



## Belfast City Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Development Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	Use of bus lanes by Taxis
<b>Date:</b>	19 March 2013
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	John McGrillen, Director of Development, ext 3470
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Keith Sutherland, Planning and Transport Policy Manager, ext 3578

<b>1</b>	<b>Relevant Background Information</b>
1.1	The Taxi Act (NI) 2008 gives the Department powers to develop new legislation aimed at modernising the industry. The Act sets out a new legal framework for regulation of taxis and taxi services. It covers the licensing of taxi operators, drivers and vehicles, fares and taximeters, hiring of taxis at separate fares, enforcement and penalties
1.2	Under the Act, Taxi Licensing arrangements are due to change from the current two tier system of public and private hire taxis with the introduction of a single tier system. The change will require Roads Service to amend its bus lane orders which currently define which taxis are permitted to use bus lanes in line with the new taxi definition.
1.3	Currently as well as buses, bicycles, motorcycles and permitted taxis can use bus lanes. The permitted taxis are Belfast Public Hire taxis (currently operating under a yellow plate) which operate from taxi ranks and can be hired on the street and taxi buses (white and blue plate) which are licensed to operate bus types on certain routes. Private taxis (operating under green plates) and public hire outside Belfast (white plates) are currently not permitted to access bus lanes.

<b>2</b>	<b>Key Issues</b>
2.1	The Department for Regional Development carried out a consultation in September 2012 on the options of Taxis using bus lanes. It was the view of the Department that allowing all taxis on to the bus lanes would see the number of vehicles using bus lanes increase but it would be highly unlikely that it will impact on the performance of bus lanes in terms of bus speeds and journey times.
2.2	It is proposed that all taxis be allowed access to bus lanes on implementation of the new licensing arrangements. The conclusion is based on the need to maintain the performance of bus lanes for the benefit of users against the need of taxis to operate in the intended way for the benefit of the users. The Department state that to preclude a section of taxis would prevent them from operating in the intended fashion as they could not pick up if hailed on a bus lane.
2.3	The decision to restrict the use of bus lanes to accessible taxis only following the impending changes to the taxi licensing regime was seen as not benefiting all users. Exceptions will include any bus lanes where other forms of transport are currently excluded primarily for safety reasons, such as the Motorway bus lanes.
2.4	Concern has been raised by cycling groups that the use of the bus lanes by private hire taxi will reduce the level of safety for cyclist. The cyclist lobby believe that allowing taxis in bus lanes will make them busier and more intimidating for new cyclist and be in contradiction of the new Active Travel Strategy which has an aim to increase the percentage of cycle trips in Northern Ireland.
2.5	Consultation on the proposals took place in September 2012 seeking views on the overall policy proposal. The Council did not make a response to the policy but did respond to the new Taxi Act consultation and supported the move to a single tier system.

<b>3</b>	<b>Equality and Good Relations Considerations</b>
3.1	There are no Equality and Good Relations Considerations attached to this report.

<b>4</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
4.1	Members are asked to note the proposed changes to Taxis using the bus lanes and agree any comments in light of the concerns raised by cycling groups.

<b>5</b>	<b>Decision Tracking</b>
Timeline Reporting Officer: John McGrillen	

<b>6</b>	<b>Key to Abbreviations</b>
DRD - Department for Regional Development	