:



Across the area only the screen is felt to be essential, but only at a relatively small 15%. The dominant view is now these measures are no longer important.



For Leyland, the essential nature of a screen takes higher importance, up to 23% feel this is essential and 34% feel it is important. Most other scores tend to be 'useful' in Leyland.



For the three other areas, the dominant view is that COVID security measures are no longer important.

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5 Key stakeholder consultation

The following key stakeholders were contacted in line with the recommendations of the BPG:

- Supermarkets
- Hotels
- Pubwatch / individual pubs / night clubs
- Other entertainment venues
- Restaurants
- Hospitals
- Police
- Disability representatives
- Rail operators
- Other council contacts within all relevant local councils

Comments received have been aggregated below to provide an overall appreciation of the situation at the time of this survey. If there are very specific comments from given stakeholders we try to maintain their confidentiality as far as is possible. The comments provided in the remainder of this Chapter are the views of those consulted, and not that of the authors of this report.

Our information was obtained by telephone, email, letter or face to face meeting as appropriate, but principally using an email and on-line questionnaire. The list contacted includes those suggested by the Council, those drawn from previous similar surveys, and from general internet trawls for information. Our target stakeholders are as far as possible drawn from across the entire licensing area to ensure the review covers the full area and not just specific parts or areas.

For the sake of clarity, we cover key stakeholders from the public side separately to those from the licensed vehicle trade element, whose views are summarized separately in the following Chapter.

Where the statistical analyses in Chapter 2 demonstrate low levels of wheelchair accessible vehicle (WAV) provision, an increased emphasis will be given to the issue in terms of the focus of stakeholders but also in specific efforts to contact disabled users and their representatives. However, it must be remembered that none of our consultation is statutory and for cost effective and fixed budget reasons we limit our attempts to contact people generally to a first attempt and reminder.

Despite a good number of invitations issued, just one restaurant responded to the consultation.

Supermarkets
It was not possible to contact any supermarket in the current situation.

Hotels
No hotels provided any comment.

Public houses
No comment was made by any public house.

Restaurants
One restaurant told us their customers and staff used local licensed vehicles. They said all customers would obtain a taxi using the restaurant public phone. They were also aware of ranks people might use. No complaints had been received.

Hospitals
No comment was provided from the local hospital.

Police
No police comment was received.

6 Trade stakeholder views

The BPG encourages all studies to include ‘all those involved in the trade’. There are a number of different ways felt to be valid in meeting this requirement, partly dependent on what the licensing authority feel is reasonable and possible given the specifics of those involved in the trade in their area.

The most direct and least costly route is to obtain comment from trade representatives. This can be undertaken by email, phone call or face to face meeting by the consultant undertaking the study. In some cases to ensure validity of the work being undertaken it may be best for the consultation to occur after the main work has been undertaken. This avoids anyone being able to claim that the survey work was influenced by any change in behaviour.

Most current studies tend to issue a letter and questionnaire to all hackney carriage and private hire owners, drivers and operators. This is best issued by the council on behalf of the independent consultant. Usual return is now using an on-line form of the questionnaire, with the option of postal return still being provided, albeit in some cases without use of a freepost return. Returns can be encouraged by email or direct contact via representatives.

Some authorities cover private hire by issuing the letter and questionnaire to operators seeking they pass them on when drivers book on or off, or via vehicle data head communications.

In all cases, we believe it is essential we document the method used clearly and measure response levels. However, it is also rare for there to be high levels of response, with 5% typically felt to be good and reasonable.

For this survey, the licensing section issued letters with questionnaires and an online link to all known hackney carriage drivers and private hire operators, with a request they pass it to their drivers.

There are presently 267 drivers. Assuming all had an opportunity to complete the form and that there are no persons that only own a vehicle and do not drive, the response is just under 5%, a usual level of response for this kind of survey. We are not aware of any previous driver surveys being undertaken. A check was made for apparent duplicate responses and none were found.

Of those responding, 69% said they drove hackney carriages, 8% private hire and 23% said they drove both kinds of vehicle. 85% of respondents were those that had the licensed vehicle trade as their only or main source of income. 15% worked part time and had other sources of income.

There were two hackney carriages who said their principal work was immediate hire work from ranks only. Two others added immediate hire work, bookings, and another added bookings and advanced hire work. Another said immediate hire work from ranks and advanced hire work. In total, 54% of those responding said they worked from ranks including one person that said they drove both kinds of vehicle. One hackney carriage said they principally undertook advanced hire work (airports). Another said they only undertook immediate hire from bookings (plus airport work). Another only undertook immediate hire from bookings (plus prison contracts). The single private hire respondent was mainly engaged with school contracts.

The average level of experience from those responding was 7.5 years. The longest quoted length of service was 20 years. One person had been driving just six months.

The average week worked was 5.6 days, with 46% of respondents saying they had worked five days in the last week, 23% each said five or six days and 8% saying they had worked four days. For all respondents, the average hours worked was 50, on the high side. The maximum hours worked quoted were 60.

Respondents told us what factors affected their choice of shift. Two did not respond. One provided two responses. Of the total responses the highest proportion, 38%, said family commitments determined the hours they worked. 23% said it was dictated by contracts, 23% that they worked when there was most demand, and 16% by the fact they undertook airport runs. This follows national trends of a higher focus on living rather than working.

46% owned and drove their own vehicle. Just 8% (one person) said someone else drove their vehicle when they were not using it – and this was only if they were ill. For those that did not share their vehicle, 20% said this had changed since COVID, i.e. more were now having sole use of their vehicles.

69% said they accepted pre-bookings. Just one hackney carriage did not. Two of the three ‘drive both’ did not accept bookings nor did the single private hire that responded (who obtained all their work from school contracts). 56% of those accepting bookings did so via a company, 22% via ‘phone’ and 22% did not say how.

The hackney carriage that did not accept bookings said 98% of their work was from ranks and 2% from hailing. The average proportions of work were 51% from bookings, 24% school contracts, 12% ‘other’, 11% rank and 2% hailing. Half the respondents said people did hail, with one respondent claiming 10% of work from hailing.

This suggests although there is insufficient work for hackney carriages from ranks, nearly all still value being hackney carriage and do get some work from both the ranks and hailing.

The hackney carriage respondents told us the ranks they serviced. However, two hackney carriages and one 'drive both' respondent did not give ranks. Of the seven stating ranks, four named two, two named three and one a single rank. Taking all mentions of ranks, Hough Lane was mentioned 46% of the time, the railway station 27% and Thurston Road 27%, with no mention at all of the Tesco rank.

60% of respondents felt there were less trips from ranks now than pre-pandemic. 30% felt about the same and 10% (one person) said there had been an increase. For bookings, there was an even split between less and the same, again with one person saying more.

All those responding said they felt there were enough hackney carriages in South Ribble at this time.

In terms of responses why a limit on vehicle numbers might benefit the public there were few responses. One suggested more hackney carriages would mean many current would give up working. Two said they felt there were shortages of vehicles at school times and when demand was high later at night. One said having too many had already harmed the trade for those who had been active for a long period. They said without contract work they would not be able to make any living. Another mentioned that private hire in the area tended to behave as hackney carriage causing confusion in customer minds as to what they could do. That person felt more night enforcement was needed and better differentiation between hackney carriages and private hire.

With regards to customers using wheelchairs, one hackney carriage driver and one both vehicle driver said they got rank-based wheelchair jobs. One said daily and the hackney carriage only said weekly. The level increased for such jobs via bookings. There were three daily, two weekly, two monthly, one yearly and one two-yearly. For contracts, there were two daily, one monthly and one yearly user.

For those in wheel chairs transferring, one said weekly from a rank and two monthly. Again, for bookings numbers increased to see four weekly, four monthly, one yearly and one two-yearly. For contracts there was just one person saying monthly and another 2-yearly.

Both questions suggest small usage of vehicles by those using wheel chairs, but with higher volumes undertaken by bookings rather than from ranks.

With reference to COVID impact, 54% knew people who had given up driving during the pandemic and not returned whilst 31% were not and 15% did not answer. For those saying they were aware, half said they knew of two people with the range between one person and five people.

Three respondents felt things were more back to normal at the time of these interviews. Three felt work remained much quieter than it had been. Looking forward most were now concerned about the rising cost of fuel and other expenses.

7 Evaluation of unmet demand and its significance

It is first important to define our specific view about what constitutes unmet demand. Our definition is when a person turns up at a hackney carriage rank and finds there is no vehicle there available for immediate hire. This normally leads to a queue of people building up, some of who may walk off (taken to be latent demand), whilst others will wait till a vehicle collects them. Later passengers may well arrive when there are vehicles there, but because of the queue will not obtain a vehicle immediately.

There are other instances where queues of passengers can be observed at hackney carriage ranks. This can occur when the level of demand is such that it takes longer for vehicles to move up to waiting passengers than passengers can board and move away. This often occurs at railway stations but can also occur at other ranks where high levels of passenger arrivals occur. We do not consider this is unmet demand, but geometric delay and although we note this, it is not counted towards unmet demand being significant.

The industry standard index of the significance of unmet demand (ISUD) was initiated at the time of the introduction of section 16 of the 1985 Transport Act as a numeric and consistent way of evaluating unmet demand and its significance. The ISUD methodology was initially developed by a university and then adopted by one of the leading consultant groups undertaking the surveys made necessary to enable authorities to retain their limit on hackney carriage vehicle numbers. The index has been developed and deepened over time to take into account various court challenges. It has now become accepted as the industry standard test of if identified unmet demand is significant.

The index is a statistical guide derived to evaluate if observed unmet demand is in fact significant. However, its basis is that early tests using first principles identified based on a moderate sample suggested that the level of index of 80 was the cut-off above which the index was in fact significant, and that unmet demand therefore was such that action was needed in terms of additional issue of plates to reduce the demand below this level, or a complete change of policy if it was felt appropriate. This level has been accepted as part of the industry standard. However, the index is not a strict determinant and care is needed in providing the input samples as well as interpreting the result provided. However, the index has various components which can also be used to understand what is happening in the rank-based and overall licensed vehicle market.

ISUD draws from several different parts of the study data. Each separate component of the index is designed to capture a part of the operation of the demand for hackney carriages and reflect this numerically. Whilst the principal inputs are from the rank surveys, the measure of latent demand comes from the public on-street surveys, and any final decision about if identified unmet demand is significant, or in fact about the value of continuing the current policy of restricting vehicle numbers, must be taken fully in the context of a careful balance of all the evidence gathered during the survey process.

The present ISUD calculation has two components which both could be zero. In the case that either are zero, the overall index result is zero, which means they clearly demonstrate there is no unmet demand which is significant, even if other values are high.

The first component which can be zero is the proportion of daytime hours where people are observed to have to wait for a hackney carriage to arrive. The level of wait used is ANY average wait at all within any hour. The industry definition of these hours varies, the main index user counts from 10:00 to 18:00 (i.e. eight hours ending at 17:59). The present index is clear that unmet demand cannot be significant if there are no such hours. The only rider on this component is that the sample of hours collected must include a fair element of such hours, and that if the value is non-zero, review of the potential effect of a wider sample needs to be considered.

The other component which could be zero is the test identifying the proportion of passengers which are travelling in any hour when the average passenger wait in that hour is greater than one minute.

If both of these components are non-zero, then the remaining components of the index come into play. These are the peakiness factor, the seasonality factor, average passenger delay, and the latent demand factor.

Average passenger delay is the total amount of time waited by all passengers in the sample, divided by the total number of passengers observed who entered hackney carriages.

The seasonality factor allows for the undertaking of rank survey work in periods which are not typical, although guidance is that such periods should normally be avoided if possible particularly as the impact of seasons may not just be on the level of passenger demand, but may also impact on the level of supply. This is particularly true in regard to if surveys are undertaken when schools are active or not.

Periods when schools are not active can lead to more hackney carriage vehicles being available whilst they are not required for school contract work. Such periods can also reduce hackney carriage demand with people away on holiday from the area. Generally, use of hackney carriages is higher in December in the run-up to Christmas, but much lower in January, February and the parts of July and August when more people are likely to be on holiday. The factor tends to range from 0.8 for December (factoring high demand level impacts down) to 1.2 for January / February (inflating the values from low demand levels upwards).

There can be special cases where summer demand needs to be covered, although high peaks for tourist traffic use of hackney carriages tend not to be so dominant at the current time, apart from in a few key tourist authorities.

The peakiness factor is generally either 1 (level demand generally) or 0.5 (demand has a high peak at one point during the week). This is used to allow for the difficulty of any transport system being able to meet high levels of peaking. It is rarely possible or practicable for example for any public transport system, or any road capacity, to be provided to cover a few hours a week.

The latent demand factor was added following a court case. It comes from asking people in the on-street questionnaires if they have ever given up waiting for a hackney carriage at a rank in any part of the area. This factor generally only affects the level of the index as it only ranges from 1.0 (no-one has given up) to 2.0 (everyone says they have). It is also important to check that people are quoting legitimate hackney carriage rank waits as some, despite careful questioning, quote giving up waiting at home, which must be for a private hire vehicle (even if in hackney carriage guise as there are few private homes with taxi ranks outside).

The ISUD index is the result of multiplying each of the components together and benchmarking this against the cut-off value of 80. Changes in the individual components of the index can also be illustrative. For example, the growth of daytime hour queueing can be an earlier sign of unmet demand developing than might be apparent from the proportion of people experiencing a queue particularly as the former element is based on any wait and not just that averaging over a minute. The change to a peaky demand profile can tend towards reducing the potential for unmet demand to be significant.

Finally, any ISUD value must be interpreted in the light of the sample used to feed it, as well as completely in the context of all other information gathered. Generally, the guide of the index will tend not to be overturned in regard to significant unmet demand being identified, but this cannot be assumed to be the case – the index is a guide and a part of the evidence and needs to be taken fully in context.

The table below compares the various elements of the ISUD index over the last two surveys:

Element / Year	2023		2000
	No Tesco	All ranks	
Average passenger delay (mins)	1.48	1.18	0.07
% hours with any off peak delay	8.51	9.52	0
% passengers travelling in hours with a minute or more APD	3.98	2.81	0.25
Peakiness Factor	0.5	0.5	1
Seasonality	1	1	1
Latent Demand	1.012	1.012	Not calc
Overall ISUD calculated	25.41	16.03	0

The current index remains below the cut-off level of 80 which is accepted at the level at which unmet demand should be counted as significant.

All elements of the index have increased since the 2000 survey apart from seasonality which has remained the same, and peakiness which has changed from being flat to peaky. A test taking out the Tesco location which is essentially booked demand led to both average passenger delay and the share of people travelling in hours with a minute or more delay increasing, and the overall ISUD value increasing further, but still well less than the cut-off value of 80. However, the off peak index element improved without Tesco. This suggests the bookings at Tesco are seeing better service levels than at ranks.

Further discussion of this section is included in the synthesis chapter.

8 Summary, synthesis and study conclusions

This Hackney carriage demand survey on behalf of South Ribble Council has been undertaken following the guidance of the BPG and other recent case history regarding unmet demand and its significance. This chapter summarises each separate section, draws them together and provides conclusions to this survey. It should be noted that this covered the BPG from April 2010 rather than the version which at the time of this Report being finalised remained awaited from the Government. However, our initial review suggest little would change had this review been under the new BPG.

Background and context

This current survey of hackney carriage operation in South Ribble was carried out between July and December 2022. The rank observations were in July and the on-street consultations in December. Despite an extended period provided trade response was low (see later). The key context for this Report at this time is that it marks the point at which the authority changed from not allowing new saloon hackney carriages to doing so, but within a set limit. That limit once reached would only be increased further were a demand survey to identify need for additional plates.

The area has always been unique in its licensed vehicle operation in four principal ways. Firstly, its location close to Preston has always led some of the smaller settlements to look economically more to Preston than to Leyland as their principal centre. Secondly, it has one main centre but several other smaller urban areas with none of them necessarily large enough to support large active ranks. Thirdly, the private hire portion of the fleet sees a significant proportion not public facing, either in servicing contracts or providing niche operations. The major contract company is larger than might be expected because it provides service across Lancashire rather than just to South Ribble. Finally, the level of independent hackney carriages is small and even private hire is strongly dominated by one large mixed-vehicle company that itself owns a very high proportion of both the publicly facing private hire and hackney carriage fleets.

The formal limit on hackney carriage vehicles was removed in favour of allowing new hackney carriages but only if they were fully WAV style vehicles. This led to grandfather rights for those vehicles put in place before 2014 that they could continue to be saloon style when changed although the need for more WAV meant at one point this was amended to head towards a fully WAV fleet though this policy changed in 2019 to focus on encouraging more sustainable vehicles.

Private hire vehicle numbers have been reducing since 2018 and continue to do so. A slow increase in hackney carriage numbers from 2018 onwards became a strong decline in the pandemic which has been reversed by the introduction of the new saloon plates during 2022.

Both hackney carriage and private hire driver numbers fell to their lowest level ever by the time of the DfT survey in March 2022. Since that point, numbers have increased again. Operator numbers have followed a similar trend although to much less a degree. The levels of hackney carriage WAV have reduced to 38% at the time of the survey whereas the private hire proportion was up to 52% but partly due to the reduced level of total private hire vehicles.

Major concerns at present remain that a lot of both hackney carriage and private hire demand in the South Ribble area is actually met by vehicles and drivers from other authorities for a range of reasons. Many are linked to the need to keep operating costs down where possible.

Rank observations

Formal rank provision has not changed much in the area. There has never been any real rank-based demand other than in Leyland. Even in Leyland the principal high-capacity rank in the Tesco car park has over the years tended to be serviced by bookings. In 2019 our site visits noted that rank filled with hackney carriages – in this survey most hackney carriages picked up near the store exit, did not use the rank at all, and appeared to be responding to calls from the free phone. The two other used Council ranks are at Thurston Road (off Hough Lane) and along Hough Lane near a key public house. The final used rank is at Leyland station, the head of which is on private land although it is not believed any extra permit is required for this location.

The surveys provided an estimated passenger demand of just under 600 passengers per week, although 40% of this was from Tesco, suggesting actual taken-from-rank passenger numbers might be no more than 400 per week at most. Hough Lane and the Station rank saw similar numbers of passengers albeit with different time profiles. Thurston Road was mainly a place where hackney carriages waited for private hire bookings to take them away – with up to 86% of all departures from this rank being empty. The other two active ranks saw no less than 56% and up to 66% of their arriving vehicles depart without passengers.

Inspection of the overall passenger departure profiles showed all ranks had saw-tooth demand profiles through their operating periods. This kind of demand is notoriously hard to meet and the use of the ranks as waiting places for those on booking circuits almost certainly provides more opportunity for people to get a hackney carriage from a rank if they so wish than would be the case if they were purely dependent on rank demand.

Overall hackney carriage rank based demand is very low. The peak hour across all ranks only saw 16 passengers. Only four hours in the three days observed saw more than 10 passengers in any hour. The levels confirm that it would be impossible for any hackney carriage to be viable were it totally dependent on rank-based demand in South Ribble.

Over the three days of observations 17% of the hackney carriage fleet and 25% of the private hire fleet were seen near to the principal ranks.

In the observed 244 hours, just 9% had average passenger delays a minute or more. Just seven passengers waited 11 minutes or more, three 6-10 minutes and 42 waits of five minutes or less. Many cases of 'unmet demand' were found to arise at times of low demand, notoriously hard to serve well with hackney carriages.

21% of the vehicles actually observed at ranks appeared to be WAV style, significantly less than the actual proportion in the fleet (38%). No passengers were observed accessing hackney carriages at any rank in a wheel chair. However, there were six people assisted into vehicles.

On street public views

As in 2019 people were interviewed across both central Leyland and the three other largest settlements. As in 2019 the interviews under-represented men with the middle groups in age over-represented. However, the overall sample was considered to be reasonable.

Overall usage of licensed vehicles in the last three months was reduced from 87% last time to 57% now. 43% of these said they used private hire only with pure hackney carriage use by just 4% of all respondents, with joint usage 10%. 24% said they never used licensed vehicles.

Average levels of usage were also reduced from 7.8 per person per month in 2019 to 1.5 now (2.3 in Leyland). However, the same proportion 71% said they phoned for their vehicle, 17% said rank and 10% said app (up from 3% but mainly at the expense of freephones).

For this survey less companies were named and less mentions were made overall of those companies. 65% just named a single company. Even the company names given were often different names for the same company, further reducing the level of competition in actuality. The fourth-most mentioned company was Preston-based. The top two companies gained 28% and 20% across the area – with the top Leyland company taking 71% of all mentions in Leyland. Only that company scored similar shares to 2019.

24% of those interviewed could not remember seeing a hackney carriage in the area, up from 12% last time. A similar 53% could not remember when they last used a hackney carriage.

With reference to ranks, top quoted rank was Hough Lane with 34% of responses and 40% of these saying they used it. Tesco was quoted by 25% with 43% saying they used it. Some named booking offices as ranks they knew but none used them.

Overall passenger views of all aspects of the service provided by licensed vehicles tended to be very good. As is nationally typical, price scored worst and was also the top item people said might increase their usage of hackney carriages.

The level of need for adapted vehicles appeared to have increased (85% did not need in 2019, with 77% now). The focus on need was for WAV but with some mentions for other adaptations not WAV.

Latent demand was low but increased from the zero of last survey.

Just 38% felt there were enough hackney carriages in the area at this point in time.

Key stakeholder views

As is nationally typical, only one respondent gave their views about taxi services, saying their customers used them, but mainly by using their own phones to book even though the restaurant responding was aware of ranks that could be used.

Trade views

A usual level of around 5% of driver response was obtained. 69% said they drove hackney carriages and a further 23% drove both kinds of vehicle.

54% of those responding said they worked from ranks with two saying their principal work came from ranks. However, three hackney carriages admitted they never serviced ranks.

Average working weeks were five and a half days and 50 hours.

Just 46% owned their own vehicles, very low. 69% accepted pre-bookings with just one hackney carriage not doing so (their work was 98% rank and 2% hail). In terms of ranks used, Hough Lane got 46% of mentions, the station 27%, Thurston Road 27% with no mention of Tesco as a rank at all.

This suggests there are a small number of traditional rank-dependent hackney carriage remaining in the area.

Formal evaluation of significance of unmet demand

Overall levels of unmet demand were far from significant. The ISUD statistic was 16 including all ranks and 25 when Tesco was omitted. The main factor involved in determining unmet demand was the proportion of off peak hours with delay a minute or more. However, the cut-off of 80 that defines unmet demand as significant is a long way beyond either of these values.

Synthesis

South Ribble is a very different area in many respects. The level of hackney carriages is far beyond the level that the small number of active ranks could ever support. Part of this relates to much of the area never having sufficient levels of demand to justify even provision of ranks, with even the area that could generate ranks dominated by one large company who nonetheless chose to operate a very high number of their vehicles as hackney carriage.

Despite this there remain a very small number of rank-based vehicles, and a long history of private-hire operating hackney carriages also populating ranks whilst waiting for calls to their bookings. In essence, this latter practice almost certainly provides more vehicles at ranks, and more rank-demand than if the ranks were purely used by rank-only vehicles.

General statistics of the fleet in the area are skewed by a high proportion of private hire being non public facing with others only available in niche markets. This leads to a conclusion that the overall market for licensed vehicles is not one that can stand high operating costs, and continually seeks operating savings to be able to be viable – even for private hire. On this basis, the opportunity to service demand by lower cost out of town vehicles can be seen to be a decision of survival although it may otherwise appear a perverse decision.

Within the hackney carriage fleet there are many that never service ranks and are hackney carriage clearly for other reasons rather than to service passengers at ranks or by hailing. Within the private hire fleet, as we have already noted, many never service the public, so the two fleets are not that dissimilar in appearing much larger than local demand dictates.

Service to the ranks although increased by vehicles using ranks to wait for booked trips to be communicated to them still sees very variable and low demand that is hard for even the over-large hackney carriage fleet to meet. This means apparent levels of unmet demand are higher than they might be given the very low overall hackney carriage rank-based demand.

In many respects the public - even in Leyland - do not actually perceive hackney carriages as thus because they often book them by phone. Many others are unaware of what a local South Ribble private hire or hackney carriage is like and use whatever vehicle is available for their journeys. This means education of the public is needed across the area. There was some evidence that even though people see many of the current hackney carriages as private hire, they also sometimes think booking offices are ranks.

Conclusions

At the present time, there is very clearly no unmet demand for the service of hackney carriages which is significant at this point in time. There is no more need for any further hackney carriages – saloon or WAV style in the area. The current cap on saloon vehicles can therefore be retained and defended.

Ranks in the area do not provide sufficient patronage to sustain more than a few hackney carriages through rank-based hire only, but their service by booking-based hackney carriages ensures higher availability at the ranks than would otherwise be the case. Although some may suggest such vehicles should not wait at ranks, were they not to do so the viability of the ranks would probably not exist.

Evidence, however, from the performance shown by the ISUD statistics does point that some way of ensuring vehicles remain at all times at the rank is important. Those operating phone-based hackney carriages should be reminded that the key reason a hackney carriage plates is granted is for service to the public at ranks and for hailing. It would be prudent for any phone-based hackney carriage called off a rank and leaving it empty should advise their booking platform this was the case so attempt could be made to replenish the rank vehicles.

People in the area quite rightly cannot easily observe what hackney carriages actually are. In the smaller areas this is because people do not see them, in Leyland this is because many principally act as private hire vehicles. This has safety implications for the public. The issues of out of town vehicles is also something not really readily acknowledged or understood by the public who simply want a vehicle when they need it, and prefer it to be at least cost above most other characteristics.

The saw-tooth nature of the hackney carriage rank passenger demand profile and very low level of rank hires, together with the context of the number of overall vehicles, makes it clear the bulk of work in South Ribble is pre-booked and the ranks are a convenient place to wait between bookings. What is more unusual is that the majority of pre-booked work is undertaken by hackney carriages, with very few South Ribble private hire (more particularly in Leyland) actually public-facing. Many do contract or other niche work.

Hackney carriages appear to have displace the immediate-hire private hire vehicles from the major market in Leyland. The dominance of one large operator may have influenced this. However, a very small number of independent rank-based hackney carriages still remain.

An interesting point is that the recent demand for saloon hackney carriage plates cannot have been driven by unmet demand which is the normal reason for issuing more hackney carriage plates. Further, it must be borne in mind that the normal reason for issue of hackney carriage plates is for them to be used servicing the public either at ranks or for hailing.

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9 Recommendations

On the basis of the evidence gathered in this Hackney carriage demand survey for South Ribble Council, our key conclusion is that the current cap on hackney carriage saloon vehicles can be retained at its present level. There does not appear to be any shortage of WAV style vehicles although this does and can never mean there may not be issues experienced by those with disabilities needing to travel by licensed vehicle.

Key elements of this survey, particularly the rank observations and public views, should be repeated at least every three years (with next rank work no later than July 2025)

Care must be taken to ensure the changes to Hough Lane do not reduce or hinder the viability of this location as an active rank. There are more detailed elements of this survey that could be used for example to identify how many spaces are needed to prevent unmet demand arising from insufficient vehicle waiting space.

There is a strong need for an education campaign to advise the public of South Ribble exactly what a local hackney carriage and a local private hire vehicle are and what people can expect from them. People need to be aware they may book a vehicle in South Ribble and be serviced by a vehicle which, were they to have issues with, would be hard for the licensing department to enforce.

Discussion is needed to attempt to ensure the small number of ranks existing are protected and kept occupied at all times passengers may need their services.

The review of the proportion of vehicles in both fleets available to the public and in different forms of ownership could be updated and then kept up to date to monitor the service levels this might lead to. This could help clarifying how and why the level of hackney carriages needs to be what it is given the actual rank and hail-based demand is so small.

More detailed review of the levels of need for vehicle accessibility could be undertaken but only if the Council has internal links to those needing specific requirements of the fleet. This is a national issue that is seeing more importance given recent legislation which needs a lot of work to achieve often relatively little (yet important) change for those very dependent on such vehicles.