

Thank you Convenor and the Committee for once again giving me the time today.

Once again, I find myself here speaking to you regarding an issue that has been discussed previously, but unfortunately remains an unresolved issue at this point in time. That is the treatment of Private Hire Taxis in comparison to black cabs. Committee members are already aware that there is ongoing litigation on this topic but it is our hope that a new issue I am going to describe can be resolved at this stage to avoid any more Legal wrangling, and quite substantial costs that are in nobody's interests here. Item 7.1 is a very large item. I would just like to focus primarily on page 118 of the Report and specifically in relation to the bus gates at the east end of Princes Street and at South St David Street. As I am sure the Convenor and the rest of the Committee is aware, the South Bridge TTRO with the bus gate that was proposed there, was abandoned after we had various legal interventions into that particular process. As part of that, we produced factual evidence from an independent transport survey company which was initiated actually at the junction of the North Bridge and Princes Street. The survey was conducted over a 2 week period in the run-up to Christmas. We obtained factual evidence at that point that the number of private hire taxis as a percentage of all vehicles in the area was very small. Somewhere between 3% and 4% depending on which day that you looked at and, obviously, slightly lower on average than the percentage of hackneys that were also using the same route.

We also clarified during those legal interventions that the proposed bus gate at the South Bridge had not been justified for pedestrian or cycle safety, and we believe that the Council is today about to take a further decision on whether to continue with the operation of the bus gates at Princes Street and South St David Street and given that the Report will move to engage the ETRO process going forward, we are asking today if the officers have considered any evidence of impact on these 2 bus gates in order to arrive at the conclusion that things should stay as they are and private hire taxis be excluded, something which we have been asking for since these Bus Gates were installed at the start of the Pandemic, and has never been undertaken.

For this ETRO process in relation to these Bus Gates to be undertaken with no evidence to exclude Private Hire Taxis is a dereliction of duty as far as we are concerned and is nothing short of historical bias in relation to the Licensed Private Hire Taxi sector which contributes to the overall Public Transport needs of our city, and we as a Trade also contribute substantially to the financial input received by this Council on an Annual basis.

There will be those listening today wondering what I mean by historical bias, suffice to say without going over old ground, we as a Trade have been subjected to these types of unfounded and unmerited decisions by this Committee for years, with no basis for doing so other than the historical "that's the way it's always been", well I am afraid that is no longer acceptable.

At the Deputation we put forward in April of this year to this Committee there were certain assertions made by Officers which included reasons given as to why Private Hire Taxi's have been excluded up till this point, these assertions went from identification of the vehicles, to not being hailed in the street and finally that the Road Traffic Act was to blame. All of those issues were debunked at that meeting and The Road Traffic Act is the same Act used across the entire country which allows for Private Hire Taxi's to use Bus Gates etc in other areas of the country. We have received legal advice that there is nothing in the road traffic legislation to prevent the Council from allowing Private Hire Cars to access bus gates. Clearly many other Scottish Local Authorities (e.g. Glasgow) agree. If there is no legal impediment to allowing Private Hire Cars to use the bus gates on an experimental basis at this stage, the question that must be asked is what is the justification?

We see today as the ideal opportunity to use the ETRO process and allow for the use of Bus Gates by all licensed vehicles in Edinburgh. A simple and straightforward change to the signage would reflect this, "Buses and Edinburgh Licensed Vehicles Only", and would allow the Council to collect evidence on actual impact, to determine what traffic regulation is appropriate at this location on a longer term basis. Excluding Private Hire Taxis from an experimental order with no evidence to justify it is unreasonable and irrational. At this point we would also draw the Committee's attention to the decision taken on the ETRO process for the A90 Queensferry Road Bus Lane and the A1 corridor bus lane at pages 120 and 121 respectively. It is our assertion that the same reasoning applies to these 2 ETRO processes, and that this represents the ideal opportunity to allow for Private Hire Taxi usage in these 2 areas and collect the relevant data on actual impact and determine what traffic regulation is appropriate on a longer term basis.

We have since our last Deputation had some very constructive dialogue with Officers including Gareth Barwell on this subject, and we feel that today gives the Committee the perfect opportunity to once and for all see the merits of our assertions and allow Private Hire Taxi's to use these Bus Gates going forward, anything else would be a decision without any factual foundation to back it up. It would also have an additional impact on the travelling public at a point where service levels have been dramatically affected across all sectors of the trade with a shortage of drivers and vehicles, something which is being seen regularly, particularly on weekend nights, and impacts on the safety of individuals just trying to get home, these Bus Gate measures mean Private Hire Taxi's having to re-negotiate routes adding further to delays.

So, we respectfully ask this Committee once again to allow for Private Hire Taxi's to be given the same rights as other Licensed Vehicles to use these Bus Gates under the new ETRO process, and the A90 and A1 Bus lanes ETRO process to enable the relevant data to be captured within the processes.

Thank you, and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.