PRIVATE HIRE PR STUNT PLACES NHS STAFF AT RISK

- Protective partition between driver and passenger enhancing safety
- Purpose built interior designed to be disinfected and washed down
- Wheelchair friendly for key workers with accessibility needs
- Knowledge accredited professional driver with enhanced DBS
- Cashless payment
- Interior designed for comfort not for cleaning and disinfection
- No social distancing for passengers
- No protective partition
- Not designed for key workers with accessibility needs
- No protective partition
- Interior designed for comfort not for cleaning and disinfection
Taxi Heroes

Despite the calls to Boris from the LTDA General Secretary and those of MP, Sir Charles Walker, during Prime Minister’s Questions to recruit, contract and mobilise the London Taxi Trade in full spirit of the Spitfires of 1940, it was the French Government that recently led the way. Catching on to the notion that they have a ‘Taxi Parisien’ army at their disposal, French officials have made the decision to directly reimburse hospitals the cost of fares when utilising taxi services to transport health workers. Internationally though, this scheme has not been taken up by most governments in any expansive fashion, despite the Trade’s continued offers of support and the obvious need to move healthcare professionals around in as safe and protective manner as possible. (See page 23 for Taxi’s International correspondent, Wim Faber’s full update.)

Reports of Taxi drivers ‘going the extra miles’ in London and beyond have rolled in thick and fast, as ‘Heroes of the Trade’ have ‘stepped up’ utilising their purpose built vehicles to safely transport our own heroic frontline healthcare professionals, support vulnerable members of the public and transport essential goods. Many of these drivers have done so at considerable personal expense to themselves.

The Mayor’s scheme to make 300 hotel rooms available to rough sleepers in order to protect these vulnerable individuals against COVID-19 and allow them to self-isolate, saw cabbies volunteer to help safely transport them between support services.

Next, a special mention to East London cabbie, Michael Hayes, who has been offering free, ‘responsible journeys’ to safely transport home NHS staff coming off shift – not to mention facilitating furnishing Newham Hospital’s Rainbow Ward with 50 donated Easter Eggs for the kids. It appears that this selfless act has inspired Cabbies throughout the country to follow suit. In Nottingham for instance, large numbers of Taxi drivers are offering safe, responsible and free transport to and from work for NHS workers out of their own self-employed pockets. A big ‘virtual elbow bump’ goes out to all drivers selflessly utilising their time and specialist vehicles to provide such safe carriage.

The Taxi Charity have been continuing to offer their usual outstanding services to veterans. These past two weeks have seen innovative approaches to support veterans in isolation. (See page 15 for full story and information on how you can help.)

It doesn’t end there though. Nor will it probably surprise you to hear that we are hearing of cabbies buying and delivering groceries for vulnerable people in isolation; supporting and advising other self-employed people on-line and volunteering to work in newly built and existing hospitals… But let’s not forget that not all ‘Taxi Heroes’ are behind the wheel right now. For those staying at home and in isolation, also protecting the NHS, Taxi salutes you.

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PRIVATE HIRE PR STUNT PUTS NHS AT RISK

TOP TRADE STORY

T
imes have never been tougher for the taxi trade than in recent weeks. Despite this, cabbies have stepped up time and time again to help others. Offering free rides to NHS staff and vulnerable people, helping homeless people in our cities to self-isolate, and delivering medicines or food supplies - London's cabbies are going above and beyond the call of duty on a daily basis.

Meanwhile, the Mincab industry see it as a PR opportunity, spending fortunes on advertising campaigns and offering free rides and discounts to NHS staff and some fool in the NHS decides to help them by promoting it to staff! Whoever made that decision needs to be fired. Have they not heard of social distancing? How can anyone, let alone a high-risk passenger, drive a front line NHS worker, stay 2 metres away from someone else in a Toyota Prius?

It's stupidity beyond belief - don't just break the government guidelines, pick the highest risk passengers, put them in a confined space (one that's hard to clean and sterilise), where they sit 'cheek by jowl' with a driver, who will then do the same thing 5 minutes later with another high risk passenger. It's not stretching the realms of possibility to say that one.busy infected Uber driver could take out an entire NHS trust over 2-3 days.

I have written to Helen Chapman - Head of Licensing at TFL, Alaina Macdonald - Head of External Affairs NHS England and Matt Hancock - Health Secretary, asking them to stop this madness.

If Uber want to help the NHS, how about they stop tax dodging and cough up some of their billions and help fund it as every working cabbie does!

I share the Prime Minister's confidence that London's cab drivers will rise to the challenge posed by coronavirus - we already are.

While the trade has been doing everything we can to support the vulnerable, with so few people travelling around London we need help ourselves. I have been fighting ‘tooth and nail’ to make sure hard-working cabbies get the support they need. I have been making the case to everybody in Government who have found themselves in dire straits.

Many NHS workers are high risk by the nature of what they do, were an infected worker to travel in a PH vehicle, as described, the risk the driver could contract it must be high. It must also be borne in mind that most PHV's, being ordinary saloon cars, are designed and built using materials chosen for comfort and aesthetics and not for cleaning or disinfecting purposes and therefore the risk of contamination from the vehicle must also be high.

If another key NHS worker, or any crucial staff then travel in the same vehicle or with the same driver the risk and likelihood of spreading the virus to members of this group are, frankly, frightening. The thought that NHS workers are being targeted or encouraged to put themselves, their colleagues and others at risk in this way is similarly outrageous.

I would be grateful for your views on this and details of any communications with the NHS highlighting this threat and also any action taken, or advice given to PH operators or drivers to minimise this serious threat to public health.

Yours Sincerely

Steve McNamara
General Secretary, The Licensed Taxi Drivers’ Association (LTDA)

Steve McNamara is the LTDA’s General Secretary

Helen Chapman
Director
Licensing, Regulation and Charging
Transport for London
Palestra
Blackfriars Rd
London, SE1 8LP

Dear Helen,

I understand that Addison Lee are promoting and offering free rides for NHS staff, I am also aware Uber and other PH operators are running similar schemes.

My understanding of government advice is to self-distance at least 2 metres.

In most licensed PHVs this is obviously not possible, in fact in a typical Prius, in an enclosed confined space, the maximum distance between driver and passenger can only be an absolute maximum of 0.5 Metres and if the passenger is sitting behind or next to the driver much less. I would suggest the phrase ‘cheek by jowl’ is appropriate.

Many NHS workers are high risk by the nature of what they do, were an infected worker to travel in a PH vehicle, as described, the risk the driver could contract it must be high. It must also be borne in mind that most PHV’s, being ordinary saloon cars, are designed and built using materials chosen for comfort and aesthetics and not for cleaning or disinfecting purposes and therefore the risk of contamination from the vehicle must also be high.

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Yours Sincerely

Steve McNamara
General Secretary, The Licensed Taxi Drivers’ Association (LTDA)

Dear Ms Macdonald,

As the General Secretary of the Licensed Taxi Drivers’ Association, representing London’s black cab drivers, I wanted to register my concern about the use of private hire vehicles to transport NHS staff and to offer the support of the taxi trade to NHS workers at this time.

Based on guidance I have seen sent to NHS staff, hospitals are encouraging their staff to make use of the offer that Uber has made to transport NHS staff for free, or alternatively to book a ‘taxi’ through Addison Lee. This is most definitely not for all cabbies - those who want to, or have to stay in isolation, should do so, but those who are still working should be utilised. I am exploring all possible options for these working cabbies to be able to help – be it getting medicines to housebound patients, delivering groceries, or providing rides for key workers. This has met with some success as Preenow, Gett and ComCab have secured various contracts for moving NHS, and other key staff around.

One request we received was for cabbies to volunteer to work at the new Nightingale hospital in a variety of what can only be described, as ‘unpleasant’ roles. Within an hour of sending out the email to our members, we had received over 400 replies, and even with a better description outlined to them of what constituted ‘unpleasant’, over 300 of these asked to be put forward - real heroes!

It has been incredibly heartening to see so many MP’s, especially members of the APPG on Taxis, speak out in support of our trade over the last week. Chair Wes Streeting MP and Vice Chair Sir Charles Walker MP continue to be fierce advocates for our trade.

Anyone who has not seen the video of Sir Charles referring to cabbies as ‘The Spitfire Pilots of 1940’ and the Prime Ministers response should make a point of watching the video located in the ‘campaign’ section on our website.

I am confident that the work of the APPG has been one of the key factors in pressuring the Government to bring forward their measures in support of the self-employed. The value of having such passionate supporters in Parliament is clear, and has never been more vital.

Steve McNamara
General Secretary, The Licensed Taxi Drivers’ Association (LTDA)

NHS England, London Office
Skipton House
80 London Road
SE1 6LH

Dear Ms Macdonald,

3 April 2020

As the General Secretary of the Licensed Taxi Drivers’ Association, representing London’s black cab drivers, I wanted to register my concern about the use of private hire vehicles to transport NHS staff and to offer the support of the taxi trade to NHS workers at this time.

Based on guidance I have seen sent to NHS staff, hospitals are encouraging their staff to make use of the offer that Uber has made to transport NHS staff for free, or alternatively to book a ‘taxi’ through Addison Lee. This is particularly important to note in this case that Addison Lee’s fleet of vehicles are not taxis. In both cases, it will be very difficult to maintain appropriate social distancing between driver and passenger.

There is a clear distinction between a taxi and a private hire vehicle – and this distinction is vitally important during this health emergency. A licensed black taxi features a partition between driver and passenger, which provides protection for both passenger and driver which, I am sure you will agree, is vital during the outbreak of a virus which spreads by close person-to-person contact. Moreover, black cabs are designed to be easily cleaned and sterilised, and are driven by drivers who have been briefed on best practice to keep their vehicles as clean and safe as possible.

Finally, the larger size of a black cab makes it easier for drivers and passengers to keep two metres away from each other.

A private hire vehicle is a normal car, not designed to the same standards as London’s taxi fleet. Not only is there no partition between the driver and the passenger, but they are not designed to be cleaned and sterilised after each use, as a black cab is.

I write to urge you to revise the advice that is being offered to NHS staff, and to encourage health workers to book black cabs wherever possible. We would be pleased to help wherever possible and would be pleased to provide you or your colleagues with more detail about the free and subsidised rides that black cab drivers and apps are offering to the NHS in London. I would be grateful if we could arrange a telephone call to discuss this matter further, as well as outlining how the black cab trade can better support transport for NHS staff.

Yours sincerely,

Steve McNamara
General Secretary, The Licensed Taxi Drivers’ Association (LTDA)
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Teenage Taxi Robber Locked Up

CRIME

Asif Khan targeted three taxi drivers last year. His ‘modus operandi’ was to be dropped off by Cabbies, then threaten them and steal takings. Khan pleaded guilty to Robbery, Theft x 2, Assault x 2 and a count of criminal damage at Birmingham Crown Court.

The Court heard from Philip Beardwell (Prosecuting) that in July last year, Khan had been initially arrested and had admitted to two previous offences - yet was released from Police custody on bail. The Prosecution outlined that once Khan had left the Police station, he got in a taxi yet again - only to arrive at his requested destination and ‘lunge’ through the drivers window, taking cash and running off – but then he returned, threatening to ‘smash the cabbies face in’ and took a brick to the Coventry-based cabbies windscreen.

The driver then reversed, and his screen was ‘bricked’ again by Khan. The Cabbie then managed to hail down a police car and following a search of the area, Khan was located and arrested.

Judge Francis Laird, upon passing sentence made the following remarks: “I have had victim impact statements read to me showing the fear that was suffered...Taxi drivers carry out a public service in the middle of the night. They were vulnerable victims you targeted.”

The Judge sentenced Khan to 3 Years in a Young Offenders Institution (YOI) stating he had taken into account Khan’s age at the time his offending and his living circumstances in that he was estranged from family.

Detective Sergeant Tom Lyons, from Birmingham East CID, commented on the West Midlands Police website: “This was a horrifying experience for the victims while going about their normal line of work. ‘We are satisfied with the sentence and I hope it offers reassurance to taxi drivers that we will take action.’

‘NO KNOWLEDGE’ TAXI DRIVER JAILED

Taxi Driver, William Ellis told Police he had ‘no knowledge’ of the three 2kg blocks of amphetamines and nearly 100 grams of cocaine, hidden in a tin of paint discovered in the black cab.

Ellis and Christopher Willis, both from Kirkby, were stopped by police whilst travelling in a black taxi in Cumbria earlier this year. Both men however, appearing at Preston Crown Court admitted ‘Possession with Intent to Supply’ the ‘Class A & B’ illicit substances. Police estimated the total value of the drugs seized to be worth £40,000 - £50,000.

Willis was handed a jail term of two years and three months and Ellis received two years and eight months.

A Police Drugs Unit spokesperson said: “These men were found in possession of a considerable amount of drugs which would otherwise have found its way onto the streets…”

Barrow and Furness MP Simon Fell said: “These people are the lowest of the low, bringing drugs and misery into our community.

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Pop in and we’d be delighted to show you round our new premises and talk you through some of the ground-breaking features of the new TX Electric Taxi.
LTDA explore options to challenge schemes which severely restrict Trade

BUS Lanes

THE MASSETT FILE

Following my last report and the update on my meeting with the Mayor of Tower Hamlets regarding the Wapping High Street Bus Gate, Tower Hamlets has moved to lift the restriction so that all vehicles can pass through - initially for three weeks, but obviously that can be extended while the present emergency continues.

The Mayor has agreed to meet with us again once the experimental restriction has been in place long enough to carry out monitoring of the effects on neighbouring streets and roads. So, it looks as if that will be some time. The barrier has to go back and then be followed by a period of normal traffic while monitoring takes place. It is anticipated that the Council will then be in a position to review the scheme, make a decision on whether it will remain in place and what forms of traffic will be permitted to pass through it.

While all this has been going on, the LTDA and the UCG have taken advice from an eminent QC on the question of whether Taxis should be permitted access to all bus lanes and other bus only measures. I am pleased to say that the advice came to a very positive conclusion - although we have had the experience of being in court and making similar arguments to those that are being proposed now, which unfortunately the Court ruled against. It does go to show that a legal opinion is just that – an opinion. (However eminent the person providing it may be.) Having said that, we are encouraged by the positivity and we will be exploring the advice further with our colleagues once things hopefully return to normal and when we can all go back to worrying about all the things that we usually worry about in our day to day lives and businesses.

If we eventually decide that we have enough confidence in the advice to take it forward and to risk many thousands of pounds in a court showdown with the authorities, it will be important to pick the right fight - one where the circumstances would be there to enable us to use our ammunition to the full.

I note that on social media, when the Beech Street tunnel restrictions came in, there were a number of the usual suspects who were shouting, ‘Why don’t the orgs do something, why don’t they take them to court?’ It’s notable that these people always want to spend someone else’s money and clearly in this case, they hadn’t looked at the facts. Beech Street is a tunnel with extremely high pollution levels which effect the pedestrians that also use it; ZEC and electric Taxis can still use it; only electric buses use it; and all taxis can use it in order to take passengers ‘to or from’ all the premises that are only accessible from the tunnel. In view of those facts and with the best will in the world, no legal challenge would be successful – and that’s MY opinion. It seems to me, that any criteria for judging a scheme as ‘challenge-worthy,’ should be one that could be applied to Tottenham Court Road, where the scheme currently being worked on will be much more restrictive to the Taxi trade and our customers.

The best thing of course, would be if there were no further schemes that would severely restrict Taxis. It’s interesting that the Mayor has been making some more positive comments about the trade recently - in one I read that he stated that ‘Taxis and PH still have a very important role to play in his transport strategy’ and another where he cited the increased number of bus lanes that Taxis can now use. However, if scrapping schemes that impact the trade is too much to ask for, and if it is thought that the legal advice will stand up - we will be ready to challenge any significant new scheme that severely restricts Taxis and where the circumstances are right to make that challenge.

Richard Massett, LTDA Chairman, and Chairman of the London Cab Ranks Committee

MASSETT’S CAMERA HOTSPOTS

EXMOUTH MARKET
BERKLEY STREET J/W PICCADILLY
JOHN ISLIP STREET
FULHAM BROADWAY/BARCLAY ROAD
CAMDEN
SELFRIDGES
LUDGATE HILL
ISLINGTON
RED ROUTES
TOWER BRIDGE
LIMEHOUSE LINK
SMITHFIELD
A13
THE CITY
KILLICK STREET
WESTMINSTER PARK PLAZA
VERNON PLACE

RED zone
Yellow box cameras
No right turn into Ponsonby Terrace
Yellow box
20mph limit
Over ranking
Zig-Zags
20mph limit
Tfl is actively enforcing yellow box restrictions
20 mph speed limit – average speed cameras
30mph speed limit
Do not park in loading boxes, they are enforced by camera
Average speed cameras in operation
20mph limit
Pedestrian zone
No right turn into Addington Street
No left turn into Southampton Row

♦ HOTSPOT 1 Devonshire Place Mews – no right turn
♦ HOTSPOT 2 Binfield Road – 24hr pedestrian zone
Edinburgh Taxi Trade Fight Uber ‘Decimation’

TRADE
Edinburgh City Council’s Regulatory Committee have voted for a survey looking at potential overprovision within both PH & Taxi trades following pressure from cabbies.

Jacqueline Dunn, addressing the committee on behalf of the Edinburgh Cab Branch of Unite, cited uncontrolled growth of private hire drivers to be “hypocritical” considering the council’s commitment to be carbon neutral by 2030.

She stated: “This wilful act of systematic decimation of a long-established taxi trade in Edinburgh is happening by allowing an unprecedented number of private hire cars to work for Uber. This is decimating the taxi trade and it is limiting the ability for us to compete due to predatory pricing and surging - and is not ensuring the needs of the customer, from safety to price... We are seeing a drop in the number of taxi drivers not renewing their licence, with a loss of 185 drivers in the last year due to increasing private hire car numbers and the extortionate running costs of putting a taxi on the circuit.”

The survey looking at overprovision of PHV licensing in particular will be considered a big win for Edinburgh based Cabbies. Dunn further commented, “We have our own language, rituals and code of conduct but we have always served the city, its citizens and visitors.”

The dispute, which seems to be increasing in its bitterness - rages on.

TRANSPORT FOR LONDON

Coronavirus information
TfL have published further advice, in TPH notice 05/20, which includes information on taxi and private hire driver Critical Worker status, DVSA MOT exemptions and taxi and private hire vehicle licenses and new driver applications. TPH notice 05/20 supplements the advice provided in TPH Notice 04/20 and TPH notice 03/20. TfL are encouraging all licensees to regularly check the Government and NHS websites for the latest information.

Contactless card payment limit to increase to £45
The limit for paying by contactless card is being increased from £30 to £45 and a national roll out of this started on Wednesday 1 April.

Software will be rolled out gradually across the UK to increase the limit. If a purchase costs more than £30 and a card payment device has not yet been updated, then contactless payments will not be an available option. More information about this can be found on ukfinance.org.

Levc adjusts production operations in response to covid-19
LEVC has announced a temporary extended closure of its manufacturing operations in Coventry, Ansty, in response to the acceleration of COVID-19 and its impact on the supply chain and the operational efficiency of the business. An extended three-week shutdown period commenced on 30th March, replacing the planned one-week at Easter.

LEVC CEO Joerg Hofmann said: “LEVC is committed to the wellbeing of our employees and keeping all jobs secure throughout this difficult period. Our strategic direction remains on track and, with high levels of customer demand and further growth planned this year, taking these measures to adjust production now will ensure that we are ready to react and supply the markets again as soon as possible.”

Levc adjusts production operations in response to covid-19

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I strongly believe the LTDA is like no other organisation.

FIGHTING YOUR CORNER

ANTHONY STREET

STREETS AHEAD

In our trade, there always seems to be a ‘new’ attack that threatens our livelihoods & the usual ‘cry of surrender’ goes out from a small minority, proclaiming ‘the game is over’ and we are all doomed. I’ve never believed that to be the case before – and I don’t now. I know things are tough at the moment financially with the Coronavirus and all the unknowns we face. We will however, at some point see some normality return to our trade as pubs, clubs, restaurants, bars, airlines and the tourist trade re-open for business. Hopefully that will be in the not too distant future.

I speak to many drivers on a daily basis - those that are new to the trade as well as drivers that have been in for a very long time. Many new drivers who join the LTDA will come into the office to see what our association offers as part of our membership and are very surprised what a comprehensive quality service we provide for just £16.80. Those that have been members of other trade associations with previous jobs will often say, “Is that all the membership really costs?”

I strongly believe the LTDA is like no other organisation - not just in our trade but across others too. The fact we have so many loyal & long serving members, just goes to prove we offer a ‘Gold Standard Service’ for LTDA members & the only standard that is worthy for the gold standard Taxi trade.

At the LTDA we were taking around 200-250 calls a day from concerned drivers, within the last year this has increased to 250-300 daily and so we have recently adjusted our staff levels to cope with the increased demand to ensure we maintain the highest quality of service to our members who deserve the best.

To give you a bit of insight to what we do at the LTDA…

Every three years, when a member receives his licence renewal pack in the post from TfL and having tried to complete the application but hit a brick wall – drivers turn straight to the LTDA for guidance through ‘this daunting experience’. We give them the opportunity to come into the office - and we take care of the CRB and the MHC203R form and complete the licence application from start to finish.

When drivers receive a letter from TfL, revoking their licence due to an overdue medical or because their GP has ‘ticked’ the wrong box or answered ‘yes’ to a question that should have been ‘no’ - a driver can be out of work for weeks, costing hundreds or even thousands of pounds, causing unnecessary financial stress for them and their family. If one of our members are faced with a problem like this or other issues, they simply contact one of the team at the LTDA - we have direct contacts within TfL to help resolve most of these problems on your behalf within 24 hrs.

We deal with everything that effects your licence, along with many other trade related matters. PCN issues? – we work with members in completing their appeals process for them and have a fantastic track record in getting tickets withdrawn.

When members receive a letter of complaint, because a passenger has accused them of being rude; taking a dubious route; overcharging on journeys or received warning letters for leaving their cabs parked on ranks unattended - you may face a costly 21-day suspension. Again, the LTDA team are here to help and we will make sure we do all we can to keep you working - once again, we have direct contacts to deal with all these matters.

We have dealt with hundreds of drivers who have experienced difficulties when decommissioning their taxis, I have worked with most of them in getting their applications processed. I remember when the scheme was first introduced, drivers were told they would receive £10,000 - then told ‘sorry it was a mistake, it’s now £9,000’ - we made sure all our members received what was agreed.

When a member cannot book an appointment for a yearly NSL test or their cab has failed an inspection and has been told they will have to wait two weeks for a re-test or that it has a cracked chassis… We can get all these issues resolved - normally with one email and advise our members what they need to do to get back working as quickly as possible and not suffering financially.

I could also mention how we assist drivers when they’ve received an enforcement notice of £273 that’s now going up to £500 due to postal or correspondence errors, relating to PCNs - we can resolve most of these problems if dealt with within the correct time frame.

Our Legal team are the best in the trade, representing our members on many different issues. They have a fantastic record of ‘getting the right result’ when attending court on behalf of our members. Where can you just park your cab up and have a legal team at your fingertips - and all for the cost of £16.80 a month? I can’t think of anyone in the trade that offers their members such fantastic service. And don’t be fooled by some who state ‘We’ve got a 100% record’ or that ‘We’ve never lost a case’- that’s very easy to do when you only ever proceed with guaranteed winners, trouble with that is, it leaves many drivers up the swanny with no help.

Everyone is entitled to have opinion, even wrong ones, but when you have drivers that are not even members knocking the LTDA on social media I find it a hard pill to swallow because I know first-hand how hard the LTDA team works for its members and the trade.

Be lucky and I hope all you and all your families stay safe and well.

Anthony Street is an LTDA Executive Support Officer

“I know first hand how hard the LTDA team works for its members and the trade”
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TAXI is the membership magazine for the Licensed Taxi Drivers’ Association (LTDA). It is circulated to 15,000 taxi drivers in London every fortnight.

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Get in touch

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WHO’S ‘STEPPING UP TO THE PLATE’?

PAUL BRENNAN

I won’t forget those that ‘step up’ - nor will I forgive those who don’t.

TOP RANK

I t’s not when everything is going well, that you find out who is a ‘good bedfellow’ - it’s when the ‘**** hits the fan.’ Well, it has certainly ‘hit the fan’ right now, and there are thousands of cab drivers who year on year have been using the services of many companies and providing vast profits for them. So, who’s ‘stepping up to the plate?’

LEVC have been fantastic in immediately liaising with us and Black Horse to offer drivers assistance with what will be one of, if not our biggest outgoing expense - the cab repayment. LEVC have issued a helpful press release answering ‘Frequently Asked Questions’ regarding their support package and rather than signpost you to it elsewhere, I’m reprinting it below for those who may be looking for LEVC related support:

Q. Is there a charge to defer a monthly payment and take a payment holiday? A. There is no charge to defer a monthly payment. However, please see question 2 for the overall cost implications of taking a payment holiday.

Q. Why am I being charged interest when I defer a payment? A. A payment deferral or payment holiday is technically a contract extension. As such, any deferred payments (1, 2 or 3 month) will be added on to the end of your repayment period and additional interest will accrue on the loan for those extra months. This will vary from customer to customer and will be disclosed once the deferment has been applied for. Black Horse have opted for full transparency regarding these costs.

Q. Is the end of contract vehicle valuation affected by the payment break? A. No, LEVC and Black Horse will honour the existing end of contract vehicle valuation providing all other terms and conditions are complied with.

Q. Is my credit rating affected by taking a payment break? A. No. During these unprecedented times, many financial institutions are working together to assist customers, and this will be taken into consideration when you come to change your existing vehicle. Please note, we find ourselves in an exceptionally complex environment, so systems and processes are having to be manually adjusted in order to offer the assistance available.

Q. Are Blackhorse going to do a blanket 3-month break for all taxi drivers, or only as and when drivers request it? A. Currently, Black Horse are trying to find an automated way of giving customers a blanket payment deferral. However, in order to give a quick solution to those customers with payments due in the next week or so, they have decided to allow an initial 1-month payment deferral to be activated immediately whilst they try and develop an automated process for months 2 and 3.

Q. What happens with upcoming payments that are due within the next week or two? A. As per the latest communication, you can follow the instructions to log onto your Black Horse account and move the payment date back 30 days (1 month). If you have already done this during your current agreement, you will need to call Black Horse to arrange this for you.

Q. If customers take the 3-month break is there an option where the customer can spread the payments across existing terms instead off extending term so in other words customers payments will just increase to cover the difference? A. At the end of the 3-month payment deferral, you can contact Black Horse and discuss rescheduling your agreement to reduce the period by 3 months and increase the resulting monthly payment. We fully appreciate that this is a protracted process but as previously mentioned, we are faced with extraordinary situations that everyone is trying to manage their way through.

If you haven’t already applied for the payment holiday offered by Black Horse but would like to register your interest: https://www.levc.com/finance/payment-holiday/ or call Black Horse directly on 0800 151 2454 if you have any other questions.

Next, we have Mercedes Finance - who at first appeared to be saying all the right things, then went worryingly silent with drivers hearing nothing. It has taken me over a week to get through to someone senior who has put my mind a little more at ease. Mercedes were very apologetic about how long it is taking to respond to drivers, they have (as you would expect) been absolutely swamped, with in excess of a thousand requests every day. Extra staff have been drafted in to assist but it is still taking between 8-10 days for them to get an offer of a resolution for each driver. They also gave me the following statement:

‘Mercedes-Benz Financial Services will be working closely with customers facing financial difficulty – reviewing each request on a case-by-case basis and ensuring the best possible outcomes for them. For more information, please visit www.mercedes-benz.co.uk/contactfinance

Hopefully, by the time you read this, many more drivers will have been contacted by Mercedes Finance and offered a payment solution that works for them - resulting in one less thing for those drivers to worry about.

This is already a very scary time for many drivers, with worries not only about possibly getting the virus but what comes after the lockdown and on top of that many of us will also have other worries on our minds.

I myself, have a daughter with a newborn, living 80 miles from me who’s partner works in the NHS and will be going home to them every night after potential exposure to the virus. My father, who has advanced dementia is now alone in a care home that has been in lockdown for a month already.

He has already had two severe falls in the past 6 months, resulting in him breaking both hips that required surgery - the latter of which he barely survived. If he was to have another today? well that will be it, an over stretched NHS probably wouldn’t or couldn’t treat him.

I’m not alone in having ‘other’ concerns. Mine compared to many others, will be trivial. We all, regardless of severity have other things to worry about - having unnecessary financial concerns shouldn’t be one of them. In the future, I won’t forget those companies and organisations who ‘step up’ and help us cabbies in our time of need – neither will, I hope those that do not. When we are finally rid of this virus and begin to return to normal, I may very well compile a list of the heroes & villains and publish it in a future edition so we all know who we can truly rely on in a crisis, moving forward.

That said, whilst I’m talking about villains, I think a special mention should go out to TfL & some local councils who are still issuing PCNs at this unprecedented and very difficult financial time for drivers. TfL are doing so by CCTV, which is bad enough, but many local authorities are sending traffic wardens out and about during this lockdown. Are they key workers? I don’t think so. The last 8 hour shift I did, I manged just £32 - at that rate I would have to work more than 2 days just to pay one PCN. All enforcement against the trade should be withdrawn during this time.

Whilst having a pop at others, it can’t go unmentioned that although most drivers are being sensible, helpful and gracious, I’m still seeing some on social media being abusive, negative and about as far away from helpful as you can possibly get. I know they perhaps won’t be, but they really should be ashamed of themselves. Drivers are scared, they have very real & serious concerns and these low-lifes are using the situation to do nothing other than further their own agenda.

Rather than have a ‘did you know’ this edition, I thought it better to give some additional useful links:

- https://www.gov.uk/universal-credit
- https://www.turn2us.org.uk/

Stay safe. ♦

Paul Brennan,
LTDA Executive
Learn Rob’s tales of London history to increase your tips!

LONDON’S OLDEST HOSPITAL

ROB’S HISTORY TIPS

While on the Knowledge, I became fascinated by the hidden stories associated with London’s countless streets and points. I’ve been passionate about the city’s history ever since - and have discovered that sharing these tales with the public often results in a nice tip!

London has 134 hospitals, many of which are on the frontline of the Coronavirus crisis. Of these, St Bartholomew’s - or ‘Bart’s’ as it’s more commonly known- is the oldest, with a history stretching back almost 900 years.

Bart’s was founded by the most unlikely of figures; a former court jester named Rahere. In later life Rahere had grown deeply religious, leading him to make a pilgrimage to Rome. Whilst in Italy he fell gravely ill and begged God to cure him, vowing to establish a priory hospital for the poor if he was spared. His prayers were answered and on the long hike home Rahere claimed he had a vision of St Bartholomew who reminded him of his promise and stated the hospital should be named after him.

Rahere arrived back in London in 1123 and chose a plot of land at ‘Smoothfield’ - the area we know today as West Smithfield. The King at the time, Henry I, was fond of Rahere, having been entertained by him in during his clowning days, and thus granted permission for the hospital to be built. Rahere died in 1143 and was buried in the hospital’s church, St Bartholomew the Great on Cloth Fair.

Initially, traders at Smithfield Market respected Bart’s, fearing their close proximity to patients would spread death and disease. Having said that, they didn’t seem too bothered by the horrific executions which occurred at the site, of which are on the frontline of the Coronavirus crisis. Of these, St Bartholomew’s - or ‘Bart’s’ as it’s more commonly known- is the oldest, with a history stretching back almost 900 years.

Londoners at the time believed the fire was punishment for the sin of gluttony- a good many more corpses sourced from local bodysnatchers… In the 1890s Bart’s pioneered the use of medical X-rays which required a 90-minute exposure at the time, often leaving the machine’s operators with radiation burns. The use of radioactive medicine was refined here and in the 1930s Bart’s became the first hospital in Britain to provide radiotherapy for cancer patients.

Shockingly, there were proposals to close Bart’s in the early 1990s. Public outcry ensued and a campaign- including a petition with over one million signatures- saved this London institution.

Today, Bart’s goes from strength to strength and is now home to Europe’s largest Cardiac Centre. If you wish to learn more about this remarkable building, the hospital has its own museum which will hopefully re-open once the current crisis has abated. In the meantime, you can follow the museum on Twitter; @BHAandM.

“...They didn’t seem too bothered by the horrific executions which occurred at the site, the most notable being that of Scottish freedom fighter, William Wallace who was hung, drawn and quartered outside the hospital in August 1305.”
DUE TO THE CURRENT SITUATION OUR DEALERSHIPS ARE CURRENTLY CLOSED BUT YOU CAN STILL ARRANGE A VIRTUAL SALES APPOINTMENT OR VIDEO APPOINTMENT ONLINE VIA OUR WEBSITE.

STAY SAFE AND WE LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING YOU SOON.

LEVC West London 110 Power Road, Chiswick W4 5PY
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TX Vista Representative Example
Weekly Equivalent £183.92 • 60 Monthly Payments £797.32 • Customer Deposit £3,750 • Gov Grant £7,500 • APR 7.30% • On The Road Price £64,599 • Amount of Credit £53,349 • Interest Charges £13,178.88
Total Amount Payable £77,787.88 • Optional Final Payment £19,486 • Duration of Agreement 60 months • Mileage per annum 30,000 • Excess mileage charge 6ppm

*Business users only. Finance illustration refers to Personal Contract Purchase 7.3% APR Representative; figures based on TX Vista with a customer deposit of £3,750, followed by 60 monthly payments plus an optional final payment. Based upon an annual contracted mileage of 20,000 (40,000 miles on lease terms). All prices inclusive of VAT. 85 deposits only be available. Two, three or four year plans are also available. Three year unlimited mileage policies are no battery warranties included. You have the option at the end of the agreement to return the vehicle and not pay the Final Payment. If the vehicle has exceeded the allowed mileage a charge per excess mile will apply, in this example, 6p per excess mile. If the vehicle is in good condition and has not exceeded the allowed mileage you will have nothing further to pay. Credit is subject to status and is only available to UK residents aged 18 and over. Finance is provided by Black Horse Taxi Finance a trading style of Black Horse Ltd, St William House, Tresillian Terrace, Cardiff CF10 5BH. Excludes Meter, credit card equipment and any local authority fees. Not to be used in conjunction with any other offer QTR figure is net of OLEV Plug in Taxi Grant which is up to £7,500 and is subject to European Whole Vehicle Type Approval and European Commission state aid notification. All prices and promotions are valid for vehicles ordered and delivered before 30 March 2020.

AFTERSALES @ LEVC WEST LONDON
• Factory trained LEVC technicians & recently extended workshop
• While you wait appointments - subject to availability
• Plated loan vehicles available - subject to availability
• Free vehicle wash & vacuum
• Rapid 22kW Charging Points available
• Meter & CC Payment Machine fitting on-site
• TX4 Part Exchanges welcome

Pop in and we’d be delighted to show you round our new premises and talk you through some of the groundbreaking features of the new TX Electric Taxi.

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*Only if you're a new Gett Driver or have been inactive for 12 months
Kind-hearted London Cabbies Looking after Veterans

The Taxi Charity for Military Veterans has asked London Cabbies if they can help veterans by collecting essential shopping or by keeping in touch regularly by phone.

A card was delivered to all the veterans that the charity works with, asking them to ‘Keep Calm and Carry On’.

The card from The Taxi Charity reads:

Dear Veteran,

We are not making light of the current situation. Far from it! We are still here and don’t want you to suffer in silence. Should you need any help, or a chat please get in touch.

The card provides the veterans with a list of contact telephone numbers for London cabbies that they can call on for help or for a chat.

Ian Parsons, Chairman, Taxi Charity for Military Veterans, said, “When I asked for additional support from the London Cabbies who volunteer for the Taxi Charity, I was overwhelmed by the response. The Cabbies do so much already but they all wanted to offer more help to ensure that in their time of need our veterans get the care, help and regular contact they need while they are self-isolating.”

The Taxi Charity has had to put all its fundraising activities on hold due to the Coronavirus restrictions so if you could help the charity please do consider donating at; www.taxicharity.org

TFL ARE OFFERING UP TO £8,000 FOR TAXI DRIVERS DELICENSING THEIR EURO 3, 4 AND 5 VEHICLES*

That’s up to £8,000 towards the purchase of a new TX.
Find out more at www.levc.com/tflfund

Alternatively speak to us about a part exchange on your new TX – we are offering up to £3,500 more on part ex valuations of selected TX4 models”*

www.levc.com/valuemytaxi or call 0203 912 6214

*The TfL delicensing fund is available for taxi drivers who want to delicense their Euro 3, 4 or 5 vehicles. For more details on scheme eligibility please refer to https://tfl.gov.uk/info-for/taxis-and-private-hire/taxi-delicensing-scheme Inflated offer prices are typically available on late Euro 5 and Euro 6 TX4 models in good condition and with full service history. All used vehicle offers are made at the discretion of the LEVC Brewery Road team. Terms and conditions apply.
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Coronavirus. There’s no getting away from ‘it’ or our four walls at the moment. So how do we stay both physically and mentally healthy in these extremely strange circumstances when all our normal routines and social activities have been put on hold?

**Exercise**
Firstly, unless you are in self-isolation, you are (at the time of publication) allowed to enjoy a walk, run or cycle near to your home either alone or with members of your household – as long as you stay 2 meters apart from other people. But if this isn’t an option for you it’s time to improvise! Walk around the house when you’re on the phone catching up with friends, family and colleagues. Use the natural obstacles in your house and garden. Dust off that old gym equipment. Put the radio on and dance like no-one’s watching. Or, if you need more structured guidance, tune into one of the free home workouts or relaxation routines being offered online.

**Diet**
Even though we’re experiencing limited choice and supply of foodstuffs, it’s important to try and maintain a balanced diet and drink enough water. Try to keep a lid on snacking – it’s all too easy to satisfy boredom with a ‘goody cupboard’ reward. - and avoid drinking too much alcohol. And maybe now is the time to dust off the recipe books and put some new dishes into your cooking repertoire.

**Connection**
Been meaning to ring a mate for weeks? Or maybe that catch up with your cousin is long overdue? Well now you’ve got time to re-connect or stay in touch with friends and family. Maintaining healthy relationships is important for mental well-being and with trusted friends you can also share your worries, concerns as well as ideas for filling the time at home. One of the good things to come out of having all this technology is that staying in touch by phone, message, video call or social media is much easier and more accessible than it used to be.

**Knowledge**
Learning something new or picking back up on an old forgotten hobby can help to fill the void and create a new daily routine. There are lots of free resources online for tutorials, courses, podcasts and quizzes, etc.... But if you want a break from your screens and devices, maybe try reading, writing, playing games, doing puzzles, drawing or painting. Absorbing yourself in something new will offer a welcome break from Covid-19 updates. And on this subject, as well as limiting the amount of time reading, listening or watching the news about this pandemic, make sure you use a trustworthy source, such as gov.uk or the nhs.co.uk.

**Be Kind**
To yourself. Life isn’t normal right now. But we’re all in this together.
‘Remember the days when we’d inwardly sigh when asked to go south of the river?’

STATE OF EMERGENCY

CHRIS ACKRILL

ON THE ROAD

What’s that saying – ’Hope for the best, plan for the worst’? Well none of us could have predicted what would happen when the Covid-19 virus hit our shores – I certainly didn’t know how bad things would get when I wrote a fairly light-hearted piece for this magazine in February. Work levels were erratic, but I put it down to the kipper season. I figured both the kipper season and Covid-19 would fade away when the green shoots of spring showed their heads.

By mid-March things had got worse. Work levels were very up and down. Mostly down. Rather than drive around wasting fuel, I parked up in radio mode on ComCab. I knew I’d get a job eventually on the virtual rank at Goldman Sachs. ‘Eventually’ though, was now stretching out to an hour or more. The area was eerily quiet. You can usually rely on a fixed price run to Paddington or City Airport but the few jobs that were coming out were short hops to another part of the financial district. Goldman Sachs employ people from all over the world, and they didn’t seem to be getting in and out so much. I suspected many employees were working from home. This was confirmed by a nice lady who I drove home to Rotherhithe. Remember the days when we’d inwardly sigh when asked to go south of the river? How times have changed. It was a nice job to do, and I hoped I’d see her later in the week. In a belated stroke of luck, I finished with a ‘Going Home’ account job to Highgate – my third job of the day!

Some people are superstitious about Friday the thirteenth. I felt lucky when my first job of the day went from Baker Street Station to Terminal 5. A young American couple were going back to Washington DC after their London college had closed. Oo-er, things are getting serious… I did just one more job that day.

I did one £49 job in seven hours on Saturday 14th. I can’t comment further after that date because I haven’t worked. I’d recently had problems with my ten-year old TX4. I had to have most of the braking system replaced, plus yet another bit of radiator hose (I must have had every section of hose replaced at least once). I had to wait for parts and lost several days’ work. By the time the cab was ready, London was grinding to a halt. I can only imagine what work levels were like: there were some real horror stories on web forums. It costs me £20 a day to drive in and out of London from Bedfordshire and I wasn’t at all sure I’d make any profit whatsoever. I’d concentrate on my writing for a while.

Cab problems are easier to predict than viruses, but not much. My finances were devastated when the engine and gearbox needed replacing in October 2018. I’d barely recovered when my cab failed its re-licensing inspection the following March and I needed body work doing. Another enforced holiday. I had to cash in a pension to pay for it all.

With virtually all my pension money gone, I had no safety net. The idea was to sell the cab and buy one of the new electric taxis, but after spending many thousands on it, I felt I had to keep it longer. With work levels plummeting, I wouldn’t have been able to keep up the payments. It must be very hard for those two thousand-plus drivers who have bought electric cabs. TfL’s Knowledge department closed on Friday 20th - Imagine if you got your badge on that day! I always advised newly licenced drivers to just go out for a few hours and take it slowly. I suppose now could be a good time to start!

It’s all too depressing to think about really. I’d been trying to support local businesses. I had a lunchtime pint at the Black Lion, sadly unaware that all pubs were going to be forced to close at midnight!

Forced into another long holiday at home, I’ve dug my old brewing equipment out of the loft and intend to start brewing later this week. Forty pints of over-strength bitter will help take the edge off things. Hopefully it’ll be back to normal by the summer. I’m looking forward to the party, it’ll be like VE Day!

Test your Knowledge

Easy Run

♦ Eton Square Cocktail Bar to City of London Club

Hard Run

♦ Tower Hotel to Queen’s Ride
A MAN IN BLACK

As the UK enters its third week of lockdown, the taxi industry has seen an enormous downturn in work. In this current climate, writing an article about the taxi industry in London has become a little more challenging than usual.

After a virtual elbow bump with the editor of Taxi, I began to explain to him via WhatsApp, how I had become embroiled in the Spanish lockdown, making it tough to write about my usual ‘on the ground’ current trade picture of London’s streets. As the conversation developed, we began discussing the picture in Spain for cabbies (I’d been talking to a few on the Costa Del Sol since my arrival) and comparing it to the UK. As we were being told Spain is circa ‘a few weeks ahead’ of us in terms of the impacts of the virus, ‘Hey Presto’, an idea for an article ahead of us in terms of the impacts of the virus, ‘Hey Presto’, an idea for an article was born!

Now I know what you’re thinking, ‘what’s the idio doing in Spain in the first place?’ (Which, incidentally, was also my editors first question too.) In my defence, I flew out there in the second week of March for an essential family matter - Spain nor the UK hadn’t gone into lockdown at that point, however I should have given it a tad more thought upon arriving at an eerily empty airport (pictured right) and boarding a plane with less than 100 people on it.

With the in-flight entertainment being Rocky 1, 2 and 3, after two women had a punch-up... 3 times, I should have realised that this trip was doomed.

Upon arrival, the first thing I noticed was that Malaga Airport was extremely quiet. I took a taxi from the airport to La Cala de Mijas, which is approximately 30 minutes away. En-route, myself and the cabbie had a chat, we were both fluent... sadly in different languages, but we managed to make ourselves understood.

‘The Costa Del Sol ‘cabbie’s rumour-mill’ is no different to the London ‘cabbie’s rumour-mill…’

The following day all was well, a cab was taken to Carrefour, a large supermarket in Fuengirola, the same discussion occurred with this cabbie as the one the previous evening. This cabbie’s English was significantly better than mine, so I felt at a distinct disadvantage. He began to explain that there had been a major downturn in work with many people scared to venture out. I asked him how he would cope if he were unable to work, the reply was unprintable and deeply concerning.

Unlike the UK where there is a safety network with Universal Credit and Employment Support Allowance, Spain carries more uncertainty. There is no real mechanism in place for something like this because according to this cabbie you’d neither be classed as ‘sick’ nor ‘unemployed’.

‘The cabbie then asked me what I thought. I had a vacant look on my face, as if somebody had asked me to take them to some obscure road in Harlesden. We parted company and later that night I had a look online at Spain’s social welfare system, quite frankly it is an incomprehensible mishmash which I couldn’t begin to unravel. According to Article 41 of the 1978 Spanish Constitution: ‘the public authorities shall maintain a public social security system for all citizens, guaranteeing sufficient support and social benefits in situations of need, especially in the event of unemployment, and that the support and additional benefits shall be free.’ It would appear from the conversations I was having with cabbies that this decree wasn’t written with global pandemics in mind.

That night, the Spanish President declared that Spain was in a ‘state of alarm’ and would be locked down at midnight the following evening - the rumour-mill was right. Thankfully I was booked on a flight back the following week so didn’t panic too much, especially since I had 5 crates of San Miguel, 12 bags of Dorito’s and the entire Walking Dead boxset, I wouldn’t be bored, thirsty or hungry.

Draconian restrictions were placed on all 47 million citizens in Spain. Bars, clubs, shops, restaurants and sports venues had to cease trading with the only exceptions being supermarkets, pharmacies, transport operators and taxis. Those living in Spain would no longer be able to leave their property except for travelling to or from a place of work, shopping, assisting the vulnerable or travelling to an airport.

Another strict regulation put in place was that a person could only travel in a car with 1 other occupant, this also applied to taxis, a recent change to the initial directive which exempted cabs. This was going to place even more pressure on Spanish cabbies.

A few days later, whilst taking the rubbish out (I say rubbish, but specifically, 36 empty bottles of San Miguel and 12 empty bags of Dorito’s) I saw one of my neighbours at the communal bin and at a safe distance, got chatting – also a cab driver, he explained that although continuing to work, he was now operating within a very tight market, with few airport runs and no tourism. The only way he was still able to earn an income was through supermarket and pharmaceutical runs, but his income had still dropped by around 80% and didn’t know what he was going to do.

The following Friday, I managed to get another taxi to Malaga Airport, it was eerily silent with the only queue being for a single coffee stand which was still open. The flight back to London was pretty uneventful, with 53 people on the flight, the only source of concern being an elderly gentleman with a dry cough.

As for the speed awareness course... despite a week of contacting the organisers, explaining I may not be able to get home to attend and them offering zero help in giving me more time and allowing me to reschedule… it was cancelled mid-flight.

I’ve been back a while now. Fares are scarce – I’ve mainly been finding work off the apps. I’ve only had one street hail in the last couple of weeks. It’s sparse earnings – I’m averaging around £45 a day. I’m continuing pushing on with work and I’m currently grateful for what meagre income it brings. I’m comforting myself with the notion that I’m contributing to keeping London’s ‘essential staff’ moving. Whilst it’s tough out here at the moment, I can’t help but spare a thought for the Spanish cabbies who are also facing some significant hardship.

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‘The city’s in trouble. The taxi industry can help.’

AN ‘ESSENTIAL PROFESSION’ IGNORED

INTERNATIONAL

If you think the corona crisis has hit the London Taxi Trade extremely hard... colleagues in many countries and on different continents share and suffer from two similar problems. Often, and in many cities around the globe where the taxi trade generously offers its support (for instance in safely ferrying medical staff and support personnel around), this outstretched hand is ignored completely by local and national governments. To add injury to insult, in many countries, the taxi trade is deemed an ‘essential profession’ just like us, journalists (and thus can keep working) but are exempted from support payments for self-employed drivers or for cab companies.

Amsterdam taxi drivers to demonstrate

This incensed the Amsterdam taxi colleagues so much, that they are now planning a nationwide demonstration in The Hague, the centre of government in The Netherlands. In keeping with ‘corona traditions’ each driver will stay in his or her vehicle. So far, only shopkeepers profit from a one-off payment of 4000 (£ 3588) in The Netherlands. The self-employed, who have flocked in their thousands to local government offices to register, get between 1050 (£937) and 1500 (£1345) for a few months. “I have just spent my reserves for January and February – our ‘kipper season’ too – and in March I expected more income”, an Amsterdam taxi driver told me. “But my monthly outgoings are higher than £1345 a month. It’s really awful, my reserves are nearly finished. Help!”

The national transport minister was not impressed with the trade’s plea and advised the population (stopping just short of an outright ban): “You can take a cab, but only if you have to. Get in the back, open the door yourself and pay by card.”

This further annoyed the nation’s taxi trade, busily lobbying for support, as the minister limited the use of cabs for medical carers, necessary shopping trips or keeping the day-to-day working. Radio circuits are to carers, necessary shopping trips or keeping minister limited the use of cabs for medical trade, busily lobbying for support, as the door yourself and pay by card.”

If you have to. Get in the back, open the impressed with the trade’s plea and advised The national transport minister was not than £1345 a month. It’s really awful, me. “But my monthly outgoings are higher than £1345 a month. It’s really awful, my reserves are nearly finished. Help!”

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The city’s in trouble. The taxi industry can help.’

A question of separation

As most cabs in Europe differ from London-type taxis, there is an increased interest in providing some form of separation in smaller cabs when the distance between driver and passenger is less than 1.5 metres (the European standard distance) – for instance, by using a plastic film.

In the German taxi trade press this led to a flurry of articles on the most efficient way to instantly equip cabs with a more durable separation, reserving back seats for passengers. In Belgium, taxis can only carry one passenger in the back of the cab. But some Brussels taxi drivers wanted to have their exemption as ‘essential profession’ lifted, so they can claim unemployment benefit. These drivers also suffer from a lack of cleaning materials and hand sanitizer. Already fearful of carrying infected passengers, most taxi drivers religiously clean door handles, surfaces, seats and their own hands - before and after each passenger.

In Antwerp, the trade, local government and social services re-ignited a system of ‘taxi cheques’ (vouchers) which will be used for ferrying hospital staff when public transport stops serving the hospitals. The prepaid taxi vouchers (no transfer of cash) would be free for end-users and are paid for by local government, social services and cab companies.

‘The virus could kill the taxi trade’

Back to Germany, where the taxi trade is in an extremely tight spot. ‘The bottom line is that the virus could kill the taxi trade,’ says Michael Oppermann, who heads the German taxi association. “Most operators are working, but are basically standing around, waiting.” One reason is that, according to the law, taxis in Germany have a duty to operate. Just like they have to carry anyone who wants a taxi. But there are few potential users around. In Berlin (8000 cabs and other big cities, taxi operators have seen an 80% drop in work. Outside the city, it’s a 65-75% drop. “We know that politicians want to help,” says Oppermann. “But they have to move fast, otherwise there will be nobody left to rescue. Taxi operators don’t have large reserves.” He explains that the federal government offers a one-off payment of 9000 (£8038) for a taxi company with five drivers; for 10 workers that rises to 15000 (£13400). Regionally, there may be a top-up of 3000-5000 (£2700-£4464). “Taxi drivers are – despite the risk of infection, happy to work. We would be happy to use the 100,000 taxis in Germany for support trips for patients, medical professionals, but also for shopping trips. That way doctors and hospital staff would not have to use public transport, where the infection risk is higher.” Oppermann also suggests that with government support, taxi drivers could carry those with public transport season tickets.

Via the digital roof-signs, one innovative signage company now warns people using 250 cabs in Hamburg to ‘stay at home’ which is paid for by the local health authority. Similarly, New York cabs would be happy to see their advertising spaces be used for a Covid-19 government-sponsored awareness campaign.

Cynical Uber-moves

“The city’s in trouble. The taxi industry can help,” wrote Ron Sherman, president of New York’s Metropolitan Taxicab Board of Trade, the city’s oldest and largest yellow taxi cab fleet. “The city’s taxi industry is among the most resilient industries in the world. Drivers, dispatchers and managers are quiet heroes who have helped New Yorkers get through 9/11, Superstorm Sandy and countless other emergencies.”

Sherman offers help. “Today we are anxious about Covid-19, like everyone else in the city. But we are working every day, every night. Our fleets are open. We are cleaning our cabs incessantly, every time they enter and leave our garages, and drivers are cleaning many more times throughout their shifts. But we are experiencing steep declines in ridership and fares, some of which are down nearly 75% in the past week.”

Just after six US national transportation associations made a plea to the White House to be included in the federal government’s $2.5 trillion rescue package, Uber-CEO Dara Khosrowshahi, in a cynical move wrote a letter to the same address, claiming help not for an Uber bailout, but for Uber-drivers. At the same time Uber has refused to drop or to lower the 25% commission on each trip – except for Uber Medical, an equally cynical move, a special commission-free service Uber opened in Germany; 25% cheaper than its normal rates. Several infected Uber-drivers in California, where gig-workers by virtue of the state’s new employment law AB5, are now deemed to be employees, had great difficulty wiping sick-pay from their reticent employer.

“Let taxis be a part of the solution, and let taxi drivers earn the living they deserve,” said Ron Sherman in New York City. “And let our taxis be the ambassadors of goodwill and efficiency.”

There the Curbs app is using yellow cabs and FHV for medical work – a cooperation with the health sector started in February.

And to end on a high note: the government in Singapore (where taxis play an important part as affordable local public transport) has just set aside the sizeable sum of 216 million S$N (£122 million) for helping the ‘point-to-point’ sector through Covid-19 times. Surely an example to follow. ♦

Hamburg’s public awareness campaign on 250 cabs: Let’s fight Corona - Stay at home! Photo TAXI-AD.

New York City: ‘Let our taxis be the ambassadors of goodwill and efficiency’
NICK-NAMES IN THE TRADE

Your green badge is not the only certificate of taxi trade membership, says 'Alf The Pipe'.

"With an estimated 4,000 taxis passing through the Feeder Park every eighteen hours, the nicknames are never ending"

We had 'Wing Nuts' (sticky out ears); 'Flipper' (with the dodgy feet); 'Shuffler' (with the funny walk); 'Ted 'The Neck'; Lenny 'Shoulders' and 'Karate' Larry.

Other well-known regulars were 'Laughing' John, 'Tammy', (who was very noisy) and 'Trap One', (he never stopped talking). 'The Raging Bull' had a fearful temper and 'Mad Barry', well he WAS mad and 'Gorgeous George' WAS Gorgeous. Two brothers from North London were known as 'Sex and Violence', as one loved the ladies and the other one loved whacking geezers. Another short geezer was known as 'Little Legs'!

Many of the nicknames originated from where the guy lived, as in 'Bagshot' Bill; 'Ashford' 'arry'; 'Hounslow' John and 'Manchester' Ted, are a clear indication of how far away these cabbies lived. They were known as 'sleepers' and would settle down in their cabs for around three nights, well wrapped up in their duvets. One of the best known of the sleepers was 'Mr. Pastry' and legend has it that he used to cook his breakfast on a primus stove in the back of his cab!

Where your parents originated from is another source for nicknames with Mick 'The Greek' and George 'The Greek'; 'Italian' Vic being prime examples. Your previous job immediately conjures up nicknames, such as Ron 'The Dust' (Dustman); John 'The Fish'; Danny 'The Docker'; Sid 'The Grocer'; 'Postman' Pat; Fred 'The Fireman' and 'The Coalman'!

Maybe it could even be your mode of dress that created your nickname, as in John 'The Hat', 'Wooley Hat' George and Fred 'The Suit'.

Back in those days anyone who had the slightest resemblance to TV actors – or even the characters in the TV adds, were given a nickname forever. We had a guy who wore big, horn rimmed glasses who was called, 'The Milky Bar Kid' and a soppy bloke known to all as 'Emmerdale'. We had 'Brains' -as in 'Thunderbirds', 'The Muppet', 'Joe 90' and 'Emu'. One of the guys was a dead ringer for Sergeant Bilko in the popular American sitcom of the 60's and 'Bilko' still works out there. We even had 'The Jolly Green Giant'!

Even your driving and eating habits warrants a nickname with Chrissy 'Hot Wheels' and 'The Motorway Mouse'. 'Knives and Forks' is scoffing all the time, while 'Bread Roll' Mick obviously has a bread roll with literally everything. 'Suffering' Peter is a lovely guy, but he gets his nickname because he can never back a winner, never wins at cards and always seems to get a 'wrong-un' (bad job)!

My regular plot for a late snack was The Pont Street Shelter off Sloane Street. Again, the nicknames were prevalent, with the homes much nearer town, like 'Brixton' Bill; 'Camberwell' Sid; 'Poplar' Pete etc. What fascinated me were the two guys known as 'Ginger' and 'Curtly'. Their nicknames must have been given to them many years ago, because they were now completely bald!

But the leading light in the shelter was 'Violent' Pete, known to many of the regulars – behind his back of course, as 'Sid Vicious'! But Pete certainly was a catalogue of contradictions and a positive menace to himself.

On the plus side he did a lot of good work for the trade charities and he was brilliant when it came to organising. But on the minus side was his vicious and uncontrollable rages – hence his nickname.

Heaven help the person who happened to upset him for some, often trivial reason and you could almost see the red mist totally consume him. We used to usher the offender out and try and placate Pete until the 'red mist' subsided!
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How are you all? Well, I hope. So far, so good here in Meg Towers. Mr Meg and I met when I was 15 and he was 16. We have now known each other for 46 years, or as he likes to joke, “Two life sentences for murder!”. As gags go, it’s an oldie but goodie. A bit like the man himself. For all the readers who comment I never have anything nice to say about Mr Meg – there - I have just proved you wrong.

There is nothing I don’t know about the man. At least that’s what I would have said 3 weeks ago before we went into lockdown.

I’ve seen a funny video online of a bloke sawing a loo roll in half to make it go further. Toilet paper is not a subject for humour here in Meg Towers. Yesterday Mr Meg asked me to sit down for a ‘serious talk’ on the subject. He had read that the average person uses 54 sheets of loo roll daily and was aghast at this profligate waste. I have been expecting Mr Meg to write “Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday etc on each individual sheet so dedicated is he to making our supplies last. ’54 sheets a day? What is wrong with these people?’ I wanted to reply that maybe they just have big bums - but his mood was too sombre for this quip.

Being at home with Mr Meg all day every day, is certainly a voyage of discovery. My first realisation is that Mr Meg has been my six-foot-tall hot water bottle for years. Because of the virus, we are sleeping in separate beds and I am FREEZING without him. After the first night of missing out on the furnace he creates in our bed, we met in the bathroom as he stepped out of the shower and I went in to brush my teeth. I declared, “Damn, you’re hot!” He looked scared and said, “I am?” followed with “do you have a fever?”

The other thing I did not know about Mr Meg is that he has been dipping into my £85 regenerating night masque and applying it liberally to the cracked skin on his heels. I caught him doing it cream-handed. Now that we are both at home all day, I get to see all his pre and post shower routine.

He was sat on the edge of the bed, whistling a happy tune, and slathering said potion onto his feet. I screamed in alarm when I saw him, “that stuff costs £85 a pot!”

He dropped it like a hot coal and hollered, “£85??????? For that? For what? Have you taken leave of your senses?” I ended up having to calm him down. He was in shock and couldn’t stop repeating “£85?” for several minutes. His excuse for using it was that 15 years ago, there had been a Boots own brand tub of moisturiser in the same shade of purple on the bathroom windowsill. And he assumed that’s what he’d been using.

“Have you never heard of Elemis?” I asked him, pointing to the brand name on the pot. “Is she your yoga friend?” he offered. I don’t do yoga.

The hard skin drama will save me buying lots of pots at 85 pounds each because, on close inspection, Mr Meg’s feet don’t look a day younger.

After 46 years, Meg knows everything about Mr. Meg. Or so she thought...
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Address

Postcode

Telephone

Mobile

Email

Twitter

Date of Birth

Badge No.

Badge colour (Please state whether green or yellow)

Year badge obtained

Suburban badge sector numbers

Have you ever been a member of the LTDA before? (please tick)

Yes

No

Do you currently have points on your DVLA driving license? (please tick)

Yes

No

If Yes how many points do you have?

Please tick if you DO NOT wish to receive information from the LTDA and other related organisations in the future?

I understand that my application for membership of the Association must be approved by the Council of Management and that until this is confirmed I am not eligible to vote in relation to any form of Association matters. I agree that all benefits prior to approval of membership shall be at the discretion of the Council of Management.

Please note: We do not provide assistance for any matters that have occurred prior to you joining LTDA.

Signed

Date

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Most cabbies, sensibly in my opinion, are sitting at home

WORD ON THE STREET

It's pretty obvious that this column should now be called the 'cab you don't drive' as most cabbies, sensibly in my opinion, are sitting at home.

With nothing happening on the cab front - unless anyone is looking to buy a late Euro V Vito I have on my drive? I thought I would look at what has been going on in the car market, as they catch up with the cab trade and go green.

In Norway, 75% of all new cars now come with a plug fitted and the majority of the remaining 25% are non-plug in hybrids - diesel and petrol make up a tiny percent of sales. Even in America, where the car is still king, over 50% of all sales are SUVs and Tesla have only just launched their model Y SUV - they have crept into the top 20 manufacturers by sales volume.

This year was to have seen 20 new EV cars launched in the UK including the Ford Mustang and the long-awaited VW ID3 and crucially, their likely big seller the SUV ID Crozz. Whilst the Ford is still on target to arrive in September, VW are having 'massive' software issues, after opting to bring all their software in-house, and we are unlikely to see models in showrooms this year.

As I write this, the news reports are looking a bit more positive and there are suggestions we could all be moving around again by the end of the month. If this materialises and a semblance of normality returns to the world, what seems crazy now may even become interesting again, such as the price of second-hand cabs!
Meet the LTDA legal team

Driving a taxi for many hours of the day in one of the world’s most congested cities is a challenging task. Cabbies often fall victim to complaints and false accusations from police, passengers and other road users (especially cyclists and PHV drivers). When these events arise it’s comforting for LTDA members to know that they have the immediate support of the best specialist in-house legal team in the business. The success rate of the LTDA Legal Team is second to none. In fact, according to Criminal Justice Statistics, LTDA members defended by our team are FOUR times more likely than the national average to be acquitted of allegations made against them.

Tom Poulson
I joined the LTDA when I first got my badge and it turned out to be the best thing I ever did. Due to an unfortunate set of circumstances I ended up getting my licence revoked by TfL. I turned to John Luckhurst, one of the LTDA’s legal eagles, for assistance. John went to great lengths to prepare a detailed appeal against TfL’s decision and briefed a brilliant barrister to represent me in court. The appeal was successful and saved my livelihood. LTDA subscriptions are only four quid a week, which is less than a pint, and three pounds can be claimed against tax. I can’t believe that every cabbie in town is not a member.

Farouk Merdjane
I was involved in an accident whilst driving my cab in Shepherd’s Bush. I wasn’t too worried about it because I was confident that it wasn’t my fault and the insurance would sort it out. A short while later I received a summons for driving without due care and attention. I had no witnesses to help me, but the other driver had produced “independent” witnesses out of thin air! I quickly contacted the LTDA’s legal department and they immediately visited the scene of the incident and arranged for professional photographs to be recorded. I later appeared before magistrates at Lavender Hill Court, where the LTDA barrister tied the witnesses up in knots and demonstrated they could not have seen what they said they had. Thank you, LTDA legal department; you gave me an excellent service.

“FOUR times more likely than the NATIONAL average to get an acquittal”

Ken Jackson
The LTDA’s solicitors and support team, could not have been more helpful when I first informed them that an allegation had been made against me. The LTDA was quick to check all the CCTV cameras in the area and arrange for plans of the location to be drawn up. Witness statements were also obtained and Mr Demidecki was successful in getting the Crown Prosecution Service to drop the case against me. Thanks LTDA - an all-round brilliant service!

Paul Baxter
I was filled with confidence the very first time I contacted the LTDA’s legal team and as it turned out, I certainly wasn’t disappointed. They did a great job in sorting out my problem with TfL. They’ve got to be the best in the business!

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