

London Assembly Transport Committee - 23 January 2024 Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Taxi and Private Hire Vehicles

Keith Prince AM (Chairman): Now we come to the main event. This is a question session on taxi and private hire vehicles (PHVs). I would like to welcome our guests for this discussion. First of all, can I welcome Helen Chapman, Director of Licensing and Regulation at Transport for London (TfL); Christina Calderato, Director of Transport Strategy and Policy for TfL, Steve McNamara, General Secretary of the Licensed Taxi Drivers Association; Mariusz Zabrocki, General Manager of Free Now; Steve Wright MBE, Chair of the Licensed Private Hire Car Association (LPHCA). We also will have another guest, Asher Moses [Founder and Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Sherbet - The Electric Taxi Company], but unfortunately, he has been delayed, he will be joining us as soon as he arrives.

We will crack on with our first question. To start off this is a question to all the guests. Over the past decade, the number of private hire drivers in London has significantly increased and the number of taxi drivers has declined. What are the reasons for this trend? I will start with Steve.

Steve Wright MBE (Chair, Licensed Private Hire Car Association): The modern technology has changed the dynamic of the way that taxis and PHVs are booked and, as a consequence of that, the old days of cabs cruising the streets and ranking up with today's traffic are less easy to do. It is very easy to book with apps and other technology, and for that reason people like the convenience of that. The other thing is that of course there is lots of requirements to become a black cab driver, I do not pretend to speak for the black cab industry, although we have our members that have those vehicles. However quite clearly there has been a change in the demographic across the UK with more private hire coming pre-bookable, door-to-door services, and less hoping that a yellow light is passing you on the street. It is just an inevitability of the world's technology today.

Keith Prince AM (Chairman): Thank you. Steve.

Steve McNamara (General Secretary, Licensed Taxi Drivers Association): Yes, good morning. Thank you. I disagree with Steve, as you would suspect. It would not be the first time. The reality is that we lost 4,000 cabs during the pandemic and that is the primary reason for the number of vehicles being down. The pandemic did us an awful lot of damage from which we are recovering strongly. We have invested over £600 million in new vehicles, but it is a combination of factors, many of which are beyond your control, but some are within certainly the remit of the Mayor [of London], that have impacted us. I will go into more detail later in other questions, but the key reason that we have lost the number of drivers we have is the pandemic, changes in regulation, changes in standards and stuff that have been applied to us, and the cost of running vehicles and the cost of buying vehicles. The age limit has also impacted. They are all factors of which become more relevant in later questions.

Keith Prince AM (Chairman): Thank you.

Helen Chapman (Director of Licensing and Regulation, Transport for London): Thank you. We have heard from my colleagues, both Steves, already. There are a mix of factors that are at play here. Certainly, the pandemic has had a big increase in the decline in the number of taxis. I can go into some numbers later on about the Knowledge, but we are seeing a positive increase in drivers that are now applying to do the Knowledge, certainly in the last year, which is positive. Also with technology, with people being able to

engage these services via apps, that is certainly playing a part as well. There is a range of different factors, all of them quite complex, that is having this impact.

Keith Prince AM (Chairman): Thank you.

Mariusz Zabrocki (General Manager UK, Free Now): I tend to agree with Steve McNamara. I would say that black cabs and presence of apps or improvements in technology are not in contradiction. The technology can improve access to black cabs. The main reason why we saw a big decrease is obviously the pandemic, but also there is a long-term negative trend caused by very strict Knowledge of London and also accessibility of vehicles, which are extremely expensive. However, obviously I can cover it in more detail further down the line.

Keith Prince AM (Chairman): Thank you very much. Christina, did you want to say anything?

Christina Calderato (Director of Transport Strategy and Policy, Transport for London): Helen and I will probably try to divvy up TfL, so we do not double up on everything for your benefit and save you some time.

Keith Prince AM (Chairman): Thank you very much. OK. In December [2023], the Mayor warned that, unless we supported the taxi industry, it would become extinct like red phone boxes. What more needs to be done to support the industry? Perhaps, Steve McNamara, you could start.

Steve McNamara (General Secretary, Licensed Taxi Drivers Association): The key factor, as far as we are concerned, is access to the road network. You cannot drive a taxi and you cannot provide a service if you cannot access the road network. Many of the late restrictions that are brought in are very confusing. If you take the low-traffic neighbourhoods (LTNs) for an example, in many boroughs we can access them and they are camera controlled, Hammersmith and Fulham, the database is there, it is very easily identifiable as a taxi, and we are allowed to access those LTNs. The neighbouring borough, we cannot. We are allowed access to most bus lanes, but some of the new bus gates that are being put in we are not allowed access to. There is a real mishmash across London.

The Mayor's team will tell you that they only control the Transport for London Road Network (TLRN) and they do not control the borough roads and the borough schemes. However, if you take, for example, Bank Junction, we have been excluded from Bank Junction. Numerous times we have asked for letters of support and support from TfL, from the Transport Commissioner, from the Mayor, to the City of London, it is currently being reviewed again at the moment. That support is not forthcoming. The same would apply to Tottenham Court Road, another major road, again not one of the Mayor's roads, but run by Camden. However, equally, most of the Tottenham Court Road that excludes us, right off of Oxford Street, was funded by TfL. Therefore, the Mayor's hand and TfL's hand are everywhere.

Then you take, for example, Bishopsgate that is a TLRN, that is a TfL decision, it was the Mayor's decision to exclude us. There are varying reasons that are always given why we are excluded from schemes. An example is Tottenham Court Road, we were excluded on the grounds of our emissions and our accident statistics. When you drill down into it, the emissions are completely irrelevant 57 per cent of our fleet is now green, and the accident stats did not apply to us, they applied to PHVs, they were completely wrong. In Bishopsgate, they will tell you that there is a 500 vehicles an hour maximum flow through Bishopsgate, but no one has ever tried it. Our position has been, with all these exclusions, is allow us in, put us in as a default position. If it then transpires that we are causing a problem - and I have repeatedly said this to the last three Transport Commissioners we have had to deaf ears, I have to add - but allow us access as a default position and if it then transpires that we are causing a problem then you exclude us. It is really straightforward.

However, instead of doing that they come up with all sorts of very complicated computer modelling that no doubt is done by very clever people. However, the reality is they are not right. The sheer number of cabs, one of the things you will discuss in here is the drop in the number of vehicles, there is 15,000 cabs on the road at the moment. If you split that into four shifts and across the whole of the Greater London Authority (GLA) area, the odds on us causing a problem anywhere at any one time are minimal. However, that is not recognised, so that is one of the key issues that we have and one of the major factors in making driving a taxi unattractive, is the fact that we cannot access so much of the road network, constantly being changed, and every single one of those schemes we have to fight tooth and nail to get in when the opposite should be true.

Keith Prince AM (Chairman): Thank you. Did either Christina or Helen want to respond to that at all?

Christina Calderato (Director of Transport Strategy and Policy, Transport for London): Yes. As Steve [McNamara] has helpfully pre-empted lots of the things that he thinks that I will say and some of those things are true. Thinking around the TLRN, we do control five per cent of the road network. Taxis have access to 95 per cent of bus lanes and the default will be taxis will be included unless there is a specific reason which might be that there will be a detrimental effect on the bus network or a detrimental safety impact for people walking or cycling. In those circumstances only that is where we will look to restrict that access. As I say, 95 per cent of bus lanes are open to taxis on the TLRN.

Borough schemes are individual schemes, and they are decided by the boroughs, but we have worked with the boroughs and spoken to boroughs about supporting taxis and what initiatives can be done to do that and we do work with them to support them in making those decisions. We have mentioned the reasons why taxis might be excluded, and I have given some of those reasons, and when you look at the example of Bishopsgate, what we have observed there is that we have higher numbers of cyclists, we have overall collisions are down, and we do also have this cycle network quality criteria, which sets out some parameters for how cyclists interact with motorised traffic, where you cannot have segregation. All of those factors lead into our thinking. Therefore taxis, along with other motor vehicles, are permitted access to the majority of Bishopsgate, two short sections between 7am and 7pm are restricted, but that is really for clear cycle safety reasons.

Keith Prince AM (Chairman): Did anyone else want to contribute?

Steve McNamara (General Secretary, Licensed Taxi Drivers Association): Yes, OK, I would come back on that if I can. I mean, Christina tells you it is a small section between 7am and 7pm. It is the A10. It is the main route from London Bridge to the east, therefore you talk about making it more appealing and accessible to us. If you want to get a taxi from London Bridge to Shoreditch, I now have to take you around Aldwych or I cannot go through the Bank Junction, that is closed. I now have to go all the way around St Paul's. All of these schemes have a contributory factor to make it more difficult for us and less attractive.

Now all the statistics that Christina tells you are all great, they are all computer modelled, they are all computer generated. Were we to have been allowed access to Bishopsgate and it transpired she was right, they could have quite easily said to us, "Well, we are right." However, then the key thing in Christina's summation is she talks about taxis and other motor vehicles. We are not other motor vehicles and that is the problem with the thinking at TfL. They lump us in with other motor vehicles when they should be lumping us in with the buses and that is the primary reason that we have the problems we have. One of the main contributory factors that we have in the decline of vehicles and the decline of drivers is that sort of attitude.

Keith Prince AM (Chairman): Thank you.

Mariusz Zabrocki (General Manager UK, Free Now): Maybe I would like to add something to what Steve [McNamara] says.

Keith Prince AM (Chairman): Can I just let Christina have the opportunity to come back on that?

Christina Calderato (Director of Transport Strategy and Policy, Transport for London): Yes, very briefly. I only mentioned the other motor vehicles in the context of that bit of through running on Bishopsgate. When we are talking about the access to bus lanes, we can see that taxis are considered very differently to other motorised vehicles.

Keith Prince AM (Chairman): Asher, welcome. Mariusz, you wanted to come in?

Mariusz Zabrocki (General Manager UK, Free Now): Yes, I would like to add something to what Steve [McNamara] said. We as Free Now, we have 10,000 black cabs and 20,000 PHVs on our platform, therefore we can give you data that shows both and we are happy to support TfL in getting that data. I fully agree with Steve that LTNs bus lanes should be always open to black cabs and wheelchair accessible PHVs potentially. The example of Bank Junction is great because we looked at it in detail and this area has 20 per cent lower pickup rates than other comparable areas with similar levels of demand. There is a clear impact, you are 20 per cent less likely to get a cab around Bank Junction due to the restrictions that are present there.

Keith Prince AM (Chairman): All right, thank you. That is very helpful. Assembly Member Boff, you wanted to come in.

Andrew Boff AM: You mentioned it, Mr McNamara, what effect has the Bishopsgate scheme had on your disabled passengers?

Steve McNamara (General Secretary, Licensed Taxi Drivers Association): Obviously, Assembly Member Boff, these sort of schemes that exclude us, while they impact everybody, they particularly impact the less ambulant and people that are reliant on no other method of transport. TfL's attitude to this is, "Well, you should cycle". That is great as long as you are not in a wheelchair, or you have not got a broken leg. The reality is that there are numerous videos doing the rounds of elderly and disabled people having to walk from the front of Liverpool Street Station, 200 yards to the cab rank, and then having to be taken on a circuitous tour of London to go in the opposite direction. These schemes are ableist. That is what they are. They fail to recognise that we provide the only 100 per cent wheelchair accessible and disability accessible part of the transport network. Instead of being recognised for that and recognised for the investment we make, as I say, £600 million has been invested by small businesses and individual drivers in meeting these requirements, and instead of recognising that, supporting that, and doing everything they can to support us and help the disabled and less ambulant get around, we get the scheme, "Well, you might interfere with the few cyclists in Bishopsgate". Well, no, we would not, and you need to change your policies.

Andrew Boff AM: On that same thing, Ms Calderato, four years ago I asked the previous Deputy Mayor for Transport about whether or not any work had been done to assess the costs for disabled people of introducing the restrictions at Bishopsgate. She had to eat humble pie and admit that no such work had been done. Have you done any work since to assess the impact of that Bishopsgate scheme on disabled people?

Christina Calderato (Director of Transport Strategy and Policy, Transport for London): Yes. In making the permanent decision around the Bishopsgate scheme, there was a consultation and we heard broadly from a number of groups and did fully consider all of those aspects following the consultation and in reaching the decision on how we manage Bishopsgate. It is really important to say that when we are managing

our job at TfL, it is to manage, on a finite road network, balance the needs of all our users, and that includes disabled people, people who need to get around the network, people who are reliant on public transport, people who want to walk and cycle, and we need to design those schemes in a way that tries to balance the needs of all users.

Andrew Boff AM: Do take into consideration that the people who have the greatest difficulty getting around London are those with disabilities, and to equally match those who walk and cycle with those who are disabled is an unfair match?

Christina Calderato (Director of Transport Strategy and Policy, Transport for London): In terms of that accessibility, that is something that we do take into consideration with a lot of our schemes. If you look at other examples where we have made exemptions for taxis and wheelchair accessible PHVs on the basis that they provide that really important door-to-door service, schemes like Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) or the Congestion Charge (CC), you can see that we do take that into account across a range of our schemes.

Andrew Boff AM: Obviously not enough, but thank you.

Keith Prince AM (Chairman): Thank you. Moving on, my second question is to TfL, fight among yourselves as which one wants to answer this. Unlike taxis, PHVs have to pay the CC. What analysis has been carried out about how this impacts congestion and the vehicle mix in central London?

Christina Calderato (Director of Transport Strategy and Policy, Transport for London): Prior to removing the exemption to the CC for PHVs, we saw that they were taking up an increasing proportion of that traffic in central London. We saw that we had a decrease in private vehicles and a significant increase, therefore it was offsetting the benefit in PHVs. I think it was up to a third, I would have to check that figure, that were circulating empty. The removal of the CC exemption was essentially to try to help us manage that traffic within the zone. Many of the trips that were still being taken by PHVs were still able to be undertaken by PHVs, but a smaller number that were in there, specialising their fleets. Therefore, what we have seen is that there was a reduced number of entries, but that meant that the vehicles that were in the zone were able to service more of those trips, therefore it had impacts on the way that people managed their fleets and serviced those trips. Of course, we still have the Cleaner Vehicle Discount for the CC, which means that if you have a fully electric PHV then you are still not paying the CC. That applies to about 16 per cent of the fleet. Therefore, we have seen that it has had traffic congestion benefits, but it has also meant that is not necessarily a straight-line proportionality with trips, because those PHV trips are still able to be made, but they are made by a more efficient PHV network in central London.

Keith Prince AM (Chairman): Thank you. Steve Wright, can I ask you, in addition to what has just been asked, what impact do you think the changes have had on fares and ridership and what evidence of the environmental impact and the removal of PHV has had with the CC?

Steve Wright MBE (Chair, Licensed Private Hire Car Association): It has had a disastrous effect on fares because, if you travel from somewhere like Kilburn into central London, it would have been £3 or £4. It is now nearer to £20 to do the same journey. Stopping people travelling by stealth is not very good. The other thing to mention, Christina has mentioned this, about the electric vehicle exemption. That stops in 2025 and our members are saying it is a catastrophic disaster for our trade that has been greener and cleaner than other modes of transport in London for a very long time and they are now really struggling to get anybody. The PHV industry has had very little subsidy, it did not get any scrappage scheme, it has been impacted with very strong regulations that are way above some of those that are required for taxi, and you cannot bully a trade into

doing it. Ultimately, where you end up is a situation where they are simply not getting electric vehicles (EVs), they are not doing the things that are necessary, and it has been extremely counterproductive.

Now the Government has recognised - and just to say we are apolitical - that net-zero needs to move a little bit. There has been a pandemic, there is a crisis, there is fires in EVs, and what have you. If we are going to get people to take up and fleets to purchase EVs, we need to keep the one subsidy that the private hire industry enjoys - i.e. the CC exemption for EVs - in place, because you add in the other difficulties that 90 per cent of [PHV] drivers cannot charge at home, they do not have a drive in a leafy suburb where they can park up and install an EV [charger]. There is no street ability to do that. We want to improve, and the CC exemption and the impact of the CC has been awful.

The other thing is that was manageable by regulation that already existed. The problem was that the app companies' drivers were flooding into central London. That was the problem. That could have been addressed because they were not allowed to come into London and enjoy the CC, but it was never managed. Therefore, a sledgehammer was taken to the problem and the net result is paying for Londoners in terms of costs, it has not really solved the problem. The same number of movements are still taking place, it has just juggled the balls. If you are a central London company that is in the CC all day long, you are far better off than one that is just outside it. Therefore, there are massive problems remaining and we have some stalled talks with TfL. We do need to get this back on the table to talk about the real impact, because, yes, there were less people coming in, but that could have been managed without making a penalty on the whole of the industry.

Keith Prince AM (Chairman): Thank you. If I can now go to Assembly Member Pidgeon.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): Lovely, thank you. I want to talk about the Taxi Strategy that the Mayor mentioned in answer to my question last month and then we will move on to other sections. At December's Mayor's Question Time [21 December 2023], I asked the Mayor of London about a vision for taxi trade, what he saw as the future of the taxi trade. He committed to working with the industry to create a new vision for taxis, a new strategy. Can I start with TfL, what is that going to include and has work started on it, what is the timescale for this really important piece of work?

Christina Calderato (Director of Transport Strategy and Policy, Transport for London): First of all, yes, we are starting to undertake that piece of work. In terms of timescale, we are right at the beginning of that, and a really key thing is that we are going to have to do this in partnership with the trade, making sure that is engagement-led from the outset. We probably need to start by reviewing the previous Taxi and Private Hire Action Plan, which we have obviously started to do already.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): If you have read it, it is like a piece of history at that moment, which is great at the time, but everything has moved on.

Christina Calderato (Director of Transport Strategy and Policy, Transport for London): Exactly, it is moved on. When you look at planning framework we have, we have got the Mayor's Transport Strategy (MTS) as the overarching strategy. The reason I mention this is because we have talked variously about a strategy and a vision and a plan. Just in terms of the way that those documents hang together, there is the MTS at the top and then we have a series of action plans, which sits beneath that. The Taxi and Private Hire Action Plan was the first one that was done in 2016, reflecting some of its importance. However, it has obviously aged and since then we have more recent walking plans, cycling action plan, bus action plan, therefore it is definitely timely for us to go back and review this now and look at what we need to do in terms of setting out what our vision for taxis is going into the future and the actions that we all need to take to help us achieve that vision.

That is something that we need to do hand in glove with industry, therefore we will be kicking all of those sessions off imminently.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): Give me a rough idea of timescale. Clearly you are going to want to work with the industry here. Can you also advise, is there going to be a similar strategy for PHV, because while they sit side by side, there are different issues in both sectors, therefore are you looking at that complementing this piece of work?

Christina Calderato (Director of Transport Strategy and Policy, Transport for London): Yes. The best way to approach it would be to look at refreshing the Taxi and Private Hire Action Plan, therefore looking at both the trades at the same time, given that they are both now harking back to a 2016 document, therefore it should account for both. The timescales will slightly depend on the remit and that is where we really need to have that clear engagement to understand what areas we want to focus on, what does that include, do we need to do new research and modelling, are we updating something that is already there. Therefore, the timescales will be partly decided by what we collectively decide we need the remit of that document to be. However, that is not an excuse for taking forever about it.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): When you say “we”, do you mean TfL, or do you mean initially even having a brainstorm with the wider sector?

Christina Calderato (Director of Transport Strategy and Policy, Transport for London): Yes, absolutely, I --

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): In the letter I had from Seb Dance [Deputy Mayor for Transport] that came through to me last week, obviously ahead of this, because I had asked specifically about a roundtable, and he said:

“I confirm TfL is happy to arrange such a discussion as this work develops and invite the reps from the trade as well as interested Assembly Members.”

Christina Calderato (Director of Transport Strategy and Policy, Transport for London): Yes, I would like to do that right at the beginning so that we can jointly agree the remit so that we get off and we are covering everything that everybody believes it needs to cover. That is our starting point.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): Then including the trade as you go along. When are you hoping to get that sort of session in the diaries? Are you talking in the next month?

Christina Calderato (Director of Transport Strategy and Policy, Transport for London): In the next month would be great. We want to do that as quickly as possible and get it kicked off.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): Lovely. OK. That is really welcome, and you are going to be doing something linked to PHV as part of this as well. Let us then get a response from others on the panel in terms of what you would want to see in this new vision. We are going to get into detail later on some of the issues. I am going to start with Steve, then I am going to come over to Asher and Mariusz and then come to Steve Wright. Steve McNamara.

Steve McNamara (General Secretary, Licensed Taxi Drivers Association): Firstly, Assembly Member Pidgeon, thank you for raising it with the Mayor, the Taxi and Private Hire Strategy. The last Taxi Strategy we had was in 2016 and then historically, very shortly after that, we started talking about how we can decimate

the fleet even further than we had already done by reducing the age limit on vehicles yet again. I estimate that we lost about £35 million through the lost residuals in second-hand vehicles that were wiped off when the age limit was reduced from 15 years to 12 years. I had numerous meetings with TfL, we had all the figures and all the statistics and obviously ours did not tally with theirs. According to them it was all going to be fine and dandy and unfortunately it was not. That is one of the reasons that we are still losing vehicles at the rate we are losing them at the moment.

We also have a major problem insofar as we have one vehicle we can buy and one vehicle only. While it is a fantastic vehicle compared to those that we have had in the past, by the time you finance one you are looking at £100,000. There is a possibility that we are going to lose the plug-in taxi grant (PiTG) in March [2024]. I know we come to that later. That would effectively put the price of the cab up by another £7,500. By the time you add interest at the rate that you are doing it. Therefore, all of these factors need to be included in any Taxi Strategy.

We also have a problem - and I will come to that later as well - with the current enforcement problem by TfL, we now have a "three points and you are out" policy. I used to think it was six points. I learned yesterday [22 January 2024] it is now three points, and you are out, which is causing us major problems. All of these things need to be included in this Taxi Strategy policy if there is going to be one. I look forward to sitting down with TfL and going through it but, to be honest with you, with all due respect, it historically has never ended too well for us.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): Just picking up, Steve [McNamara], you have mentioned the vehicle and we will probably come on to that later. However, I was talking to a driver last week who also raised with me the huge issue around the maintenance agreement that you have with the manufacturer, how that has gone up and gone up again in terms of, if there are issues with the vehicles, it is three times at least the cost it was previously. Also, insurance has gone through the roof. Are those some of the other factors here that are putting pressure on just the cost of that vehicle alone?

Steve McNamara (General Secretary, Licensed Taxi Drivers Association): Yes, running the vehicle generally - and Assembly Members will know if they run vehicles themselves and insure them - the price of insurance of cars has just generally gone up. We have a very successful low accident rate, and most underwriters recognise that. For example, the cost of insuring a taxi as opposed to a PHV will be far less because the underwriters recognise that we are a lower risk. However, nonetheless, insurance figures are higher. The maintenance of vehicles generally is higher, the parts are much more expensive, vehicles get written off now at a third of their value, whereas it used to be two-thirds, involved in an accident. Therefore, we are struggling, we are being hit by a combination of factors that you can almost call a 'perfect storm'. Then you throw into the mix external factors that are also impacting us that I will come on to later, and then you throw into TfL's interpretation of some Government policies, and you have a perfect storm that is hitting the industry, all of which are countering our efforts to recover from the pandemic. We are recovering from the pandemic. It is not the negativity that you can see. We are incredibly busy. As Mariusz will tell you, apps are doing very well, we are doing very well, but we are doing very well in spite of TfL, not with their help.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): Yes. These issues need to be picked up in the Action Plan. Asher, let me come to you. As I said, we have this Action Plan going to start to be developed, what are the key things you want to see in this new vision?

Asher Moses (Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Sherbet - The Electric Taxi Company): Coming at this from a commercial point of view, with the largest electric taxi fleet in London, I personally - as a small family business - have invested over £30 million of our personal money in line with the Mayor's strategy to go

green. My colleagues have invested, as we say, our fleet owners have invested over £300 million. Alongside our colleagues and licenced cab drivers, we invested over £600 million in the Mayor's strategy to go green.

A few months ago, there was an article, the Mayor said to licenced cab drivers who cannot afford these vehicles, "Well, you can rent one". I am the largest electric taxi fleet, and I cannot afford to buy them any longer. I am seriously considering, among my colleagues, whether we should continue to invest in a vehicle that is over £100,000, that cab drivers cannot afford to rent, let alone buy. These vehicles are great vehicles, but we cannot get parts, the prices to maintain these vehicles are expensive, and we cannot continue to increase rents on these particular vehicles. The licenced London taxi trade is doing extremely well and that is because we have shrunk, as we had 23,000 licenced cabs before COVID, 22,000 licenced drivers, no electric. Today, licenced electric cab drivers have done an amazing thing, they have invested £600 million in TfL's and the Mayor's strategy. However, we have zero support other than the £7,500 Office for Low Emission Vehicles grant, which is due to run out with no vision. Planning for a vision for taxis and PHV is a bit too late in the sense that it is going to take, as you say, from 2016 was the last meeting. I certainly will not be here in 2024 investing in taxis if it is going to take that long. None of my colleagues are.

The other thing is our industry, fleet owners and drivers, our demographic is ageing and shrinking. Including us, our fleet owners, ourselves, do we want to invest in an industry that we love and continue to really do well in without the support of Government, without the support of TfL, and the answer is clearly no.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): That is an interesting different angle, picking up the issue of fleets will need to be in this and the rental market, the maintenance of the vehicles, all those issues, and people I am picking up there as well. Mariusz, is there anything else you want to add in terms of from an app point of view, what you would like to see in this?

Mariusz Zabrocki (General Manager UK, Free Now): I completely agree with what Asher and Steve [McNamara] mentioned before that the main issue is the number of drivers that declined sharply over the years and accessibility of vehicles. Last year we ran a survey among Private Hire Drivers (PHD) because they are the key group that can become black cab drivers. Why they do not upgrade and become black cab drivers and there are two big issues: one issue is the Knowledge, which is extremely difficult, takes three to four years, it is quite obscure. There is no defined list of pick-up points that people need to memorise, it is a very difficult exam; and the second biggest issue is availability of vehicles. The topic that Asher covered £100,000, that is crazy. We have pretty much one vehicle that is the only choice the drivers have. In terms of rental, that is £400 a week, equivalent to £20,000 a year, this is an awfully high cost, and that is because there is no competition. We need more vehicle models available. Maybe we need to look at some of the requirements such as the turning circle, to make sure we have more models, because executive class vehicles for PHV, they cost around £230 a week. That shows you how crazy is this price.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): Yes.

Mariusz Zabrocki (General Manager UK, Free Now): We need to address it and otherwise this industry in 10-15 years' time will be just a tourist attraction because it will not be a viable transport option anymore.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): OK. Then let me come to Steve Wright in terms of PHV, you are here, they are going to be part of this strategy/vision/action plan. What are the key things you want to see in that?

Steve Wright MBE (Chair, Licensed Private Hire Car Association): We need to take account of the pandemic first and foremost. It has also had a great effect on the people that use the vehicles as well as the

numbers in private hire, down over 20,000 drivers. The use of PHVs and taxis has grown as a consequence of social distancing and various other things and demand is increasing in special needs sectors and disability sectors, but we are shrinking as well. There are lots of drivers that are currently licenced that are not going to renew. The numbers are down as well and there is a problem here. Just something to reference, which I will reference a bit later on if I may, in the 2016 plan, there was a commitment by TfL to have a review into getting more wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAVs) into the private hire fleet and there was going to be dialogue about that. As a trade body, we have had no dialogue on that whatsoever. It is in the minutes of the 2016 panel. If we have things happening at these reviews, they need to be followed through.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): It needs to materialise, lovely. That is a great scene setter. Thank you very much. Thank you, Chairman.

Keith Prince AM (Chairman): Thank you. Assembly Member Baker.

Elly Baker AM: Thanks, Chair. My first question is to TfL. In the MTS, there was a proposal to limit the overall number of PHVs licenced for use in London. A lot has happened though since the MTS, you talked a little bit about the amount of private hire that you saw in central London that was empty at the time. What is TfL's current thinking about numbers of PHVs and what might need to be done or not done around that?

Helen Chapman (Director of Licensing and Regulation, Transport for London): Thank you. We certainly did ask the Government for powers to be able to cap the number of PHVs. It is interesting that, in the rest of England, licencing authorities have powers to cap taxi numbers but in London we do not have powers to cap either taxi or PHV numbers. That is certainly something that we ask Government for. The Government pulled together a Task and Finish Group on Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Licensing, which was around 2018, Steve [Wright] and Steve [McNamara] and I were all on the panel from that. One of the recommendations that came out of Task and Finish Group was that there would be some powers. However, the Government has made clear that those powers will not be given.

A far bigger issue that we are seeing, which is something that we did warn and did have concerns about, is a cross-border hiring point, so that vehicles and drivers can be licenced by another licencing authority and work all or part of their time in a different authority. We could see that was a potential risk and that it was going to happen. We asked again for powers to be able to prevent that from happening and we came up with a policy paper with some proposals, which we gave to Government about a journey either needing to start or end in the area for which it is licenced. Again, that was another recommendation that did come out of the Task and Finish Group but is not something that the Government has so far taken forward.

Elly Baker AM: Thanks. Can I just - you may not know - clarify, is that because the Government is just not in a position or is not prioritising that at the moment or do they believe those are powers that they do not want to give London? If you do not know, then you do not need to speculate.

Helen Chapman (Director of Licensing and Regulation, Transport for London): No, it is a good question. In terms of capping, it is powers that they do not want to give. On the cross-border hiring, they do have some ideas about how to solve it, which do not necessarily follow the recommendations that we made in our policy paper, but things like having national minimum standards so that it detracts from people perhaps 'licence shopping', going for lower standards or cheaper licences. However, I still have reservations about whether that would work. Having some legislation to prevent cross-border hiring, but in a way that still enables the industry to operate of course, would be an easier way of dealing with it.

Elly Baker AM: Thanks. Can I just ask, the number of PHVs has gone down over the pandemic. I will come over to the rest of the panel and see how they feel about that mix at the moment. However, is that something that TfL would use if they had the power at this point in time or is it something that you would like to have if necessary?

Helen Chapman (Director of Licensing and Regulation, Transport for London): It is an interesting question. This is anecdotal, therefore forgive me, but from everything I have heard from my colleagues today, but also what we hear from the industry, is there is a far bigger demand than there is supply at the moment. If you were ever given powers to cap, then those obviously have to be used very responsibly and you have to think about the safety implications of using them. As it currently stands, we are not hearing that there is a big problem with an oversupply of either taxis or PHVs; the opposite seems to be true since the pandemic, which is obviously very positive for the industry.

Elly Baker AM: Thanks. Just opening up to the to the panel, we have heard about the barriers for black taxis, but if anyone wants to come in and disagree then now is the time to do it, but that it would be good to have more black taxis. Does anyone have any views on that or also on the levels of PHVs that we have in London?

Mariusz Zabrocki (General Manager UK, Free Now): We have both PHVs and taxis in our platform and I would say there is a huge difference between PHV and taxi, therefore I would say there is a massive shortage of taxi drivers. I would not say that is the case about PHV. I would probably say the current number of PHD more or less is probably what is needed. In terms of caps, there are other tools than caps that lead to the same result. We can change the licencing requirements and we can enforce certain requirements that were not enforced so far around English language, for example, or safety. However, at the same time, I would like to really say that still London has the best track record in terms of safety. Therefore, I do not want to criticise TfL too much because there are some amazing things that we achieved and we operate across Europe, we operate across we used to operate across Latin America, and London has the best track record in terms of safety of PHV and taxis. However, at the same time, we need to look at how we increase the supply of black cabs, but I believe PHVs are more or less at the right number.

Elly Baker AM: Asher?

Steve McNamara (General Secretary, Licensed Taxi Drivers Association): Can I come in there?

Elly Baker AM: Can I come to Asher and then I will come to you, Steve?

Steve McNamara (General Secretary, Licensed Taxi Drivers Association): Yes, sure.

Elly Baker AM: Thank you.

Asher Moses (Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Sherbet - The Electric Taxi Company): If we look at the numbers of licenced London taxis on the road today, we are talking about 14,500 taxis, of which around 8,000-ish are electric. If I am not mistaken, there are 19,000 licenced London taxi drivers. That is 5,000 taxi drivers who do not have a taxi at all, OK. Those 5,000 taxi drivers need to get into a taxi. They are already qualified, licenced London taxi drivers who cannot rent or buy a London taxi.

Then you have 8,500 electric. To the left of the 19,000 you have another 7,000 diesel drivers who also need to get into electric in the next few years because of 2030. These vehicles are going up and up and up [in price] and they cannot get into it. We are approaching it by use of technology, by developing an app for taxi

sharers. Therefore, do we need more taxis in London? I believe we should have a lot more licenced London taxis and PHV should be a way to flow PHV drivers into becoming licenced London taxi drivers. There is not a city or a country in the world that would not give their right arm for a licenced London taxi service like - I would say like Sherbert - but like London taxis.

Elly Baker AM: Thanks. Steve, sorry, I saw Asher before --

Steve McNamara (General Secretary, Licensed Taxi Drivers Association): No, and Asher is right, and of course that is another irony. Any taxi driver in London will tell you that we get told constantly all day long that we are the best cab service in the world, they recognise the black cab. The only place we are not recognised as the best cab service in the world is at City Hall and TfL, which is the definition. When I say at City Hall, I do not include you, I will come on to what I am talking about. If that is not irony, I really do not know what is.

Very quickly, Helen just mentioned just now when she was talking about the number of vehicles, the safety implications, and then Mariusz touched on it. In November [2023], TfL were talking about the English language requirement and part of their Safety, Equality and Regulatory Understanding (SERU), their safety policies, and in November --

Elly Baker AM: Steve, I think we are going to come to that later. I wonder whether it would be wise to pause that, is that OK, I just do not want to tread on other people's questions if that is OK.

Steve McNamara (General Secretary, Licensed Taxi Drivers Association): Happy to stand down. I will be quiet.

Elly Baker AM: Thanks. Steve Wright, did you want to come in on this?

Steve Wright MBE (Chair, Licensed Private Hire Car Association): Yes, I am sure somebody that makes a lot of money selling taxis would like to destroy the PHV industry's 1,600 businesses that remain in London by making them all become black cab drivers. I am not sure my members would be doing cartwheels about that. However, with regard to the 'ABBA' principle of returning empty, it was environmentally unfriendly, the Department for Transport (DfT) held free sessions, most people went to those sessions and pointed out the absolute madness to make all PHVs return empty to their area of origin. It is just environmentally damaging and not viable.

With regard to capping, we would be in a problem now if we had capping and the Competitions and Markets Authority would be against it. The Government did look at it and it serves no real purpose because the market is the marketplace. Currently, try getting a PHV at 2 [o'clock] in the morning, just try it. There is a massive shortage out there and it is no good going back to 'dinosaur' thinking of capping and restrictions, that is not the way forward. We need to talk about how we service Londoners, the disabled community and everybody that uses us. Thank you.

Elly Baker AM: That is a really interesting point about overall caps and then where the demand is and what other levers there are. I just have a couple of follow-ups. Did you want to come in, Assembly Member Boff?

Keith Prince AM (Chairman): If I can ask Assembly Member Boff to come in.

Andrew Boff AM: Ms Chapman, you have done some work on this limiting. How would you restrict the opportunities for otherwise qualified people to become cab drivers? Is it going to be by demographics, is it

going to be first come, first served, is it going to be by age profile? How would you impose such a limit on these people just wanting to do a job?

Helen Chapman (Director of Licensing and Regulation, Transport for London): If your question is relating to capping as opposed to the proposals we had around cross-border hiring, it is a long time since we looked at this because, as I say, there were some conversations with Government which happened five or six years ago. That is not something that we have looked at since. However, at the time, and when you look at how licencing authorities deal with their powers that they have in terms of capping taxi licences outside of London, from memory - and forgive me because I might be mis-recalling this - but they do that on the basis of a study that is done to understand the total number of people in the area and what the demand is for taxis and then they will release a certain number of taxi licences per year and it is first come, first serve. That is how other licencing authorities deal with it. As I said, a much bigger problem and one we would prefer to have powers to deal with is the cross-border hiring issue.

Andrew Boff AM: Yes. People like borders and do not like restricting people going to other places, but I am particularly concerned, what do you think, why would it be that somebody who has a PHV licence would go into London to look for business if there was not a demand? I just have this picture of all these PHV vehicles parked up all the roads in London waiting for business and there is no business. Only then could you justify some kind of limit. However, that is not the case, is it, people do not intentionally go into inner London and drive around looking for business if it is not there.

Helen Chapman (Director of Licensing and Regulation, Transport for London): Yes, but again, do you mean in terms of the cross-border hiring issue?

Andrew Boff AM: No, I mean in terms of capping the number of licences. This is a problem that does not exist. I think 'this Snark is a Boojum'. I do not think that it exists, because why would somebody drive into London looking for a fare if the demand is not there? I cannot understand what problem a cap would solve.

Helen Chapman (Director of Licensing and Regulation, Transport for London): As I said earlier, this is not an issue that we have actively followed up on for a number of years because that is because --

Andrew Boff AM: However, it is still the Mayor's intention, is it not, to put this cap in?

Helen Chapman (Director of Licensing and Regulation, Transport for London): We talked earlier about the Taxi and Private Hire Action Plan now being almost eight years old and the need to refresh that. All of that will be looked at.

Andrew Boff AM: Is there some hope that he might drop this ridiculous measure?

Helen Chapman (Director of Licensing and Regulation, Transport for London): That is a question you need to put to the Mayor.

Andrew Boff AM: Thank you.

Keith Prince AM (Chairman): Assembly Member Baker.

Elly Baker AM: I just wanted to briefly follow up with TfL, you have mentioned a couple of areas that you have asked for regulatory powers and there has not been any. Some of the Acts of Parliament covering this

area go back over 150 years. Is there anything else that you would like to say that you would like powers over that you think the Government should regulate?

Helen Chapman (Director of Licensing and Regulation, Transport for London): Yes. We are very supportive of the Pedicabs (London) Bill that is currently making its way through Parliament. We are very hopeful that will come to fruition, and we will be able to licence and regulate pedicabs in a way that has not been possible in London. Certainly, more enforcement powers, being able to deal with things - and I am sure Steve [McNamara] is at some point going to come on and talk about motoring convictions - but being able to, not just have the power to suspend or revoke a licence, but to issue more fines, fixed penalty notices and things for more minor misdemeanours would be helpful. However, some of those things are written in the Mayor's Taxi and Private Hire Action Plan, which is obviously quite out of date now, and we need to do a refresh of all of those things and rethink where powers would be helpful. However certainly on pedicabs, we are very supportive of the Government's efforts to get that through Parliament.

Elly Baker AM: Thank you. Is there anyone else on the panel who has anything to say about where the law stands or where the law needs to be updated in any area other than the things that have been covered? No. My final question is to TfL, are you planning a fare increase for taxis this year?

Helen Chapman (Director of Licensing and Regulation, Transport for London): We are midway through a process looking at taxi fares. We have recently consulted or closed the consultation, taxi fares are calculated using the cost index and we have heard from other members of the panel this morning about insurance costs and maintenance costs, all of those things go into a bucket and are worked out. Therefore, we have put some proposals out for consultation, we have had responses in, we are now giving consideration to that and to what recommendation to put in front of [the TfL] Finance Committee, which will be in the next two months.

Elly Baker AM: Thank you. Back to you, Chairman.

Keith Prince AM (Chairman): Thank you. Assembly Member Garratt.

Neil Garratt AM: Morning. I am just moving on in a second to talk about the Knowledge, but first I just have a quick question. There is something that puzzled me that you were saying, what you described as a cross-border problem, Helen. Just to set the context, my constituency is Croydon and Sutton, it is right on the border of London, that border is a very porous border, there are residential streets that are partly in London, partly in Surrey. I cannot honestly understand what is the benefit to the consumer of restricting say a Reigate and Banstead taxi, or a Tandridge taxi from coming into Croydon or a Croydon taxi from going into Tandridge. I do not understand how that benefits the customer by having those restrictions.

Helen Chapman (Director of Licensing and Regulation, Transport for London): No, you are absolutely right. Obviously, there are areas on the very outer border. If it is helpful, we can share the policy paper that we wrote around this because we did give it consideration. I probably will not do it justice in the time that I have to explain. However, we did propose a method of being able to address that. This was not about vehicles not being able to pick up or drop off. Our proposal is that either the journey should start or end in the area for which the vehicle has a licence. It allows for that journey to not return empty, but it also makes sure that we do not have a situation where we have requirements that are in place for very good safety reasons in London and somebody can go and get a licence from any other licencing authority and work all of the time in London.

Neil Garratt AM: OK. That would be useful because, as I say, I am just concerned about restraints on, if you drove from Banstead up into Sutton and then pick up a fair that might go to Croydon, you would block that.

Anyway, moving on to the Knowledge, perhaps I will start with you, Steve McNamara. My understanding is that the number of people applying for the Knowledge is going down, and I suppose the big question is, is it fit for purpose? Does it need a rethink? What is going on? Does it need looking at or is it fine the way that it is?

Steve McNamara (General Secretary, Licensed Taxi Drivers Association): Very quickly, you might want to make a note of this, there is a bit of praise for TfL here, because they have done a review of the Knowledge. I am not totally negative on everything they do. The Knowledge is very much fit for purpose. Satellite navigation (satnav) is great, they are an *aide-mémoire*. The example I always give is I am sitting at the lights at Piccadilly Circus, we all know Piccadilly, I am facing Eros, and someone comes running up and says to me, Phillimore Gardens. If I have to start entering that into a satnav and people are behind are now beeping me at the lights, and I know Phillimore Gardens is in Kensington, therefore I do a U-turn and go back down Piccadilly.

If you do not know that, by the time you have pulled across Piccadilly Circus, start entering it into your satnav, it is now going to take you 20 minutes to get back to where you started. The Knowledge is very relevant for an immediate hire, which is primarily what we do. There are problems with the Knowledge, in recent years, in the 1980s the average time to do the Knowledge was 18 months to two years. In current times it is three to four years, therefore the time taken has excessively gone up.

We have suggested various ways to TfL in which the Knowledge, the standard can be retained, what we call our 'gold standard', and equally achieve that standard, but possibly in a quicker time. Some of the things that we have suggested are currently being reviewed. The Knowledge team that Helen has at Greenwich, there is a new building at Greenwich, very forward thinking, very innovative people, most of them are taxi drivers, therefore they recognise that, and we are going to see some changes with the Knowledge. Not to make it easier but to make it more accessible and we welcome that.

What I would say to you when you are talking about the Knowledge is we are one of the very few industries in London where our demographics have changed massively over the last ten years. When I came into this business, God was a boy, and everybody looked like me. That is no longer the case. We now have our demographics have changed massively. If you go down to Helen's place when they hand out the badges or you go to any Knowledge School, what you see is a cross-section of London exactly as it is today. You see people of all shapes, sizes, colours, all religions, everything. You see a real good mix. I recently had the pleasure of attending a Somalian cab drivers' dinner. I did not even know there was such a thing. However, I had the pleasure of attending one in Kensington and there were 300 Somalian black cab drivers there, which represents the changes that we have seen in this industry.

So, the Knowledge is very relevant. The only problem we have with the Knowledge at the moment, the demographics, the number of women is still very low, the number of women doing the Knowledge. We have tried to address that. We now run an all-women Knowledge School at our building in Southwark. Once a week we run an all-women Knowledge School. That is the only thing that really needs addressing and we have suggested to TfL various ways in which they could do that. We have also suggested to them various ways in which they could actively encourage more people on to the Knowledge. For example, they have a database of about 120,000 PHDs, many of which would welcome the opportunity to be informed of how the Knowledge runs, what they could do, how they could be, how they could work for themselves and upgrade, if you like. I think everybody accepts it is an upgrade from a PHD to a taxi driver. We have suggested those and many of those are being looked at. That is one of the few positives that I am going to bring today, I am afraid.

Neil Garratt AM: OK, just you did say it is taking roughly twice as long now. What is the reason for it taking longer? Is it that the requirements have changed or just somehow it takes people longer to get through?

Steve McNamara (General Secretary, Licensed Taxi Drivers Association): There are various schools of thought as to why that is. One of the theories is that more people are doing it part time, therefore it takes longer. I am not so sure on that one. The way in which the Knowledge is tested or the way you are given it, you are given a list of runs, a big, long list, and you go away, and you come back when you have done it. I have always been of the opinion it should be much more modular, like any exam. If you are doing an A-level history, they do not go away and say, "Here is a book, twentieth century history, start at 1900, come back in 1964", you do it in blocks, you do pre-First World War. That is how I believe the Knowledge should be done.

We have made many of these suggestions, but it is quite positive because one of the things that Helen - we are probably taking her thunder - one of the things that they are currently going to do is, at the moment when you are learning Knowledge, they can ask you anything, any point in central London. Theoretically the examiner could ask you to take him from his nan's house to his mum's house. You would have no idea where either were, and he could legitimately ask that. They do not. What we are having now, we are going to have a basket of points, there will be a number, 1,000 points, and you know what you have to learn. You know you have to know this many thousand points. It will not make it any easier, but it will make it that you know what you have to learn. You will know the key points. It is changes like that, along with a review of what we call the Blue Book, which is the runs you have to learn, will make it much more positive. That is the good news.

Neil Garratt AM: OK, thanks, Steve. Helen, you were indicating. I do not whether Steve has stolen your thunder or whether you had something else to add.

Helen Chapman (Director of Licensing and Regulation, Transport for London): Steve, steal my thunder? Never. We do consider the Knowledge is still relevant. London taxi drivers are world renown for setting the standard and I think anybody who has come into London and gets in a taxi expects that driver to know where they are going. That is an iconic part of the whole taxi trade. As Steve [McNamara] says, we have been doing a review of the Knowledge. I cannot answer why it takes longer now with any certainty because I was not around in the 1980s, but we certainly do know that we get a large number of people who are applying are people who are doing it while maintaining another job, having a family, having a mortgage, and all of those things. Therefore, we think that is certainly a contributing factor, if not the whole factor.

What is really positive is we are seeing - I mentioned it briefly at the start - an increase in the number of people who are applying to do the Knowledge. In total for 2023, we have seen 579 people apply to do the Knowledge; that is over 200 higher than 2019, which is obviously the last pre-pandemic year. Even in this month alone, in the last week alone, we have seen more people than applied for the whole of January last year [2023]. We are seeing some positive signs. We are going to continue to work and engage with the taxi trade to make sure that the Knowledge stays fit for purpose, that it does keep track, keep pace with technology, while maintaining that gold standard that is recognised around the world.

Neil Garratt AM: I do not put words in your mouth, but it sounds like the general message from both of you on the Knowledge is that it is basically solid, some tweaks here or there, but there is no need to rethink the whole thing. I see a lot of nodding on that.

Helen Chapman (Director of Licensing and Regulation, Transport for London): Yes.

Neil Garratt AM: OK, good. Mariusz, you mentioned earlier, you talked about this programme of 'upgrading', let us call it, from a private hire to taxi. How is that going and what have you learned from that programme that you have?

Mariusz Zabrocki (General Manager UK, Free Now): It is going great, but I wanted to start with maybe what Steve Wright said before that somehow black cab businesses want to destroy PHV. To me, PHV is the training ground for black cabs, that is how we see it. Strong PHV trade means there will be a strong black cab trade in the future. Those two professions coexist, and I believe there is no contradiction between strengthening both.

In terms of our programme, we open it to all PHV drivers pretty much in London, so anyone who completes at least 100 trips for Free Now, and it could be someone who is an Uber driver on a daily basis, if they complete 100 trips for Free Now, they qualify for our programme. We cover all the costs, and we cover the cost of Knowledge School, of all the materials, all the TfL fees, any cost that is related to completing the Knowledge and becoming a black cab driver, we are covering that cost.

We launched it only two months ago and we already have more than 600 drivers who completed the criteria to start the process and more than 200 drivers are already in Knowledge Schools and that is in two months. Therefore, we believe that this is already looking like the biggest black cab driver recruitment effort since the Olympics. We just started. We want to recruit thousands of drivers long term, but we believe that obviously with the company we can do quite a lot. As the biggest black cab operator, we believe it is our responsibility to have this kind of programme, but also there need to be changes in terms of upgrading, updating Knowledge to the twenty-first century, while obviously it is a great exam, there are some small changes that need to be made, and accessibility of vehicles. Those things need to be addressed so that we ensure that number of drivers bounces back because we clearly see there is a demand for more black cab drivers.

Neil Garratt AM: That is very positive because obviously one of the concerns some people have is that the black cab trade risks becoming stale. You have the people now who are doing it but, if there is not a healthy pipeline of new people coming in, then obviously it becomes a deteriorating group. I do not mean that personally; in terms of the group of people diminishes as people naturally retire and new people are not coming in. However, it sounds like you have potentially a very healthy pipeline to keep that sustainable.

Mariusz Zabrocki (General Manager UK, Free Now): Yes. What we notice is that the level of awareness among PHV drivers is very low about the Knowledge. That is one of the things that really surprised us that people do not understand what is required. They think it is even harder than it really is. We are trying to address it. However, in the end, TfL can play a role in addressing this. Sometimes when I talk to people from TfL, the argument they use is PHV and taxi, they are on par, we do not want to give preferential treatment to any of the transport options. However, that is not really true, is it, I mean, the black cab trade is clearly superior to PHV trade. This is high quality of vehicles, sorry, high quality of Knowledge, understanding of the city, therefore it is in our best interest as consumers as well as passengers is to ensure as many drivers as possible go down that path and become black cab drivers. It will improve everyone's safety and customer experience across the whole city. Therefore, it is really important that we promote black cab trade among PHV drivers because they have already done half of the work, they know the streets, they know the landmarks. Maybe they need to learn a bit more, but they already did half of the work. We believe they can complete the Knowledge within 18 months easily and that is what we are targeting within this programme.

Neil Garratt AM: That is very positive. I feel I ought to point out as well, almost always when I sit in this room, somebody is telling me why there needs to be a subsidy or a Government programme or a new regulation to make something happen, this is people who see a need filling a need that they see, which is brilliant. Helen, you just wanted to come back. I do not want to take too much more time.

Helen Chapman (Director of Licensing and Regulation, Transport for London): No, I understand. Just very briefly, because it is important to acknowledge, I have heard it quite a few times from various of my

colleagues, we regulate taxi and private hire services, and they are very distinct services. Obviously, if a PHD wants to do the Knowledge and become a taxi driver, we will do whatever we can to support that driver. However, I do not think it is fair on the PHV industry and I do not think it is fair for me to sit here and not correct that we do not see PHV as a training ground for black cabs. They are their own distinct industry providing a very important service and some drivers may wish to go on and become taxi drivers, some drivers are incredibly happy being PHDs and doing chauffeur and executive services and minicab services, and both are important.

Neil Garratt AM: Understood and noted. Thank you, Helen. Chair, back to you.

Keith Prince AM (Chairman): Thank you. I would like to call on Assembly Member Bailey.

Lord Bailey of Paddington AM: Thank you, Chairman. Morning to the panel. My first question is to Steve McNamara. We have just heard about wonderfully diverse goings-on in black cab drivers, but only two per cent of your drivers are women. What is the reason for that? Is there something that could be done about that? Do you think you need to do anything about that?

Steve McNamara (General Secretary, Licensed Taxi Drivers Association): No, we certainly do need to do something about it. The reality is that driving a cab is a great job for anyone. It gives you the most unbelievable amount of freedom. You go to work when you want, you come home when you want, you can fit it around anything. When I was young, when I had younger kids, I never missed out on school plays or things that were in the day because I just did not go to work, I went out later. For all those criteria, and bearing in mind that most women tend to be the primary carer of children, for whatever reason, it is a great job for a woman. However, it is also a good job for anyone, and I do not really understand why so few women drive cabs. My wife drives a cab, too much, I cook my own dinner most nights. The reality is I cannot cook, I clean, but I do not cook. It is a fantastic job; it gives you the independence. We do not have the issues in the taxi industry that women would, for example, safety aspects in a PHV because you are in your partitioned vehicle, you are separate. I honestly do not know; I have given this untold thought as to why it is. I just think it is one of those industries where women just do not seem to think they can do it, even though there are a number of women driving cabs and, as I said, we run this Knowledge School for women. The women that we get there are a real mix of ages and just like everything else. Some of them are doing very well and one or two of them have already now got their badges. I asked them and they do not know, they seem to think that women do not know. The answer to your question, Assembly Member Bailey, is I do not know.

Lord Bailey of Paddington AM: Do you want to come in, Steve?

Steve Wright MBE (Chair, Licensed Private Hire Car Association): Yes. I think I can help here because I ran a minicab company for 25 years and we ran, in the 1990s, great programmes to try to get women into the system. It was not successful. At the end of the day, the women did not particularly want to be cab drivers. However, outside of that, since then, there has been a lot of movement of women coming into the profession, they certainly were 90 per cent of the staff internally in my office, but they did not choose to be drivers. However, they are coming in to do school runs and special educational need runs and stuff like that. There has been great success in Swansea where they give restricted licences that are only for school runs and women are taking up a lot of those licences.

They are also becoming the majority in the sector of passenger assistance, and it tends to fall in with the working patterns that women would want to do. Rather than being out late at night, they would like to be family orientated or whatever. We have done quite a lot of work on this, and it has been very successful. In fact, one of our special educational needs companies outside of London has 90 per cent women drivers,

therefore it is something I would like to talk to TfL about because you do not need the full, you cannot go and become a mini cab driver, but these restricted licences have now been recognised by the Institute of Licencing as something that has helped to get women in the workplace.

The other thing is we are working with two organisations, Females in the Fleet and Think Pink, with regard to getting more women in. However, I have the experience that the women choose not to be drivers, but they choose to do different types of driving as opposed to taxi and minicab driving. There is a lot of work happening on that at the moment.

Lord Bailey of Paddington AM: That is very interesting, the way you have acknowledged how people build things around how families, etc, respond differently to the time pressures needed. I just want to quickly come to Mariusz. You have a programme that has 600 drivers and who are making that transition. The questions I want to ask is what proportion of them are women, what proportion them would you consider are from a diverse background, do you collect those statistics at all?

Mariusz Zabrocki (General Manager UK, Free Now): I wanted to comment maybe first on the female share overall in the market. We ask both PHV and taxi drivers, and I talk to many female drivers as well, why they choose this trade, and it is really perception. There is a perception either of lack of safety or perception it is not a job for a woman. However, there are a lot of reasons why it is a great job for especially when you have kids, when you have to combine it with other responsibilities. However, the big barrier on the black cab side is the cost of vehicle, because women are way more likely to be part-time drivers and when you have to pay £400 a week obviously you cannot really cover that cost working part-time. However, coming to your question, it is a very diverse group in terms of ethnicities, around two-thirds of our participants in the programme are of minority backgrounds. However, in terms of female share, it continues to be low in line with the PHV [sector] because we are recruiting PHD and therefore in the PHV trade the share of female drivers is as low as in the taxi trade, therefore it is very low.

Lord Bailey of Paddington AM: Asher, I want to come to you because you are the one who is most linked to the reality of the finances in a very sort of personal family way. You seem to be more connected to helping people come in because you run a fleet. How many women do you come across in that situation? When you talk about people from ethnic background, is it just a case of confidence, is it a case of financing? Obviously, I come from a Black community, I cannot remember, growing up, many families who would have had quite frankly the funds to now purchase £100,000 cab. We would have become a minicab driver because that was more relevant to us. Is that your sort of experiences as well?

Asher Moses (Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Sherbet - The Electric Taxi Company): There is no doubt on my fleet, we run a fleet of 530 electric vehicles, ten per cent are female drivers. We tend to find that our female drivers, they tend to pick up pre-book fares, our customers ask for these particular drivers, they are a lot more approachable for what we call a 'white glove' service for our customers. Again, they are very niche, and we want to build more female drivers on our team. As Steve [McNamara] says, it is a fantastic job for single parents, for individual people who want to be able to do it part time, it is not a job, it is a career. This is the difference between cab drivers, we do this, I am a cab driver, driving a taxi is a career, it is not a stopgap. We do not do it in between jobs, it is something that we come in and we are proud to do and be part of London. Female cab drivers are very, very important for us. The cost of the vehicles and the cost to entry is too much for anybody. As I say, for a fleet owner myself, I will not be investing in many more taxis until there is a solution. We will look at other mobility programmes. However, licenced London taxis are too expensive to continue to invest in buying those vehicles.

Lord Bailey of Paddington AM: OK. Helen.

Helen Chapman (Director of Licensing and Regulation, Transport for London): We would love to see more women both in taxis and in PHVs. We do not have any specific data that suggests that it is linked to safety, but safety probably does play a part in it. We have recently held a driver safety forum where we were talking about how can we make drivers feel safer and what additional access do they need to the police and that sort of thing, therefore we are going to continue to follow the actions through that have come out of that driver safety forum.

Then specifically with regards to women on the Knowledge, we have a female Knowledge manager, and she is a taxi driver. She has been great, she has been doing some work directly with women, with other women taxi drivers. We have had some articles in *En Route*, which is our magazine that we produce for the taxi and private hire trade. We will continue to work with the industry and do what we can to promote far more diverse industry.

In terms of the Knowledge demographic data, this data is correct up to December 2023, it is 98 per cent male, two per cent female, even on the Knowledge as of today. 18 per cent have not provided us with any demographic data, 31 per cent of people on the Knowledge are white, and 51 per cent have identified themselves as Black, Asian and minority ethnic. We are seeing an increase in demographics on the Knowledge which is positive but definitely more to be done with women.

Lord Bailey of Paddington AM: The diversity piece is probably just responding to the demographic change in London, there are many more ethnic people. The big issue here that we need to draw down on is the idea that many women will want to do this part time and the real barrier is cost to then pay for this very expensive cab. I wonder what is TfL doing to help control the cost of the cab because ultimately, correct me if I am wrong, Asher, that is it, everything would be better if the cab costs less.

Keith Prince AM (Chairman): Sorry, Assembly Member, we are coming on to that.

Lord Bailey of Paddington AM: OK, you can answer that question when it comes around. That is it from me then, Chairman.

Keith Prince AM (Chairman): Thank you very much. I now look to Assembly Member McCartney.

Joanne McCartney AM: Thank you. I am going to ask about the licencing requirements for PHVs. My questions are first to Helen. To be a PHV, you have to have a licence and there are quite stringent requirements to that. You have to be a fit and proper person, you have to go through medical tests to check you are medically fit to drive a cab, you have to have an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS). However, recently, there have been new tests that PHV drivers have had to pass, the English language test and then the recent SERU test as well. I am sure many Assembly Members have had many constituents writing to them. In in my area of Enfield and Haringey, I have a lot of PHV drivers whose English may not be their first language, particularly Turkish, Kurdish, and Bangladeshi drivers in particular, who are terrified that they are going to lose their livelihood because of these tests.

All of us would realise that there has to be an appropriate level of English, you have to be able to communicate effectively with your passengers. You have to be able to understand the rules and regulations of the road and other licencing requirements. Can I just ask, what is the concerns that you have been hearing about the tests and what have you done about it? Obviously, the Mayor made an announcement last week about pausing enforcement but trying to pilot a new way of doing the test. Could you just explain a little bit about that?

Helen Chapman (Director of Licensing and Regulation, Transport for London): Yes, absolutely. As you summarise, it is important that PHDs are able to communicate with their passengers in English and also be able to understand written English because we communicate quite important regulatory notices and various other things that we need to know that they have that basic level of understanding. The English language requirement we first announced in 2016, but we brought it in under transitional arrangements to allow time for the industry to adjust. Then the SERU requirement is a multiple-choice test where we ask drivers to prepare in advance, so that is reading information material that is in our PHD handbook, and then we ask questions on that handbook. It is not designed to catch them out in any way, but it is designed for us to be able to know that they understand their obligations when it comes to safeguarding, whether that is child sexual exploitation, county lines, that they understand their regulatory obligations and their obligations when it comes to the Equality Act [2010], carrying disabled passengers.

The first deadline has passed where a number of drivers were due to have passed by 30 September last year [2023], and, of the group, the majority of them did manage that. The pass rate on the English language, for example, is close to 90 per cent. The first thing I would say to your constituents, and any worried constituents, this is not something to be concerned about and I think the fear of it is worse than the assessment.

What we have seen with the SERU assessment is that some drivers are failing it and the feedback that we have had from those drivers is that, while they are under pressure in an assessment environment, which is not familiar to them, they are struggling to recall the information. This was never designed to be a memory test. Therefore, what we have said is, "OK, let us pause the enforcement of the licencing action for them and let us trial, with that much smaller group of drivers, getting them in and doing it as an open book assessment". We are not trying to catch them out. We want them to pass, but we want to know that they understand their regulatory obligations. That is what we have just announced last week, as the regulator, we announced last week, we are taking a pause on licencing enforcement action with this small group of drivers and we are going to invite them in again, but to undertake the assessment when they can do it with the handbook in front of them.

Joanne McCartney AM: OK, and how long is that pilot going to last for?

Helen Chapman (Director of Licensing and Regulation, Transport for London): It is difficult to put an exact time on it because we have not sent out letters yet and we do not know drivers' availability and things, but we said in our notice we anticipate it will be several months.

Joanne McCartney AM: OK, and anybody coming in seeking their first licence or renewing their licence is still going to be expected to do the test, but will they be doing the test under the pilot scheme?

Helen Chapman (Director of Licensing and Regulation, Transport for London): The pilot scheme is ringfenced just to this small group of drivers that were due to have passed by 30 September last year [2023], but have not. If it is successful, we will then roll it out to everybody. Any new applicant has to do the test and has to pass it before they become licenced and that has not changed. Anyone who is renewing their licence, if their licence expires, we have said we cannot issue them with the new licence until such time as they meet these important safety requirements. However, if they have expired or they are due to expire they will be top of our priority list to say, "Come in and do the assessment quickly so that we can help you and get your licence back to you as quickly as possible."

Joanne McCartney AM: That is why I asked about how long the pilot is going to last for because we will have a rolling case of drivers coming up for renewal who will be worried and if there is a better way of doing the test that still meets all the requirements. For example, safeguarding is really important, but if there is a

new and better way that you can be assured they understand everything, but it is better for them, then that is why I am saying as quick as possible to get the lessons from that and to apply it.

Helen Chapman (Director of Licensing and Regulation, Transport for London): Absolutely, yes. Just to give you reassurance, for the vast majority of PHDs, the deadline has not hit for them yet. It is difficult to explain but obviously because there is such a big population of PHDs, from a capacity perspective we just could not get 100,000 drivers all in at the same time, therefore we set various deadlines depending on how much evidence they had or had not provided us for English language. It was only 9,000 drivers who were in this first cohort who in total, who had to satisfy us by 30 September [2023], and well over 6,000, I think closer to 7,000, have. Therefore, I am talking about 2,000 drivers. For the majority of the rest of the drivers, even if they are coming up for renewal, they have until 30 September 2024 or 31 March 2025, depending on which category they fell into. Therefore, they really do not have to be concerned. It is this 2,000 to 2,500 drivers, if their licence is due to expire or has expired, we will work with them to get them in quicker as part of the trial. However, if their licence has not expired, then they can breathe a sigh of relief because we are pausing licence and enforcement action so that we can get them in, and they will still be able to work in the meantime.

Joanne McCartney AM: Thank you. Can I just ask a question, because I am taking my lead from the Chairman of our Committee, Assembly Member Prince is also the Conservative Transport Spokesman, was with the drivers that came and demonstrated against the test here last week. However, Assembly Member Prince, I am just going to quote you if I can, you said, "PHDs need to be able to speak English, but they do not need to sit a written exam." I think, Assembly Member Prince, you asked a [mayoral] question last week that was unfortunately withdrawn because I would like to know the answer, to say that perhaps, rather than a written exam, have you looked at whether a training module could be completed satisfactorily as opposed to an exam? What options did you look at?

Helen Chapman (Director of Licensing and Regulation, Transport for London): We did look at a number of options. We do consider that being able to communicate in English, in reading and writing, is important. However, it is obviously not important that they can do that to a degree level. Being able to understand basic communications from the regulator or from a passenger and that was a point that that did go to court, and we were successful with back in 2016. We did look at different modules. We have made a significant amount of material available online to help drivers to prepare. We consider that doing the assessment is the right approach. However, we encourage drivers to go online and to make use of all the training materials we have made available to them before they come in, which includes some Knowledge, check questions at the end of each module, they have the PHD handbook. We also have a safeguarding training course, which is online.

In addition to that, a number of larger private hire operators are also offering free training to drivers, therefore they are getting drivers in, offering them that training and preparing them before they come in for an assessment. We have also made a number of videos available online and we are in the process of filming some more, which tells the driver what to expect when they come to the assessment centre, and we basically walk them through it in that video. The videos that we are filming at the moment, the training videos breaking the modules in the PHD handbook down into smaller sections so that they can watch the video and understand it and then do a Knowledge check online. Therefore, we are really not trying to catch any drivers out by this. Quite the opposite, we are doing as much as we can to help them, but we do still consider for safety reasons it is important that they understand their obligations.

Joanne McCartney AM: Yes, absolutely. Can I just come to Steve Wright and Mariusz, if I can. The PHDs that you represent, or you work with, how have the tests impacted them, and do you welcome the changes that TfL are making?

Steve Wright MBE (Chair, Licensed Private Hire Car Association): Yes, we welcome the changes and just to put a bit of background, when I was an operator, my company was the first taxi and PHV company in the UK to get a national training award and Investors in People. I was also on the Sector Skills Councils for taxi and private hire for ten years, so I know a little bit about training. What is important is the journey since 2016. It was too high in 2016 and, having a TfL Board Member, I was demonstrating outside City Hall about the level. With half a million miles of driving and running a cab company and being on the TfL Board, I might have failed the examinations that were being required. Certainly, my old school is a block of flats now.

What we want is appropriate training. The Task and Finish Group [on Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Licensing] did move the dial a little bit in 2018 with Professor Mohammed Abdel-Haq's findings by saying that you need to understand English, but you do not need to do a two-hour essay. We had the dyslexia people saying, "Nobody is going to pass this test". We need to get appropriate training. I am going to do the SERU test, but we have been inundated with people that are perfectly good drivers, that can communicate with passengers, often from ethnic minority communities where it was too much for them. We really welcome fine-tuning; training needs to be appropriate. Absolutely, it does not need to be at a low level; it needs to be appropriate. We will continue to work with Helen on this, but the dial has moved, and we welcome last week's announcement.

Joanne McCartney AM: Good, thank you. Mariusz?

Mariusz Zabrocki (General Manager UK, Free Now): In terms of Free Now, as I mentioned we are one of those operators who supports drivers to complete those requirements. We have partnered with an English training provider and also, we have provided training to our drivers regarding SERU. Overall, we support TfL here and we think the requirements are reasonable. There are certain cases where maybe they need a bit more time, to be more flexible with people with dyslexia, etc, but overall, I believe it is the right way forward and I do not think it has a negative impact on supply of drivers. I welcome those requirements.

Joanne McCartney AM: OK. You welcome the changes and the pilot, I am assuming?

Mariusz Zabrocki (General Manager UK, Free Now): Yes, I recognise that if someone has dyslexia or is, let us say, a first generation immigrant, maybe they speak English, but they are not necessarily comfortable with writing. I understand those concerns, so we definitely need to take them into account.

Joanne McCartney AM: Yes, thank you. Can I stick with you there? I have a follow-up question. In terms of licensing requirements, TfL is responsible for licensing and regulating taxi [drivers] and PHVs and vehicles as well as private operators. We understand that TfL does not have the power to license companies operating taxi services via an app or radio circuit. In terms of your business, does that mean that only part of your company is regulated by TfL and part of it is not? How does that work?

Mariusz Zabrocki (General Manager UK, Free Now): We are a licensed PHV operator, but on the taxi side indeed there is no such thing as an operator licence. However, the reason why I believe there is not necessarily a need for it is because the requirements on drivers are already so high. They have the Knowledge; TfL regulates the prices and there is no need for an additional layer in that operator licensing. That is what I believe. If there were such requirements, I am quite comfortable we would meet them because we are already a PHV operator, but that is where it comes from. When we talk about the Knowledge and we talk about pricing and ensuring safety, all those things are already covered by the driver in vehicle licensing, so the current system completely makes sense.

Joanne McCartney AM: TfL and Helen, is that your view as well or would you like the ability to have that licensing requirement?

Helen Chapman (Director of Licensing and Regulation, Transport for London): It is an interesting question, and it is one we have not spoken to Government about for a few years. The last time we did speak to it, we said that we did not consider that it was necessary because drivers can ply for hire and can be hailed on the street. We have not had a lot of discussion with Government since then, but as we have seen now, all of the taxi app companies are also now private hire operators so there has been that convergence anyway. What we are seeing is that they tend to operate the same systems because of economies of scale and things. It does make life quite interesting if we are thinking about regulation and thinking about what regulation might be appropriate for private hire. It is a bit of an oddity that we are then talking to the same company, but we do not have the regulatory power to be able to say about one side of the company, but we can about the other. We would need to give it more thought. Sorry, it is a very waffly answer and I need to think about it.

Joanne McCartney AM: OK, thank you.

Mariusz Zabrocki (General Manager UK, Free Now): I have maybe a couple of sentences. What we try to do as a company - and I believe our competitors do the same thing - is we try to copy some of the PHV requirements also to our taxi business. When there are reporting requirements, safety enforcement requirements or complaint management, even though theoretically TfL does not regulate us on the taxi side we still follow the same process. For example, whenever a customer complains about the taxi fare or taxi driver behaviour, we treat it exactly in the same way as we would with a PHV complaint. As I mentioned, all major taxi players are also PHV operators so I do not think it would have any impact on the businesses who have also taxi operator licences.

Joanne McCartney AM: OK, thank you. That is helpful. Yes, Asher?

Asher Moses (Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Sherbet - The Electric Taxi Company): For my penny's worth, I am all-licensed London electric taxis only with zero private hire on my business. Again, we do not have a requirement from TfL to be operators as our drivers do the Knowledge and they are the operators of their own vehicles, but we do supply them electric taxi booking work on their platform.

Joanne McCartney AM: OK, thank you. Thank you, Chairman.

Keith Prince AM (Chairman): Thank you very much. We are going to take a five-minute break.

[The Chairman adjourned the meeting at 11.40am and resumed the meeting at 11.50am.]

Keith Prince AM (Chairman): Ladies and gentlemen, if we can start the second session. I call upon Assembly Member Pidgeon.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): OK, we are moving on to a section about the electrification of vehicles, it all overlaps and my colleagues are going to talk more about charging points. In terms of vehicles, we have the PiTG and we know that that is only guaranteed, I think, until March of this year [2024]. It would be good to hear, perhaps starting off from TfL, whether you are making representations to Government about what happens beyond that. We have already heard about the unaffordability of the vehicles and that helps with a small amount of finance. If Government is not willing to continue that grant, is this something TfL may look at, their own plug-in grant? Christina, thank you.

Christina Calderato (Director of Transport Strategy and Policy, Transport for London): This one could be either of us, but I will take this one. Yes, in terms of making representations we are absolutely doing that and feel very strongly that this is something that we need to continue, and Government needs to continue. As we talked about, that cost barrier is a barrier to people moving into the industry and being able to see the uptake of those cleaner vehicles, so it is something that is important. In the PiTG to date, DfT has provided £4,000 of that and TfL has put in £3,500 of that.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): £3,500, yes.

Christina Calderato (Director of Transport Strategy and Policy, Transport for London): We have been supporting that, but that funding is all running out, so we are having those conversations and making those representations. We have also been making representations and asked about the value-added tax (VAT) on the vehicles because there is VAT, which is not necessarily applicable on privately owned WAVs. The Commissioner [of TfL] has written to the [HM] Treasury about VAT on vehicles, about VAT on public charging points and on the importance of the PiTG. Yes, we are continuing to have all of those conversations.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): You are continuing on that. Regardless of the £4,000 element that comes from DfT, will your £3,500 continue after?

Christina Calderato (Director of Transport Strategy and Policy, Transport for London): The £3,500 was funding that was provided by DfT for purpose of being able to provide those grants.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): OK, got you.

Christina Calderato (Director of Transport Strategy and Policy, Transport for London): It is all part of the same conversation.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): OK.

Christina Calderato (Director of Transport Strategy and Policy, Transport for London): We are still having those conversations and we are hopeful that we will be able to make some progress there.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): Hopeful.

Christina Calderato (Director of Transport Strategy and Policy, Transport for London): It is something that we --

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): If you cannot get anywhere with Government, might you be considering developing your own similar scheme?

Christina Calderato (Director of Transport Strategy and Policy, Transport for London): What we have done previously in terms of our schemes is the Mayor provided £50 million funding, which includes that PiTG but also the delicensing scheme payment. Again, we worked with the trade to restructure that in a way that made it more supportive for drivers and more attractive and that has been tens of millions [of Pounds], giving drivers up to £10,000 to decommission 4,000 vehicles.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): Going forward, will you look?

Christina Calderato (Director of Transport Strategy and Policy, Transport for London): I think we can look --

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): I thought the answer would be "Yes, we will be looking. We cannot guarantee anything."

Christina Calderato (Director of Transport Strategy and Policy, Transport for London): That probably is the answer, but within the context of funding I definitely cannot make any promises today.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): No, of course.

Christina Calderato (Director of Transport Strategy and Policy, Transport for London): The point that I am making is that we feel strongly, and we have behaved in a way that demonstrated previously that that financial support for drivers is a really important element and we are continuing to have those conversations with Government.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): Lovely, OK. As we have discussed earlier, the big issue is there is a monopoly here - we have one vehicle, as we have heard - with finance. It is £100,000-odd, I know from talking to Asher before, and even if you bulk buy some for your fleet you get virtually no discount on them. What options are there for making taxis more affordable in the future in London? What are your thoughts on that? I am going to start with Asher.

Asher Moses (Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Sherbet - The Electric Taxi Company): Sadly, I cannot see ahead anything shortly in the next 12 or 18 months of any new type of vehicle. I did approach the Stellantis Group to build an all-British licensed taxi and to couple it with technology, so we are collecting data. It is something that regulators can regulate, operators can operate, drivers can book, and advertisers can advertise, and it can be replicated globally. That project is over two years and there is an investment, a huge investment. We are looking to work with the Penso Group, which is the same group who did the Mercedes [Benz] conversion, but we are, I believe, at least 18 months to two years away. With all the things we have to get through, we are a long way away.

If I may come along to that £7,500 grant, if that does not get renewed, I can see a disaster in London simply because when a taxi driver or a fleet owner goes to buy a cab, that is £7,500 is shown as part of the sale, which is part of a deposit on a vehicle. If you take that away, you are going to see sales plummet to the lowest levels. London Electric Vehicle Company (LEVC), which has a monopoly, cannot even fund its current business at the moment. We are a warranty dealer as well so it cannot fund its current warranty problems because there are so many repetitive problems. This whole monopoly of the LEVC needs to really be looked into in detail because of the effects it is having on businesses like us, who support fleet owners like us, who get people into work and give them vehicles. We are the conduit for these people who cannot afford to buy these vehicles. I cannot afford the vehicles today with a £7,500 grant, we will not be buying more vehicles and none of my colleagues --

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): Yes, a grant will be needed, but clearly the monopoly and getting other players in is, you think, the way to make them more affordable in the future?

Asher Moses (Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Sherbet - The Electric Taxi Company): Without doubt, but one of the biggest things when you bring other players in is we must not lose sight of the glorious, iconic, licensed London taxi that we have, the purpose-built, iconic, clean, green WAV. We need to find a

balance. Ideally, we should not lose the 'iconicness' of our vehicle. We need to invest in it, support it and support the drivers who support it. That is my view.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): Yes, lovely, thank you. Mariusz, do you want to add anything to that?

Mariusz Zabrocki (General Manager UK, Free Now): I fully agree with what Asher said. We need to at least, I would say, try the manufacturers here and there needs to be real competition. We need to bring the cost down to, I do not know, £60,000/£50,000 because that £100,000 is completely unreasonable. Even £7,500 PiTG, while it helps --

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): It is a drop in the ocean.

Mariusz Zabrocki (General Manager UK, Free Now): -- it is a drop in the ocean.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): Yes, absolutely. Absolutely. Steve McNamara, did you want to come in and then Steve Wright?

Steve McNamara (General Secretary, Licensed Taxi Drivers Association): Yes. There is a saying that you should be very careful what you wish for.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): Yes.

Steve McNamara (General Secretary, Licensed Taxi Drivers Association): The reality is the vehicle is expensive. It is also the best vehicle that we have ever had by far. There are reliability issues with key parts of it, but compared to vehicles that we have driven previously, Asher and I go back to when they would not go up hills. That is not a joke by the way. We had a model of a cab that would not go uphill, and he is laughing because it is true. Be very careful what you wish for. Lots of people talk about alternative vehicles. In the time that I have been in this business - and Asher and I have been in it about the same amount of time - for the vast majority of time there has only ever been one vehicle and it has only ever been a monopoly. There have been periods when there have been other vehicles come and other vehicles go and the reason that they come and then they go is they tend not to be very good. The most recent one we had, an electric Nissan cab - you may have seen them --

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): Yes.

Steve McNamara (General Secretary, Licensed Taxi Drivers Association): -- has been an absolute disaster and so it went away. The problem is that any modern vehicle that is going to meet the current zero emission capable requirements is going to be an expensive vehicle and it almost certainly has to be pure EV. There is no way that anybody is suggesting or would support the removal of the wheelchair requirement. It is one of the key issues that we have in London, and we are the only city in the world that has a 100 per cent wheelchair fleet so that requirement is not going. If you are going to keep the wheelchair requirement, the vehicle has to be of a certain size and dimensions. It has to be a van-type conversion in order to qualify and there are a very limited number of van-type conversions on the market that could be aligned. Asher mentioned the Mercedes [Benz]. The current eVito, which is similar to the one that was used before, starts at about £70,000 as a van. By the time you convert it into a taxi, you put a partition in and you fit the seats and even if you do not go with the turning circle requirement, even if you were to scrap that - and I do not think you should, but even if you did - the vehicle would still be a similar price to the [LEVC] TX E(V). Therefore, there are no savings to be had there. We have a Stellantis that Asher talks about, we use it as a newspaper

delivery vehicle at work, an electric one - we are very clean and green - and that vehicle cost us, I think, about £40,000. Equally, there are new requirements for minimum height for a wheelchair that a vehicle has to have. Again, by the time you convert it, I honestly do not think you could do it with a Stellantis and we have looked at it. Be very careful what you wish for. The --

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): How do you make them more affordable, Steve?

Steve McNamara (General Secretary, Licensed Taxi Drivers Association): Firstly, LEVC is losing £140 million a year. When we talk about monopolies, we must not be all under the idea that they are all sitting up in Coventry, quaffing champagne and cheering on; they are not. They are losing substantial amounts of money and the reason for that is it is a very niche, monopoly vehicle and always has been. Going back to the days of Asher and I, the way to do it - and something that we have supported for many years - is wheelchair vehicles can be VAT exempted. They can be zero-rated for VAT and that is absolutely something that should happen to a London taxi. If they were wheelchair-exempted, we could lose 20 per cent of VAT on the purchase price to bring the price down.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): That certainly brings it down, yes.

Steve McNamara (General Secretary, Licensed Taxi Drivers Association): We need to massively support and get behind the PiTG, possibly even looking to get it increased, as crazy as it seems.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): Increased, yes.

Steve McNamara (General Secretary, Licensed Taxi Drivers Association): Both of those would have a massive impact, both of those would be good for us and it would be good for the jobs in Coventry, English jobs, British factories, and all of that. It would be good for us, it would be good for business, it is good for the wheelchairs, it is good for London, and we keep our icon. That is where we need to be looking. We have lost the phone boxes; the police now sit in BMWs with machine guns, and you do not see the bobby and his hat. We could lose the iconic [black cab] vehicle, I do not think we should do that, and central Government needs to recognise that. The Treasury needs to reduce VAT on the vehicle and TfL, the Mayor and, indeed, the Assembly should be pushing for that above all else.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): That is very helpful. I will bring Steve [Wright] in for any comment you have and then I want to come to TfL. Steve?

Steve Wright MBE (Chair, Licensed Private Hire Car Association): Yes. The problems that are there for taxi are also there for private hire. Not all PHVs cost £80,000 to £100,000, but some do and for the ones likely to be able to afford these things, the grants disappearing is an absolute catastrophe. The Mayor has something that can be directly done on this because the CC Zone Cleaner Vehicle Discount (CVD) is going to stop in 2025 and that is a catastrophe. I have a few notes here from people that have massively invested in EVs. May I read them?

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): Briefly, yes.

Steve Wright MBE (Chair, Licensed Private Hire Car Association): It says,

“The Congestion Charge Zone Cleaner Vehicle Discount exemption loss will be a disaster. The EV market has not progressed enough to make this incentive no longer necessary. The EV market is struggling in terms of vehicle availability and charging infrastructure. The Cleaner Vehicle Discount

exemption is the last remaining incentive available both in London and from central Government to support PHV businesses and drivers to transfer to EVs. If the exemption ends, businesses who made investments to transition will see a huge increase in running costs. Currently, the demand for EVs amongst drivers is low because electricity prices have risen and Fuel prices have dropped."

Many PHVs do not have their own house or drive or ability to charge from home and that means effectively they have to go to work and lose an hour while they go and charge. They have also made the point that rapid chargers are very, very, very expensive --

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): We are going to come on to the network, yes.

Steve Wright MBE (Chair, Licensed Private Hire Car Association): There are some problems here and it is not just exclusively for taxi, but the Mayor can do something about this. The Government has done it - that is not a political statement - and TfL needs to review what it is doing with this CVD CC.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): Yes. OK, thank you. Thank you --

Steve McNamara (General Secretary, Licensed Taxi Drivers Association): Can I come back in on that, Caroline?

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): Steve [McNamara], you wanted to mention something, yes.

Steve McNamara (General Secretary, Licensed Taxi Drivers Association): Very quickly. My heart bleeds for Steve. His members have a plethora of choice of vehicles, and I think there is anything up to about 40 vehicles that can be used as a PHV. Some of them are as cheap as £25,000 and, indeed, you can invest £100,000 in a vehicle, but it is a choice. It is a choice that we do not have unfortunately.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): That a taxi does not have, yes. Let us come to TfL just to conclude this bit. The Mayor has said the Commissioner [of TfL] and Deputy Mayor [for Transport] are working with industry representatives on this and I know from when we met a few months ago that you were off to meet the manufacturer. Can you update us on what discussions are taking place? Are you looking at whether you can widen the vehicles? What are you doing in this space to try to deal with this issue?

Helen Chapman (Director of Licensing and Regulation, Transport for London): Yes, it is a complex issue on the taxi side, as we have heard. The Commissioner has recently written to the Treasury, asking for that 20 per cent VAT --

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): The VAT, yes.

Helen Chapman (Director of Licensing and Regulation, Transport for London): -- that Steve [McNamara] has said, which will make the key difference. I recognise what Asher is saying about a monopoly, but for all the reasons that we talked about earlier this is a finite market. Any vehicle manufacturer looking to come into London is going to look at the amount of vehicle sales and then it is a judgement call for them and not something we have direct control over. However, we are very keen to work with any vehicle manufacturers that show an interest in developing a vehicle to bring into London and we will stand ready to talk to them.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): Will you be reviewing the requirements at all as part of this piece of work you are about to undertake as well?

Helen Chapman (Director of Licensing and Regulation, Transport for London): That is something that we have not given detailed consideration to because, for all the reasons Christina set out earlier, we want to have some engagement with the industry to determine what should and should not be looked at. There are two key requirements, which essentially drive the shape of the vehicle. One is wheelchair accessibility.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): Yes, and the turning circle.

Helen Chapman (Director of Licensing and Regulation, Transport for London): The other is the turning circle, and the turning circle is still used. I think Steve [McNamara] did a survey with his members quite recently - I cannot remember the statistics - that said that a lot of drivers still use it every day.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): Yes, they still use them.

Helen Chapman (Director of Licensing and Regulation, Transport for London): Any ranks we put in are designed and developed with the turning circle in mind so it would be a huge change to depart from that --

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): Yes, to change it.

Helen Chapman (Director of Licensing and Regulation, Transport for London): -- and it would need proper consideration.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): OK, lovely, thank you. Thank you, Chairman.

Keith Prince AM (Chairman): Assembly Member Garratt? Sorry, Assembly Member Baker, did you want to come in?

Elly Baker AM: They have all been answered.

Keith Prince AM (Chairman): Thank you. Assembly Member Garratt?

Neil Garratt AM: Very efficient. I was going to come on to the charging, but I have a quick question. Doing this job, people accost me and go, "You are asking about this thing, and I would like you to ask this". Here is a question that I was given to ask, which is interesting, and it is perhaps one you could answer, Asher. It is about the electric fleet. Specifically, you mentioned earlier about reliability problems with certain components, and he mentioned to me the heater, particularly obvious because we had a period of cold weather. You are nodding and making a face in recognition, I think. His point was that the heater is proving unreliable and there are a limited number of places where you can get it fixed. How big a problem is that? Is that something that is getting sorted?

Asher Moses (Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Sherbet - The Electric Taxi Company): It is a huge problem for both fleet owners and owner-drivers. During the winter, we have no heating, so our passengers have to go in the back of our taxi when we pick up ABC1's C-suit of London, who book with us for a guaranteed taxi. They have to sit in the back of my cab, ice cold, or even get out of my cab. When you go to LEVC for spare parts, they are on back order, but they are able to manufacture more vehicles. Today, I have 23 vehicles of my fleet waiting for parts, 23 vehicles which include heat pumps for air conditioning in the summer. In the winter, we have the heating problem and the electric rear axle drive problem that we keep bringing to the market. Every week, we are losing constant money as a business because of spare parts and that also applies to owner-drivers as much as fleet owners.

With regard to spare parts, we are coming into the fifth year of the electric taxi and battery management is another thing that we have to look at because for all those vehicles that we bought in the first five years those batteries are not up to standard. They were not up to standard then; they are certainly not up to standard now and they cost £20,000 each to repair. No one is seeing this storm coming yet. I am feeling it; we are experiencing it. Parts and repairs: we are not supported from LEVC even with this £140 million loss a year as a warranty dealer. You do not get paid on time so small businesses are really struggling and fleet owners are struggling with any support, even from the manufacturer.

Neil Garratt AM: It seems to me the only thing worse than £400 a week for a taxi is £400 a week for a taxi that is off the road.

Asher Moses (Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Sherbet - The Electric Taxi Company): Oh, and apparently, we cannot get spare cabs to support us because it is driveable and because it is driveable, we will not get a spare vehicle on the warranty. That is not right, and these are brand new vehicles.

Neil Garratt AM: This does sound like a real problem. There is this monopoly relationship and I do not know whether it is something that TfL can put pressure on them to deal with, as the people who selected that vehicle. Sorry, thank you, Asher, I really appreciate that. Helen?

Helen Chapman (Director of Licensing and Regulation, Transport for London): Yes, I was going to come in to say this is not an issue we were aware of, but we do meet regularly with LEVC and have some very constructive conversations. This is absolutely something we are very happy to take back and raise in our next conversations with them.

Neil Garratt AM: Yes, anyway that is one positive thing we might have achieved this morning, thanks. On to my actual questions, which are about the charging points. I do not know who wants to take this. I will start with TfL. The move to the all-electric fleet comes with it a requirement for charging and particularly those are working vehicles that hopefully are busy all day long, so they need range, and they need to be able to recharge. TfL's Electric Vehicle Delivery Plan specified 40,000 to 60,000 charging points built by 2030. From your point of view, TfL, presumably that is a project that you are driving. Are you happy that you are on track to get to that point?

Christina Calderato (Director of Transport Strategy and Policy, Transport for London): Yes, we are already on track to meet those forecasts and that is through borough delivery, using £39 million of the Local Electrical Vehicle Infrastructure Fund and the On-Street [Residential] Chargepoint Scheme. We are on track to meet the needs that we identified through that Plan. One of the other things that we identified through the Plan, which is really important, is when we were identifying that level of need, we looked at it through the eyes of key user groups. We had both taxi drivers and PHV drivers identified as part of that, and they have quite different charging needs, which has already been alluded to. As you say, where you have taxi drivers who might be out all day and need to get a rapid and ultra rapid charge as part of a charging day, you need to make sure that you have access to those charge points in the places where people need them and that they are available. Then you can stop and do a 40-minute top-up and that keeps you going or a recharge in fact. For PHV drivers, it is quite different, and you have lots of PHVs who do not necessarily have access to off-street charging. What is really important when we think about that future infrastructure mix is that we do not put all our emphasis on rapids and ultra rapids. There is still a need for that on-street overnight and slow/fast charging. That mix of the type of chargers where they are and the different groups that they need to serve is something that is really important and planning that right level of infrastructure.

Neil Garratt AM: In terms of getting to that number, we are on track? We are not doing the hockey stick thing where nothing much happens and suddenly it all gets fixed in the last year of the target?

Christina Calderato (Director of Transport Strategy and Policy, Transport for London): I do not think so. We are on track and seeing it growing, as we thought they would need to grow. We have looked at that across two different time spans, the Delivery Plan to 2025 and then we have the Strategy looking to 2030. We are on track with that. By way of numbers - I am not going to throw millions of them out - there are more than 18,500 public charge points in London, which is more than a third of all the charge points in the UK. A thousand of those are rapids or ultra rapids, 300 of those were put in by TfL and 80 are taxi-only. We are continuing to ramp up that delivery and make sure that we have the charge points in but also the hubs and that the hubs are where people need them in central [London] on key strategic routes.

Neil Garratt AM: OK. Before I go on to my next question, back to you for a moment, Chairman.

Keith Prince AM (Chairman): Thank you. Yes, before we move on can I welcome to the public gallery the School Council from St Bernadette's [Catholic] Primary school in Harrow. Hello and welcome.

Keith Prince AM (Chairman): Assembly Member Garratt?

Neil Garratt AM: Thank you. We were talking about TfL's installation of chargers. I had a question down here, which is: are there any barriers preventing you meeting the targets? It sounds like there are not because you feel like you are on target to meet them. Is that fair to say?

Christina Calderato (Director of Transport Strategy and Policy, Transport for London): Yes, I think that is right. The thing that we want to continue to do is to continue to work with the private sector on making sure that we maximise both of our ability to get those points in the right place. One of the barriers that has previously identified is land. One of the things that we do through that strategy, the keystone commitment, is freeing up TfL and GLA land, which is often in very useful places. We are working through Places for London, and we have an EV Infrastructure Delivery Group so that is how we are doing that. We are trying to tackle those barriers.

Neil Garratt AM: Just jargon busting, Places for London is TfL's property development arm rebranded, is it not?

Christina Calderato (Director of Transport Strategy and Policy, Transport for London): Yes.

Neil Garratt AM: Finally, before I open up to the panel, I was going to imagine that one of the challenges is about most of these sites/roads in central London are going to be council roads rather than TfL roads. It sounds like by using GLA and TfL land you are able to be more in control of getting the charger network out. Is that right?

Christina Calderato (Director of Transport Strategy and Policy, Transport for London): It is both of those things. We are using GLA and TfL land and we are trying to find those prime sites, but we are also working really closely with the boroughs. We are doing that with London Councils, so we do have a pan-London approach to that, which is working successfully.

Neil Garratt AM: OK. Having heard how great it is, anybody else on the panel, what is your experience either from PHV or from a cab point of view of finding electric infrastructure? Asher, perhaps you can kick us off?

Asher Moses (Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Sherbet - The Electric Taxi Company): I know all about electric infrastructure. I bought the first 50 electric taxis, I had to get them charged and it was an absolute nightmare because the chargers were in the wrong place or were not where the drivers lived. Or when you actually achieved getting there, they were not working, and you would have to make all that trip to get there. Things have changed, chargers are popping up and a lot of private companies are popping up all over the place. With regard to charging, the whole big thing about charging is where drivers live. When I first started buying these taxis, I used to rent them and, like you were saying, Steve Wright, at the end, I could only rent it to somebody who had a drive[way]. Today, I have rented it to all the drivers who have a drive and now we have cab drivers in diesel cabs who want to get into electric, but they live in tower blocks. When they want to come and rent a taxi, we cannot just chuck a cable from a tower block, so we do not rent them the vehicle.

The market on rental is difficult at the moment. We have struck a deal with an energy provider that will assist these drivers very shortly. The issue of charging is quite critical, and the difference is we were sold an EV, but we are an electrically driven vehicle. That is a big point, and we are spending £100,000 on an electrically driven vehicle. We have an internal combustion engine (ICE) in our electrically driven vehicles that allows our vehicles to be charged at five per cent at all times. What you are seeing here is we are defeating the purpose. If you go next to an electric taxi on the street, you can hear the engine running. It is fair to say that this electrically driven taxi gives out 29 grams of carbon emissions in comparison to 229 grams of a diesel, but the point is it is still electrically driven. Charging infrastructure at the moment is not where it needs to be, and I find it is a long way off. My drivers are using their ICE because then they are not forced to charge. That is where we are.

Neil Garratt AM: Just a thought then. It is a barrier. The drivers who have their own drive at home can have their own rapid charger, let us say, or even just an overnight charger on their drive at home so they start their shift fully charged.

Asher Moses (Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Sherbet - The Electric Taxi Company): Correct.

Neil Garratt AM: This is not a Property Committee, but increasingly that is not the norm for people to live in a house with a drive in London. Is that a new barrier effectively to entrance in the market?

Asher Moses (Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Sherbet - The Electric Taxi Company): Most of our drivers have moved on to the outer side of London. They are not really the licensed London fleet, and the drivers are not really in London. They are outer London from around the M25 going, in my view, from the North Circular out to the M25. There is a demography who have drives, and there are quite a few people now - I would say the bulk of the people that we have - living in flats and do not have the ability to charge on their drive.

Neil Garratt AM: OK. Thanks, Asher. Anybody over this? Steve or Steve, did you want anything to add on the challenge of charging or perhaps the ease of charging?

Steve McNamara (General Secretary, Licensed Taxi Drivers Association): The major factor is the costs of on-street charging. When we were first using the rapid charging points that were provided, we were paying 35 pence a kilowatt. They are now approaching 70 and 75 pence a kilowatt, so they have doubled. The availability is getting better everywhere, but it is a primary decision, it is a cost and, just like everything else with EVs and everything we do, it is just expensive.

Neil Garratt AM: Yes. Particularly more from the PHV perspective, Steve [Wright], your fleet is gradually switching over as well, I guess?

Steve Wright MBE (Chair, Licensed Private Hire Car Association): It is gradually and the reason it is gradually is that 90 per cent of PHVs live in flats or terraced accommodation in inner city areas where there just is no infrastructure. If you come back to the scenario, when I ran my company in Harrow many years ago, I used to say, "Never start work in the morning with an empty tank of fuel". Well, all these people are starting with an empty charge if they cannot charge it at home and this is the real problem. The numbers: although we hear 40,000, there are four million motorists in London. Is it four million? It is certainly millions; I cannot be sure, but I heard four million a while back. When you start to put the numbers into place, you have got to put the number of chargers available, but [there is] the cost. One of our fleets was very much pro getting into the scenario because it was a fleet, as opposed to self-employed drivers. They are employing. They replaced their fuel card with an EV card, and they found that the cost was dearer than diesel. They have now taken those off those drivers and guess what. The Government has not woken up yet - I am sure it must be thinking about this - to the Treasury impact of fuel. These prices of electricity are without Fuel Duty. We have really got to solve some problems here. There are not enough chargers, definitely.

Neil Garratt AM: I was going to ask. Is it an availability of charging problem or a cost of charging problem or a combination of both?

Steve Wright MBE (Chair, Licensed Private Hire Car Association): It is a combination of both, and it is preventing the electrification.

Neil Garratt AM: Yes. I spoke to a PHV driver, and he had switched recently from diesel to electric. He was quite excited about it initially with a lovely new, silent vehicle and the company that he was working with prided itself on being all-electric. He was a bit grumpy about it because he felt he had come out worse off as a result of switching because it was more expensive to run, which he was not expecting. Is that one grumpy driver or is that normal?

Steve Wright MBE (Chair, Licensed Private Hire Car Association): No, that is the case. You have a big international company that operates in 200-odd countries that says, "Actually, we are trying to back this and we are going to give people a card where they can charge and do this". Then they say, "We have had to withdraw them because the price they are getting on the street is prohibitive".

Neil Garratt AM: Presumably, if you charge at home that is less of an issue, but then you come into the --

Steve Wright MBE (Chair, Licensed Private Hire Car Association): It is up to eight times cheaper to charge at home. That is the problem.

Neil Garratt AM: OK, so there is a big divide. OK, I think that is it from me. Thanks, Chairman.

Keith Prince AM (Chairman): Thank you very much. We now move to Assembly Member Desai.

Unmesh Desai AM: Thank you, Chair, and good afternoon, panel. I have two questions and the first question is to TfL. Has TfL completely resolved its previous disputes with Uber?

Helen Chapman (Director of Licensing and Regulation, Transport for London): Thank you for the question. Uber is a licensed private hire operator, along with around 1,700 other licensed private hire operators, and I do not think TfL has ever had an issue with Uber. We have requirements that we expect all

licensed private hire operators to meet, and Uber has put a number of things in place off the back of some decisions that TfL has made, and it is a licensed operator. I am not sure there is much more I can answer in terms of the appropriateness of talking about one individual operator amongst 1,700.

Unmesh Desai AM: Yes, but it is the one that has had a lot of publicity and some very legitimate issues were raised with the court cases and so on. Are there any other outstanding issues?

Helen Chapman (Director of Licensing and Regulation, Transport for London): No. I am trying to think. It is a licensed operator, and I cannot remember when its licence expires. There is nothing that causes us concern with it or, indeed, a number of other private hire operators that would suggest that its licensing status has changed. I am not sure if that answers the question, and I am sorry if it does not.

Unmesh Desai AM: Yes, OK. Moving on to my second question, which is to all of you, and if we can start with you, Steve [Wright]. What will the impacts be for the taxi industry of Uber opening up its service to black cabs?

Steve Wright MBE (Chair, Licensed Private Hire Car Association): I try to avoid talking too much about the taxi industry and leave that to my colleagues, but I think there is a resistance to that happening. Naturally, Uber is a PHV entity that stated it would like to get rid of all the taxis, wherever it was, and replace them with driverless cars many moons ago. It has not endeared itself in previous lives to people and that is not a good start point for the many self-employed drivers in the two sectors. At the end of the day, its business model is going to be its business model and it is going to try to get into the black cab space because other apps have done that. We will see. I will leave that for the taxi industry to answer and I take the 'Fifth Amendment' on giving you a complete breakdown. Thank you.

Unmesh Desai AM: Which leaves it up to you, Steve [McNamara].

Steve McNamara (General Secretary, Licensed Taxi Drivers Association): Yes, and the answer is "It will not". The reality is that to launch an app in London - and Mariusz and Asher will give you more detail on that - you need probably a base of 3,000 drivers as a minimum in order to provide a decent coverage. I am going to be stunned if Uber get 30 drivers, let alone 3,000. As Steve [Wright] rightly summed up, our relationship with the private hire industry has changed massively over the years. I am sitting next to Mariusz. He runs a private hire fleet, and he runs a taxi fleet on his apps, as does Bolt, as does Gett, and drivers work quite happily with those platforms. The issue with Uber is there a long history of it. You do not need me to go into it. When Bolt was coming into the taxi market, it came and saw everybody in the trade, and they told them what they were doing. We had various conversations with them, and they launched. Uber in typical fashion announced it in a fanfare of media launches, balloons and bunting and gave it all as a done deal and it is not a done deal. We are doing very well at the moment, as I said to you earlier. We are doing very well on our existing apps. Interestingly, sorry, just now when we were talking about apps and whether they should be licensed or not, there are three apps in London that do not also run private hire. Asher runs Sherbet, there is also one called Unify and there is one called Taxi app. They have no private hire on them at all and they are not licensed or regulated by TfL, and neither should they be.

We have a good choice of apps, and they all work very well for us. We certainly do not need Uber and I honestly just cannot see it having an impact. One or two things are going to happen. It is either not going to launch as it said it was going to launch and it will all die a death or it will put ghost cabs on its apps so when you open the app, you will see all these cabs driving around. This is how these apps work. You will see these 'ghost cabs' on the app and when you try and hail one, you will not get one. To answer you, it is not going to happen.

Unmesh Desai AM: TfL?

Helen Chapman (Director of Licensing and Regulation, Transport for London): This is a matter for Uber to comment on and for individual taxi drivers to decide whether that is something that they want to do or not. It is not really a matter for TfL as the regulator.

Mariusz Zabrocki (General Manager UK, Free Now): I can only congratulate them on another successful public relations (PR) campaign because that is what it is. Yes, maybe if they recruit 20 drivers, maybe they will cover one small train station. We have seen other companies trying to launch in the black cab space. As Free Now, we have never seen any negative impact on our supply, and I really do not expect that drivers are going to choose to drive for Uber. We saw a lot of negative feedback and I have not met a single taxi driver that said something positive about them. So good luck to Uber.

Asher Moses (Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Sherbet - The Electric Taxi Company): My view is if you really want to destroy the life of a taxi trade, allow them on the Uber platform simply because licensed London taxis are regulated by a meter. We are regulated by a meter. We do not surge price. We guarantee that we arrive. We do not cancel 30 per cent of our bookings. We are properly regulated and licensed. I truly feel that Uber's attempt to get into the licensed London taxi market yet again is just a farce and great PR. I do not see that happening. We have seen drivers take up the offer, but it is really taking the money rather than the offer. Not only that, I look at them more as a tech disruptor who wants to destroy our iconic London licensed taxi industry; and not only in London, in every city in the world. Let us be very careful. If drivers want to join, by all means - we cannot stop them - but I do not think there will be major success in London.

If I can just add, licensed London taxi drivers alone contribute over £1.4 billion in licensed London taxi fares to the London economy. We do not need Uber to help us along to do that. We do that alone. We pay our taxes in London. We ferry the CEOs in London, we ferry the 'C-suite' of London, keeping the economy moving. We are doing a good job. We can do without Uber at the moment. That is my view, Assembly Member Desai.

Unmesh Desai AM: Thank you.

Keith Prince AM (Chairman): Thank you very much for that full and frank answer. Assembly Member Berry, did you want to come in?

Siân Berry AM: Thank you very much, Chairman. I know there has been a lot of talk about one particular company but there is a wider issue, is there not, of app-based hiring? Obviously, there are people like your company, Mariusz, who are focused on black cabs, but also a wealth of app-based work - some of which is taxi driving and some of which is obviously couriership of things around in different ways - where there are issues around worker rights and worker support.

I just wanted to ask TfL if you are having good contact with people representing the workers for the private hire companies who particularly work for apps, where this is an issue. I know they are represented by the App Drivers & Couriers Union (ADCU), who are not here today but I know work in this space. Do you meet with them? Do you regularly check in about worker conditions? I know this applies less to black cabs, but it is definitely an issue and something that TfL probably is concerned about more widely around other types of services on the roads as well.

Helen Chapman (Director of Licensing and Regulation, Transport for London): Thank you. We do meet regularly with a number of PHD representative groups, including the ADCU and the GMB [trade union].

They are part of our regular formal engagement. We have a lot of informal engagement with the Independent Workers Union of Great Britain and anyone who wants to ask us for a meeting to discuss something that is important to them.

Worker rights are a matter for the specialist employment tribunals, as opposed to being a matter for TfL as the regulator. Obviously, if there are cases that have been through a court system and then there are repeated breaches, that is something that we could or we would take into consideration as part of a 'fit and proper' consideration in the future. We do have regular engagement with those groups that you have mentioned.

Siân Berry AM: Excellent. Thank you very much. Obviously, it is about being responsive to things like court cases and tribunals that then have an impact on how you might regulate in future. Finally, the roundtable that my colleague has so kindly raised and asked me to set up ahead of the next development of your Strategy. Will you include those groups in your roundtable, please?

Helen Chapman (Director of Licensing and Regulation, Transport for London): Do you mean the ADCU and the GMB?

Siân Berry AM: Yes. Driver representatives.

Helen Chapman (Director of Licensing and Regulation, Transport for London): Yes, absolutely.

Siân Berry AM: Great. Thank you.

Keith Prince AM (Chairman): Sorry, Steve McNamara, you wanted to come in?

Steve McNamara (General Secretary, Licensed Taxi Drivers Association): Just very quickly. Helen mentioned that one of the licensing requirements for a private hire operator is to be fit and proper. That is the primary requirement of anyone who is licensed. Personally, I have always thought that a lot of the way the company acts should be taken into account. For example, a company – 'no names, no pack drill' – that deliberately bases itself abroad, avoids its tax liabilities, treats its workers in the way it treats them and is forced – literally dragged – through the court system, kicking and screaming every inch of the way, to be made to recognise their workers' rights. The way that they treat their workers and the way that they treat the public, I think, personally, should all be part of the fit and proper criteria. It is something that I think TfL should be reviewing.

Keith Prince AM (Chairman): Thank you. Assembly Member Desai, you wanted to come in?

Unmesh Desai AM: Chairman, just to add to the question from Assembly Member Berry, I am going to declare an interest. I am a member of the GMB, and I am glad that TfL is engaging with the proper trade union, who represent many Uber workers. Well, I do not have the exact numbers, but I know that after the historic court case -- I just want to put on record my appreciation that you are engaging with the GMB trade union.

Keith Prince AM (Chairman): I am sure that is in your declaration of interests anyway, is not it, Assembly Member Desai?

Unmesh Desai AM: Most certainly.

Keith Prince AM (Chairman): Yes, of course. Thank you. If we can move on to Assembly Member Moema, please.

Sem Moema AM: Thank you. I will come to my questions, but I just wanted to ask -- Steve Wright, I was really interested in what you were saying about vehicle excise duty on diesel and petrol and not on electricity for drivers, and that concern for the Treasury. If you would not mind expanding on that.

My question to all of you is: are there currently enough places for taxi and PHDs to rest and meet? I know you have gone down from 60 to 30 rest places. Is that the case, Steve McNamara? I will start with you first, Steve Wright.

Steve Wright MBE (Chair, Licensed Private Hire Car Association): Just about the cost to the Treasury and to the Government, it is a simple thing. Electricity prices are subject to a small amount of VAT, in my understanding, at the moment. Of course, fuel - diesel, petrol - is subject to Fuel Duty, which is a massive, great big Government revenue. Now, we are seeing the price of charging matching the price of diesel, in some cases being greater, without the Government's Fuel Duty on it. At some stage, somebody is going to get out a calculator and work out there is a massive, great big black hole if everybody moves to electric. There would be a massive, great big problem. We have to look at this now and think about it now. If we want to get electrification to happen, you have to take this in as a factor, and it is not much discussed. Does that explain?

Sem Moema AM: Yes. It was just really interesting food for thought. That comment was helpful.

Back to my substantive question about enough places for taxis and PHDs to rest and meet. Maybe we will start with Steve McNamara and then go along.

Steve McNamara (General Secretary, Licensed Taxi Drivers Association): What you are referring to are the green taxi huts that are in London. The number has not decreased in recent years at all. In the last 40 years I think the numbers have stayed pretty static. They are listed buildings. Incidentally, if any Assembly Member has never been in one, I think they were built by Lord Shaftesbury in 1850 or something as a rest place and they literally are Victorian works of art. If anyone has never been in one, I would be very happy to entertain you in one of them for a cup of tea. You could enter it in your Members' book of interests, obviously. They are fascinating historical parts of London. The numbers have not gone down. There are issues with parking on some of them, alongside ranks, but those numbers have not gone down.

One of the major issues that we have, and I will come on to it at the moment, is that we now employ five people full-time to answer the phone to our members all day, dealing with [penalty charge] tickets. I know for a fact that Asher [Moses] and his fleets and most of the fleets now have to employ someone to just deal with notices that come through all day long. You do a U-turn, you get a ticket. You park here, you get a ticket. You do this, you get a ticket. You do that, you get a ticket. It has become a major, major issue.

We are recruiting at the moment for another call taker, just trying to deal with the sheer numbers of camera-enforced offences that we get, some quite minor and some quite a pain. I am sure that Asher will speak for the other fleet owners when he tells you the vast majority of them have to employ someone now, an additional expense, just to deal with the stuff that comes through every day. Finding somewhere to stop is very, very difficult, and of course you do not know you have a ticket until such time as a fortnight later. It comes through the post, and you are trying to think, "Well, what was I doing there?" It is very, very difficult. London, as you know, is one of the most camera-enforced cities in the world. I always say to people, "If you are going to get mugged", which is a frequent occurrence on our streets now, "do it on a yellow line because they will get a picture of you".

Sem Moema AM: I am quite interested in that visit, though I do not think we would drink £50 worth of tea to declare it in our interests.

Elly Baker AM: I will give it a go.

Sem Moema AM: Each. No, but that is a really serious point. I am just interested. I do not know much about the stands that you are talking about, but we have talked about charging infrastructure. Could you bring those two things together in those places?

Steve McNamara (General Secretary, Licensed Taxi Drivers Association): Obviously, when we first liaised with TfL and we were looking at places to put charging infrastructure, one of the big problems is that you cannot just put a charger anywhere you want. The power supply has to be there. It can be very expensive to get the power moved from one side of the road to the other. Some of them are not statutorily approved and you have to get planning permission for them. The whole charging thing is very difficult.

Again - this is the second time today - we have been approached by a company that allegedly has an innovative idea to supply rapid charging across London, throughout the ULEZ, initially to the taxi trade but possibly elsewhere. To be very fair to Christina - again, first time today - TfL have met these people. They are very strange people, as I am sure she will tell you. I cannot say too much - we have had to sign non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) and stuff - but if it works it could be really positive and it could be a really good thing. Obviously, if and when it comes, we would welcome the Assembly looking at it and perhaps helping to promote it even further.

Sem Moema AM: Thank you. Can I come to Mariusz and Asher as well?

Mariusz Zabrocki (General Manager UK, Free Now): Definitely those green huts are a great place for taxi drivers, though maybe for PHV drivers it is a bit of a bigger challenge. One thing I wanted to clarify is that we have a PHV and a taxi business, both of them, and they are both quite substantial. Combining charging infrastructure with places to rest during your shift is something that TfL are definitely doing a lot to support. I would say it is an important topic. I definitely think that especially on the PHV side, more probably could be done.

Asher Moses (Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Sherbet - The Electric Taxi Company): As a whole, it is so important for taxi drivers to stop. They have to go to the toilet twice a day, if not more. There is a lack of toilets in central London for the drivers to stop. If we do stop, we cannot park, and if we park, we will get a ticket. I do like the idea Assembly Member Moema of some of charging and convenience facilities. We are looking to work with energy providers to give convenience and charging to our drivers and hopefully we will have an announcement soon that we will share with you.

Sem Moema AM: Before I come to TfL, Steve [Wright], is there anything you wanted to add to that?

Steve Wright MBE (Chair, Licensed Private Hire Car Association): Of course, PHVs cannot rank so we are a different type of animal in that respect. Lawfully. Steve [McNamara] is smiling. They generally tend to park in places. What I would add to that is I cannot see there being rest areas on the agenda for private hire.

The problem of ticketing is getting quite serious, even in places where we are absolutely lawfully able to park and set down, on red routes. I am getting quite a lot of information saying that the tickets are coming in for

lawfully stopping, dropping or picking up a person on a red route. They are having to go in and appeal them, which is wasting a great deal of money for everybody. That is something to look at.

It is difficult to lawfully park anywhere at the moment. It is very, very difficult. At the end of the day, for environmental reasons, PHVs do not want to be returning too far back towards their office or what have you, or having to go to their offices even, to use facilities. It cannot be solved in the same way as it can with the green huts.

Sem Moema AM: Christina and Helen, you have heard what the providers have to say. What more can TfL be doing to support the issues that they have raised?

Helen Chapman (Director of Licensing and Regulation, Transport for London): As Steve says, there are a number of rest ranks - we designate them as rest ranks - for taxi drivers already. We have undertaken some trials, again limited to taxi drivers, to give them access to some Tube stations and the facilities onsite at the Tube stations, with rest ranks nearby so that we could tie it all up together. Unfortunately, they did not prove popular with taxi drivers at all. I am sure there will be very valid reasons for that, and we can perhaps get into them. We have discontinued those trials, but we do publish online a list of toilet facilities, which is just pulling together publicly available information. We have put it in one place for taxi and PHDs to be able to use. We do obviously recognise there is a challenge and there is a basic human right with having access to those facilities. We did not consider it was worth continuing with the trial because obviously that was not the answer, but we remain available to speak to or listen to what the issues are, to see where we can continue to provide any support.

Sem Moema AM: OK. If I can just push you on the point that Steve McNamara and Asher raised about the ticketing, what work has been done? They have reported a growth in tickets and managing that for taxis and PHDs.

Helen Chapman (Director of Licensing and Regulation, Transport for London): Those issues do not get raised with my team as the regulator. I have no doubt some of those tickets will have come from other parts of TfL and I would be very happy to have a conversation or facilitate that conversation with my colleagues in TfL, but of course the ticketing goes much wider than TfL because that presumably is an issue that they are experiencing from boroughs as well.

Keith Prince AM (Chairman): Assembly Member Baker, do you want to come in, please?

Elly Baker AM: Thanks, Chairman. Yes. I just wanted to pick up on a subject that we covered earlier on. An aspect of it was not fully covered.

However, before I do that, I would like to pick up on something else. It is really good to hear the conversation about welfare and I think the panel is really knowledgeable, it is a fantastic panel, but we do not have any representatives of PHDs here, as has been referenced. We cannot have an endless panel and there are lots and lots of driver organisations, but maybe we need to think about making sure that in areas like, for instance, why women are not coming into the industry and also on this welfare issue, we are getting voices in. That is no criticism of any of you. Thank you for all your contributions. I think we need to have a think about that.

My actual question. We were talking about women drivers earlier on but something that came up a couple of months ago, speaking to TfL, was the provision of taxis or private hire for women, where they might want to make sure there is a woman driver. We used to. Years ago, I remember there used to be minicab firms who were all women drivers, and from some of my constituents it has been raised. Now, obviously the structure of

private hire particularly has completely changed -- well, not completely, but significantly changed now. Is there any way, do you think, of managing to provide that service for women who might want to say, "No, I definitely want to book a specific woman PHD"? Does anyone have any thoughts on that?

Steve McNamara (General Secretary, Licensed Taxi Drivers Association): It is interesting that you should say that because there is a significant demand for it. I hear it over my breakfast cereal because my wife is frequently asked by women to give her a card and a phone number for that very reason. There is definitely a demand for it. I come from a family of cab drivers - Christmas around my house is like a rank, there is a rank of cabs outside - and my sister-in-law also drives a cab. They constantly say the same thing. They get it all the time. There is a demand for it. The problem would be that because there are so few women cab drivers, when you spread it across three or four shifts they are not going to be in the right place at the right time. Unfortunately, that is the problem, but there is certainly a demand for it.

Elly Baker AM: Certainly, for taxis, it is about trying to work out why women are not going into the trade. We all support trying to work that out, I think. Does anyone else want to come in?

Mariusz Zabrocki (General Manager UK, Free Now): What Steve [McNamara] said is completely true. I can say from the business perspective that even if we had all the female drivers for PHV and taxis on a single platform, there are still not enough to deliver good service levels. We would have to raise the share from two per cent to at least five per cent, maybe more, for this fleet to be able to exist. Otherwise, we are talking about very long waiting times for everyone, which will mean either very low earnings for drivers because they will waste a lot of time on going to the customer, or very high prices for customers. Alternatively, it would need to cover only small parts of London. Ignoring potential legal challenges here as well, we would need to have at least, I would say, three times more women in the trade for this fleet to be possible.

Elly Baker AM: It is something that you could look into, but we just need to have the drivers there? OK. That is fine. Steve [Wright]?

Steve Wright MBE (Chair, Licensed Private Hire Car Association): I go back a long way, back to the 1970s and 1980s, when Cindy George was the lady that started the first Lady Cabs, but she could not sustain it. She could not sustain it because she could not get the drivers, and the reason she could not get the drivers is that women chose to work more on a part-time basis. When you have to fund a vehicle, a licence and all the costs of insurance, it is not viable to do it on a part-time basis. That is a major hurdle.

Now, I am talking to Think Pink and Females in the Fleet, and we have some very good members within the LPHCA community who are trying to do their best, but it is difficult, and it simply boils down to the demographic of the work that women choose to do. Of course, we have mentioned the fear factor late at night and what have you. That comes into it. It is not an easy task. We are thinking of putting forward a women's representative on our group. We have had them in the past. I am having talks with a couple of the prominent female operators - we have females who are very, very prominent in their organisations - to see what we can do, but it is a difficult challenge. It is not something you could mandate easily. It is a difficult challenge but any assistance we can get will be welcome.

Elly Baker AM: Thanks, that is really helpful.

Keith Prince AM (Chairman): Assembly Member Moema.

Sem Moema AM: Thank you. A slight shift in gear, so to speak, on to the changes in Government legislation around pedicabs. This is for TfL. How are you planning to integrate pedicabs into taxi and private hire strategies?

Helen Chapman (Director of Licensing and Regulation, Transport for London): Thank you. Obviously, as I said earlier, we welcome the [Pedicabs] Bill and we are following its progress very closely. We have had a lot of conversations with Government over the years about the potential regulation of pedicabs and we have already drafted a potential outline of a licensing framework. That would require some further discussion and engagement with the pedicab industry, and then we would put that out to consultation and obviously ask a much wider audience, including passengers or potential passengers of pedicabs, before we would set a regulatory framework.

It probably comes as no surprise that the outline of the regulatory framework that we have drafted as a potential is very similar in nature to the framework that we already operate for taxi and private hire. We would be very keen to get input on that from pedicab drivers and pedicab operators but also people who would look to use those services.

Sem Moema AM: Does anybody else have any comments around that? I cannot imagine that they are loved. They are just a different beast. We will start with Steve [McNamara].

Steve McNamara (General Secretary, Licensed Taxi Drivers Association): We obviously worked very closely with Nickie Aiken [Member of Parliament for Cities of London and Westminster] when she was preparing her Private Member's Bill, which is the basically the one that is currently going through at the moment.

Whenever we raise the subject of pedicabs or rickshaws the first thing that people say is, "You do not like the competition", but they are not competition to us. Rickshaws in London are a drunken fairground ride, as we all know.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): It is.

Steve McNamara (General Secretary, Licensed Taxi Drivers Association): It is, from Covent Garden to Leicester Square. Anyone in this room or anyone listening or watching who is thinking of planning a journey home tonight, you might consider the Night Bus. You might get the Night Tube. You might get the Elizabeth line. You do not put "pedicab" on your list of journeys to get home. It is not a transport option, it is a fairground ride, and anyone who says otherwise is just wrong.

What we see, because we get the reports constantly from drivers, is these outrageous rip-off fares where a tourist is picked up, taken a few hundred yards, and almost threatened and demanded hundreds of pounds for a journey. Some of them have been well publicised. We also get damage to vehicles where the guy rides by and scratches the cab, a £100,000 vehicle that now has a scratch down the side and is going to fail its licensing appointment because someone is having a rickshaw race across London. We were initially of the opinion that they should have been banned totally. We do not see any purpose for them in a twenty-first century city like London. I still think it is quite crazy.

Having said that, if we are going to regulate them, we need to do it properly. The legislation needs to be primarily on fares and primarily on safety. We had one tested many years ago at the Transport Research Laboratory and if anyone is looking you can find the crash test on our website. The Transport Research Laboratory would not let their engineers ride it at more than nine miles per hour (mph), they said it was not

safe, and that was before they were electrically assisted. Some of these things now do 20 or 25 mph. It is absolutely crazy that they are allowed to operate on the streets. What we will be saying to TfL is that as part of the licensing structure, the primary concern is that they cannot be electrified. You cannot have them electric because of the speed. Safety has to be a key concern, they need to have seat belts and God knows what else, and the key issue is that the fares must be regulated. They have to be set and it needs to be clearly displayed to stop the rip-off. As you probably gathered, we do not like them.

Sem Moema AM: Helen, do you want to come back?

Helen Chapman (Director of Licensing and Regulation, Transport for London): Yes. Steve [McNamara] has touched on fares and obviously that is something we hear a lot from people. We see a lot of media stories about people getting charged extortionate fares for going very short journeys. Fares absolutely are part of the potential framework that we have put together.

The one thing that we are having ongoing discussions with Government about at the moment is the level of background checking for the drivers. For taxi and PHDs it is absolutely right that we do enhanced DBS checks. As it currently stands, the occupation of pedicab driver does not fall under the definition that would permit us to do enhanced DBS checks. We have set out that we are seeking a firm commitment from Government that that will be resolved by the time we come to implement any licensing regime, because it cannot be right that they do a journey transporting potentially children and vulnerable adults - but all passengers - and have had a lower standard of check than everybody else that we regulate.

Sem Moema AM: Just really quickly --

Keith Prince AM (Chairman): Yes.

Sem Moema AM: All right. As Steve [McNamara] has said, the function of a pedicab as a transport mode, it is really difficult to see where it fits in a wider strategy. What is your view on the appropriateness - I am trying to be diplomatic - of it as a legitimate alternative to the bus or even a scooter? I am thinking of the police, who struggle to stop a person on an e-scooter because it is going too fast, and that is going at ten mph. How would it work? How does it fit into the ecosystem of all of the vehicles on the road?

Christina Calderato (Director of Transport Strategy and Policy, Transport for London): As Helen says, we would need to understand what that actual offering is, how it is regulated and what service it is performing. That is what is difficult to do now, whilst it is unregulated in the way that it is. Once you have those parameters you can start to look at how it might fit into a Transport Strategy and into that hierarchy of modes, if you like, and whether it counts as a sustainable form of transport and all that kind of thing. It is difficult to see at the moment how it would satisfy being an active, safe mode of transport. That is where the regulation is really important. Once you have that information, then we can look at how it sits alongside other modes.

Sem Moema AM: OK. My final thing is how you would regulate fares on a pedicab.

Helen Chapman (Director of Licensing and Regulation, Transport for London): I think we are envisaging it in a mostly similar way to the way that we regulate fares for taxis. We have not, obviously, put a lot of detail into what a cost index might look like or what the basket of costs would be. It will be important to make sure that passengers have a clear understanding of how much their maximum fare would be, so that we stop hearing these stories of people being charged £350 to go around the corner, which is obviously allowed to happen at the moment. Those are things that, as our thinking develops and as the Bill makes progress through

Parliament, we will be able to keep you updated on. They will form part of our consultation so that everybody will have an opportunity to comment.

Keith Prince AM (Chairman): Assembly Member Berry, you wanted to come in?

Siân Berry AM: Just a quick point. Obviously, like I think Assembly Member Moema was saying, we have an ecosystem of different vehicles out there at the moment. Obviously, we have the black cabs, who are a gold standard. You hire them on the street. They need to meet lots and lots of different criteria in order to be able to be picked up. Then you have the app-based systems, and you have the newer vehicles, which are going through trials.

There has to be potential there for something lighter, electric-based and driven/guided, where you are not owning the vehicle. I have been driven around town, for example, in a Pedal Me cargo bike, and that sort of thing must be thought about as a way of reducing the overall impact of personal transport around the place. I hope that does form part of your future thinking. The pedicabs as they stand are a strange anomaly but there has to be some place for electric, lighter and less impactful personal transport, particularly if you need to be driven, in the future of London somewhere. Do you agree, I suppose, to ask a question?

Helen Chapman (Director of Licensing and Regulation, Transport for London): Looking at those new forms of mobility and different types of micro-mobility is definitely something that we are doing, and looking at how that fits into the Strategy. Like you say, there are lots of different permutations of that, lots of different variations on cargo bikes and electrically assisted cargo bikes as part of that, so we are trying to think about what their parking and storage needs are as well. That is active work that is happening.

Siân Berry AM: Excellent. Like you say, from a driver and quality point of view, you have this big bunch of people who are licensed drivers who could be driving these vehicles. You do not need to think about how to licence each type of vehicle separately; potentially you could use the driving licence as a method, which is what the scooters are doing as well.

Helen Chapman (Director of Licensing and Regulation, Transport for London): Yes, that is one way that we could think about it.

Keith Prince AM (Chairman): Thank you. Assembly Member Boff.

Andrew Boff AM: I kind of miss pedicabs. I used one at my wedding in place of a horse and carriage. They were fine. I miss them. Anyway, Mr McNamara, what has the impact been of 20 mph speed limits on your members?

Steve McNamara (General Secretary, Licensed Taxi Drivers Association): In a word, devastating. The argument for lower speeds is obviously clear. The safety arguments are clear and unequivocal on secondary roads, and by "secondary roads" I mean small side streets, the roads outside here, the residential roads that we live on and all of the side streets. I do not think anyone would argue against 20 mph speed limits, certainly not us.

However, since the Mayor's introduction onto the TLRN - we are looking at roads like Finchley Road, which is a three-lane dual carriageway in either direction, and Park Lane, which was four lanes in either direction and previously had a 40 mph limit - we are now seeing a situation where I have not hundreds, yet, but many, many dozens of members who are now out of work and unlicensed, some of whom have been driving a cab for 40 years with an absolutely faultless driving record: no complaints at TfL, no accident record and absolutely zero

points or endorsements in the 40 years that they have been driving. They have found themselves with 12 points in absolutely no time at all.

It is very easy for people to say, "Well, a 20 mph limit, you know what it is. It is 20 mph". Of course, during the day it is quite easy to maintain 20 mph - in most parts of London you cannot do that anyway, we wish you could - but at four o'clock in the morning, if you are coming down Park Lane, which was 40 mph as recently as a year ago, and the vehicle creeps up to 24 mph -- and it coincides that the criteria for prosecution by the police is now ten per cent plus one. It used to be ten per cent plus three. You now get a ticket at 24 mph. I can literally give you multiple examples of drivers who have been caught at 24 mph, 24 mph, 24 mph and 24 mph, at all hours of the night, and have lost their licenses. Now, I accept the simple argument that they should not have done it, but of course in the real world these people are not a danger to anyone. They are not driving recklessly. A year ago, in Park Lane they would have been driving at under half the speed limit.

These have had a major, major impact, and unfortunately for us we have a perfect storm. TfL have introduced a new driver policy. The driver policy has been an absolute disaster for us, and it coincides with a reorganisation of their appeal process. The way it works is that if your licence gets suspended or revoked, you have an appeal process to TfL. Under the old system it was dealt with by two former licensing officers, the people who used to have Helen's job years ago. You would appeal before them, they would listen to you, and they would make a recommendation to TfL whether you should have a licence or not. That is now dealt with internally by the same people who refused you a licence in the first place, by the same department. Now, they might be sitting at a different desk in the corner, but it is made by the same team. Our argument is that goes totally against all natural justice whatsoever. I do not come in front of you, Assembly Member Prince, and you make a decision, and then I come back and appeal to Assembly Member Pidgeon, who is sitting in the desk opposite, although she would probably agree with me.

The point is the whole process has come together to give this perfect storm. Driving a taxi is now one of the most stressful occupations on the planet because of the sheer number of cameras, the plethora of unnecessary 20 mph limits, all of which are coming together to make cab driving the most stressful thing.

Now, I am just going to read a paragraph of a letter out. I was given it yesterday [22 January 2024]. This is now typical of a letter that one of my members got yesterday morning. My members get these by the dozen from TfL. I can arrange to share it and Helen will have seen it. This letter starts,

"Dear Mr [and I have obviously blanked his name out],

London taxi driver's licence.

We have received notification of an adverse nature regarding your fitness to be licensed in line with our policies and regulatory requirements. We have considered if it is appropriate for you to continue to be licensed."

Your livelihood is now under threat. What heinous offence has this man committed? Incidentally, this guy has been driving a cab for 35 years. Never had a point, never had a complaint. This is what he has done.

"We have received notification on 5 January from the DVLA [Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency] you received three points on 19 October."

It mentions Uber because they use standard letters, they just copy and paste and forget to take the bits out. That is just wrong, but we will excuse that.

“The verbatim of the allegation: SP30, exceeding statutory speed limit on a public road.”

This guy has done more than 30 mph, he has got three points and he gets that letter. It is outrageous. It is absolutely outrageous. The driver policy that they have now is that if you get six points or what they deem a serious offence -- I will give you another verbatim example.

One of my members did a U-turn, was stopped by the police, and basically the police said he drove without due care and attention because he did a U-turn without looking, they said. Unfortunately, he pleaded guilty by letter, did not think it was a big event and got three points. That indicates to you that it is very much at the lower end of the scale because for driving without due care and attention you can get anything up to 12 points. He got three points, which is the minimum, so it was obviously a very minor offence. His licence has been suspended. The man is out of work.

It is absolutely crazy, this new policy that they have introduced, then coupled with the appeal process that we have to go through where we appear before the same people who have made the decision to revoke your licence, in all essence. Helen will tell you it is not. It is the same department, it is the same people. It goes against all natural justice. We then have to fund an appeal to a Magistrates Court and try to get it overturned at a Magistrates Court.

One of the reasons that we are sitting here today is that you are talking about the decline of the black cab, and we cannot get people to come into the industry. One of the key reasons people are leaving the industry is because it is so stressful. I have already told you that London is the most ‘camera-ed’ city in the world and all day long we are getting tickets, “You have done a U-turn here”, you have done this, you have done that.

The difference between driving a taxi and driving a car -- I presume that most of you drive. Obviously, you probably do not, Assembly Member Berry, but most people do drive at some time, or they get driven, or somebody has a car. I am being flippant. When you do it you have your husband, your wife, you have the kids in the car, whatever, and you are going where you are going. You might have the satnav on. Fine.

When you are driving a taxi, you have somebody sitting in the back who is telling you where to go. They want to get there as quickly as they can. “Why are you going this way? My normal driver goes that way. Can you do a U-turn here? I want to go that way. Oh, hang on, by the way --” and the dog’s barking, “By the way, what time does Selfridges --” It is a very, very different occupation to driving normally. Unfortunately, because of the nature of that and the fact that you are driving for eight, ten or 12 hours a day in central London, the odds of you creeping up to 24 mph at three o’clock in the morning -- it is almost inevitable. It is inevitable. I am not trying to defend it, but it is inevitable. It is not the heinous crime that TfL make it out to be.

Andrew Boff AM: We are coming to the end of the meeting pretty rapidly, but I think it was important that you gave us that information.

Steve McNamara (General Secretary, Licensed Taxi Drivers Association): I will get this letter circulated.

Andrew Boff AM: Is it worth comparing what you have just said with the actual accident statistics related to black cabs *vis-à-vis* other vehicles? I think that might reinforce your story.

Look, we have almost come to the end. I would have loved to have gone along the line and asked about this issue. It is not going to happen. However, there was a whole line of questioning that I wanted to do, which I am not going to do now because I think I will be lynched.

Ms Chapman, I am interested in knowing the internal organisation of the licensing function within TfL, who they were, who they report to and who holds them to account. One of the things I have raised with my colleagues here is that I am very concerned that this Committee has only called you in front of us once every five years, and I do not think that is enough. I do think that we in future probably need to pay more attention to PHVs and black cabs on a more regular basis. If you could send me the internal organisation and what legislation governs you as well, that would be very, very helpful. Thank you, Chairman.

Keith Prince AM (Chairman): Thank you very much. Helen, that is OK with you?

Helen Chapman (Director of Licensing and Regulation, Transport for London): Yes, that is fine. We can provide some details in writing in response to some of the points that Steve [McNamara] has raised as well.

Keith Prince AM (Chairman): Thank you. Yes, Assembly Member [Pidgeon]?

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Deputy Chair): Could we get sent some of the sample letters, Helen? I have not an identical letter here, Steve, but one that a driver sent me, and I have to say that the tone of it is just wrong. For somebody who has 12 points, who has done something very serious, I would expect a sterner letter, but the letter I have here, which then basically says, "We are not going to do anything, but we are keeping an eye on you", is not a nice tone. You might want to reflect on rewriting those letters to get the right tone for the right offence. It would be good if we could see some of those.

Helen Chapman (Director of Licensing and Regulation, Transport for London): We can share them. If I may in the 30 seconds, we are actually in the process of reviewing our correspondence at the moment. Yes, we can share those with you.

Keith Prince AM (Chairman): Thank you very much. I would like to thank all our guests for attending today and for their answers to our questions.