



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Date:	7 February 2012
Subject:	Public Consultation – Taxi Fare and Taximeter Regulations
Reporting Officer:	John McGrillen, Director of Development, ext 3470
Contact Officer:	Keith Sutherland Planning and Transport Policy Manager ext 3578

1.	Relevant Background Information
1.1	The Department published a consultation document on the 21 st November 2011 which seeks views on proposals made by the Department of the Environment (DOE) Road Safety and Vehicle Regulations Division (RSVRD) on the introduction of a standard taxi fare tariff which will apply to all types of taxis in Northern Ireland. The Department also proposes that all taxis in Northern Ireland would have to carry a taximeter which is calibrated to the standard set tariff.
1.2	Currently only public hire taxis are required to have meters, private hire (pre-booked) taxis are not required to have a meter although most do in Belfast. Taxis that operate like buses in Belfast are currently not required to have a meter.
1.3	The Department has requested comments on the taxi fare review and the taximeter proposals before the closing date for the response on the 17 th February 2012.

2.	Key Issues
2.1	Tariff Elements The following elements are included in the proposed tariff: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- A distance tariff, which reflects the vehicle operating costs;- A waiting time tariff for when the vehicle is stationary, or moving at very low speeds. This would be lower than the distance tariff to reflect the lower operating costs;- A flag drop tariff which is the fare showing on the meter at the beginning of the journey (the maximum initial charge for commencement of the hire);- An unsociable hours premium for providing a taxi service between 8pm – 6am during the week and at weekends and on bank holidays

2.2	<p>Tariff 1 Monday – Friday 06.00-20.00</p> <p>A flag drop of £3.00 This covers the first 880 yards (0.5 miles) of the journey £0.20 every subsequent 224 yards £0.20 for every 73 seconds or part thereof, whilst the vehicle is stationary</p>	<p>Tariff 2 Monday – Thursday 20.00-06.00</p> <p>A flag drop of £3.40 This covers the first 880 yards (0.5 miles) of the journey £0.20 every subsequent 224 yards £0.20 for every 73 seconds or part thereof, whilst the vehicle is stationary</p>	<p>Tariff 3 Friday 20.00- Monday 06.00 Bank holidays (20.00 on the preceding day to 06.00 on the following day)</p> <p>A flag drop of £4.20 This covers the first 880 yards (0.5 miles) of the journey £0.20 every subsequent 224 yards £0.20 for every 73 seconds or part thereof, whilst the vehicle is stationary</p>
2.3	<p>The above maximum initial tariff for commencement of the hire is proposed by the Department which would apply to all taxis (public and private hire) in Northern Ireland, regardless of location or whether they were hailed, operated from taxi ranks or prebooked. Drivers would still be free to agree a reduced fare.</p>		
2.4	<p>Additional charges are also proposed for</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - additional passengers: £1 for the fifth and each subsequent passengers; - charge for soiling of a taxi: £50 maximum can be charged; and - direct costs such as toll charges or airport charges which must be agreed with passenger before the journey begins. 		
2.5	<p>The Department also proposes that all taxis in Northern Ireland would have to carry a taximeter which is calibrated to the set tariff. The customer or driver would be free to negotiate a lower fare if they wished, but the taxi operator could not charge more. The regulations would make provision for taximeter offences and establish the penalty system provided for by the Act. The Department also propose that all taximeters must be capable of printing receipts which will give details of the taxi journey, distance travelled, the fare rate and the total fare.</p>		
2.6	<p>A proposed draft response is attached in Appendix 1 and some general comments are outlined below as the basis for consideration by committee as a suggested submission to the Department:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Council recognise that the introduction of a new maximum initial tariff (flag drop) for commencement of the hire for all taxis in Northern Ireland, along with the requirement to have a taximeter calibrated to this fare is intended to promote fair competition and enhance consumer protection. There are however concerns that the maximum set tariff proposed could make travel by taxis unaffordable for individuals and families on low income. In particular the Council would not support the additional premium flag drop tariffs for what is termed ‘unsociable hours’ for providing a taxi service between 8pm – 6am during the week, at weekends and on bank holidays when there are reduced or no public transport services. 		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The recent Travel Survey for Northern Ireland 2008-2010 indicated that 43% of households in Belfast have no car ownership and therefore are dependent on other forms of transport to access jobs and services. The Council would be concerned that for economically or socially disadvantaged communities, the costs of travel by taxi could be a major barrier to participating in everyday activities in particular activities in the evenings, weekends and Bank Holidays. - The Council considers that the flag drop tariff which is the fare showing on the meter at the beginning of the journey could be unaffordable for many current users particularly the premium drop flag tariff of £4.20 for providing a taxi service for unsociable hours at weekends and Bank holidays. The proposed premium could have an adverse impact on the evening economy and may have implications for accessibility to events within the city. at a time when businesses are struggling to attract users. Consideration should also be given to potential personal safety issues where individuals may opt to walk home at night time rather than pay the premium fare proposed.
--	--

3.	Resource Implications
3.1	There are no resource implications

4.	Equality and Good Relations Considerations
	There are no Equality and Good Relations considerations attached to this report.

5.	Recommendations
	<p>Committee are asked :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To note the proposals for Taxi Fare and Taximeter Regulations and if appropriate agree a response to be submitted to the Department for the Environment by the 17th February 2012 consultation deadline.

6.	Decision Tracking
	Timeline: Submit response to DOE by 17 th February 2012

7.	Key to Abbreviations
	<p>DoE - Department of the Environment MID – Measuring Instruments Directive DVA – Drivers & Vehicle Agency</p>

8.	Documents Attached
	Appendix 1 Draft Response

Appendix 1

Draft Council response to Public consultation on Taxi Fare and Taximeter Regulations

General comments

- The Council recognise that the introduction of a new maximum fare tariff for all taxis in Northern Ireland, along with the requirement to have a taximeter calibrated to this fare is intended to promote fair competition and enhance consumer protection however, the Council is concerned that the maximum set tariff proposed will make travel by taxis unaffordable for individuals and families on low income. In particular the Council would not support the premium flag drop tariff for what is termed 'unsociable hours' for providing a taxi service between 8pm – 6am during the week, at weekends and on bank holidays when there are reduced or no public transport services.
- The recent Travel Survey for Northern Ireland 2008-2010 indicated that 43% of households in Belfast have no car ownership and therefore are dependent on other forms of transport to access jobs and services. The Council would be concerned that for economically or socially disadvantaged communities, the costs of travel by taxi could be a major barrier to participating in everyday activities in particular activities in the evenings, weekends and Bank Holidays.
- The Council considers that the flag drop tariff which is the fare showing on the meter at the beginning of the journey is not affordable in particular the premium drop flag tariff of £4.20 for providing a taxi service for unsociable hours at weekends and Bank holidays. The proposed premium could have an adverse impact on the evening economy at a time when businesses are struggling to attract users. Consideration should also be given to implications for community safety where individuals may opt to walk home at night time rather than pay the premium fare proposed.

Q1 Is there under supply of taxis at these times? Do you consider that provision of an unsociable hours premium is appropriate?

The Council does not consider the provision of an unsociable hours premium at the rate proposed as appropriate. Any additional charges in the evening during the week, weekends, bank holidays so called 'unsociable hours', may discourage people from travelling, given that public transport provision is reduced in evenings and during holidays or weekends. The Council considers the proposed maximum fare tariff of £4.20 for weekends and bank holidays could be unaffordable for lower income individuals and families. The proposed premium could also have an adverse impact on the evening economy and potential impacts on personal safety.

Q2 Do you agree with the proposals for the maximum Fare Tariff in Northern Ireland?

The Council agree that a maximum tariff may be beneficial to the users and prevent over charging but as previously stated there is concern at the high rate proposed for the maximum flag drop tariff by the Department may have adverse implications for the city. Although drivers would have the opportunity to agree a reduced fare, the Council believe this introduces uncertainty; may not be apparent to the user or offered by the drivers and may deter individuals from using taxis.

Q3 Do you agree that a taxi operating under regulated fare should have only one Taximeter fitted?

Yes

Q4. Do you agree that permitted taximeters should be held on a list controlled by DVA until October 2016 when all taximeters should be compliant with Measuring Instruments Directive (MID) standards?

Yes

Q5. Do you agree that taximeters should continue to be clock calendar type?

Yes

Q6 Do you agree that a taximeter should be designed to ensure clarity of fare for ease of use by passengers, including on screen display, position of the meter within the taxi, single currency display and verbal clarification from driver if required?

Yes

Q7. Do you agree that all taximeters must be capable of operating a receipt printer which has secure transmission from the taximeter?

Yes and it should be a requirement to offer a receipt to all passengers. The Council would request clarification if a receipt will be provided if a lower fare is agreed.

Q8 Do you agree with the proposed acceptable optional functionalities being permitted but not required for all taximeters?

Yes

Q9 Do you agree that DVA should be responsible for the approval of taximeter, including publication of a list documenting permitted taximeters, until full implementation of MID?

Yes

Q10 Do you agree with the Department making it an offence to forge alter break or use a seal with the intention to deceive?

Yes

Q11 Do you agree that it is the drivers' responsibility to report if the taximeter is broken, and that until the taximeter is fully repaired and sealed the taxi will not be used for Hire and Reward?

Yes

Q12 Do you agree that all taxis operating to a regulated fare should have an illuminated sign which is extinguished automatically when the Taximeter is turned on?

Yes

Q13. Do you agree Taxis operating within a regulated fare must display a 'fares board' which can be viewed clearly by all seated passengers?

Yes this will allow for a transparent fare charging scheme, however the display should include information that a reduced fare can be agreed.

Q14 Do you agree with the assumptions of the impact of the proposed changes? If not please can you explain why and provide any evidence which supports that view?

The Council agrees that the proposed changes will create a transparent fare charging regime which should reduce the risk to users from over charging. However there are concern that the high levels for the flag drop down charges are not affordable.

The recent Travel Survey for Northern Ireland 2008-2010 indicated that 43% of households in Belfast have no car ownership and therefore are dependent on other forms of transport to access entertainment, jobs and services. The Council would have concerns that for economically or socially disadvantaged communities, the costs of travel by taxi could be an additional barrier to participating in everyday activities especially activities in the evenings, weekends and Bank Holidays when there are reduced or no public transport services.