Wyre Council
Hackney carriage demand survey

March 2023

Executive Summary

This Hackney carriage demand survey has been undertaken on behalf of Wyre 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 Wyre was undertaken between March 2022 and January 2023. It includes on-street public consultation in July, all-trade driver consultation in July and August and rank observations during July, the same time as in the previous survey (which minimises seasonal differences). Over-arching County policies support the licensed vehicle fleet with a major focus on rank provision and services provided for the County.

The overall industry structure remains very similar to that at the time of the previous survey, with a focus of companies on parts of the area.

Rank provision has not changed, but usage has been affected by many recent site redevelopments and closures. Night life has effectively focussed on Poulton, where there seems to have been growth.

Overall average weekly usage of hackney carriages from ranks appears to have fallen by 18% (lower than the 38% between the previous two surveys). However, the 3,665 passengers per typical week from ranks remains 32% higher than the very low level observed in the 2008 survey.

Ball Street is the busiest location, albeit less so, with about a third of all demand there, mainly at weekend nights. Poulton station rank is second busiest, now with 19% of total demand. The next two busiest ranks each have 12% of demand (The Regal and London Road, Fleetwood).

There is a stark difference between levels of demand in Poulton and that in other areas. This effectively splits the area in two with reference to demand levels.

There is further evidence of reduced service by hackney carriages to the night trade and in this survey, clear requests that marshals are needed particularly in Poulton to help. There is a possibility the potential clash between priority to bookings and to customers at ranks may not be helping this, but there is insufficient evidence to corroborate this at present.

In the northern areas with active ranks, unmet demand arises from the result of overall low levels of demand. In Poulton the unmet demand arises from less vehicles servicing the higher levels of demand, partly due to fear and partly due to being able to work when preferable, and possibly, as noted above, because most operate under one banner.

What is remarkable is the distinct confidence across Wyre that even if you arrive at a rank and there are no hackney carriages, they will arrive in due course, meaning no latent demand was observed.

Trade response was higher than the previous survey.

As was warned about in the previous survey, levels of unmet demand have continued to increase and are now at levels that are clearly significant.

Overall, Wyre remains a very different area in terms of licensed vehicle operation than many others, and recent changes have reinforced this difference. The bulk of licensed vehicle usage in the urban parts of the area is undertaken by hackney carriage vehicles mostly on telephone circuits, mainly with liveries. This in essence makes these three parts of the area a one-tier system, with most people knowing 'taxis' as hackney carriages.

People have increased their phone usage of licensed vehicles but are still very confident to wait at a wide range of ranks knowing a vehicle will arrive perhaps more quickly than if they phone. The fact that phoning will only access generally the same fleet of vehicles must be a sobering realisation to those waiting.

However, there is a clear issue that demand, particularly on both weekend nights at Poulton is suffering from less drivers being willing to service these hours. This issue needs to be resolved. It needs discussion between licensing and the operators and honesty about operating protocols that from the licensing point of view ought to favour ranks whereas companies may tend towards favouring bookings.

However, overall, the level of demand for hackney carriages at ranks is well below that implied by the current number of vehicles on issue. Despite unmet demand statistics saying there is an issue with service levels provided, there is not per se a shortage of vehicles across the full area. Adding more is more likely to reduce supply when needed than increase it given no-one can condition when vehicles must operate.

There is a strong need to take concerted action across the industry to ensure the needs of people travelling are more effectively met, particularly if people see their travelling ability affected by disability of various kinds. But again, the principal benefits in this regard are most likely to be achieved by liaison, co-operation and working together rather than by blanket policies seeking change.

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1 General introduction and background

Licensed Vehicle Surveys and Assessment (LVSA) is a joint venture between CTS Traffic and Transportation Ltd (CTS) and Vector Transport Consultancy. These two companies have hitherto been the two leading practitioners of hackney carriage unmet demand surveys in recent years and who joined forces in early 2017. The combined experience of this joint venture covers in the order of 250 similar studies undertaken since 1999. The contracting company for this survey, CTS, also undertook the previous two surveys for this authority, in 2018 and 2015, and is aware of earlier surveys, therefore having unrivalled knowledge of the operation of licensed vehicles in the area.

Wyre 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.

Public experience

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.

Legislative Background

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 five most recent reviews were by the Office of Fair Trading in 2003, through the production of the Best Practice Guidance in 2010 (BPG), the Law Commission review which published its results in 2014, the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Taxis deliberations in 2018 (resulting in the publication of a part revision of the BPG) and the 2022 consultation on a more comprehensive review of the 2010 BPG (BPG 22). None of these resulted in any material change to the legislation involved in licensing.

The Deregulation Act 2015 had two clauses relevant to taxi licensing – relating to length of period covered by licences (Section 10) and allowance of operators to transfer work across borders (Section 11) (both enacted October 2015).

In November 2016, the Department of Transport (DfT) undertook its consultation regarding enacting Sections 165 and 167 of the Equality Act 2010. These allowed for all vehicles capable of carrying a wheel chair being placed on a list by the Council (Section 167) leading to any driver that uses a vehicle on this list having 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 so chooses to travel in a seat to make provision for proper and safe carriage of the wheel chair
- To take such steps as are necessary to ensure the passenger is carried in safety and reasonable comfort
- To give the passenger such mobility assistance as is reasonably required

Since enactment in April 2017 issues with discrimination have not reduced as much as expected and further change occurred with one of two 2022 Acts put in place (see below).

Regard has also been had to the Statutory Taxi and Private Standards July 2020 which were published on 21 July 2020 and represented a milestone in transportation regulation, because for the first time the safeguarding of children and vulnerable people were put right at the heart of the taxi licensing system. This publication also noted that a more complete review of all sections of the 2010 Best Practice Guidance would occur in due course and consultation on a draft of this new document ran from March to June 2022.

At the time of writing of this report, no date had still been given for formal publication of the new DfT Best Practice Guidance following the close of the consultation period.

The two 2022 Acts make small but significant changes. The 2022 Acts are the "Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles (Safeguarding and Road Safety Act) (31 March 2022)" and the "Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles (Disabled Persons) (28 June 2022)".

The first makes it mandatory for any licensing authority in England that has information about a taxi (hackney carriage) or private hire vehicle (phv) driver licensed by another authority that is relevant to safeguarding or road safety concerns in its area to share that information with the authority that issued that drivers licence.

The second amends the Equality Act 2010 to place duties on taxi and phv drivers and operators such that any disabled person has specific rights and protections to be transported and receive assistance when using a taxi or phv without being charged extra for doing so.

The present situation

The upshot of all the changes in legislation with respect to the principal subject of this survey, local authorities retain the right to restrict the number of hackney carriage vehicle licenses.

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 horizon used for demand surveys also be used for rank reviews and accessibility reviews. In the end, no legislative change resulted and more recent discussions and the consultation on the revised Best Practice Guidance are assumed to be the Government response.

During the pandemic, the DfT formally advised authorities to delay unmet demand reviews beyond this three-year interval as they advised any review in the midst of the pandemic was not sufficiently typical to be of value. Most authorities accepted this review.

Alternatives

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. Such restrictions can also be in place within areas that also retain a limit on vehicle numbers.

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 (no longer produced), 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. A secondary issue arises in that many larger powered chairs, becoming more common, either need a van style version with tail lift or are unable to be carried by hackney carriage or private hire at all due to vehicle loading restrictions.

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.

More recent considerations have added how greater and more speedy introduction of more sustainable vehicle propulsion might be encouraged in the licensed vehicle fleets.

Evaluation 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 on 5 April 2012 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".

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 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.

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.

This 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'. Further discussion of this is provided in Chapter 8 below including details of the numbers of authorities that retain such quantity restriction.

Conclusion to chapter

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. Wyre has long had 'dual' driver licences allowing any driver to choose the style of vehicle they need to drive at the time.

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 current issue of the Ukraine occupation.

During Autumn 2022 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 resulting in many private hire vehicles being unusable, whilst rail patronage remains reduced with patterns of travel strongly revised towards off-peak travel.

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 for some authorities. A further knock-on has been change to how those involved in the trade interact with their licensing authorities, with most face-to-face contact effectively removed.

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. However, our experience suggests that even spare plates and reduced demand can still result in unmet demand increasing as a result of change in the range of elements that need to balance to provide better public service.

2 Local background and context

Key dates for this Hackney carriage demand survey for Wyre Council are:

- appointed Licensed Vehicle Surveys and Assessment (LVSA) on 15 February 2022
- in accordance with our proposal of December 2021
- as confirmed during the inception meeting for the survey held on 14 March 2022
- this survey was carried out between March 2022 and January 2023
- On street pedestrian survey work occurred in July 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 through July and August 2022
- An additional WAV-user survey was facilitated and promoted by the Council during July and August 2022
- Key stakeholders were consulted throughout the period of the survey
- A draft of this Final Report was reviewed by the client during February 2022
- and reported to the appropriate Council committee.

Wyre 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 111,900 using the 2021 initial estimates from the 2021 census (albeit for 2021). This is slightly higher than in 2018 but a little less than the estimate of 2021 previously available from updated 2011 information.

In terms of background council policy, Wyre Council is a district council with many powers held at the higher, County level. This includes transport policy as well as highways. Until 2000, ranks were under the control of the local authority, but in 2000 the County took these powers over such that any rank is now provided by and maintained by the County. 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.

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.

With respect to the background Transport Strategy, the Wyre Local Plan runs from 2011 to 2031. This was last updated formally in February 2019. In section 6.7 it points out that society and business relies on an effective and efficient transport system, the capacity of which in Wyre is limited. It is noted that the rural nature of the area implies high reliance on the car. However, maximising opportunities for safe pedestrian and cycle movements and access to public transport is important.

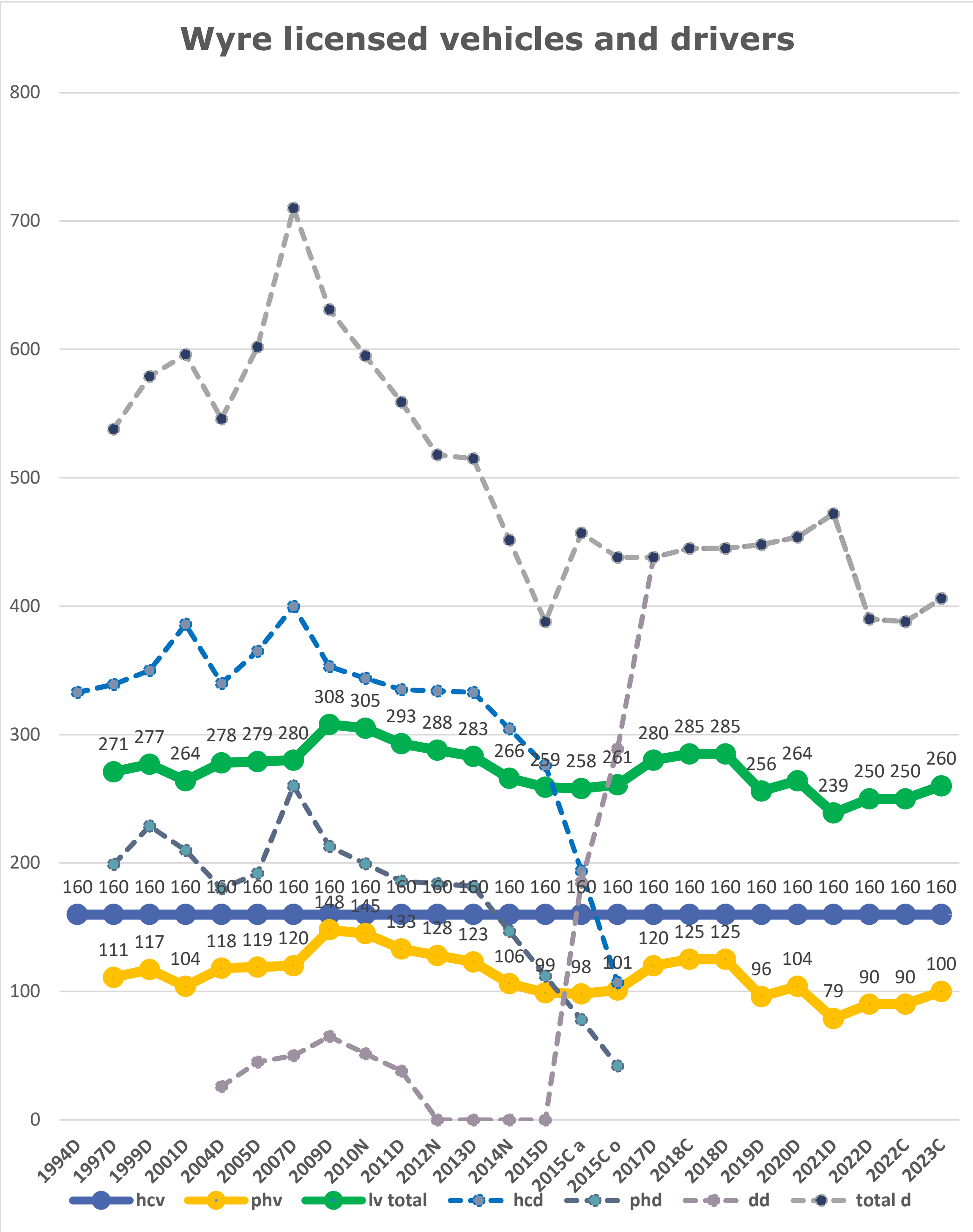
The principals of the Lancashire Local Transport Plan are embodied by the Fylde Coast highway and transport masterplan, agreed after public consultation in 2015. This sees focus on improving access to Fleetwood principally by new highway links from the revised M55 junctions at Wesham Circle and Marton Circle, the latter of which shall link to Fleetwood via the new Windy Harbour to Skipool Bypass. Additionally, the rail network connecting the West Coast Mainline to Blackpool North Station (passing through Poulton on route) has now been electrified and is capable of accommodating pendolino services directly to and from London Euston. This coupled with the extension of the Blackpool Tramway from the promenade at North Pier to Blackpool North station will improve access to the UK national rail network from Blackpool, Fleetwood and Cleveleys.

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.

Local Licensing Statistics

All licensing authorities have full powers over licensing the vehicles, drivers and operators serving people within their area within the strictures above. Wyre Council has chosen to utilise its power to limit hackney carriage vehicle numbers, and as far as we are aware has done so since 1974 according to references in the DfT statistics databases.

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.



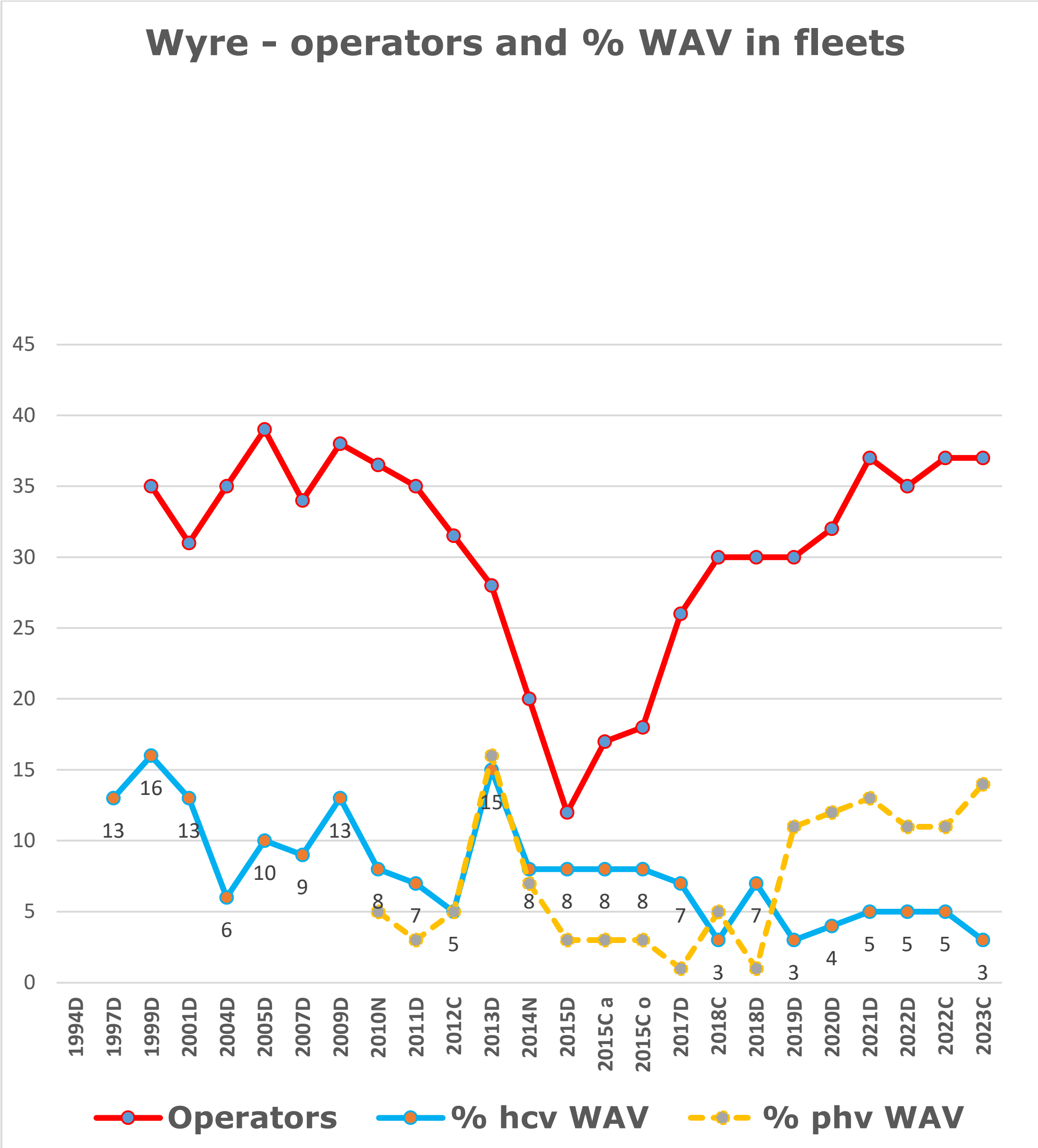
Licensing Statistics from 1994 to date

The number of hackney carriages still remains as it was at the start of DfT statistic gathering. There were up to three plates which were not renewed at one point in the recent year (and around the time of the survey). It is likely without the limit those plates might have been lost.

The level of private hire peaked in 2009 after which there was a slump to 2015 and some resurgence to just ahead of the pandemic. The pandemic had a strong impact on private hire numbers, which only began to resurge about the time of the April 2022 DfT survey. They are growing again now, although they remain lower than the level at which the data began (1997, 111 vehicles). They remain the smaller part of the licensed vehicle fleet, 38% of the total.

Overall driver numbers also remain much lower than the 2007 peak, with a very slight recent increase observed after the large drop of the pandemic. Just before the pandemic, numbers had been starting to grow more. The change to dual driver licences was fully complete by 2017.

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 wide variation in levels of wheel chair accessible licensed vehicles, with the peak, in both parts of the trade, apparently reached in 2013. However, after that, there has been a general decline in the level of such vehicles, and with an apparent switch between the hackney carriage and private hire fleet in the recent statistics. This switch between hackney carriage and private hire has become more acute since the survey work was completed, with direct switches of vehicles from hackney carriage to private hire. Whilst this may make sense in terms of most disabled passengers tending to make bookings, it further reduces the potential to get a wheel chair accessible vehicle at a rank, and more so given the large number of ranks in the area.

Further discussion of this is provided below in the synthesis section of the Report where other matters are brought into consideration from the stakeholder consultation.

Contrary to other information, the level of operators in the area has seen significant increase from the time of the last survey to date, although even this level remains slightly lower than the peak of just under 40 reached in 2005.

Wyre Council undertakes regular review of its policy to limit hackney carriage vehicle numbers in line with the BPG. The previous surveys were in 2018, 2015 and 2008. No unmet demand was identified as being significant in either survey although in 2018 there was suggestion interim reviews might be needed to consider the position regarding night demand in Poulton. The date for the 2021 survey was delayed by the COVID pandemic.

Fleet ownership structure

The overall fleet structure in the area remains stable. The number of one-man band operators remains large, with many having no public facing element whilst others focus on service in the more rural Over-Wyre part of the area. Some of these companies exist mainly to service Lancashire County council contracts which are generally given only to companies and not to individuals.

Fleetwood retains its two main companies each with about the same number of vehicles, 45 or so, and mainly hackney carriages with a few private hire. Both have different operating models. It is understood that one fleet may have expanded a little at the expense of the other.

Cleveleys now has three main companies all of which are mixed hackney carriage / private hire fleets. They are a similar size to the Fleetwood companies and both have a few private hire related to them, with all three having fleet liveries. One new company has set up since the last survey and gained drivers from the other two companies.

Poulton retains one main company, which is also a mixed fleet, and is overall a little smaller than the other four companies noted above.

The hackney carriage fleet is mainly related to the above companies, with there being about six independent hackney carriages in Cleveleys, four in Poulton and none in Fleetwood. We understand this number has remained very similar since the previous survey.

This is compounded by most private hire companies having a livery which is applied to the hackney carriages in their fleets meaning most ranks also provide those using vehicles from them with the name of the company for whom the vehicle is working. Most major public facing companies also have names including either Taxi or Cab in their advertising both generally and on vehicle.

Livery colours vary by company but on this basis are also specific to the different areas of the authority. In parts of the authority where there is just one company the fleet will appear more homogenous (Poulton) than in those areas with two or three companies (Fleetwood, Cleveleys). The rural area of Over Wyre tends to have smaller companies, almost exclusively private hire, but again tending to have 'cabs' in their titles. Further discussion of the implications of this follow.

3 Patent demand measurement (rank surveys)

As already recorded in Chapter 2, control of provision of on-street ranks in Wyre 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, although the trend of locations that formerly provided demand now being replaced by new facilities which have no significant taxi demand generation ability continues. This includes several former public house sites that have become housing development locations. The general decline in night life in the area has continued with heightened focus of such demand in Poulton.

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 three previous surveys to identify trends and validate the present observations. The table also includes reference to all locations visited during previous sites visit with comments from information provided by the licensing team and in some cases from driver comment, where possible.

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.

Rank	Passengers per week 2022 survey	Passengers per week 2018 survey	Passengers per week 2015 survey	Passengers per week, 2008 survey
Ball Street, Poulton	1,300 (35%)	1,467(33%)	3,001(42%)	317(12%)
Breck Rd, Poulton (Station)	706 (19%)	558 (12%)	675(9%)	519(19%)
London Street, Fleetwood	447 (12%)	517 (12%)	954(13%)	199(7%)
Victoria Rd West, The Regal, Cleveleys	446 (12%)	549 (12%)	640(9%)	985(36%)
Victoria Rd West, KFC Cleveleys	327 (9%)	356 (8%)	772(11%)	58(2%)
Nutter Rd, Cleveleys	314 (9%)	476 (11%)	499(7%)	171(6%)
Church Road, Thornton	34 (1%)	78 (2%)	88(1%)	N/A
Cleveleys Avenue, Cleveleys	26 (1%)	163 (4%)	222(3%)	50(2%)
Grange Rd, Fleetwood	17 (0.5%)	93 (3%)	48(1%)	N/A
Broomfield Rd / Lindel Rd	26 (1%)	62 (1%)	72(1%)	N/A

Darbishire Rd, Fleetwood	11 (0.3%)	8 (0.0%)	62(1%)	60(2%)
Lord St, Post Office, Fleetwood	10 (0.3%)	12 (0.3%)	30(0.5%)	N/A
Kemp St at Lord St, Fleetwood	1 (0.03%)	72 (2%)	60(1%)	10(0%)
Adelaide St, Fleetwood	1 (0.03%)	21 (0.5%)	48(1%)	N/A
Princess St, B+M, Cleveleys	No demand	63 (1.4%)	23(0.5%)	133(5%)
Leslie Avenue, Thornton-Cleveleys	No demand	0 (0%)	0(0%)	N/A
North Albert St, Fleetwood	Unused	Unused	18(0%)	N/A
Victoria Rd West, Tramway, Cleveleys	Little used	Little used	2(0%)	N/A
Dock Street, Fleetwood	Club gone	Club gone	0 (0%)	N/A
Larkholme Parade, Fleetwood	Unused	Unused	0 (0%)	N/A
Pharos Place	Unused	Unused	0 (0%)	N/A
Oxenholme Ave, Thornton-Cleveleys	Unused	Unused	0 (0%)	N/A
Rossendale Avenue, Thornton-Cleveleys	Unused	Unused	0 (0%)	N/A
Rossall Rd, Thornton-Cleveleys	Given up	Given up	N/A	233 (8%)
Victoria Rd, Lyntons, Thornton-Cleveleys	Unused	Unused	N/A	35 (1%)
Birch St, Fleetwood	Unused	Unused	N/A	8 (0%)
Kemp St, Harlequins, Fleetwood	Unused	Unused	N/A	4 (0%)
Pier, Fleetwood	Unused	Unused	N/A	0
Windsor Rd, Garstang	Gone	Gone	N/A	0
Knott End Café	Unused	Unused	N/A	0
Clock Tower, Knott End	Unused	Unused	N/A	0
Poacher’s Way, Thornton-Cleveleys	No demand	No demand	N/A	N/A
Mount Road, Fleetwood	Unused	Unused	N/A	N/A
Victoria St, Library, Fleetwood	Little used	Little used	N/A	N/A
North Drive, Thornton-Cleveleys	Little demand	Little demand	N/A	N/A
Sandpiper, Thornton-Cleveleys	Pub closed	Pub closed	N/A	N/A
Beach Road, Travellers	Little demand	Little demand	N/A	N/A
Victoria Road West, near Slaters Road	Little used	Little used	N/A	N/A
Manor Road	Pub gone	Pub gone	N/A	N/A
Chatsworth Avenue	Pub gone	Pub gone	N/A	N/A
Poulton Elk (new since 2015)	Unused	Unused	N/A	N/A
Pinewood Avenue (still marked)	Deleted	Deleted	N/A	N/A
Slinger Road, Thornton-Cleveleys	Rarely used	Rarely used	N/A	N/A
Total	***3,665***	***4,495***	***7,214***	***2,782***
Growth from previous	***-18%***	***-38%***	***+259%***	***n/a***
Growth from 2008	***+32%***	***+62%***		

The table above shows there appears to have been an 18% drop in average usage at ranks across the area between the last survey and now. This is despite the surveys being undertaken at a similar time to the previous. There are currently just under 3,700 passengers using hackney carriages from ranks in a typical week in 2022. However, this is still just over 32% more than the level observed in 2008 which was just under 2,800.

The reduction in number of active ranks continues with another two locations totally unused in this survey and two more where numbers of passengers are effectively zero. In this survey 96% of estimated passengers are accounted for by the top six ranks. Three ranks provide 1% and another five total the final 1% of demand. In 2018, the top six accounted for 88%.

Ball Street in Poulton remains the busiest rank overall, having increased its share slightly to 35% (was 33% in 2018). This remained around half the level of that observed in 2015. The other rank in Poulton, at the station, remains the second busiest in the area, also taking an increased share (19% compared to 12%) of average weekly passenger demand. This means that Poultons two ranks see 54% of weekly demand across the authority.

London Street Fleetwood and Victoria Road West, the Regal in Cleveleys are the only other two ranks seeing more than 9% of demand, both taking 12% each with Fleetwood seeing just one more estimated passenger than the Cleveleys Rank. Whilst both have retained the same share as the previous survey, passenger numbers have reduced, more so for the Cleveleys rank. No Sunday survey work was practicable in Fleetwood due to it being Tram Sunday although weekly estimates include values for a typical Sunday.

The fifth busiest location is estimated as the Cleveleys Victoria Road West KFC rank. This location has seen slightly less reduction than others and has hence increased its share of the total passengers from 8% last time to 9% now.

Having increased share despite losing patronage in the last survey, for this survey Nutter Road Cleveleys has seen more decline and has therefore dropped in share from 11% to 9% and in rank. This is the last of the ranks seeing more than 1% of total passenger numbers.

As noted above, the focus on ranks has tightened further – in the last survey the top seven ranks were those with highest flows, now the top six all have flows of 314 passengers per week or more, with the remaining active ranks seeing no more than 34 passengers estimated per week.

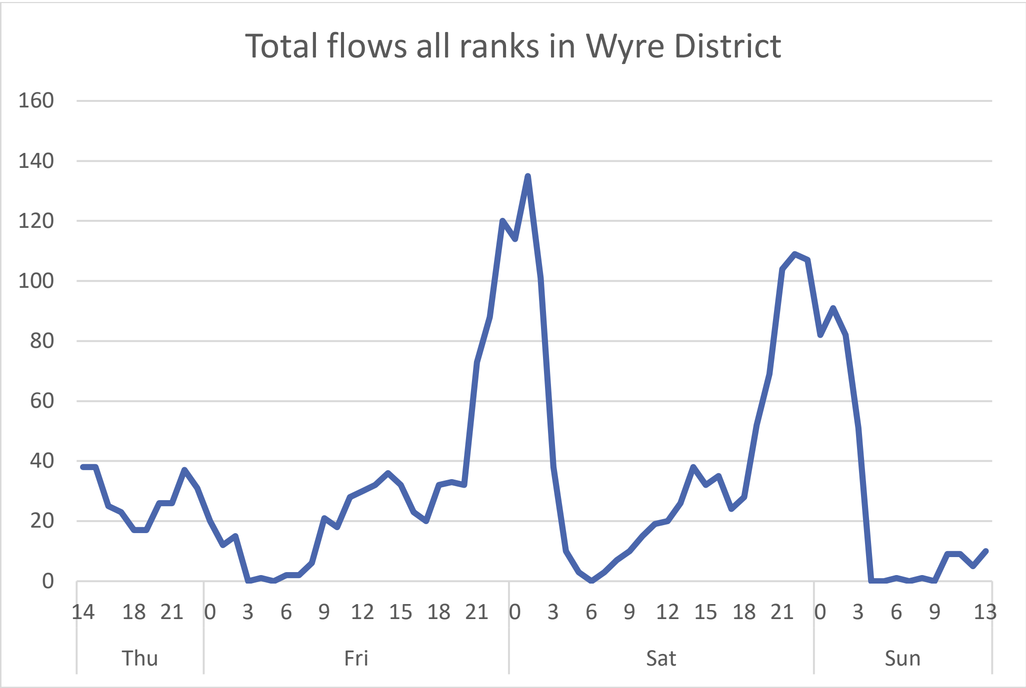
As in the previous survey, eight other ranks were observed and found to have some passenger flows during the survey period. Of these, only one saw a negligible increase in estimated passengers. All the remainder lost further levels of passenger usage to the level that most are almost not really active as ranks where passengers go to obtain vehicles more than occasionally.

Two more ranks have become unused – Princess Street in Cleveleys and Leslie Avenue (which actually had no passenger flow in the previous survey but still saw some vehicle activity).

The remainder of the table provides comment where relevant from our previous survey site visit, principally of locations no longer used mainly because the demand generators, pubs or clubs, has either closed, or in several cases been demolished and replaced by other land uses with significantly less potential for licensed vehicle usage, particularly for hackney carriages. Some signing and markings remain even though the formal orders are believed to have been removed.

Surveyed rank usage

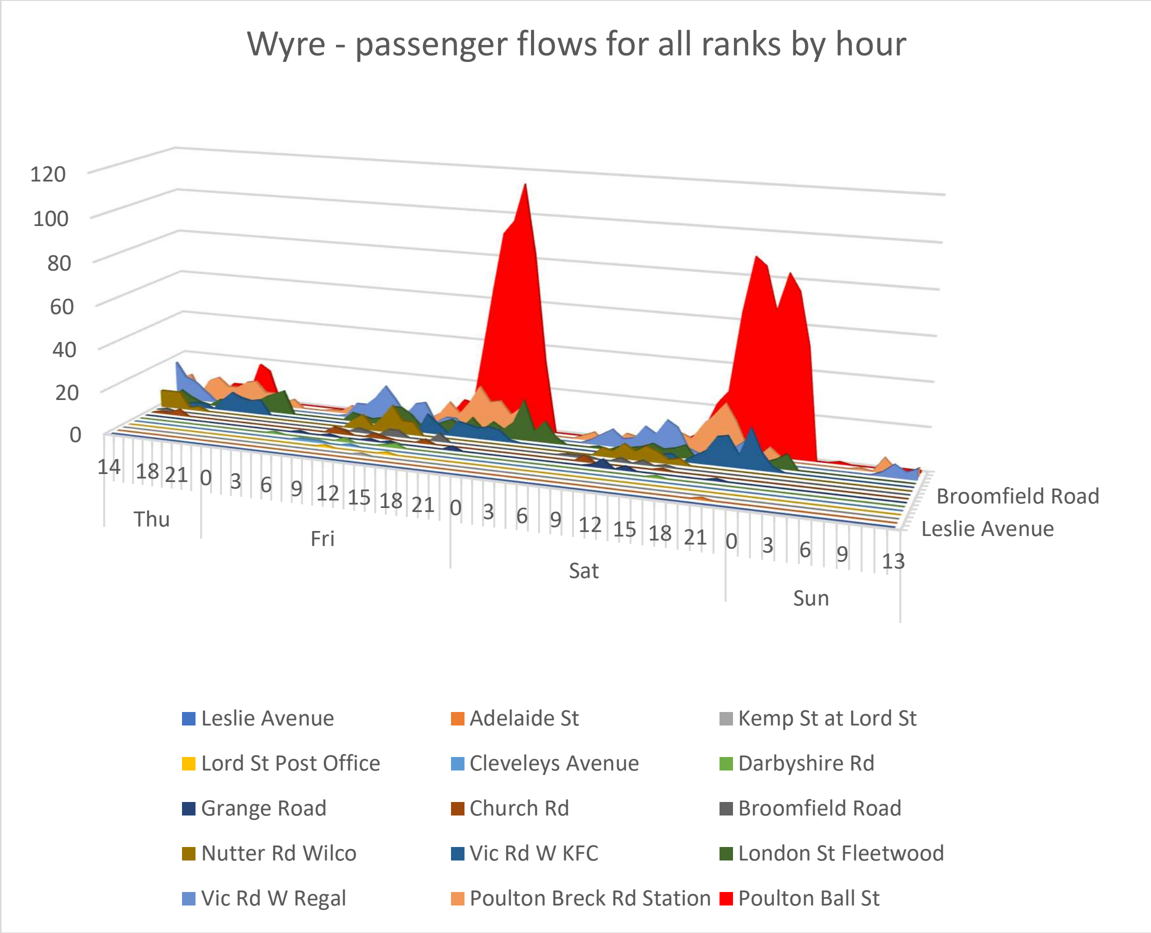
The actual surveyed rank usage is presented below in graphical format.



The graph showing all passengers on all surveyed days shows generally very low passenger flows at all times apart from on Friday and Saturday evenings.

This profile of demand is very hard for a fixed vehicle fleet to meet as it needs a lot of activity over relatively short periods and provides little remuneration at other times.

The graph showing all locations is shown below:



The graph confirms that there are a large number of active ranks, but a wide range of usage between them. The graph is ordered with the busiest rank to the rear, with lesser used ranks further forward. It confirms the already noted point that the top six ranks provide the bulk of the passengers. However, it also shows that the busiest rank is very dominant in evenings but sees relatively little flow during the daytimes. A review of the share of this rank found that for the observed hours this rank produces 51% of all passengers. When compared by hour, from 22:00 Saturday to 03:00 Sunday this location produces between 79% and 100% of all passengers and between 74% and 87% of all passengers from 22:00 Friday until 03:00 Saturday.

The most notable conclusion from the graphs is that the area sees much more demand on Fridays and Saturdays than on other days, but more notably there are two very clear peaks, both principally led by Ball Street, Poulton demand. The highest number of passengers in any hour was 135 at 01:00 in the early hours of Saturday. There were two hours before and one after when flows were 101 passengers or more. The Saturday night peak was 109 in the 22:00 hour, with an hour before and after with flows over 100 passengers.

On both nights there are supplementary peaks earlier in the evening at the Breck Road (Poulton le Fylde) station rank, suggesting some late night revellers arrive there by train.

Further tests confirmed that the two peaks are quite marked compared to all other demand, with the conclusion that the area now sees 'peaky' demand in terms of evaluation of the significance of unmet demand (see later chapter).

The overall low levels of demand, however, imply that most hackney carriages will need to supplement their income by being available to meet telephone demand, with many of the smaller ranks, as in previous years, only providing an option for walk-up custom because vehicles are waiting there for such calls. This remains an important best practice element of the operation of the trade in Wyre, although the trend towards extinction of these smaller ranks continues from previous years.

This is confirmed by a review of the overall level of empty departures from ranks. Across all surveyed hours, 53% of all vehicle departures from ranks are empty. London Road Fleetwood saw 73%, 70% and 80% on Thursday / Friday / Saturday respectively. The Wilco rank saw 72%, 70% and 67%. Breck Road Poulton station rank and Victoria Road West Regal ranks provided more rank-based custom – 38/42/50 and 37/34/31 % respectively by day.

Considering overall demand, the average hourly observed number of passengers across our surveyed hours was 33 (38 in previous survey) – across all hours over the entire Wyre area. For this survey the observed peak hour was the 01:00 hour early Saturday morning, with 135 passengers. This is reduced from the 152 of the last survey; and the Saturday / Sunday peak is now much lower (just 109 in the 22:00 hour Saturday night).

However, the pattern and level of hours with no passengers were actually slightly reduced this time. There were two (was five) hours in the early hours of Friday morning, one in the early hours of Saturday morning (same) and four (three previously) in the early hours of Sunday morning with no observed passenger departures from ranks across the area. Given the overall low level of demand, this is a good spread of demand over time, albeit at a very overall low level.

Vehicle activity at ranks

During the observation of the rank recordings, the types of vehicles seen at or near ranks were also recorded. Some 7,924 (10,190 last time) different vehicle arrivals or departures were observed. Of these, 75% (74% last time) were hackney carriages. 20% (21% last time) were private cars – a much higher level than in 2015 (8%).

With regard to where there were most issues with parked private vehicles, this time Kemp St at Lord St fared worst (46% of all records), then Victoria Road West Regal (39%). London Street fared better now than in the last survey (25% now, was 60%). The issue that had gone away at the Regal rank in the last survey has however returned.

Goods vehicles made up a further 2.9% (was 4%) with just 2.2% (2%) being private hire vehicles.

In general terms, this confirms reasonable availability of ranks to hackney carriages although there is clearly some issue with cars using ranks at times. The busy Ball Street location did see 6% of movements as private cars which given its busy nature could be an issue.

Active Plates

A further review was undertaken observing the plate numbers of hackney carriages active at key locations around the area, near to principal ranks. This test was undertaken on the Saturday / Sunday when the rank observations were being carried out.

Of the 223 observations, 80% were local hackney carriages, 7% local private hire, 4% were missed, 4% were unknown, 4% were possibly Wolverhampton and 3% were possibly Blackpool plates. Some of the non-local plates will be valid journeys (the Blackpool ones) but it is very unlikely the Wolverhampton would be legitimate journeys from that destination.

During the course of the observations, on a Saturday, half (two thirds last time, but also half in 2015) of the available Wyre hackney carriage fleet were observed. This suggests a less active fleet now.

33% (nearly half last survey) of the fleet were observed in Poulton, with 11% (15%) of the fleet seen in Fleetwood and 14% (21%) in Cleveleys. All these figures confirm lower levels of activity now compared to the last survey.
As is usual now, the highest proportion of the fleet tends to be active earlier in Poulton, reducing as time progresses. This demonstrates people choosing to work at preferable times, a national trend seen following the pandemic. 18:30 to 19:30 sees 18%, 23:00 to 00:00 17% and 02:30 to 04:00 12%. Values considering total activity by all plates show 24%, 21% and 21% respectively suggesting active vehicles are undertaking more trips and more so in the later period to attempt to make up for less vehicles working overall.

However, both Fleetwood and Cleveleys proportions of total plates are higher later, against the national trend. Early evening in Fleetwood sees 3% of the total fleet 16:30 to 17:30 rising to 10% for 01:00 to 02:00; for Cleveleys 6% at 15:00 to 16:00 rises to 9% for 21:00 to 22:30. The totals for all movements relating to the above are 4%, 11%, 9% and 11%, not as large an uplift perhaps because there are more actual plates active.

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 Wyre at this time.

Some 784 (555 in the previous survey) hours of rank activity were observed in the present survey. Of these hours, 10% (7% last time) had average passenger delays of a minute or more. These hours included 39% (was 17%) of the passengers observed, although not all of these actually experienced any delay. A further 4% (5% last time) of hours saw average passenger delay ranging up to 59 seconds. The estimation of significance of unmet demand uses a slightly different evaluation (see later).

There were 103 (18 last time) passengers who had to wait 11 minutes or more. 157 (50) waited between six and 10 minutes. 454 (245) had waits of five minutes or less, with many of these being just a minute. This means that, of the 2,394 (2,743 last time) people observed leaving ranks, 30% (11% last time) experienced unmet demand directly. This suggests a large increase in the incidence of unmet demand at this point in time.

A review of the longest waits (average passenger delay over a minute in an hour) identified that just over three quarters (half last time) of these occurred in times when those having to wait were in fact one of less than ten 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.

The worst overall passenger queues generated were at Ball Street between both 22:00 on the Friday night and 06:00 on the Saturday morning and 22:00 on the Saturday night and 03:59 in the early hours of Sunday.

Further discussion of the implications of this occurs in the synthesis chapter below.

Disability and rank usage

With respect to hackney carriages, 6% (10% in the last survey) of the vehicles observed appeared to be wheel chair accessible style. This is similar to the 5% in the fleet at the time of the survey, although since that time several more hackney carriage WAV have transferred to private hire, reducing that value to 3% of the hackney carriage fleet. The level of WAV observed was much higher at the two Lord Street ranks although the overall hackney carriage movements there were small.

A further check was undertaken of those actually observed accessing vehicles in wheel chairs at ranks. There were five observations – exactly the same as in the previous survey, one each at Poulton Station, Poulton Ball Street (as in the last survey) but adding one each at Church Road, London Street and Nutter Road, Wilco this time (Fleetwood Lord St Post Office, and two at the Cleveley's Regal rank in the last survey). This is a fairly high level of usage given the low level of WAV available in the hackney carriage fleet. It is also increased from the two seen in 2015. Given the changes with the pandemic, having the same number now as before is remarkable.

There were a further 70 (48 last survey) passengers who appeared to have some kind of mobility impairment who were assisted into vehicles by drivers – again a good level of assistance. This continues the growth from that seen in the last survey which was increased from the 2015 level of 42. The largest share for this survey were at Victoria Road West, Regal rank with 39 instances noted there – 56% of the total.

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.

The 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. 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 246 (250 last time) people were interviewed across the Wyre licensing area. There were 50 interviews in each of Thornton, Fleetwood, Cleveleys and Poulton. The Garstang sample only reached 46. Interviews were in July 2022 around the same time as the rank observations.

The sample interviewed the same proportion of males and females as were identified in the latest 2021 census results. The previous survey had interviewed more males than the census proportion (53% compared to 48% in the census).

With regards to age, a more detailed specification was used for this survey. The closest match was for the 60-79 group (29% interviewed, 27% in census) with the two other over-represented groups being the 20-39 (30% interviewed compared to 20%) and 40-59 (30% interviewed compared to 26%). As might be expected, the younger group (up to 19) was underrepresented by the interviews (7% compared to 20%, many of these would not be available for interview) and 3% of the 80+ compared to 8% in the census.

Over the full area, 17% said they were not from the area itself (10% last time). This proportion was highest in Garstang, with 46% of those responding saying they were not from the area. After this, the next highest non-local response was in Poulton, with 10%. For Fleetwood and Thornton just one of those interviewed said they were not from the area. For the different areas between 50 and 78% of those interviewed in each area said they were from that area itself.

Across the area, 49% said they had made a trip in the last three months by private hire only, 10% by hackney carriage only and 13% by hackney carriage and private hire. This suggests 72% have made a licensed vehicle trip in the last three months in the area (up from 46% in the last survey). Poulton had the highest level of hackney carriage only 20%, with Thornton second 14% and (surprisingly) Garstang third with 13%. Cleveleys saw no hackney carriage only and Fleetwood saw just 2% hackney carriage only (which both seem very low).

Fleetwood had the highest private hire only level of recent trips -72% followed by Thornton 58%, Poulton 56%, Cleveleys 48% and Garstang 9%. For use of both kinds of vehicle, values were highest in Poulton (22%) then Thornton (16%), Cleveleys (10%), Garstang 9% and finally Fleetwood 8%. Garstang had the highest non-use at 70%, with Cleveleys 42%, Fleetwood 18%, Thornton 12% and finally Poulton with just 2%.

When asked about frequency of usage of licensed vehicles, the average level of usage was 2.6 (1.1 2018 and 2.2 2015) trips per person per month. Interestingly, the level was highest in Fleetwood (4.8) and lowest in Garstang (0.6) whereas Fleetwood had been lowest in 2018 and highest in 2015.

People saying ‘never use a licensed vehicle’ when asked about frequencies used was 20% across the area, but dominated by the 40% saying this in Cleveleys matching the high level of non-users quoted in the previous question. The most frequent response across the area was less than once a week but more than twice a month (22%). For both Thornton and Poulton this value rose to 30% with Cleveleys 18% and Garstang just 9%. The highest ‘3 or more times a week’ was Fleetwood with 16%.

When asked about specific usage of hackney carriage vehicles, as always, levels were lower. Across the area, there are 0.6 trips per person per month by hackney carriage – 22% of the total licensed vehicle value. For this value, the highest is Fleetwood (0.9) and the lowest joint between Thornton and Garstang (both 0.3). Poulton is 0.6 and Cleveleys 0.7. This implies that 16% of Thornton, 19% of both Fleetwood and Poulton, 31% of Cleveleys and 51% of Garstang licensed vehicle trips are made by hackney carriage (again the latter seems high).

Across the area 26% said they could not remember seeing a hackney carriage in Wyre. This was 22% in Poulton, 30% in Thornton and Fleetwood and 31% in Cleveleys. This response was not used at all in Garstang, nor was the response people could not remember when they last used one. In terms of not remembering last usage, this was lowest in Poulton at 38%, higher in Fleetwood and Cleveleys (41%) and highest in Thornton at 48%.

People told us how they normally got a licensed vehicle in the area. 73% (89% previous survey) said they telephoned, with 20% (11%) saying they got them at ranks, 5% freephone, 2% hail and 1% app (none of these last three were quoted in 2018). The highest rank usage was in Poulton at 30% (though none said they used them in 2018), Fleetwood 25% and Cleveleys 17%. Garstang respondents said 10% used ranks but 85% phone and 5% used freephones there (but only a smaller number answered there). App usage was actually only quoted in Thornton (6%), with telephones there 81%. Telephones were also high in Cleveleys at 83%. Poulton was lowest at 59%.

74% of all interviewees provided at least one company they would phone for a vehicle. Of these, just 2% gave three names (two in Poulton and one in Thornton), 26% gave two names and 72% a single name. This suggests a relatively high satisfaction with companies used but also a reasonable range of choice for customers.

20 different companies were named (slightly less than the 22 from last time). However, eight were only mentioned once, and another just twice. All others were mentioned three times or more. Eight of these were local private hire companies, one was a hackney carriage group (not requiring its own operating licence) and the other two were Blackpool-based companies. There were 27 other local private hire operators who received no mention, most of whom were smaller or niche operators.

In terms of share no company was dominant across the area. However, Fleetwood was dominated by one group (81%, which appeared to be a hackney carriage group) with a second local company taking a further 13%. Another local company took 4% with one unknown taking the remainder. Fleetwood saw the strongest domination.

Seeing the next largest dominant company was Poulton, with the top company there taking 52% of share of mentions given. Second and third, with 23% and 13% were the two Blackpool companies which is sensible given the proximity of that area to the boundary. Four other local companies obtained between one and three mentions each.

Cleveleys was similarly dominated by one company with 36%, another local company with 21%, the two Blackpool companies with 18% and 8% and four other local companies with between 1 and 3 mentions each.

Garstang saw two local companies with 39% and 17% each plus the bulk of the unknown small single mentions for this survey.

Thornton had much more of a mix, with the top three companies only taking 27%, 21% and 17% each. The two Blackpool companies took 14% and 3% with another local company taking 11% and another just three mentions.

This confirms that the area remains one that operates in licensed vehicle terms as at least five or more separate areas with relatively little interplay between them. This makes overall service to the public more difficult with each area needing sufficient vehicles internally to meet all demands.

When looking at the overall area response, the top company had 17% of mentions, two shared 15% of responses each (as in 2018) with a fourth taking 11% of the share. All but the top company were mixed fleet companies whose vehicles were often seen waiting at ranks and these were as in 2018.

The two Blackpool-based companies took the next two slots with 10% and 9% of mentions (one company had increased from a few mentions to 10% and the other from 5% last time). Two other local companies not mentioned in 2018 came next (6% and 5%) with three more local companies next with 3% (was 2% 2018), 3% (4%) and 1% (6%) of share. Two of these were companies in Garstang. Interestingly the names quoted for both of these ended 'Cabs' even though one company is actually named 'Cars'.

The large number of smaller company quotes in 2018 were not repeated this time, with the focus as above, suggesting either agglomeration or a focus by people on the larger companies now. This is a general national result of the pandemic.

65% of those interviewed provided at least one rank and if they used it or not. Of these respondents, just 2% named three, 27% two and 70% a single rank. This resulted in a total of 213 mentions of a range of ranks. The previous survey only obtained 66 total mentions, suggesting much better response for this survey.

27 ranks were named (20 last time), but five, with nine total mentions, were in Blackpool (12 last time) (but this time none of these were noted as used). However, the lower response last time saw 71% saying they used the ranks they named. This time, just 23% said they used the named ranks.

In a similar response to that for companies, responses tended to be focussed on the area people were interviewed in. The largest response came for Victoria Road West Thornton Cleveleys but did not specify which rank there. It was the top mention for both Cleveleys (71%) and Thornton (46%) and therefore overall, but only 15% of people said they used the rank they named.

Next most-mentioned was Poulton station rank which obtained 40% of the Poulton and 20% of the Thornton mentions. 24% said they used this rank.

London Street Fleetwood came third for the whole area. 40% of those in Fleetwood mentioned this rank (with a few mentions in Cleveleys but none elsewhere). 14% said they used it.

Ball Street Poulton obtained 9% of mentions when taking into account some called it the St Chads Church rank. Most mentions were from Poulton but there were again some from Thornton. 40% said they used this rank, the highest level of quoted usage of an active rank.

The next two most quoted locations were in fact booking offices. 7% quoted a cab office in Poulton and 53% said they used this. 6% quoted a cab office in Fleetwood and 8% said they used it.

5% overall (12% in Thornton, 9% in Cleveleys and 5% in Poulton named Nutter Road rank but none said they used it.

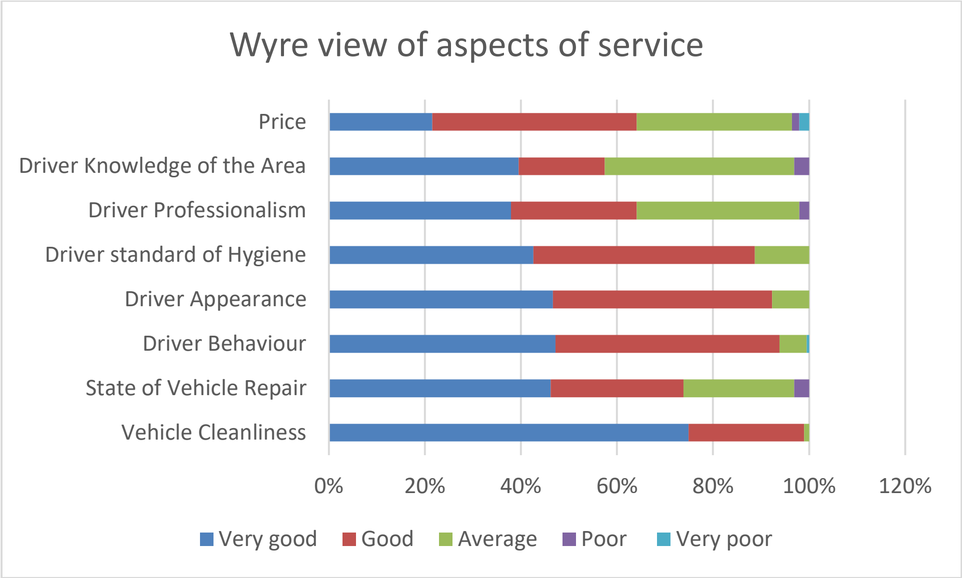
5% named the pair of ranks at Lindel Road / Bromford Road (all from Fleetwood interviewees) and 38% said they used it.

Of interest in the remaining ranks are Fleetwood Hospital (Pharos St) where all five quoting it (in Fleetwood) said they used it. The person quoting the Ferry Port Fleetwood rank also said they used it (markings long gone, so this must be a booking). The two people quoting Booths Garstang also said they used that rank. This is marked near the store exit in their private car park and may well be bookings.

The responses above between recent usage, method of hire, rank and company knowledge, do show some inconsistencies between responses – such as for Cleveleys where people said none used hackney carriage only recently, but 17% said they normally got vehicles from ranks. The situation was similar in Fleetwood. In Garstang 13% said they used hackney carriage only and 10% said they got vehicles from ranks even though there are few if any hackney carriages and no active council provided ranks.

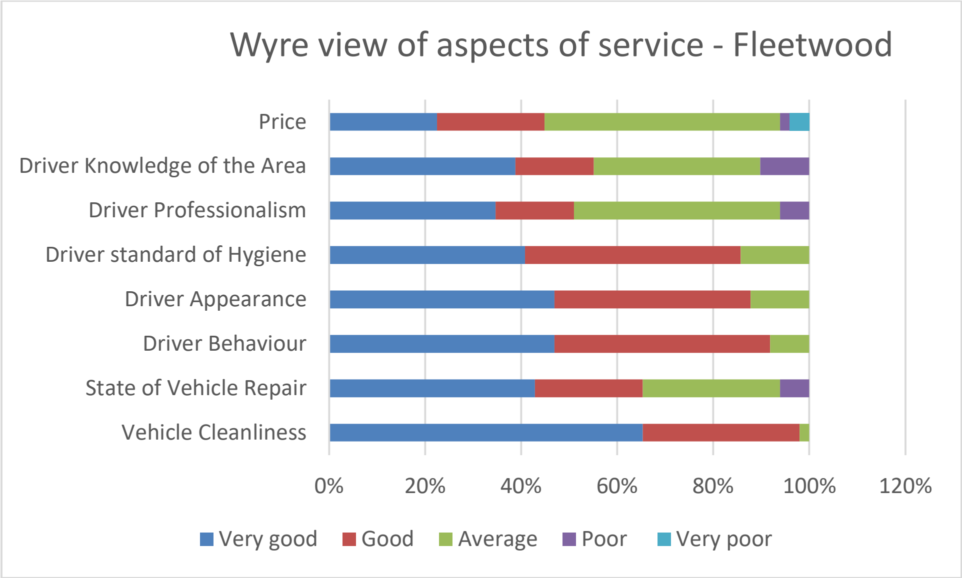
The fact that most major companies call themselves either 'cab' or 'taxi' and that many have liveries on hackney carriage vehicles appears to have led to people in the area viewing the vehicles they use as 'taxis' or 'cabs' and having little real appreciation of the formal differences between hackney carriage and private hire. In most cases, people will phone for a vehicle from home and be serviced by a liveried hackney carriage vehicle.

People were asked to rank their opinions about various aspects of the service provided by licensed vehicles in Wyre. The graphs below show the views, firstly for the full area and then area by area.

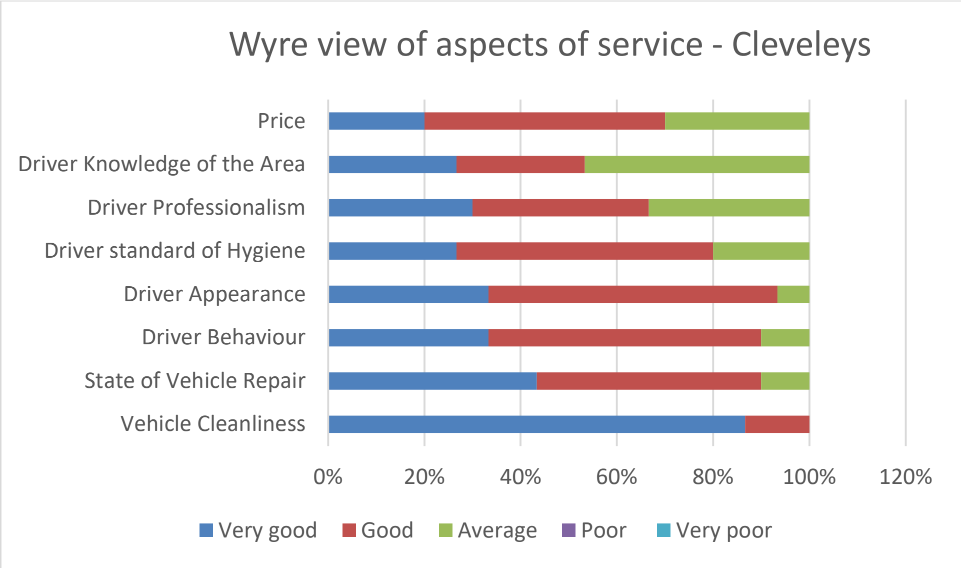


The dominant response across the area is towards most aspects of the service being 'very good', though to very different degrees. Vehicle cleanliness has the best performance, with no poor or very poor and 75% of respondents saying 'very good'. Driver hygiene, appearance and behaviour are also focussed on very good and good scores, although vehicle repair has 3% feeling this was poor. Driver knowledge and professionalism, though having high 'very good' scores also see more average scores and some poor. As is normal around the country, price sees the worst performance, with 2% each poor and very poor and only 22% very good. However, good and very good even for this aspect total some 65%.

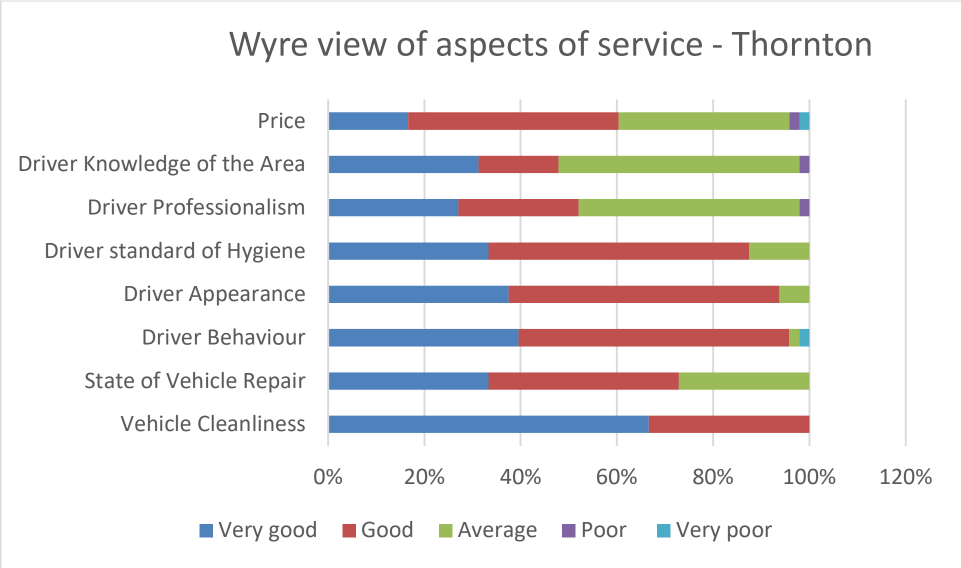
As with other aspects, there are variations by area. Fleetwood:



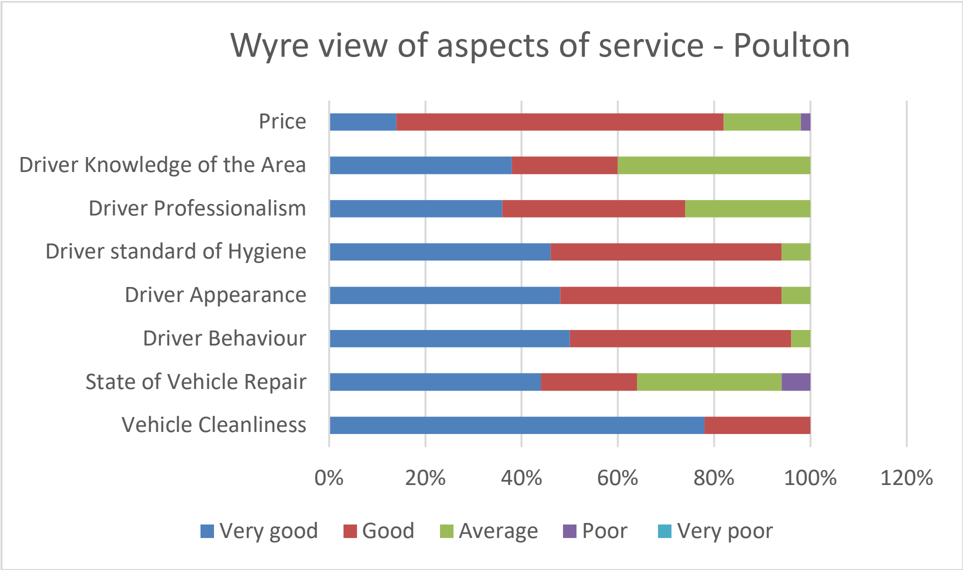
The very poor score for Fleetwood price is up to 4%, with 2% for poor and only 44% for the two 'good' levels. This suggests people here are more sensitive to price. Poor scores for driver professionalism were 6% and for driver knowledge 10% showing concerns over these aspects here.



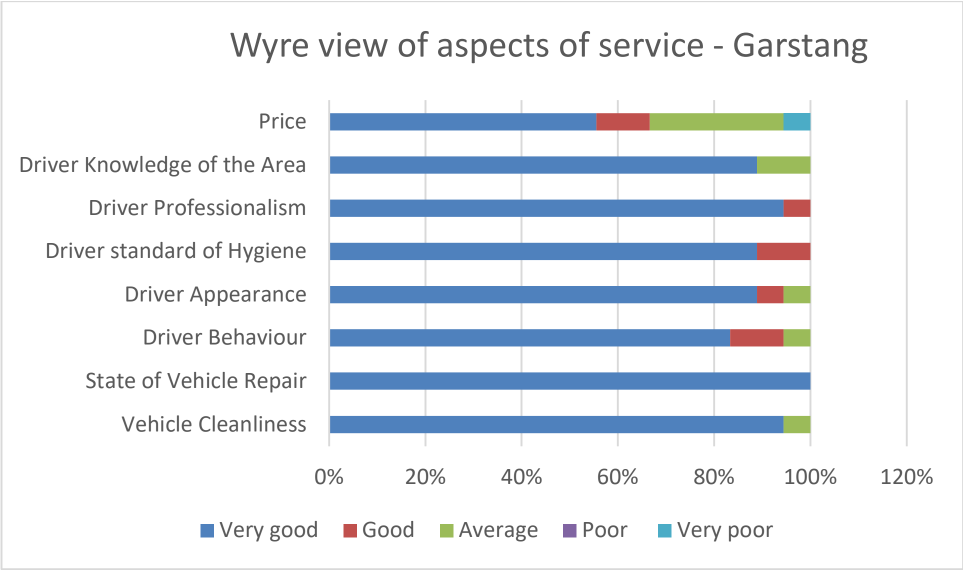
Cleveleys sees no poor or very poor scores at all for price; in fact the overall tone of their responses is that there is no poor or very poor for any element, although many aspects are mainly 'good' rather than very good, apart from vehicle cleanliness as in all other locations.



Thornton sees very poor scores for driver behaviour and for price. Poor scores also occur for driver knowledge and professionalism suggesting overall views here are more negative than in the other areas. However, there are only very good and good scores for vehicle cleanliness. Driver knowledge and professionalism also focus more on average than other areas.



For Poulton, state of vehicle repair appears to see more poor scores than in other areas other than Fleetwood. There are no very poor scores and a generally otherwise similar pattern to the overall. Price also is dominated by good scores rather than very good, so is again a slightly more sensitive issue than all other places than Fleetwood.



The Garstang response is the most positive with only prices showing any very poor, and no poor scores at all. Very good responses dominate with excellent driver knowledge, vehicle cleanliness and state of vehicle repair notable.

These graphs do show overall views but also reinforce that the areas of Wyre are all individual in terms of how people feel about the service provided. However, the overarching view is the service is generally very good.

As in the previous survey the dominant matter that might encourage or increase use of hackney carriages was if they were more affordable. For this survey, a higher level of response was obtained than last time. Overall 72% of interviewees gave at least one item that would encourage or increase hackney carriage usage. However, there was a strong variation in level of response with Fleetwood highest at 96% and Garstang lowest at 26%. Cleveleys saw 60%, Thornton 86% and Poulton 88%. This generally ties in with the level of satisfaction scores.

62% of people gave one response, 38% two and just one person three responses. This provided a total of 246 responses. As already noted, 63% of these were ‘if they were more affordable’. 11% said more hackney carriages they could phone for, 9% more hackney carriages to hail or at ranks, and 7% each for better vehicle quality and having a screen between the passenger and driver. Variation was not that great across the different areas. However, Garstang respondents only said if more affordable and more hackney carriages to phone for. Fleetwood and Thornton had higher levels of wanting more hackney carriages at ranks or to hail and 10% of Poulton interviewees said they would use more hackney carriages were the vehicle quality better. One person in Fleetwood said they would use them more if they were not charged to carry their wheelchair (this is illegal).

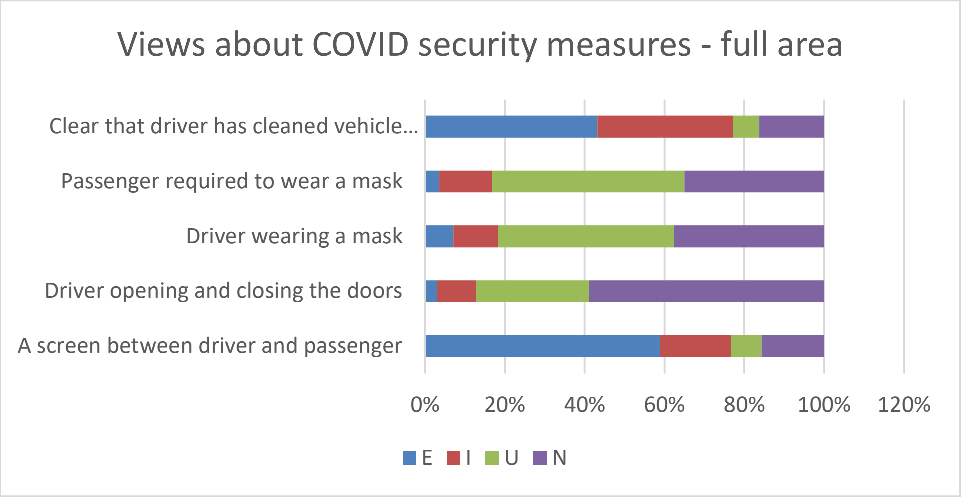
79% (92%) of respondents said they did not need, nor know anyone who needed an adapted licensed vehicle to travel, the reduction suggesting more need for adapted vehicles now than in the previous survey. Of those needing an adapted vehicle, the highest proportion said they, or someone they knew, needed a wheel chair accessible vehicle. This remained the same as in the previous survey.

One person in Fleetwood said they had given up waiting for a hackney carriage but then said this was from home. The other respondent from Cleveleys did not say where. We therefore suggest there is no real latent demand in the area, as in the last survey.

In regards to people considering there were enough hackney carriages in the area, there was a wide range between the areas. In Garstang just 29% felt there were sufficient, 38% Cleveleys, 51% Fleetwood and 55% Poulton and Thornton. On average this was 48%, much lower than the 93% saying they felt there were in the last survey. This is a strong change from last time although for Garstang there are no real ranks available.

People were asked about their change in travel behaviour from pre Covid to the time of the survey, and from then to in the future. The dominant overall response was no change, 67% saying no change from COVID to now, and 78% saying no further change going forward. For the whole area the net impact of people using hackney carriages more or less was zero, for private hire there was about a 5% gain (from pre Covid to now); looking forward a year the response was the same but only 4% for private hire gain.

People were asked about COVID security measures. They were asked to say if these were essential, important, useful, or not relevant. The results below for the full area suggest less concern in July 2022 although there was still a strong feeling that people preferred screens between the driver and passenger, and to a lesser extent that people felt the vehicle had been cleaned.



There were differences as before between areas. With reference to the screen the strongest views were 74% in Fleetwood and 73% in Cleveleys. Poulton and Thornton saw 54% with Garstang a low 18%.

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. In some cases, there are very specific comments from given stakeholders, but 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. 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.

Our information was drawn from those contacted in 2015 and 2018 plus a refreshed review of potential key stakeholders by the council following inception. A large number of respondents did not respond within the time period available.

An attempt was made to enable people to respond using an internet form, with three responses. Further details follow.

Supermarkets
One supermarket responded and said their customers did use local licensed taxis. Further details of the response are in the general summary below.

Hotels
No response was made by any hotel.

Public houses
No public house nor representative of them made any response.

Restaurants
No restaurants provided any response.

Hospitals
No comment was provided from any of the hospitals contacted.

Police
No police response was received.

Disability
A more detailed disability user questionnaire was undertaken the results of which are provided in a separate chapter.

Other Council contacts
No other council contacts had any response.

General response
The general internet response summary came from a social club, a shopping centre and a supermarket. All said their customers used local licensed vehicles. A third said people used the location Freephone, with the remainder using their own mobile phones to call for a vehicle. Only one (a third) was aware of a rank people might use. Two thirds said they had not received any complaints about the service. One third – one respondent – said there were issues in vehicles not arriving in a timely manner particularly when staff are waiting to go home. Further, customers that are delayed late at night can end up becoming noisy whilst waiting.

The shopping centre said they were happy to allow drop off and collection but they did not get involved with any element of provision as far as them not advertising any taxi service provision in any way.

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. A discussion was also held with the current trade representative by phone.

There are presently 406 (445 previously) dual drivers. Assuming all had an opportunity to complete the form, the response is just under 9% (5% last time, but 7% in 2015), a higher than usual level of response for this kind of survey.

89% of those responding said the licensed vehicle trade was their only or main source of income. 6% worked part time with no other income and 6% worked part time but had other sources of income.

Of these, 71% (73% last time) said they drove hackney carriages, 26% (18%) private hire, with the final 3% (5%) said they drove both kinds of vehicle. Last time 5% said they did not drive but were involved in the trade.

The average level of experience from those responding was 13 (11 last time) years. The longest quoted length of service was 39 (34 last time) years. Those saying they drove hackney carriages appeared to have longer length of service (15 years compared to 8).

The average week worked was 5.1 (5.5 last time) days, with 40% saying they had worked five days (18% last time), 34% (59% last time) six days in the last week, 11% seven days (none last time), 3% four days, 6% two days (both zero last time) 6% (9% last time) saying they had not worked in the last week.

For all respondents, the average hours worked was 41 (45 last time), on the high side. The maximum hours worked quoted were 85 (70 last time).

Hackney carriages tended to work less days (4.8 compared to 5.7) and less hours (39.7 compared to 45.1).

Respondents told us the kinds of work they normally undertook. All the private hire gave one answer only, whilst the hackney carriage respondents gave one, two (8%) or three (28%) responses. The person saying they drove both kinds of vehicle also provided three responses. Across all responses, none mentioned chauffer, corporate or contract work.

For private hire, a third said they undertook only advanced hire work whilst the remainder said they undertook just immediate hire through bookings.

28% of hackney carriage respondents said they undertook immediate hire from both bookings and ranks plus advanced hire work. 8% said their work was both immediate hire from ranks and bookings, with the remaining 64% of hackney carriages only undertaking immediate hire from ranks.

88% (95% last time) owned and drove their own vehicle. However, 56% (68% last time) said someone else drove their vehicle when they were not using it. Various periods were quoted for when the vehicle was used by someone else, with the top period quoted being 'days' (33%), then weekend evenings (28%), a mix (22%) and nights (17%). Of those saying no-one drove their vehicle now, 13% said this had changed since pre-COVID, i.e. a reduced level of vehicle sharing.

An extremely high 94% (86% last time) said they accepted pre-bookings. 81% of these were stated as being via an office. One person, 3%, said via an app. There did not appear to be any independent hackney carriages responding to the questionnaire this time given that the two negative responses were a nil response and one from a private hire respondent.

The hackney carriage respondents told us a range of ranks they serviced. This time there was a response from all areas drivers – last time there did not appear to be any Poulton respondents. 41% of hackney carriages responding said they serviced three ranks in Fleetwood (with just one only naming two ranks). 38% were from Poulton, all naming the two ranks there apart from one that said they also serviced Cleveleys. The remainder, 21% named Cleveleys ranks, all naming three, although three of the five included Poulton as one of their three ranks.

As already noted, both active ranks in Poulton were mentioned. Fleetwood saw more ranks named overall including London Street (all mentioned this), Darbyshire Road (five), Lindel Road (three), Grange Road (eight), Lord Street (once only) and one mentioned Adelaide Street which is actually a booking office. For Cleveleys, the Jolly Tar was mentioned four times, Cleveleys Avenue three times, the Regal twice, Nutter Road once and the Tramway once.

These responses suggest Fleetwood and Poulton tend to have more localised fleets whilst Cleveleys vehicles also service Poulton.

Taking all rank responses, 16% of mentions were London Street Fleetwood, 13% Poulton station and 13% Grange Road Fleetwood, with no other rank obtaining more than 6% although some were quoted using different names.

A different question sought the method they felt they got most fares. Many gave multiple responses. Across all respondents, including the private hire, 44% of mentions were phone, 33% rank, 16% hailing, 4% school contracts and 3% ‘other’. There was a single response that suggested that person got all their work from ranks. No others were that dependent on ranks. This is a further move away from ranks which had already been noted between 2015 and the last survey. COVID simply hastened this decline.

Respondents told us what factors affected their choice of shift. The highest proportion, 21% (30% last time), said family commitments determined the hours they worked. This time 14% said they avoided times when people were likely to be intoxicated (none said this in previous surveys). However, 11% said they worked nights because they knew there was more need at that time. One person worked at times with most fares available whilst another worked nights because they shared a vehicle.

79% felt there were enough hackney carriages at this time in the area.

Most told us why they thought the limit benefitted the public. 60% of those in favour said it maintained a high standard of vehicle and service (a third said this last survey). 20% felt it provided regular drivers, 10% felt it kept over-ranking in check and 10% said it ensured the trade was shared between those committed to the trade. Some private hire agreed with the limit. However, one hackney carriage driver shared frustration that they wanted a plate but could not get one and so had been renting for 9 years; four private hire did not think the limit was of any benefit.

Those responding told us how often they obtained wheel chair customers both needing to travel in their chair and by transferring. 25% (eight drivers) of those responding said they got a daily booking for someone travelling in a wheelchair with 17% getting a booking for someone that transferred. The most frequent usage was 27% saying they got 27% travelling from a rank, 25% from bookings, 7% from contracts, 43% from ranks transferring, 33% from bookings and 8% from contracts. However, 41% never got a wheelchair bound fare from a rank, 28% never from a booking, 87% never from contracts, with lower values of 14%, 17% and 83% respectively for never getting people travelling in wheel chairs who transferred from their chair. However, these numbers are not insignificant. Unusually, the rank-based frequencies tend to be higher than the bookings. This may arise from the level of vehicles choosing to wait at ranks whilst waiting for bookings.

Questions were asked regarding COVID impacts. 60% of those responding (all those that replied) said they were aware. Whilst 75% of responses were up to 10 people, one person suggested they were aware of 25 that had left.

Less responded to the question about how levels of rank and booked trips had changed. 33% said rank work and 40% said bookings were about the same. 50% said rank work was less now, with 35% saying bookings were less. However, 17% said rank work was higher now with 25% saying they got more bookings.

People gave a wide range of comments about the effects of the pandemic and plans looking forward. Some were pessimistic, many mentioned driver shortages whilst others said they were now busier. One made their plans to develop their business clear and were confident they would succeed. Several mentioned the much greater difficulty in getting people willing to work nights given that reduced supply had made passenger behaviour worse at those times. Many mentioned there was reduction in levels of people going out at night still.

Other comments were provided. One said they felt the only passenger queues were for a few hours on Saturday nights. Another sought police presence at key trouble times and a fare increase. Two others made a similar comment explaining the shortage of night vehicles was due to fear of violence and damage to vehicles and lack of any support from enforcement or police at these times.

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 (see below for further explanations).

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 three surveys:

Element / Year	2022	2018	2015	2008
Average passenger delay (mins)	1.85	0.5	0.4	0.2
% hours with any off peak delay	17.29	13.6	6.7	0
% passengers travelling in hours with a minute or more APD	39.57	16.8	14	9.3
Peakiness Factor	.5	.5	.5	1
Seasonality	1	1	1	1
Latent Demand	1	1	1	Not calc
Overall ISUD calculated	632	57.3	20	0

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

Average passenger delay has increased a large amount since 2018. However, the off-peak component has not increased as much as the component measuring the proportion of people travelling when average passenger delay is over a minute. No other element has changed, with the area retaining a peak profile and no real latent demand.

There are strong mitigating factors however that make conclusion that more plates are needed incorrect. Matters include very high levels of operation of hackney carriages on private hire circuits and resulting very low levels of demand at many ranks for most periods. The three-way split of the fleet between areas increases the level of vehicles needed to meet demand in specific areas. The huge disparity in demand between the two northern areas and Poulton, and particularly the peaky nature of Poulton demand are also strong contributory factors, as is reduced levels of driver availability both generally and also at specific times. Further discussion of this section is included in the synthesis chapter.

8 Disability users questionnaire

A specific questionnaire was issued by the council to those known to need some form of adapted licensed vehicle. The survey obtained 25 responses. Respondents told us how often they used both hackney carriage and private hire. Of those responding, 36% never used hackney carriages and 12% never used private hire. 24% and 32% rarely used the respective vehicle types. This left 40% who did use hackney carriage and 56% that did use private hire.

The age profile saw 52% of respondents reporting age 60 to 79, 20% 20 to 39, 16% 80 plus, 8% 40 to 59 and 4% 0 to 19. This is a fair spread of ages.

With reference to those using either kind of vehicle, for hackney carriages 20% of those using them used them almost daily, 20% once or twice a week, half once or twice a month and the remaining 10% once or twice a year. For private hire the respective values were 14%, 29%, 43% and 14%. This suggests for those using hackney carriages, they tend to use them more than private hire although overall more use private hire.

The overview of the service provided found 32% saying satisfactory, 24% bad, 20% dreadful, and 12% each either good or excellent – a mixed set of views but showing that action is needed based on this sample.

In terms of the conditions covered, one person (4%) stated four (mobility, hearing, mental health and long standing health issues), 24% gave three, 36% two and 36% just a single issue. In total, there were 49 quotes of conditions from the 25 people, with mobility making 45% of these, long standing health issues 29%, 6% each hearing or mental health, 4% vision and 2% learning difficulties. This demonstrates a wide range of overall need.

In terms of aids needed, 32% gave three, 28% two and 40% one, suggesting some complex needs. Of the total of 48 quotes of aids, 25% said a wheelchair all of the time, 21% a chaperone, 17% each a wheelchair some or most of the time, or walking sticks, 13% hearing aids, 6% sight aids and 2% an assistance dog. In many cases a person needed both use of a wheel chair and someone with them, which can be an issue for some smaller WAV style vehicles.

In terms of describing what people would need 36% gave two responses, 32% one, 18% three and 14% four. Of the total of 63 responses given the top response was 24% saying they were a wheel chair user and the vehicle would need to be a purpose built WAV. 16% each would either need a private hire vehicle driver to contact them when the vehicle arrived, or would require the private hire vehicle to be exactly on time. 11% would require a text message that their private hire had arrived. 8% would require assistance between place and vehicle.

6% each said either they were a wheel chair user but did not need a WAV but that they would need help transferring from their wheelchair, OR that they could not step up into a high vehicle so needed a saloon. 5% said they would need the driver to tell someone else about journey progress with the final 2% saying they needed to be sure the vehicle and driver would happily take their assistance dog.

38% (of just 13 responses) said they felt hackney carriage drivers did enough to enable them to travel. 31% each said either drivers usually went above and beyond to assist them when travelling, or did not seem to understand their disability or travel needs. With regard to private hire drivers, 41% said private hire drivers did not understand their disability or needs. 32% said they did enough to enable the person to travel. 27% said private hire drivers went above or beyond. This is generally a positive response, but clearly there is room for improvement although it appears hackney carriage drivers seem to give marginally better service.

When asked their views on the availability of WAV in Wyre and demand for them, all gave a response. However, 40% (36% private hire) of responses were that people did not know. Of those giving a clear answer, 93% (81% private hire) felt there were too few WAVs to meet demand with only one (three private hire) saying they felt there were just about the right number. This is a true reflection of the higher proportion in the private hire fleet.

Respondents told us what they would do if a suitable hackney carriage was not available when they needed one. 50% of respondents gave one answer, 41% two answers and 9% three answers. Of all the 35 responses made, 23% each said they would phone a private hire operator or use other public transport. 20% would call a friend or family member. 14% would get where they wanted to go under their own steam. 11% would wait till a suitable hackney carriage was available whilst 9% would use a less suitable vehicle but as a result would need more assistance.

For a similar question, but for private hire, 50% gave one answer, 33% two and the remaining 17% three. The highest response was 27% saying they did not attend their activity or appointment. 20% called a friend or family member, 18% used other public transport, 16% gave other comments including two people saying they would not go out, 9% each said they would wait for a suitable vehicle or get to their destination under their own steam. Just 2% would use a less suitable vehicle and therefore need more assistance. Despite these occurrences being low numbers, the seriousness of the implications are such that zero tolerance of such should really be the normal. The licensing section told us they were being regularly made aware of such instances.

In respect of private hire operators, all but one person told us their views on the service obtained from operators when phoning to book a WAV or other adapted vehicle. 54% gave one answer, 21% each gave two or three and 4% (one person) gave four responses. Of the total of 47 responses given, the top response was 19% saying they found it hard to get WAV as they were told they were pre-booked for school runs. 15% each either said they found private hire operators never or rarely able to provide a suitable vehicle, or they were usually told they did not have a suitable vehicle, or that they were usually unable to get a suitable vehicle for an immediate booking. Just 13% said they were usually able to get appropriate vehicles. 11% did not feel private hire operators made reasonable adjustments to help them travel, 9% said the service received was good and the final 4% said they did not tell operators for fear of discrimination.

9 Summary, synthesis and study conclusions

This Hackney carriage demand survey on behalf of Wyre 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.

Background and context

This current survey of hackney carriage operation in Wyre was carried out between March 2022 and January 2023 following our proposal provided to the Council in December 2021. On street and driver consultation occurred in July with rank work in July (very similar to previous studies). An additional disability user survey was also prepared and circulated by the Council.

The authority has a number of over-arching policies set at the County level, including provision of ranks and conditions for contracts operated for the Education and Social services County departments. The area has its own updated Local Plan as well as the Fylde Coast highway and transport masterplan feeding transport developments.

Whilst hackney carriage vehicle numbers have not increased since DfT statistics were first issued, private hire peaked in 2009, slumped to 2015, saw some resurgence just before the pandemic and then saw a large drop, only just returning early in 2022. Their numbers at the time of the survey were lower than those in 1997 when data was first collected. Driver numbers followed a similar pattern – with all local drivers having the ability to choose between driving hackney carriages and private hire vehicles as they see fit.

Current levels of wheel chair accessible vehicle are currently at their lowest level, just 3%, although there has been some increase on the private hire side, but overall values are not high. There had been some growth since the last survey, but this has recently been lost.

The overall fleet structure, with large numbers of one-man bands, remains stable. Given that Lancashire county contracts have to go to companies, there are many of these that are purely set up to ensure they can operate on these contracts, which provide ready income.

An extra mixed fleet company has arisen in the Cleveleys area, but otherwise the overall fleet structure has remained constant since the last survey, remarkable given the pandemic issues. The level of independent hackney carriages remains as small as at the time of the last survey, totalling just ten over the two northern parts of the area (with none in Poulton or Over Wyre).

Most hackney carriages also have company liveries. The range of liveries in an area is dependent on the number of active companies – with Poulton having just one and Cleveleys more.

Rank observations

Ranks have remained stable since the last survey. The trend to reducing use of ranks continues with a few more now effectively unused compared to the last survey. The overall estimated weekly usage of ranks in 2022 is around 18% less than that in 2018, although this is actually a slowing in the decline that had been seen from 2015 (38%).

Present estimated demand is just under 3,700 passengers in a typical week. However, this remains 32% more than the very low level observed in 2008.

Ball Street remains the busiest location, but with slightly more dominance than in 2018, with 35% of all estimated weekly demand there (was a third), and mainly at weekend nights. The station rank in Poulton remains the second busiest also increasing its overall share from 12% in the last survey to 19% now.

London Street Fleetwood and Victoria Road West, Regal both see 12% of estimated weekly demand. Fifth busiest is also in Cleveleys near KFC. This location saw slightly less over all reduction in share even though actual total passenger numbers appeared reduced.

This survey is like the last in seeing eight other ranks that had some passenger flows. Two more ranks effectively dropped out of usage – Princess Street Cleveleys and Leslie Avenue.

Graphically, demand is clearly much higher on Fridays and Saturdays than in the week, and there are also two very clear peaks on both nights, mainly at Ball Street. The top six ranks now provide the bulk of passengers.

Ball Street is very dominant as a rank – taking 51% of all passengers for the hours observed, and providing 79% to 100% of all passengers in the hours from 22:00 Saturday to 03:00 Sunday and 74-87% Friday/Saturday.

Both peak flows are led by Ball Street Poulton demand. The peak was 01:00 in the early hours of Saturday morning, with the Saturday night peak in the

22:00 hour. The Friday/Saturday peak saw four hours with over 100 passengers per hour whilst the Saturday/Sunday had just three such hours. Both nights see supplementary peaks that suggest arrivals by train into the area at the Poulton station rank.

The nature of demand has now become 'peaky' compared to previous years. Further, overall demand levels imply need for hackney carriages to supplement their income. However, the Wyre practice of vehicles waiting at a large range of ranks remains a benefit although the trend towards extinction of these smaller ranks continues apace.

Overall, 53% of all rank departures are empty vehicles. London Road Fleetwood and the Wilco rank in Cleveleys saw very high levels of empty departures.

Average hourly observed passenger numbers over the hours surveyed was just 33 this time (38 last time) – both not high. The highest peak was 135 (152 last time) passengers.

Despite lower flows than the previous survey, the number of hours with no passengers was either the same or reduced to two early Friday (was five), one early Saturday (same) and four Sunday (three).

A similar level – 75% - of observed vehicles at or near ranks were hackney carriages. The level of car abuse was also very similar at 20%. Kemp St at Lord St and the Regal rank were worst affected.

The plate observations found 80% to be local hackney carriage, 7% local private hire, 4% Wolverhampton and 3% Blackpool based.

Review of active plates found around half (two-thirds last survey) of the fleet active on a Saturday in the area. Poulton saw the highest proportion, followed by Cleveleys and then Fleetwood – as in the last survey, but at lower levels. Those in Poulton were also observed more frequently. About a third of the fleet was only seen in Poulton, 11% (15%) only in Fleetwood and 14% (6% last time) only in Fleetwood.

The national trend of less working late was observed in these observations although those active were undertaking more trips. Further, Fleetwood and Cleveleys plate observations bucked that trend with more active later.

Moderate levels of unmet demand were identified. Of the 784 (555) hours observed, 10% (7%) had average passenger delays of a minute or more, accounting for 39% (17%) of all passengers travelling in these hours.

Although this level of unmet demand appears high, detailed review for this survey identified, as in the last survey, that just over three quartrs (half last time) of all waits were at times when those having to wait were one of less than ten passengers within that hour.

Ball Street saw the worst overall passenger queues, occurring from 22:00 onwards on both Friday and Saturday nights through to the early hours of the next morning.

At the time of the survey, just 6% of vehicles observed appeared to be WAV style, lower than the 10% of last time. We are aware this level may well have decreased further since the survey. Despite this, the same level of people using wheel chairs were observed, some five people all at different ranks across the area. The numbers assisted by drivers had increased significantly to some 70 in the period of the survey.

On street public views

From the 246 people interviewed, 72% (46% last time) said they had used a licensed vehicle in the area in the last three months. Of these, 10% had used hackney carriage only, 13% hackney carriage and private hire. The highest level of hackney carriage only use was in Poulton at 20%. There was concern with the high level of quoted hackney carriage usage in Garstang, suggesting people there think their private hire service is actually hackney carriage operated.

Overall stated usage was increased to 3 (1.1 2018, 2.2 2015) trips per person per month. For pure hackney carriage usage, the level was lower at 0.6. Despite this being increased from the previous survey (0.1) this time 26% could not remember seeing a hackney carriage in Wyre.

For this survey, across the area 73% said they phoned (down from 89% last time) whilst rank proportion was increased from 11% to 20% this time. However, this time freephone, hail and app all appeared compared to not being mentioned in the last survey. Garstang respondents said 10% used ranks, this value was 30% in Poulton. As previously, particular companies phoned were specific to each area, with Poulton and Cleveleys also seeing two Blackpool-based companies quoted. Garstang saw two companies but also a large number of single quotes of other companies.

People named 27 different ranks although five were in Blackpool. 23% said they used the ranks they named, much reduced from the 71% last time. Rank quoting was specific to areas where people were interviewed. The most quoted rank was one on Victoria Road West but people did not specify which one. Poulton Station rank was second. Two locations named as ranks were booking offices (in Fleetwood and Poulton).

The overall views for the public are effectively for a fleet that is mixed hackney carriage and private hire generally very little differentiated.

People generally felt the service provided by licensed vehicles was very good. Vehicle cleanliness was highest scoring with, as normal around the country, price seeing worst performance. This was supported by people saying they would increase use or begin to use hackney carriages more if they were more affordable.

Responses suggested increased need for disability friendly vehicles with a focus on wheel chair accessible style.

No latent demand was identified, despite a much lower 48% (93% last time) saying they felt there were enough hackney carriages in the area. Fleetwood and Poulton both saw higher levels considering there were sufficient, with Garstang respondents stating just 29% felt there were enough.

Key stakeholder views

As is more usual now, post COVID, there were just three responses from the range of key stakeholders contacted. Only one was aware of a rank that might be used. One had issues with timely arrivals of vehicles when their staff were waiting to be taken home by licensed vehicle.

Trade views

A higher than usual level of around 9% (5% last time) of driver response was obtained. Average experience in the trade was 13 (11) years. The average week worked was 5.1 (5.5) days and 41 (45) hours, marginally reduced.

88% (95%) were owner-drivers, but a relatively high 56% (68%) said someone else also drove their vehicle when they were not using it. An extremely high 94% (86%) accepted pre-bookings. Possibly one independent responded given they said they got all their work from ranks.

A high number of ranks were quoted as used, consistent in general with the observations from the rank work and from what the public said. London Street Fleetwood got most mentions followed by Poulton Station and Grange Road Fleetwood.

For the first time, there were 14% of responses from drivers that they avoided times when passengers might be less hospitable although 11% said they worked nights because of higher demand. 79% including many private hire felt there were enough hackney carriages. There was strong support for the limit and many explained why they felt this benefitted the public. There were requests for more police assistance at times.

Formal evaluation of significance of unmet demand

All the main three component elements of the index of significance of unmet demand have moved to mean the current conclusion from the index is that there is unmet demand which is significant in the Wyre area. Average passenger delay has gone from 0.5 minutes to 1.85 minutes, the proportion of passengers travelling in hours with a minute or more average passenger delay has risen from 16.8% to 39.57%, and (less change) off peak hours with delay have increased from 13.6% to 17.29%.

However, inspection of the results finds many occurrences of unmet demand arise from the low levels of demand at ranks, from the three-way split of the fleet across the area and the strong peaky nature of Poulton demand. All militate against provision of service to the public.

Disability Issues and Survey

As already noted just 5% (10% last time) of vehicles observed at ranks appeared to be wheel chair accessible compared to the actual 3% in the fleet. This may relate to there being WAV appearing vehicles in the fleet which are not in fact actually WAV capable. Actual usage by passengers in wheel chairs was the same as in the 2018 surveys.

A very detailed survey was undertaken that identified significant issues with provision of service to people needing adapted vehicles or assistance when travelling. The 25 responses were from a varied set of need but highlighted glaring issues strongly impacting on peoples' abilities to live how they preferred to, with many missing appointments as a result.

However, the actions needed were not focussed on hackney carriage operation but applied equally across both kinds of vehicle and to operators. The overall details suggest a strong change in attitude and operation is needed across the industry. This does arise from the fact that most hackney carriages are operated in association with companies and have a livery.

Synthesis

Wyre is a very different area in terms of hackney carriage operation than many others. Recent trends have reinforced this difference. In essence, the bulk of licensed vehicle usage in the three main, more urban, parts of the area is undertaken by hackney carriage vehicles, most of which work on the main company telephone circuits and are liveried.

For this part of the area, the public facing licensed vehicle service is effectively one-tier, with the bulk of people travelling in hackney carriages. This has not changed despite COVID.

Again, despite increased levels of passenger waiting (even though passenger demand itself is reduced), there is no real latent demand in the area – people know if they go to ranks they will eventually get a vehicle. Overall demand has reduced, increasing dependency of many hackney carriages on bookings, further reducing the level of vehicles likely to be at ranks. There is not really a great amount of competition between hackney carriage and private hire because they are effectively the same fleets.

We found two examples where booking offices were effectively seen by the public as ranks.

Our analysis demonstrates that around three quarters the incidences of unmet demand can be attributed to passengers arriving at relatively low demand, quiet ranks, or busy ranks at quiet times, and then waiting for a vehicle to arrive. These are related to low demand and high passenger expectation and confidence, and should not be counted as unmet demand for the purposes of significance of unmet demand.

There is, however, a clear issue that the demand at Poulton particularly is suffering from a reduced level of drivers willing to service those hours – this has got worse since COVID and the last survey. This issue does need to be addressed to ensure the continued safe growth of the night life of Poulton. The previous report had warned that unmet demand at Poulton might become much more significant. There were plans to test how this had progressed which were thwarted by the COVID pandemic.

The classic response to identification of such unmet demand is the release of further plates. Plate review found a reduced level of vehicles in the early hours suggesting that methods to encourage more vehicles to choose to work at this time could have a better impact than adding new plates. That is backed up for this survey by drivers asking for more assistance from marshals at such busy times, which may encourage those now choosing not to service such demand perhaps to return.

One question that has not been answered is the operating protocols in place for hackney carriage vehicles sitting at ranks. It is clear many leave the ranks to service bookings, and that some small demand ranks benefit from this practice. However, there can be an issue arising if several bookings are made and take all the vehicles away from the ranks and a passenger appears at the rank – leading to unmet demand. This is less likely to occur where there are several companies operating and likely to be more severe where there is only a single company providing vehicles.

The other valid reason for attempting to encourage the current plates to meet demand which can clearly be met if vehicles were making themselves available is that if extra plates are issued, they cannot be restricted to just meeting the demand that is contributing to the unmet demand significance. They are available to operate at all hours. This would further dilute the earnings received from lower demand hours and may have the perverse result of shifting more vehicles towards telephone service rather than continuing to wait at ranks. The result would be increased levels of off peak or quiet demand period unmet demand.

It would therefore be prudent to attempt to encourage more availability at key times from current plates before any offer of additional plates were considered. The impact of fare increases should be tested after their introduction to ensure the correct result had occurred.

Another concern arises from the very specific definition of wheel chair accessible vehicle, mainly to allow vehicles to service Lancashire County contracts. At the time of the survey, this was still providing a modest level of vehicles that were being used, since the survey this has worsened.

Conclusions

The current survey finds high levels of unmet demand which are significant – with a focus on Poulton but also covering the other two areas with active ranks. This is occurring even though overall levels of passenger demand are further reduced (albeit at a lesser rate than between the previous two surveys).

However, the almost unique nature of the urban licensed vehicle operations, plus further reduced levels of apparent willingness to work in the small hours, produces problems meeting demand across the area. In Poulton this is related to high demand, in other areas it relates to much lower demand levels but an overall confidence from people that waiting at ranks will eventually provide them with a vehicle.

There are concerns from Over-Wyre and from Fleetwood and Poulton that the public perceive booking offices as ranks, which could lead to issues with people being uninsured when travelling. This may require public education and trade encouragement to better define the differences in vehicle types. Or it might be prudent to ensure that all waiting spaces adjacent to booking offices are designated as ranks. Given that most vehicles servicing the booking offices appear to be hackney carriages this should not give rise to major issues.

The mixed fleet nature of the operations in the area does not help in this regard, but on balance such operations tend to better service the public than operation of totally separate fleets.

This leads to a related issue – there will be a protocol in place for hackney carriage vehicles that are attached to companies as to what priority is given to demand from ranks or from the booking office at busy times. Hackney carriage plates are primarily issued to provide public service at ranks and through hailing. This may require more specific observations to test if this is an actual issue in the area or not. There is additional information within the survey data that could be used to identify how often passengers arrive just after vehicles have left the rank empty, rather than leaving with passengers.

9 Recommendations

On the basis of the evidence gathered in this Hackney carriage demand survey for Wyre Council, our key conclusion is that there is evidence of unmet demand for the services of hackney carriages which is significant at this point in time in the Wyre Council licensing area.

However, we would not recommend issue of further plates which our experience suggests would be counter to the aims of improving service. Provision of marshals in Poulton is essential for public and trade safety but further discussion is needed across the area with operators of hackney carriages to try to identify how public service levels to the active ranks can be improved. This may require encouragement for operators to ensure that ranks are not left empty in favour of bookings.

We would also recommend additional work, if possible, with disability groups, to identify how they obtain vehicles that meet their specific needs, and to identify measures across the industry to provide better for disability needs. This would best be achieved by use of focus groups in each area where the trade, users with disabilities and licensing representatives met together to work towards ensuring higher level of meeting needs that are best met by people travelling in licensed vehicles.

The new Best Practice Guidance may introduce need for an 'Integrated Service Plan' to consider such issues.