

London Assembly

Transport Committee

Tackling taxi touting in London
March 2008

The Transport Committee

Roger Evans	- Chairman (Conservative)
Geoff Pope	- Deputy Chair (Liberal Democrat)
John Biggs	- Labour
Angie Bray	- Conservative
Elizabeth Howlett	- Conservative
Peter Hulme Cross	- One London
Darren Johnson	- Green
Murad Qureshi	- Labour
Graham Tope	- Liberal Democrat

The terms of reference for this investigation, approved by the Committee at its meeting on 21 November 2007 were:

- To assess whether TfL and the MPS have achieved their aim of making a demonstrable difference to the level of touting in target areas since the introduction of the Cab Enforcement team in 2003
- To examine the effectiveness of the methods TfL and the MPS use to combat touting
- To examine practice on combating touting in another major city

Tackling taxi touting in London

Table of contents:

Rapporteur's Foreword	4
Executive summary.....	5
1. Introduction	6
How is touting dealt with?	7
2. The scale of the problem	8
Arrests for touting	8
Cab-related sexual offences	8
Market surveys on touting	9
3. Why is touting occurring?.....	11
Late night transport	11
The licensing system	12
Touting enforcement	14
4. Conclusions	17
Appendix 1: List of recommendations	18
Appendix 2: Written information, meetings and site visits	19
Appendix 3: Principles of London Assembly scrutiny	20
Appendix 4: Orders and translations	21

Rapporteur's Foreword



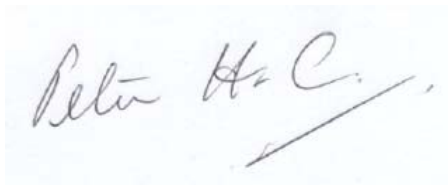
Getting home after a night out in central London is not always as easy as it could be especially after the Tube has stopped running. Faced with the prospect of waiting around for a night bus, or a fruitless search for a black taxi, Londoners can be forgiven for being tempted when a driver of a minicab pulls over when he is flagged down or someone outside a nightclub offers a minicab service.

Many may not even realise that minicab touting in this way is illegal. And the risks of catching a ride from a tout are serious: the driver is not insured to carry passengers, and it is much more difficult to detect offenders if a crime is committed.

This report highlights some good progress made by the police's Cab Enforcement Unit in tackling touting by individual car drivers and licensed minicab drivers who should not respond when flagged down in the street or carry passengers who have not been pre-booked. But there is no room for complacency: seven cab-related sexual offences are committed every month and more than 20% of respondents to the most recent survey report being approached by a tout.

Our report examines the underlying causes of touting and makes practical recommendations for addressing them including setting up more marshalled ranks in London's touting hotspots and adopting a 'three strikes and you're out' approach to licensed drivers repeatedly caught touting.

We would like to thank the Cab Enforcement Unit and representatives of the private hire trade who took the time to contribute to this investigation. We hope our report will assist in the ongoing fight against touting and make London a safer place to travel at night.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Peter Hulme Cross', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Peter Hulme Cross AM

Member of the Transport Committee

Executive summary

Minicabs, or private hire vehicles, started to be regulated in 2001, almost thirty years after the rest of the country. This was in response to concerns over public safety because of 'touting': private individuals offering a cab service by picking up people from the street. Minicabs may only be pre-booked through a licensed company. In 2003, a specialist Cab Enforcement Unit, part of the Transport Operational Command Unit (TOCU), was set up by the Metropolitan Police Service and Transport for London to tackle touting.

The Committee set out to investigate what difference the Cab Enforcement Unit has made in reducing the level of touting in London. We found that the Unit has had considerable success:

- Sexual assaults in cabs have been reduced by nearly 50% in the last five years;
- The number of people making illegal journeys has been reduced by half since 2003, and the number of people approached by touts late at night has reduced from 65 per cent to 35 per cent between 2003 and 2007; and
- There have been 3,800 arrests made for touting since 2003, with 3,372 individuals convicted. Around half of those convicted are licensed drivers.

However, there is evidence that touting is still widespread, and we are concerned at the number of licensed drivers found to be acting illegally. Our report makes suggestions for tackling the underlying causes of touting and ways of improving the Cab Enforcement Unit's work even further:

- The Public Carriage Office (PCO), in partnership with the TOCU Cab Enforcement Unit, should set up more marshalled ranks in touting hotspots to provide people with more legitimate options for getting home;
- Applicants for private hire driver licences should be required to provide evidence to the PCO of which operator they are or will be employed by, and this information recorded on a database;
- Resources should be focused on small operators who are using their licences as a front for touting. TOCU and the PCO should ensure that premises are closed down and licences revoked where touting is occurring;
- The PCO should adopt a policy of revoking driver licences after three convictions for touting to send a clear message that touting is taken seriously.
- The TOCU Cab Unit should set up an email address, phone number and text service so private hire and taxi drivers can report illegal activity quickly and easily.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Private hire, commonly known as the minicab trade, make an important contribution to London's economy, with 1.4 million journeys made per week¹. There are over 40,000 licensed private hire drivers and vehicles in London, working for 2,100 private hire operators².
- 1.2 Until 2001, there was no regulation of the private hire industry in London³. The Private Hire Vehicles (London) Act 1998 provides for the licensing and regulation of private hire operators, drivers and vehicles. The responsibility for licensing the private hire trade was delegated by the Government to Transport for London (TfL), and the Public Carriage Office (PCO), a department of TfL, carry out the everyday licensing activities. Licensing was introduced in phases:
- The licensing of operators began in 2001 and was completed in 2002
 - The licensing of drivers began in 2004 and was completed in 2006
 - The licensing of vehicles began in 2004 and completed in 2005⁴
- 1.3 There are regulations on how the private hire trade must operate. For each journey, the booking must be made through a licensed operator and carried out by a licensed driver using a licensed vehicle. Private hire vehicles cannot 'ply for hire', ie be flagged down in the street, as black taxis can be. Nor can drivers actively solicit business from potential customers. A private hire driver may not give out a card with a private telephone number on it – a journey must be booked through an operator.
- 1.4 Those within the private hire trade view touting as a serious problem which licensing has not dealt with. A recent article in *Private Hire News* alleged that many licensed drivers are touting⁵. Touting by either licensed or unlicensed drivers is dangerous and problematic for a number of reasons:
- The vehicle is not insured unless it has been pre-booked and therefore the passenger is at risk;
 - If the operator is not aware of the booking it is much more difficult to detect offenders if a crime is committed or inappropriate behavior occurs;
 - Illegal plying for hire by licensed vehicles makes the detection of those wholly unlicensed much more difficult;
 - The charging tariff of operators is undermined and passengers may be charged unreasonable amounts for journeys; and
 - Trade is being taken from licensed black taxis and private hire firms.

¹ London Chamber of Commerce and Industry, *The London Taxi Trade*, June 2007, p6

² Mayor's press release, 18 December 2007
http://www.london.gov.uk/view_press_release.jsp?releaseid=14973

³ The private hire trade in the rest of England and Wales was regulated and licensed under the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976

⁴ PCO evidence to Transport Committee 'Where to, Guv?' and PCO information:
<http://www.tfl.gov.uk/businessandpartners/taxisandprivatehire/1344.aspx>

⁵ Private Hire News, summer 2007

How is touting dealt with?

- 1.5 Touting in London is dealt with in two ways – through prevention and enforcement action. The Safer Travel at Night initiative⁶, which began in 2002, aims to raise public awareness of the dangers of using illegal cabs. It has commissioned a series of public information advertisements and created the Cabwise service, which provides telephone numbers of local licensed private hire operators and taxi services. Marshalled ranks and additional night bus routes have also been set up to provide Londoners with a variety of options for getting home.
- 1.6 The Transport Operational Command Unit (TOCU) has been in operation since 2003. It is part of the Metropolitan Police Service but is funded by TfL. The Cab Enforcement Unit has 34 officers and focuses on dealing with illegal taxi and private hire activity at key hotspots in London although activities are not limited to these locations. The hotspots are: West End, The Strand, Conduit Street, Regents Street, Charing Cross Road, Kingston, Clapham, Shoreditch, Whitechapel, Camden Town, Croydon, Ealing, Angel/Upper Street, Haymarket, Park Lane (particularly Grosvenor House Hotel), Greenwich (particularly around O2, Church Street, Creek Road), New Cross (around The Venue). The TOCU Cab Enforcement Unit carried out almost 500 operations in 2007⁷ including high visibility deterrence and compliance activities, targeted covert touting operations, visits to cab offices and visits to late night venues.
- 1.7 TfL is currently undergoing a five year review of the services the TOCU Cab Enforcement Unit provides. Given the recent concerns expressed by the private hire trade over widespread touting, we thought it timely to investigate how effective the Cab Enforcement Unit has been. The purpose of our review was to examine whether the TOCU is achieving its stated aim of “making a demonstrable difference to the level of touting in target areas” since its creation in 2003.
- 1.8 To help us assess the effect of TOCU on touting, we examined the performance indicators that TfL uses to measure the effect of TOCU’s activities. We also accompanied TOCU Cab Enforcement officers on a covert operation to observe the problems around identified hotspots and discuss tactics for dealing with the problem. Finally, we held a meeting with private hire representatives to discuss how effectively they feel TOCU has been in tackling touting and what more needs to be done to prevent it.

⁶ Safer Travel at Night is an ongoing initiative involving the GLA, Transport for London and the Metropolitan Police.

⁷ This compares with 254 operations in 2006

2. The scale of the problem

- 2.1 GLA Economics has estimated that 500,000 people regularly go clubbing in London on a Saturday night⁸. Many more will be attending bars, theatres and other late night venues in the West End or town centres. Once the last Tube leaves at around 1am, getting home can be a problem. TfL has significantly increased the number of night buses, but for those who want to be taken straight home, flagging down a black taxi or finding a private hire firm can be a problem. The sheer number of people trying to get home can mean a long wait for a minicab and a tout offering a quick and easy journey may become an attractive proposition.
- 2.2 Estimating the amount of illegal activity is problematic by its very nature. London's Taxi Network, a taxi radio circuit trade association with members including Dial-a-Cab and Radio Taxis, estimates that thousands of licensed and unlicensed drivers are touting every night in London. It is possible to build up a picture of the scale of the problem by examining the TOCU Cab Enforcement Unit's performance indicators. These are the number of arrests made for touting, the number of cab-related sexual assaults and market surveys to establish how frequently people are being approached by touts and making journeys with them.

Arrests for touting

- 2.3 Since 2003, 3,800 arrests have been made for touting offences. Of these, 3,372 have resulted in convictions. Just over half of those convicted were licensed drivers or had applied for a licence from the PCO⁹. The penalties for touting convictions will be dealt with in the next chapter.
- 2.4 The figures suggest that touting by licensed drivers is a significant problem. The Private Hire Car Association has undertaken night time observations in areas where touting occurs and notes that many touts are using PCO-licensed vehicles¹⁰. The London Taxi Network and Licensed Private Hire Car Association (LPHCA) told us they were concerned that some licensed drivers were touting on a regular basis¹¹.

Cab-related sexual offences

- 2.5 There has been a 46 per cent reduction in cab-related sexual offences over the last five years¹². The following graph shows the overall number of incidents per year and the average number per month. The average has halved from almost fifteen per month to seven per month. This represents a significant

⁸ SDS Technical Report 6 for GLA Economics, *Late-Night London: Planning and Managing the Late-Night Economy*, June 2002, p5

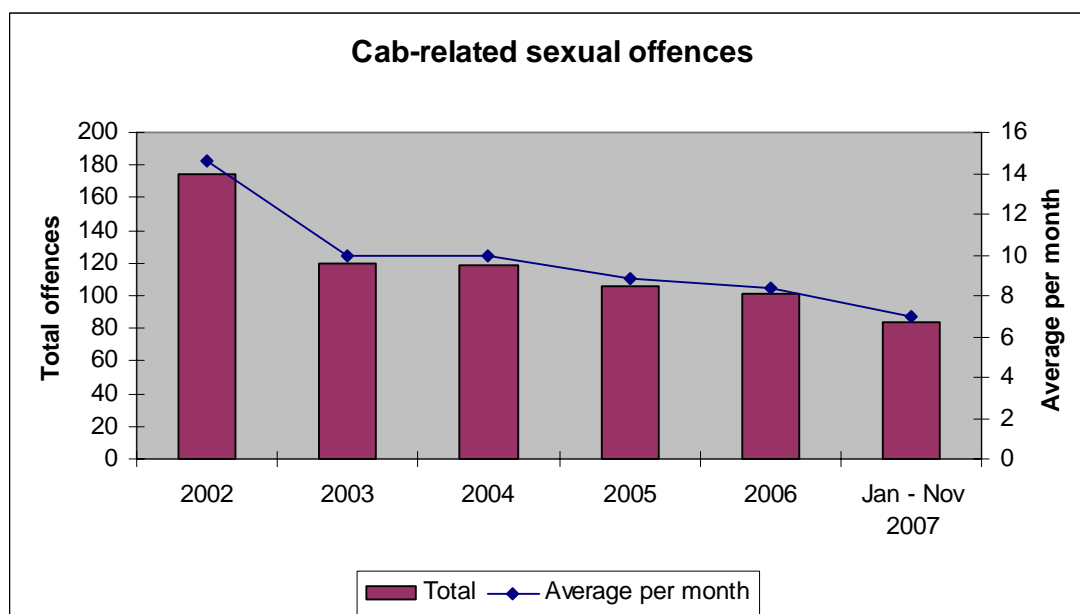
⁹ Transport for London written evidence

¹⁰ Private Hire Car Association written evidence

¹¹ Geoffrey Riesel and Steve Wright, cab enforcement meeting, 28 January 2008

¹² Transport for London written evidence

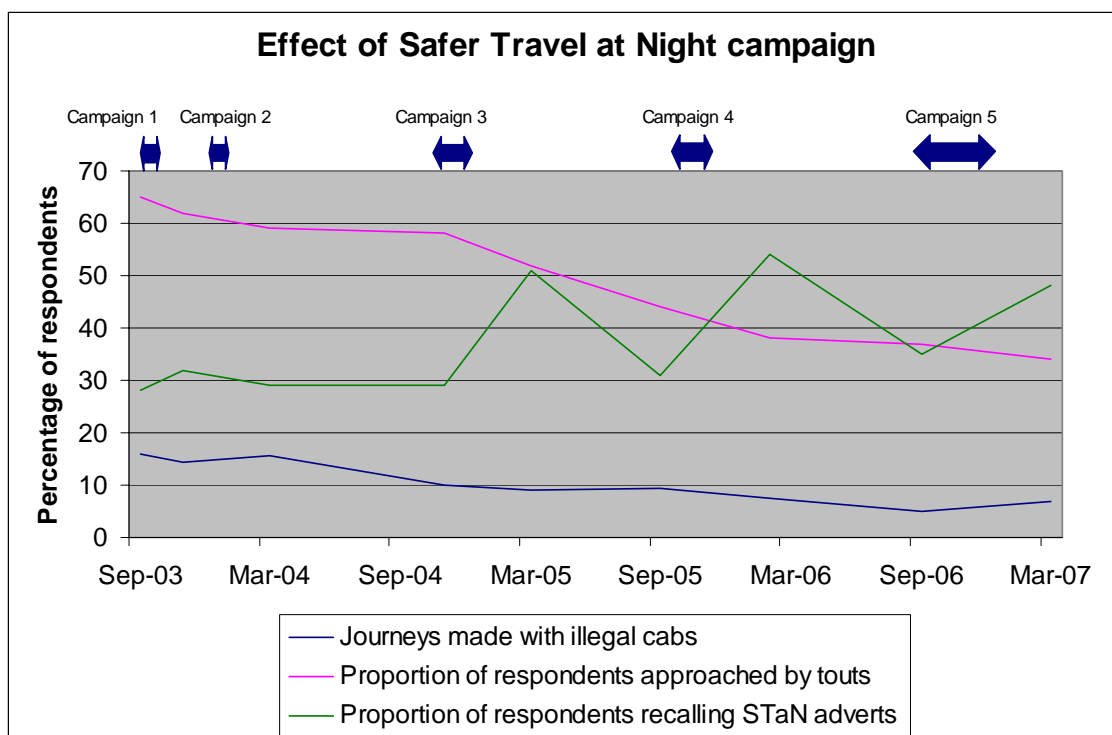
improvement although there is clearly no room for complacency. The greatest reduction was achieved in 2002-03. The draft findings of the TOCU Cab Unit's five year review states that the primary purpose of the Unit is to reduce the number of cab-related sexual assaults. Resources are to be targeted at unlicensed drivers who are violent, have previous criminal convictions or who are predatory, in order to further reduce assaults.



Source: TfL

Market surveys on touting

- 2.6 TfL commissioned an independent agency to conduct an ongoing programme of research to assess the effectiveness of the Safer Travel at Night campaign. The primary purpose is to establish the market share of illegal journeys in late night transport, but questions are also asked about how often people are approached by touts and whether they recall Safer Travel at Night advertising. Research is carried out twice a year, before and after an advertising campaign.
- 2.7 Survey results demonstrate a declining trend of both late night journeys made illegally and whether people have been approached by touts. The graph on the next page shows these trends, along with results for recalling Safer Travel at Night advertising and when the advertising campaigns were carried out (marked in blue arrows).



Source: TfL

- 2.8 Overall, the TOCU Cab Enforcement Unit's performance indicators show that good progress has been made in tackling touting. Fewer people are making journeys illegally and being approached by touts. A large number of arrests have been made and fewer sexual assaults are being carried out by touts.
- 2.9 However, there is evidence that touting is still a significant problem. Representatives of the private hire trade estimate that thousands of drivers tout every night. On our site visit with TOCU officers, we witnessed widespread illegal activity. Officers pointed out rows of cars which were parked outside venues and which they believed to be touts and acknowledged that the problem was significant. Those in the private hire trade believe that whilst the TOCU Cab Enforcement Unit did an excellent job, the underlying causes of touting need to be addressed. In the next section we explore the root causes of touting and how these can be tackled and also make suggestions about what more needs to be done to tackle illegal cab activity.

3. Why is touting occurring?

Late night transport

- 3.1 Representatives from the private hire trade told us that difficulties in getting home late at night in London are a major cause of touting. London's vibrant late night economy, and the effect of the liberalisation of the licensing laws, which came into effect in 2005¹³, mean that there is a significant demand for late night transport. Late night transport options have improved to meet this demand, and London probably has better transport links late at night than anywhere else in country.
- 3.2 However, whilst night bus services have significantly improved, they may not be an easy option for everyone and are not the quickest route home, which is often a priority for people late at night. Furthermore, evidence suggests there is a shortage of black taxis available late at night. People may be unwilling to call and wait for a minicab or cannot find a local office. Touts exploit these difficulties as people try to make their way home as quickly and cheaply as possible.
- 3.3 There are 25,000 black taxi drivers in London, but according to a London Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) report, nearly two-thirds of black taxi drivers do not work past 9pm and almost four fifths do not work past midnight¹⁴. It is understandable that drivers do not want to work anti-social hours or deal with potentially difficult passengers. However, research shows that London's black taxi driver population is ageing, with more drivers over 70 than under 30¹⁵. Drivers under 50 are much more likely to work late at night¹⁶. This suggests that the PCO needs to encourage younger people to become taxi drivers, both to replace drivers who will soon retire and because they are more willing to work late at night.
- 3.4 In 2001, the PCO created a late night tariff from 10pm to 6am to encourage black taxi drivers to work later hours. However, the LCCI's research suggests that just 17 per cent of drivers now work late at night more often since the introduction of the tariff. The late night tariff is approximately 30 per cent more than a day time fare, and high costs may deter those trying to get home from using them. Furthermore, we were told that this may enable drivers to earn more money and go home quickly, rather than stay out later¹⁷. Recent fare increases, due to come into force on 5 April, increase the late night tariff by 3.1 per cent¹⁸. There are currently not enough black cabs available at night to meet demand

¹³ Under the Licensing Act 2003

¹⁴ London Chamber of Commerce and Industry, *The London Taxi Trade*, June 2007, p15

¹⁵ Transport Committee, *Where to, Guv?*, November 2005, p14

¹⁶ op cit., p15

¹⁷ Geoffrey Riesel, cab enforcement meeting, 28 January 2008

¹⁸ Transport for London press release, 7 February 2008:
<http://www.tfl.gov.uk/corporate/media/newscentre/7395.aspx>

and interventions in the market, such as increasing fares, have not made a demonstrable difference.

- 3.5 TfL has provided a number of services to improve late night travel options: there are now over 100 night bus routes in London, with 34 million passenger journeys in 2005¹⁹. Cabwise, a simple to use text service which provides the telephone numbers of local private hire and taxi companies, is an innovative approach to providing people with late night travel options set up by Safer Travel at Night. The PCO has enabled satellite offices of licensed operators to be set up in clubs and other late night venues to reduce touting outside. Marshalled taxi ranks have been set up by the PCO in Bromley, Beckenham, Cranbourn Street, Kingston, Liverpool Street and Romford and marshalled private hire schemes operate in Croydon and Kingston. Additional private hire and taxi ranks, as well as satellite offices in clubs and bars would provide a quick and safe option for getting home in touting hotspots where the availability of taxis is currently low.

Recommendation:

1. **The Public Carriage Office, in partnership with TOCU, should reduce opportunities for touts and provide people with safe options for getting home by establishing additional marshalled private hire and taxi schemes, and encourage late night venues and operators to set up satellite offices in touting hotspot areas. Progress on setting up new marshalled ranks should be reported back to the Committee by October 2008.**

The licensing system

Links between drivers and operators

- 3.6 The Committee is also concerned about potential loopholes within the licensing system that can make it easier for licensed drivers to tout. Representatives of the private hire trade told the Committee that there are inadequate links between operators and drivers and vehicles in the licensing system, which were never intended when the legislation was being drawn up. Drivers are able to get themselves and their vehicle licensed without being attached to an operator (as they must be to take bookings). A tout with a licence and a licensed vehicle could confuse those not entirely clear about private hire regulations into thinking their actions are legal. This weakness in the licensing system should be addressed as a priority by the PCO, who should require those applying for a licence to provide evidence of which operator they will be working for.
- 3.7 The Committee also heard that the PCO hold no records on where a licenced driver currently works or has previously worked. The police also told us that a database of which operators drivers have worked for would help them identify licensed drivers who are touting and operators who are encouraging touting.

¹⁹ Transport for London written evidence

Recommendations:

2. **Applicants for private hire driver licences should be required to provide evidence to the Public Carriage Office of which operator they are or will be employed by. This change to the application process should be enacted by October 2008.**
3. **The Public Carriage Office should create a database of licensed drivers and the previous and current operators they work for, which can be shared with the police. The database should be in place within a year and progress reported back to the Committee in six months time.**

Organised touting by operators

- 3.8 Both the police and private hire representatives have identified a problem with some small operators who are using their licensed status as a cover for touting. A small operator may not have more than two private hire vehicles to carry out bookings. We were told by both the police and private hire organisations that they were aware of small operators who set up premises, obtain a licence but then actively tout outside their office. Although all premises are inspected by the PCO, evidence from the police and the private hire industry alleged that licences have been awarded to premises which they believe to be unsuitable and to those who have previously had licences revoked.
- 3.9 The PCO is to be commended for undertaking the huge task of licensing London's private hire industry, and most small operators are running perfectly legal businesses. However, it appears that some are using their licenced status to carry out touting but present it as legal business. TOCU has increased joint visits with the PCO to cab offices as part of their enforcement activities²⁰. We believe they should continue to work closely with the PCO to shut down operators who are abusing their licences. We also understand that TOCU will be confiscating assets and conducting financial investigations into operators who are touting.

Recommendation:

4. **TOCU and the Public Carriage Office should increase their enforcement activity focus on small operators using their licences as a front for touting and ensure that premises are closed down and licences revoked where touting is occurring. This should be prioritised as part of the five year review and an update on the number and type of enforcement activities carried out by TOCU and the PCO should be reported back to the Committee in October 2008.**

Private hire recruitment

- 3.10 Representatives of the private hire trade also expressed concerns over recruitment of drivers. We were told that the current application process can deter potential drivers, who may then choose to tout because it is an easier

²⁰ Transport for London written evidence

option. Any one applying to become a private hire or black taxi driver must have an Enhanced Criminal Records Bureau check²¹. This should be processed within 4 weeks²², although the Committee was told that in some instances it can take up to 4 months²³. Whilst a driver is waiting for Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check, they are not able to work.

- 3.11 Private hire representatives emphasised that CRB checks should be carried out but suggested that a provisional permit is granted whilst the driver is waiting. The Committee shares the concerns of the private hire trade about the alleged shortage of drivers, however we believe that a provisional permit would not provide adequate public safety reassurance. We urge the PCO to investigate concerns over the length of time CRB checks are taking and raise the issue with the Home Office if necessary.

Touting enforcement

TOCU's current resources

- 3.12 Private hire organisations widely welcome the work of TOCU and believe that it is effective in its operations. However, they believe that the unit is at present too small to deal with the sheer scale of touting that is currently occurring. The Unit currently has 34 officers, just over one officer for each borough in London. The PCO employs 41 licensing and compliance officers to enforce private hire and taxi regulations.
- 3.13 Unless the regulations governing private hire can be effectively enforced, some licensed drivers and others will act illegally if they believe they will not be caught. Furthermore, there appears to be a tension between the priorities of borough police and the TOCU Cab Enforcement Unit. Borough police working late at night will prioritise getting people home as quickly as possible which does not necessarily complement TOCU's work. We understand however, that TOCU will in the future be working closely with borough police to raise awareness and share intelligence around touting activity. As part of the 5 year review of the TOCU Cab Enforcement Unit, TfL should assess whether there is currently adequate numbers of both frontline staff and technical support to effectively tackle touting. We also believe consideration should be given to whether the number of enforcement and compliance staff at the PCO should be increased to support TOCU.

Intelligence-led policing

- 3.14 Drivers and representatives from both the private hire and taxi trades have highlighted to the Committee the difficulties of contacting the Cab Enforcement

²¹ The Criminal Records Bureau (CRB), an agency of the Home Office, provides wider access to criminal record information. This service enables organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors to make safer recruitment decisions by identifying candidates who may be unsuitable for certain work, especially that involve children or vulnerable adults. An Enhanced check is for those who are regularly in sole charge of children or vulnerable adults.

²² <http://www.crb.gov.uk/Default.aspx?page=289&qid=444>

²³ John Griffin, cab enforcement meeting, 28 January 2008

Unit to report illegal activity. TOCU officers accepted that the Unit should be more responsive and make use of drivers as a source of intelligence. Drivers have a vested interest in reporting touting as touts are taking trade away from them, and it should be as easy as possible for them to report illegal activity.

- 3.15 There may be lessons to be learned from other cities. Leeds Council licensing authority have contact details clearly available on their website, as well as the Crimestoppers number and local police contacts. Currently driver or public complaints about touting would be made through the PCO, but we believe there is a case for setting up a dedicated email address, telephone number and text service that is clearly advertised on the website and in other media.
- 3.16 We understand that TOCU is aiming to improve its stakeholder engagement by formalising a framework to assist with this. The framework will include meetings with representative bodies, encouraging the use of the Crimestoppers number to report activity anonymously and giving feedback to those who provide information. Quality feedback provided to those who supplied intelligence would also better inform the taxi and private hire industry of the work that TOCU does.

Recommendation:

5. **The TOCU Cab Unit should set up an email address, phone number and text service so private hire and taxi drivers can report touting quickly and easily. This should be enacted within a year and progress reported back to the Committee by October 2008.**

Penalties for touting

- 3.17 The effectiveness of enforcement activity also depends on how penalties are applied to those convicted. Evidence provided to the Committee by Transport for London showed that the courts are not applying maximum penalties to cases of touting. This has been identified as a problem in tackling illegal activity by the police, TfL and private hire operators. Those convicted for touting are also charged with having no insurance²⁴. Touting carries a maximum penalty of £2,500. Driving without valid insurance carries a fine of up to £5,000, between 6 and 8 penalty points on a driving licence and a discretionary driving licence disqualification²⁵. However, TOCU analysis of a sample of cases found that the average fines for touting and having no insurance were £150 for each offence. Around half of those convicted in the sample had their licences suspended for an average of 8 months.
- 3.18 TfL and the Mayor raised concerns with the Home Office over inconsistencies and leniency of the average fines being applied by the courts. It was felt that they were not adequately severe to deter touts. Magistrate's Court Sentencing Guidelines are now being revised and are expected to include specific guidance on penalties for touting. This issue was also addressed by TOCU by ensuring the

²⁴ Unless a private hire vehicle is pre-booked, the car is not insured

²⁵ Transport for London written evidence

majority of cases were heard through a small number of courts. This has helped ensure that penalties are more consistently applied and TOCU now believe the average fine is much higher. We believe it would be useful for TfL to carry out this exercise again to test whether their initiatives have had an effect on the way penalties are imposed.

- 3.19 Around half of those convicted for toutting were licensed drivers or had applied for a licence from the PCO. The PCO deals with licensed drivers found toutting and has temporarily suspended half of those convicted. Just over 10 per cent had their licences revoked but the same amount had no action taken against them²⁶. We believe that clearer guidelines need to be drawn up to deter licensed drivers from toutting.
- 3.20 For example, Leeds City Council will suspend a driver who is found to be toutting (with evidence which could support a criminal prosecution or Home Office caution). Upon conviction, the private hire licence will be suspended for one year from the conviction date. If convicted again, the licence will be suspended for a further three years. Birmingham have a 'three strikes and you're out' policy. This sends a clear message to drivers that toutting is a serious offence and will not be tolerated. We believe the PCO should adopt a similar principle to ensure that licensed drivers or those thinking of applying for a licence understand the consequences of toutting.

Recommendation:

6. **The Public Carriage Office should adopt a policy of revoking driver licences after three convictions for toutting. This should be in place by October 2008.**

²⁶ op cit

4. Conclusions

- 4.1 The Committee has found during its investigation that the TOCU Cab Enforcement Unit has succeeded in its aim of making a demonstrable difference to the level of touting. Arrests and convictions for touting have consistently increased. Cab-related sexual assaults have halved, and according to surveys, the numbers of people making illegal late night journeys and being approached by touts has steadily fallen.
- 4.2 However, the Committee found evidence that touting still occurs on a widespread scale. Licensed drivers as well as private individuals are touting: around half of all those convicted of touting offences hold a private hire licence. There is clearly no room for complacency.
- 4.3 Our report identifies the underlying causes of touting, including difficulties in finding black taxis and minicabs late at night and loopholes in the licensing regime which allow drivers to obtain a licence without being employed by an operator. We believe that implementing our recommendations will reduce the scale of illegal activity. We also make recommendations to TOCU on making better use of intelligence and targeting operators who facilitate touting, which we believe will improve the work of the Cab Enforcement Unit even further. We hope TfL will take our findings and recommendations on board during its five year review of TOCU services and we look forward to seeing the full findings.

Appendix 1: List of recommendations

1. The Public Carriage Office, in partnership with TOCU, should reduce opportunities for touts and provide people with safe options for getting home by establishing additional marshalled private hire and taxi schemes, and encourage late night venues and operators to set up satellite offices in touting hotspot areas. Progress on setting up new marshalled ranks should be reported back to the Committee by October 2008.
2. Applicants for private hire driver licences should be required to provide evidence to the Public Carriage Office of which operator they are or will be employed by. This change to the application process should be enacted by October 2008.
3. The Public Carriage Office should create a database of licensed drivers and the previous and current operators they work for, which can be shared with the police. The database should be in place within a year and progress reported back to the Committee in six months time.
4. TOCU and the Public Carriage Office should increase their enforcement activity focus on small operators using their licences as a front for touting and ensure that premises are closed down and licences revoked where touting is occurring. This should be a prioritised as part of the five year review and an update on the number and type of enforcement activities carried out by TOCU and the PCO should be reported back to the Committee in October 2008.
5. The TOCU Cab Unit should set up an email address, phone number and text service so private hire and taxi drivers can report touting quickly and easily. This should be enacted within a year and progress reported back to the Committee by October 2008.
6. The Public Carriage Office should adopt a policy of revoking driver licences after three convictions for touting. This should be in place by October 2008.

Appendix 2: Written information, meetings and site visits

Written information

The following organisations provided written information to the Committee:

- Transport for London
- Metropolitan Police Service Transport Operational Command Unit
- London's Taxi Network
- Private Hire Car Association

Meetings

We discussed taxi touting in London with the following organisations on 28 January 2008:

- Steve Wright – Chairman, Licensed Private Hire Car Association
- Geoffrey Riesel – Chairman, London's Taxi Network
- John Griffin – Chairman, Private Hire Car Association

Site Visit

Transport Operational Command Unit Cab Enforcement team, 23 January 2008

We accompanied TOCU officers on a tour of key touting hotspots around the West End to observe touting activity and the TOCU custody suite on Albany Street. We discussed the tactics deployed by TOCU in arresting touts, how touting was deterred and the future development of the Cab Unit.

Appendix 3: Principles of London Assembly scrutiny

An aim for action

An Assembly scrutiny is not an end in itself. It aims for action to achieve improvement.

Independence

An Assembly scrutiny is conducted with objectivity; nothing should be done that could impair the independence of the process.

Holding the Mayor to account

The Assembly rigorously examines all aspects of the Mayor's strategies.

Inclusiveness

An Assembly scrutiny consults widely, having regard to issues of timeliness and cost.

Constructiveness

The Assembly conducts its scrutinies and investigations in a positive manner, recognising the need to work with stakeholders and the Mayor to achieve improvement.

Value for money

When conducting a scrutiny the Assembly is conscious of the need to spend public money effectively.

Appendix 4: Orders and translations

How to order

For further information on this report or to order a copy, please contact Bonnie Jones, Scrutiny Manager, on 020 7983 4250 or email Bonnie.Jones@london.gov.uk

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