



Subject:	Taxis Issues – Donegall Square
Date:	13 th April 2016
Reporting Officer:	Donal Durkan
Contact Officer:	Anne Doherty Planning & Transport Officer

Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	To outline the proposed response to the DRD Transport NI consultation in relation to providing a public hire taxi feeder rank in Donegall Square West by reducing the existing coach bay and the proposal to convert part of the existing taxi rank on Chichester Street to a coach bay.
1.2	<p>The proposals are a response from the Department for Regional Development (DRD) to issues raised by elected members and the Belfast Public Hire Taxi association representatives at the City Growth and Regeneration Special meeting on the 3rd of February. The report also provides an update on other issues raised at the meeting relating to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the taxi representatives' request to improve signage to the public hire taxi ranks in the city centre; and• Members' request for feedback on the Regional Development Committee Stakeholder event on the 9th March on "Public Transport in Belfast City Centre" and specifically the issues relating to taxi access to the city centre.

2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>In relation to the DRD proposal to increase the Belfast public hire taxi rank capacity in the Donegall Square area, it is recommended that elected members consider the response below and if appropriate agree the submission to DRD as the Council position. In summary:</p> <p>a) it is suggested that the Council could support the proposed reduction of the existing coach bay in Donegall Square West and the introduction of a public hire taxi feeder rank of 20 metres on the basis that alternative provision is provided for coach parking as proposed in (b); and</p>
2.2	<p>b) it is suggested that the Council supports the proposed reduction of the existing taxi rank on Chichester Street to accommodate a 23 metre coach bay (outside Victoria Square Shopping Centre, opposite Seymour Street).</p>
2.3	<p>The support for these modifications are suggested on the basis that it is introduced by DRD on a trial basis and subject to planned management and monitoring to ensure the conditions of use of the new rank and coach bay areas are adhered to by the operators.</p> <p>It is requested that elected members note:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • that the Council are in contact with DRD to consider proposals to improve directional signage information to the public hire taxi ranks in the city centre; and • that information from the Regional Development Committee on discussions relating to public taxi hire access in the city centre is outlined in Para 3.7.
3.0	Main report
3.1	<p>Representatives from the Belfast Public Hire Taxi association attended the City Growth and Regeneration Special meeting on the 3rd of February to highlight a number of issues relating to their operations in the city centre. The two main issues highlighted by the representatives related to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • inadequate provision for public hire taxi operations in the city centre and in particular for ranking in the Donegall Square area; and • lack of directional signage to the public hire taxi rank locations.

3.2	<p>DRD has requested feedback on two proposals:</p> <p>Donegall Square West – There is an existing coach bay (70.90 metres) for drop off and pick up only on the lane closest to City Hall. DRD is proposing to reduce the coach bay by 15 metres to 55.6 metres and to allocate a space of 20 metres for a public hire taxis feeder rank. The total allocated space is being extended and the proposal is illustrated in Appendix 1.</p>
3.3	<p>It is suggested that the Council could support this proposal on a trial basis, subject to further details on the approach to management and monitoring to ensure the conditions on the use of the ranks and coach bays are adhered to by the operators. This change in allocation of space would only be possible with the provision of alternative space for the coach bay as outlined in Para 3.4. It should be noted that there are plans to change the regulations for the taxi industry including changing from a two tier system (public & private hire) to a single tier system. It is proposed the changes will be rolled out later in 2016. The Council would request clarification if the implications of the deregulation have been considered as it is proposed that all wheelchair accessible taxis (public and private) will be allowed to stand or ply for hire therefore this may increase the use of the taxi ranks.</p>
3.4	<p>Chichester Street - There is an existing taxi rank (53 metres) on Chichester Street outside Victoria Square which representatives from the Belfast Public Hire Taxi association stated at the committee meeting was under utilised by taxi drivers as demand was low in this area. DRD is proposing to introduce a new coach bay of 23 metres and reduce the existing taxi rank to 30 metres. The proposal is illustrated in Appendix 2.</p>
3.5	<p>It is suggested that the Council could support this proposal as it could address the Council's previous concerns regarding loss of coach bay space in the city centre which is considered an important tourism asset for the city. The new space allocated for the coach bay on Chichester Street could compensate for the loss of space at Donegall Square West, however, close liaison is needed with the coach operators to ensure that they are made aware of the new location.</p>
3.6	<p>Signage</p> <p>Council officers had previously considered adding directional blades to tourism signs to indicate locations of public hire taxi ranks in the city, however, a budget was not available at the time to implement the scheme. It should be noted that Council officers are in contact with DRD to consider proposals to improve directional signage information to the</p>

<p>3.7</p> <p>3.8</p> <p>3.9</p> <p>3.10</p>	<p>public hire taxi ranks in the city centre and associated costs which will be bought back to Committee for further consideration.</p> <p>Regional Development Committee</p> <p>The Regional Development Committee hosted a Stakeholder event on the 9th March on “Public Transport in the Belfast City Centre”. The following issues were raised by participants relating to taxi access to the City Centre are outlined below -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was suggested that there were safety and access issues resulting from the taxi rank at Donegall Square North that needed to be addressed as a matter of urgency. • Distribution of taxi ranks needs to be reviewed alongside a need for better information on the location of public transport and clearer signage available to everyone, particularly infrequent visitors and tourists. • There may be scope for review and consultation on the potential for and impact of use of bus lanes, at specific times, by other users. • Taxi marshals were suggested as a positive intervention and it was suggested the costs of a pilot scheme should be assessed. • There is a need for consistent enforcement. <p>The extract from the issues paper from the event published by the Regional Development Committee is attached in Appendix 3.</p> <p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p> <p>Costs will be assessed for any improvements to the pedestrian signage and will be bought back to Committee for consideration.</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications</u></p> <p>None</p>
<p>4.0</p>	<p>Appendices</p>
	<p>Appendix 1 - DRD Transport NI proposals and layout drawings – Donegall Square West</p> <p>Appendix 2 - DRD Transport NI proposals and layout drawings – Chichester Street</p> <p>Appendix 3 - Extract from Committee for Regional Development Public Transport in Belfast city Centre - Issues Paper</p>