

26. Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Strategy

26.1 Introduction and Overview

The purpose of this strategy is to set out what is required in Warwickshire over the next five years to ensure that Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles play their full role in helping to meet the needs of both current and potential passengers in Warwickshire, and deliver the transport objectives of the Government and the County Council.

This Strategy deals specifically with the contribution that taxis and private hire vehicles make in providing an effective transport network.

26.2 The Policy Context

The overall national, regional and local policy context of public transport in Warwickshire is set out in the Public Transport Strategy.

In March 2004, the Government published its Action Plan for Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles. This document recognised the role of taxis and private hire vehicles in the provision of public transport, particularly where buses and trains are not available. As well as providing the connecting first or last stage of a journey, making it easier to use public transport, they can provide people in the lower income groups with access to vital services and an enhanced quality of life.

The Action Plan, which was put together as a response to a set of recommendations by the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) identified a number of issues, namely:

- The removal of restrictions on the number of taxi licenses that can be issued by a licensing authority (except where removal of such restrictions would lead to a significant consumer detriment as a result of local conditions);
- The need to maintain quality in taxi and private hire vehicle service provision, particularly in relation to securing the safety of the general public;
- The identification of maximum rather than minimum fare levels, in order to protect vulnerable consumers and allow users to negotiate lower fares in certain circumstances; and
- The need to establish single licensing areas, in order to bring greater clarity to areas where multiple zones exist.

26.3 Overview of the Current Situation

The overall review of the current situation relating to the provision of public transport in Warwickshire is set out in the Public Transport Strategy.

In addition, there are a number of characteristics which relate to taxis and private hire vehicles specifically.

26.3.1 Differences between Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles

The market for hire vehicles in the UK is divided between licensed taxis (known either as hackney carriages or cabs), which can ply for hire in the streets or at ranks, although they can be booked over the telephone, and private hire vehicles that can only be pre-booked. There are also differences in the regulation of the two sectors. The taxi licensing authority regulates the quality of service and safety standards of both taxis and private hire vehicles. Drivers of taxis and private hire vehicles must both be licensed. The licensing authority may regulate the fares charged by taxis, and may set a limit on the number of licences for taxi vehicles (as opposed to

taxi drivers). It does not have power to set limits on the number of private hire vehicles, or to regulate their fares.

26.3.2 Roles and Responsibilities

Whilst the County Council is the relevant Transport Authority for Warwickshire, responsibility for the licensing and regulation of taxis and private hire vehicles lies with the five District/Borough Councils. In Warwickshire, these are:

- North Warwickshire Borough Council, covering Atherstone, Polesworth, Coleshill and Kingsbury;
- Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council;
- Rugby Borough Council;
- Warwick District Council, covering Warwick, Leamington Spa, Kenilworth and Whitnash; and
- Stratford-on-Avon District Council, covering Alcester, Stratford-upon-Avon, Southam, Studley and Shipston-on-Stour.

The County Council has consulted these Authorities in the preparation of this Strategy. Each of the five Authorities has its own policies for taxi and private hire vehicle provision that reflect local need.

26.3.3 Current Demand for Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles

Taxi and private hire vehicle provision can be found throughout Warwickshire, but is generally focused in the main urban areas. Taxis and private hire vehicles also meet important journey needs in rural areas, particularly where bus service provision is limited.

The County Council make extensive use of taxis and private hire vehicles to meet certain school/college related trips, and journeys associated with Social Services provision.

26.4 Problems and opportunities

26.4.1 Problems

Some of the problems associated with taxis and private hire vehicles are:

- The cost of using taxis and private hire vehicles in Warwickshire is generally around 3-4 times more than the cost of the same journey by bus;
- Fares for taxis and private hire vehicles service provision can differ substantially by operator and by District/Borough;
- There is a large number of the taxi and private hire vehicle fleet operating in the County that do not currently meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act; and
- Rogue operators working outside the taxi and private hire vehicle licensing regime can affect the reputation of the industry.

26.4.2 Opportunities

Taxis and private hire vehicles provide a useful, and often vital complement to conventional public transport. As a mode of transport, they are able to offer:

- A flexible transport service which can respond to a wide range of (individual) transport needs;
- A thriving, efficient and affordable taxi service contributes to a town's economy and benefits both local residents and tourists;

- Specialised transport provision that can cater for people who have some form of physical, mental or sensory impairment;
- A 24-hour service which can provide transport at times when other services are not operating (particularly in evenings and on Sundays);
- A transport service that is relatively secure, particularly for those travelling alone in the evening;
- An important facility for tourists and others who are unfamiliar with an area, including air and rail travellers;
- An alternative to bus services when passengers are encumbered by luggage or heavy shopping;
- A potential transport system to act as a feeder service to mainstream public transport provision; and,
- An alternative mode in rural areas where conventional public transport is unable to provide a suitable range of destinations.

26.5 The Strategy

The vision of Warwickshire County Council's Taxis and Private Hire Vehicle Strategy is:

'An affordable, accessible, safe, convenient and environmentally friendly provision of taxis and private hire vehicles across the County, capable of meeting local demand, improving accessibility and reducing social exclusion, thereby contributing to the achievement of the objectives in the Warwickshire's Local Transport Plan 2011'.

The main constraint to the County Council's ability to deliver the Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles Strategy is that it is neither the licensing or regulatory Authority. However, through partnership working, particularly with the five District/Borough Councils, the County Council aims to assist in improving taxi and private hire provision throughout Warwickshire.

Therefore, the main theme of the Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles Strategy is to work in partnership with others to improve taxi and private hire vehicle provision across the County.

The Strategy will contribute to achieving the objectives of the LTP by promoting a taxi and private hire vehicle provision, which:

- Offers accessibility through the public transport system, both in terms of physical access to transport and its availability, to the widest cross section of the population;
- Gives people (including those who do not have access to cars) more travel choices to access work, services and leisure activities;
- Offers affordable fares to passengers;
- Provides an attractive and sustainable travel alternative to the car thereby helping to reduce traffic congestion and pollution levels and improving air quality and the environment; and,
- Encourages integration with other modes of transport.

Policy PTT1: Partnership

The County Council will work with the five District/Borough Councils in Warwickshire, taxi and private hire vehicle operators, taxi and private hire vehicle users, adjoining authorities and other stakeholders to improve taxi and private hire vehicle services and facilities across the County.

Policy PTT2: Quality of Service

The County Council will work with the bodies and organisations set out in Policy PTT1 to encourage the provision of taxis and private hire vehicles services in the County which are affordable, accessible, available and acceptable.

a. Affordable

- Taxi and private hire vehicles can often be the least affordable local transport services, but passengers can benefit from more affordable taxi fares and hire charges if taxi-sharing schemes operate in their area.

b. Accessible

- The design of taxis and private hire vehicles and taxi waiting facilities should enable passengers to board or alight from the vehicle unaided or with a reasonable level of assistance;
- Interchange infrastructure should provide for 'seamless' changes between transport modes;
- Taxi and private hire services should be co-ordinated to encourage interchange consistent with the aims of the County Council's Public Transport Interchange Strategy, Bus Strategy, Passenger Rail Strategy and Community Transport Strategy, with the object of increasing the range of travel opportunities and options for travellers; and
- Pedestrian and cycling routes to taxi waiting facilities shall accord with the standards set out in the Walking Strategy and the Cycling Strategy.

c. Available

- Taxi waiting facilities should be conveniently located and afford a visible, high level of access. Where possible, reasonable access to taxi waiting facilities where possible will be maintained where general traffic is excluded from town centre streets or other areas.

d. Acceptable

- Taxi waiting facilities should provide reasonable shelter, comfort, suitable heating (where appropriate) and ventilation for the season of the year; and facilities to address personal safety and security issues; and
- Taxi and private hire vehicle staff should be helpful and courteous and preferably have received an appropriate level of customer service training.

e. Simple to Use

- Information on taxi and private hire vehicle operators should be readily available, easy to understand, and be simple to use. This should include information on typical charges for end-to-end journeys;
- Information systems should enable passengers to plan their journeys and provide increased public confidence as to the availability and reliability of taxi and private hire services; and
- Signage to taxi waiting facilities should be provided where appropriate, including provision from within railway stations and key bus interchange facilities.

Policy PTT3: Development of Taxi buses

The County Council will work with its public transport partners and stakeholders to develop suitable proposals for taxi buses to meet specific travel needs in both urban and rural areas. Taxi bus services will be developed where conventional bus service provision is not appropriate, either in operational or economic terms

Policy PTT4: Improvement of Taxi and Private Hire Vehicles Facilities at Public Transport Interchanges

The County Council will work in partnership with public transport interchange facilities operators to seek their commitment in making appropriate improvements for taxis and private hire vehicles at existing and new interchange facilities consistent with the Public Transport Interchange Strategy.

Action Plan

Table PTT1: Action Plan

Policy	Action	Schemes and measures	Timescale
PTT1 Partnership	The County Council will work with the five District/Borough Councils, taxi and private hire vehicle operators, users and other stakeholders	Progress the delivery the policies set out in the Public Transport Strategy, the Taxi & Private Hire Vehicles Strategy and the other public transport mode strategies	Ongoing
PTT2 Quality of service: 'Affordable'	Encourage schemes for taxi sharing from designated places or taxi/private hire vehicle sharing by advanced booking.	Work in partnership with District/Borough Councils and operators to implement appropriate schemes under Sections 10 and 11 of The Transport Act, 1985.	Medium/Long
PTT2 Quality of service: 'Accessible'	Encourage the on-going replacement of older taxis and private hire vehicles in order to meet DDA requirements.	Work in partnership with District/Borough Councils to improve the quality of the taxi and private hire vehicle fleet.	Short/Medium (to be completed by January 2012 at the latest)
	Enhance facilities for taxis and private hire vehicles at public transport interchanges consistent with the Public Transport Interchange Strategy.	Nuneaton Bus Station Improvements	Short/Medium
		Leamington Spa Rail Station	Short
		Kenilworth Rail Station	Short/Medium
		Stratford Parkway Station	Short
	Promote integration between taxis and private hire vehicles with bus, rail and community transport services.	Work in partnership with taxi and private hire vehicle operators, bus operators, train operators and community transport providers to improve integration between services	Ongoing
Seek to safeguard sites with the potential for improved taxi waiting facilities.	Work in partnership with Local Planning Authorities and developers	On-going	

PTT2 Quality of service: 'Available'	Identify locations in the main urban areas of the County and at key public transport interchanges where taxi provision is inadequate, or where existing provision needs to be improved.	To be identified	
PTT2 Quality of service: 'Acceptable'	Improve the safety of taxi and private hire vehicle travel, particularly at key public transport interchanges and close to dedicated taxi ranks.	As issues arise	
PTT2 Quality of service: 'Simple to use'	Provide information that should be readily available, easy to understand and simple to use.	Continue to maintain and improve the public transport information pages on the County Council's website.	On-going
	Raise public awareness about taxi and private hire vehicles and the travel choices that they can provide.	Green Travel Initiatives.	On-going
Policy PTT3 - Development of Taxi Buses	Develop proposals for taxi bus services to meet specific demand in the County where such services would offer a greater flexibility than conventional public transport.	To be identified.	Short/Medium
Policy PTT4 - Improvement of Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Facilities at Public Transport Interchanges	Enhance facilities for taxis and private hire vehicles at public transport interchanges consistent with the aims set out in the Public Transport Interchange Strategy.	Nuneaton Bus Station Improvements	Short/Medium
		Leamington Spa Rail Station	Short/Medium
		Kenilworth Rail Station	Short
		Stratford Parkway Station	Short

Indicators and Monitoring

Monitoring the delivery of the actions outlined in the Taxi & Private Hire Vehicle Strategy will be an important part of the management and control process. Progress against the identified actions and standards will be reviewed on a regular basis (at least annually) to make certain that the Strategy is achieving the desired outcomes. The monitoring, benchmarking and measuring of indicators and targets will allow changes to be identified, incorporated and updated in due course.