



Unmet demand survey



Northampton Borough Council
March 2017

Executive Summary

This Unmet demand survey has been undertaken on behalf of Northampton Borough Council following the guidance of the April 2010 DfT Best Practice Guidance document, and all relevant case history in regard to unmet demand. Northampton currently does not limit the number of hackney carriage vehicles, having had no such limit since 1997, albeit with a quality policy of all new vehicles having to be fully wheel chair accessible. This report seeks to identify the evidence to show if there is currently unmet demand for hackney carriages across the licensing area, and if so, if this is significant in terms of Section 16 of the 1985 Transport Act and all current guidance.

The database of evidence presented in this report was drawn together during November 2016 and February 2017 with most on the ground data collected during November 2016. The area has seen high population growth in recent years. It is a lower tier authority with transport and highway policy set by the County authority. However, the County leaves licensed vehicle policy entirely to the local council, apart from some references to needs to consider emission issues. The rank provision is however under County control.

In the period since statistics have been available from DfT hackney carriage vehicle numbers have grown 122% whilst private hire have grown slightly more at 152%, not a significant difference. However, recent experience has shown reducing hackney carriage vehicle numbers but increasing private hire. Driver numbers have also seen recent increase although operator numbers have reduced slightly. There are a small number of WAV in the private hire fleet, but not many in line with other authorities where there is a fully WAV hackney carriage fleet.

Demand for hackney carriages peaks on Friday and more so Saturday nights. These flow levels put the remainder of the week into almost insignificance. Whilst overall the main rank sees 34% of demand, only exceeded by that at the private station rank (42% of weekly demand), the Drapery informal location produces 11% of estimated weekly passengers.

The observed demand is being met by around 63% of the available fleet over the peak day. Some vehicles only serviced the station, with just under a third servicing the station at some point. 29% of the fleet met late evening demand whilst 41% met the early hours highest demand levels. Apart from at the station rank, the key area for ranks being abused by both private hire and private cars is the Bridge Street – Drapery axis. The main rank seems to be fairly self-enforcing, albeit a bit of a detour off the main night demand axis.

A high level of usage of hackney carriages by people getting them at ranks in wheel chairs was identified. Further, people felt that when they saw someone in a wheel chair being served by those in hackney carriages, the passenger got good service.

People in the streets were found to make about three trips per person per month for all licensed vehicles and 0.7 for hackney carriages, fairly good levels of usage. Latent demand, split equally between the main rank and the private station rank, was moderate at 9%.

Police and other groups looking after night travelers felt there were sufficient vehicles available. However, they, and other stakeholders were concerned about some confusion over if private hire booking offices were ranks or not, and the general untidiness of how supply and demand were met along the George Street – Drapery axis. This was worsened by poor links with the highways representatives at the County meaning identifying solutions for this mismatch was difficult and convoluted.

The trade response identified a significant level of experience of drivers, with a relatively low number of hours and days worked. 72% of hackney carriage respondents wanted a limit on vehicle numbers with half the private hire respondents also in favour.

Although, as in most places, unmet demand was identified, the level of this across the council provided ranks was a long way from being significant. Overall the present situation appears healthy and balanced – although there would be public interest in a limit being re-applied in terms of enabling drivers to focus on customer service, and the council to work at improving the way night demand is met overall. There is more than enough spare capacity in the present fleet to meet any expected future improvements in demand, whilst having a limit will ensure the present demand, and any future growth, goes to the benefit of those who have significant investment in the present trade in terms of the length of time they have been actively involved.

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1 General introduction and background

Northampton Borough Council is responsible for the licensing of hackney carriage and private hire vehicles operating within the Council area and is the licensing authority for this complete area. It does not have any limit on the number of hackney carriage vehicles licensed, although all new vehicles added must be wheel chair accessible. There is no legal means by which either private hire vehicle numbers, private hire or hackney carriage driver numbers, or the number of private hire operators can be limited. Prior to this survey, there are no other identified previous surveys.

This review of current policy is based on the Best Practice Guidance produced by the Department for Transport in April 2010 (BPG). It seeks to provide information to the licensing authority to meet section 16 of the Transport Act 1985 "that the grant of a hackney carriage vehicle licence may be refused..if, but only if, the licensing authority is satisfied that there is no significant demand for the services of hackney carriages within its local area, which is unmet." This terminology is typically shortened to "no SUD". In this case it is to identify if the council has an option of applying a limit to hackney carriage vehicle numbers or not.

Current hackney carriage, private hire and operator licensing is undertaken within the legal frameworks set by the Town Polices Clause Act 1847. This has been amended by various following legislation including the Transport Act 1985, Section 16 in regard to hackney carriage vehicle limits, and by the Local Government Miscellaneous Provisions Act 1976 with reference to private hire vehicles and operations. Many of the aspects of these laws have been tested and refined by other more recent legislation and more importantly through case law. Beyond legislation, the experience of the person in the street tends to see both hackney carriage and private hire vehicles both as 'taxis' – a term we will try for the sake of clarity to use only in its generic sense within the report. We will use the term 'licensed vehicles' to refer to both hackney carriage and private hire.

The legislation around licensed vehicles and drivers has been the subject of many attempts at review. The limiting of hackney carriage vehicle numbers has been a particular concern as it is often considered to be a restrictive practice and against natural economic trends. The three most recent reviews were by the Office of Fair Trading in 2003, through the production of the BPG in 2010, and the Law Commission review which published its results in 2014. None of these resulted in any material change to the legislation involved in licensing.

The upshot of all these reviews in respect of the principal subject of this survey is that local authorities retain the right to restrict the number of hackney carriage vehicle licenses. The Law Commission conclusion included retention of the power to limit hackney carriage vehicle numbers but utilizing a public interest test determined by the Secretary of State. It also suggested the three-year horizon also be used for rank reviews and accessibility reviews.

After introduction of the 1985 Transport Act, Leeds University Institute for Transport Studies developed a tool by which unmet demand could be evaluated and a determination made if this was significant or not. The tool was taken forward and developed as more studies were undertaken. Over time this 'index of significance of unmet demand' (ISUD) became accepted as an industry standard tool to be used for this purpose. Some revisions have been made following the few but specific court cases where various parties have challenged the policy of retaining a limit. Some of the application has differed between Scottish and English authorities due to some court cases in Scotland taking interpretation of the duty of the licensing authority further than is usual in England and Wales.

The DfT asked in writing in 2004 for all licensing authorities with quantity restrictions to review them, publish their justification by March 2005, and then review at least every three years since then. In due course, this led to a summary of the government guidance which was last updated in England and Wales in 2010 (but more recently in Scotland).

The BPG in 2010 also provided additional suggestions of how these surveys should be undertaken, albeit in general but fairly extensive terms. A key encouragement within the BPG is that "an interval of three years is commonly regarded as the maximum reasonable period between surveys". BPG suggests key points in consideration are passenger waiting times at ranks, for street hailings and telephone bookings, latent and peaked demand, wide consultation and publication of "all the evidence gathered".

The most recent changes in legislation regarding licensed vehicles have been enactment of the parts of the Equality Act related to guidance dogs (sections 168 to 171, enacted in October 2010), and the two clauses of the Deregulation Act which were successful in proceeding, relating to length of period each license covers and to allowing operators to transfer work across borders (enacted in October 2015).

In November 2016, the DfT undertook a consultation regarding enacting Sections 167 and 165 of the Equality Act. These allow for all vehicles capable of carrying a wheel chair to be placed on a list by the local council (section 167). Any driver using a vehicle on this list then has a duty under section 165 to:

- Carry the passenger while in the wheel chair
- Not make any additional charge for doing so
- If the passenger chooses to sit in a passenger seat to carry the wheel chair
- To take such steps as are necessary to ensure that the passenger is carried in safety and reasonable comfort
- To give the passenger such mobility assistance as is reasonably required

This enaction will occur on 6th April 2017. There remains no confirmation of any timetable for instigating either the remainder of the Equality Act or the Law Commission recommendations. This is particularly pertinent to any consideration of limiting vehicle numbers since one section would mean any authority with a limit on vehicle numbers must issue licences irrespective of their policy until a given proportion of hackney carriages were WAV style.

In respect to case law impinging on unmet demand, the two most recent cases were in 1987 and 2002. The first case (R v Great Yarmouth) concluded authorities must consider the view of significant unmet demand as a whole, not condescending to detailed consideration of the position in every limited area, i.e. to consider significance of unmet demand over the area as a whole.

R v Castle Point considered the issue of latent, or preferably termed, suppressed demand consideration. This clarified that this element relates only to the element which is measurable. Measurable suppressed demand includes inappropriately met demand (taken by private hire vehicles in situations legally hackney carriage opportunities) or those forced to use less satisfactory methods to get home (principally walking, i.e. those observed to walk away from rank locations).

In general, the determination of conclusions about significance of unmet demand must take into account the practicability of improving the standard of service through the increase of supply of vehicles. It is also important to have consistent treatment of authorities as well as for the same authority over time.

In conclusion, the present legislation in England and Wales sees public fare-paying passenger carrying vehicles firstly split by passenger capacity. All vehicles able to carry nine or more passengers are dealt with under national public service vehicle licensing. Local licensing authorities only have jurisdiction over vehicles carrying eight or less passengers. These are split between hackney carriages which are alone able to wait at ranks or pick up people in the streets without a booking, and private hire who can only be used with a booking made through an operator, and who otherwise see passengers not insured for their journey.

2 Local background and context

Key dates for this Unmet demand survey for Northampton Borough Council are:

- appointed CTS Traffic and Transportation on 2nd November 2016
- in accordance with our proposal of October 2016
- as confirmed during the inception meeting for the survey held on 7th November 2016
- this survey was carried out between 7th November 2016 and February 2017
- On street pedestrian survey work and the video rank observations occurred in November 2016
- Licensed vehicle driver opinions and operating practices were identified from an all-driver survey using a questionnaire issued after the rank surveys and returned within November / December 2016
- Key stakeholders were consulted throughout the period of the survey
- A draft of this Final Report was reviewed by the client during March 2017
- and reported to the appropriate Council committee in April 2017 by the licensing officer.

Northampton Borough Council is one of the seven districts of Northamptonshire. It is the largest urban area in England which is not a unitary authority. In 2015 a report by the Centre for Cities suggested the population growth from 2004 to 2013 for the authority was one of the ten highest rates in the UK. The authority has a current population of 224,800 using the 2016 estimates currently available from the 2011 census.

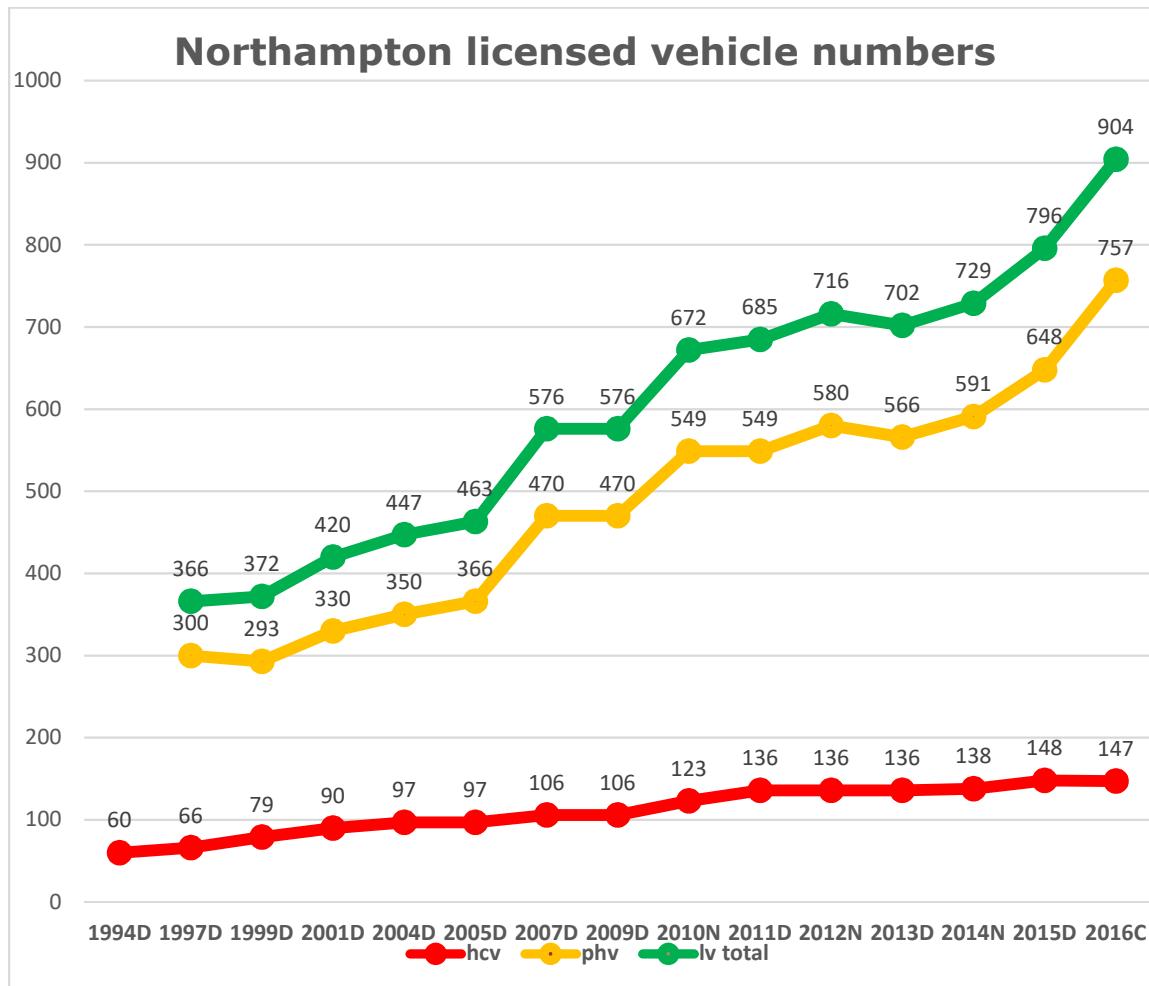
In terms of background council policy, Northampton Borough Council is dependent on inputs from the County in terms of transport and highway policy, and many other elements of activity including social services and education transport provision. Local transport policy is outlined in the Northamptonshire Transportation Plan (TP), a suite of documents updated as and when needed. These are essentially a set of thematic and town transport strategies, all first set up in 2012. There is also a further document, Northamptonshire Arc, Connecting Northamptonshire which seeks to encourage sustainable travel as far as practicable. The main TP, in common with many other similar documents, has little with respect to either hackney carriage or private hire vehicle policy.

The Northampton Town Transport Strategy, Fit for Purpose (NTTS) was produced in January 2013. It covers the Borough plus an extra section known as the Northampton Related Development Area, from where extra housing needs are drawn.

A key focus is developing the city centre under the Central Area Action Plan – with some emphasis on encouraging reduced emission levels as well as reducing the impact of the ring road on connectivity. The basic data used suggests the mode split in 2001 saw no Northampton use of taxis at all for travel to work, compared to a national level of 1%. Again, there is little if any reference to taxis despite admissions that the general public transport network tends to reduce significantly outside peak and daytime hours.

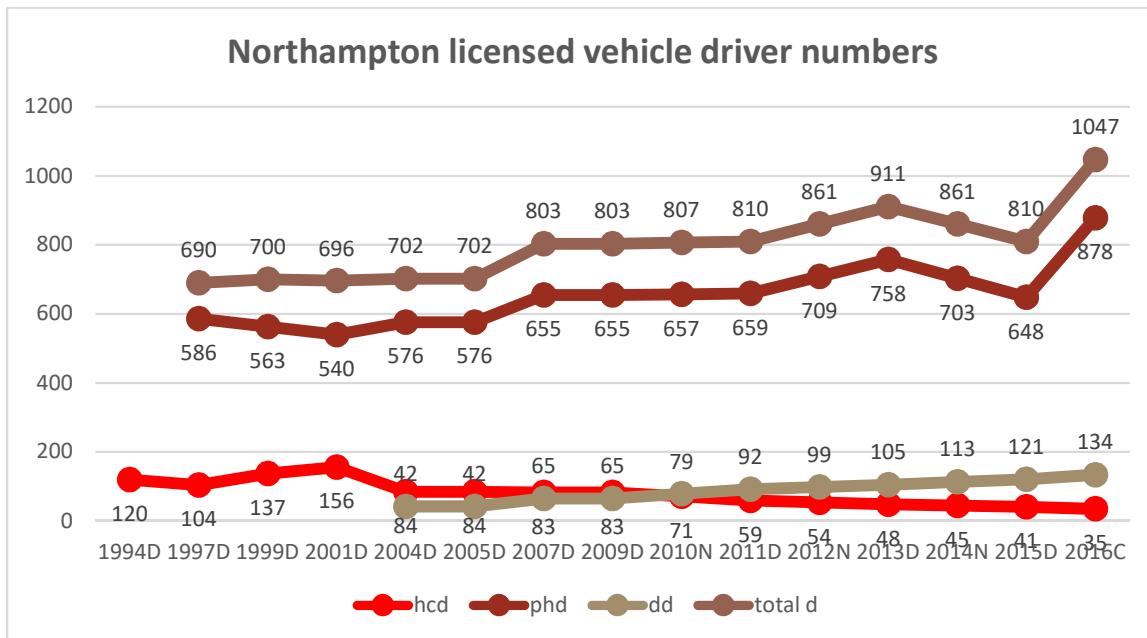
The nature of the authority means that rank provision is under the control of the County. The County also controls the application of on street parking enforcement in respect of abuse by non-licensed vehicles. However, all licensing authorities have full powers over licensing the vehicles, drivers and operators serving people within their area. Northampton Borough Council has not presently chosen to utilize its power to limit hackney carriage vehicle numbers, although it had originally retained such a limit until determining on 29th April 1997 to remove this limit.

By drawing together published statistics from both the Department for Transport (D) and the National Private Hire Association (N), supplemented by private information from the licensing authority records (C), recent trends in vehicle, driver and operator numbers can be observed. The detailed numbers supporting the picture below are provided in Appendix 1. Due to the comparative size, the operator figures are shown in the second picture.



Licensing Statistics from 1994 to date - vehicles

The graph above shows continued growth of both kinds of licensed vehicle over the years for which data is available. From 1997 to date, hackney carriages have grown some 122%. Private hire growth has been a little higher at 152%, but not a great deal more. This means the share of the vehicles which are hackney carriage has fallen from 22% in 1997 to 16% now, again not a large fall. However, recent trends have seen much less recent growth in hackney carriages, and in fact a slight decline, compared to a hastening of private hire growth since 2012. This must be a market effect since there is no limit on either kind of vehicle number, although there could be some impact of the quality control on hackney carriages if the higher cost of entry vehicle price is a key entrance determinator.

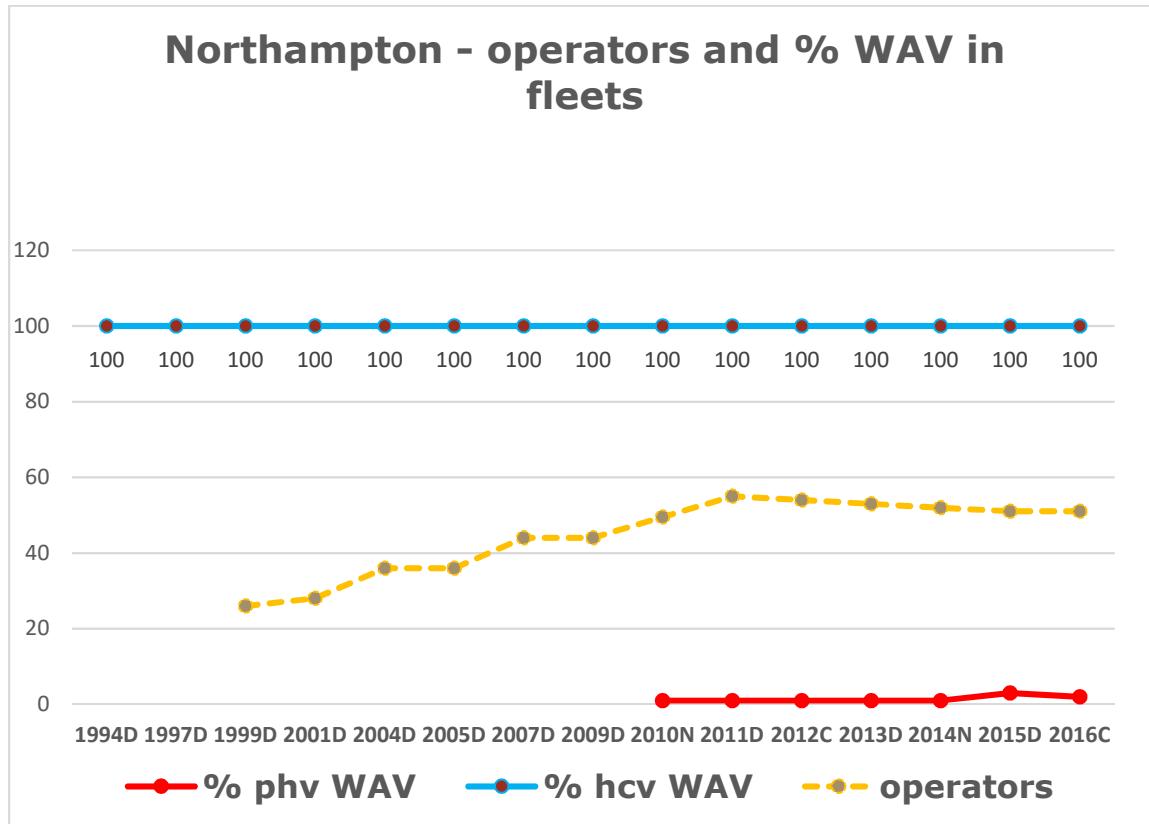


Licensing Statistics from 1994 to date - drivers

On the driver side, there has been a swap of hackney carriage drivers to dual status, and a much more recent increase in private hire driver numbers. There was a strange situation in 2015 where the total number of drivers was actually very similar to the total number of vehicles.

Information is also available from these sources to show how the level of wheel chair accessible vehicles (WAV) has varied. It must be noted that in most cases the values for the private hire side tend to be much more approximate than those on the hackney carriage side, as there is no option to mandate for private hire being wheel chair accessible. In some areas, to strengthen the ability of the public to differentiate between the two parts of the licensed vehicle trade, licensing authorities might not allow any WAV in the private hire fleet at all. Also, for Northampton, all hackney carriages have needed to be WAV since 1983, although this often means there are no WAV in the private hire fleet, which is not the case for this area.

Numbers of private hire operators in the area rose to 2011, but has since steadily declined, although not to a great degree. This suggests the growth in private hire vehicles is to current companies rather than new ones.



Operator numbers and levels of WAV provision in the fleet

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3 Patent demand measurement (rank surveys)

As already recorded in Chapter 2, control of provision of on-street ranks in Northampton Borough Council is under the auspices of the higher tier County authority, as is their enforcement with respect to general vehicle abuse.

Appendix 2 provides a list of ranks in Northampton Borough Council at the time of this current survey.

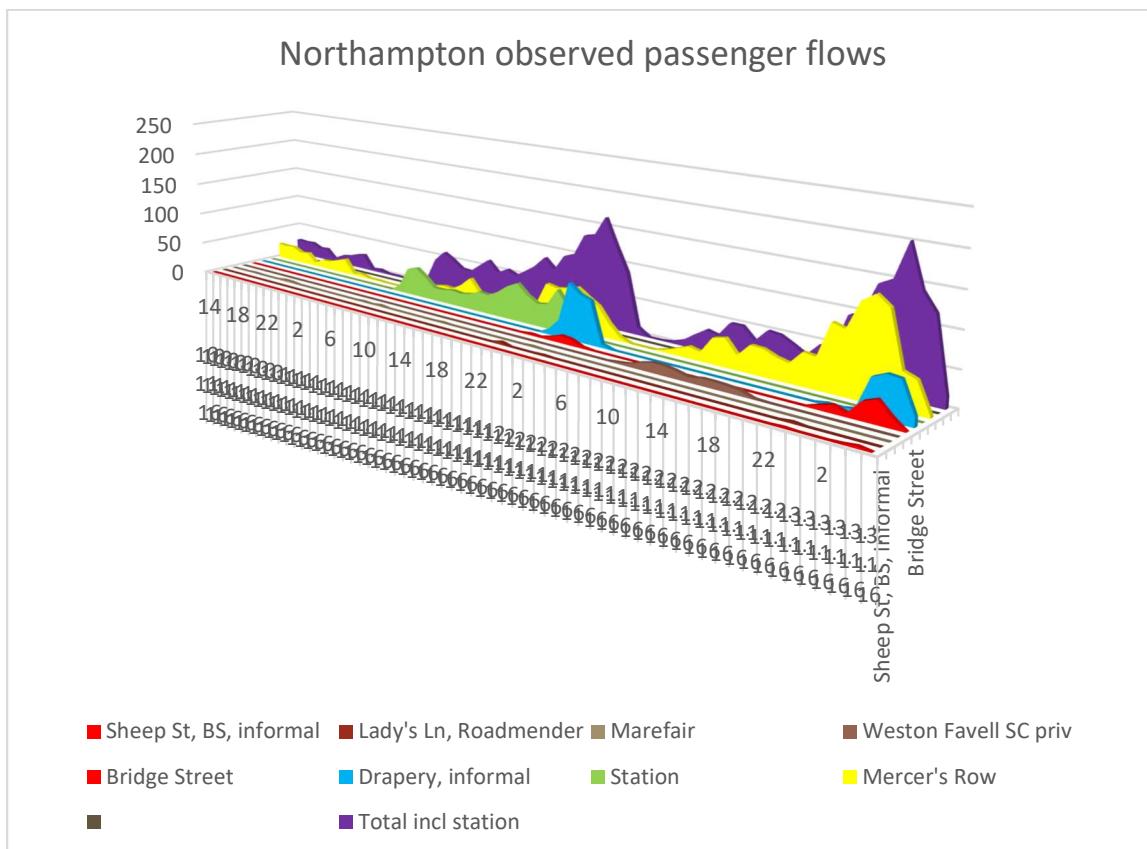
Our methodology involves a current review both in advance of submitting our proposal to undertake this Unmet demand survey and at the study inception meeting, together with site visits where considered necessary. This provides a valid and appropriate sample of rank coverage which is important to feed the numeric evaluation of the level of unmet demand, and its significance (see discussion in Chapter 7). The detailed specification of the hours included in the sample is provided in Appendix 3.

Overall rank observations

During the course of our observations at active ranks and some informal locations where people flag hackney carriages, we recorded some 3,700 different vehicle movements across the area in and around our observation locations. Of these, 68% were hackney carriages. 22% were private cars, although the bulk of these were setting down at or around the rank at the railway station. Other high levels of car activity were at or near the Bridge Street rank, and in the informal location at the Drapery (as might be expected).

Just 1% were goods vehicles or emergency service vehicles. 8% were private hire vehicles. The main rank did not see any abuse by private hire vehicles, whereas the highest level of potentially inappropriate activity was again at Bridge Street. The impact of vehicles from the office at Marefair on or around the rank was also very clear.

Total passenger flows observed during the survey accessing hackney carriage vehicles were identified and presented in the graph below:



The graph demonstrates the dominance of the main rank at Mercer's Row in passenger terms. It also shows that both Friday and Saturday nights are clear peaks in demand for hackney carriages. Even daytime flows on Thursday are much lower. Bridge Street does see moderate levels of use by hackney carriages, whilst more use the informal Drapery location to hail hackney carriages, or at least to board ones that have paused there. Further detail follows below.

Overall usage of hackney carriage ranks in Northampton

The table below uses our surveys to estimate weekly demand at ranks and other locations across the area.

Rank	Estimated passengers	% of total
Station, private	3,707	42
Mercer's Row	3,013	34
Drapery, Macdonalds, informal	1,008	11
Weston Favell, shopping centre, private	713	8
Bridge Street	241	3
Sheep Street, Bus station layby, informal	140	2
Marefair	25	0.0
Lady's Lane, Roadmender	7	0.0
George Row	Not used	0

On an average weekly basis, the station sees most passengers, around 42%. This is closely followed by 34% of the total at Mercer's Row. The next area where hackney carriages do gain passengers, and a relatively high 11% is the informal area near Macdonalds. A further 8% of total weekly patronage comes from the location used by hackney carriages at Weston Favell shopping centre (not the formal rank). Bridge Street is used by hackney carriages to take around 3% of their patronage, followed by a further 2% at another informal location, near the bus station.

Marefair did produce some hackney carriage departures with passengers, but only a very small amount – compared to the private hire departures from here. George Row did not see hackney carriages at all, but did see some private hire departures.

Hackney carriage activity by rank

This section considers the surveys of each rank, working in order of the busiest Council provided ranks first (including informal locations), followed by the private locations. In all cases, any non hackney carriage movements have been removed from the discussion below. All vehicles were observed as wheel chair accessible style Northampton hackney carriages. Full details are provided in Appendix 4.

Mercer's Row

This is the main rank in the central area of Northampton. It is located in a one-way loop road with the main section of rank located on the far side of the road away from the shops along the boundary of the Church. There is a small front section of rank, with raised kerbing, on the shops/left hand side of the road, although many vehicles tend to pick up from the main section rather than pulling across to the head of the rank. The rank tends to be self-enforcing against both private cars and other licensed vehicles due to its location. If passenger board at the main section of the rank, they enter from the driver's side which faces the narrow pavement. When people wish to board with wheel chairs, the vehicle moves across to the header area which has a raised kerb and then enter from the passenger side of the vehicle away from traffic.

This rank operates all hours and is very close to the market area of the centre of Northampton. Vehicles leaving must pass back around through George Row and back out to the Drapery. The rank was observed from 14:00 on Thursday 10th November 2016 through to it being closed for Remembrance Day at around 06:00 on Sunday 13th November 2016. During the full period of observation, there was very little if any abuse by other licensed vehicles or by private cars of the spaces related to the rank.

Thursday observations

During the Thursday, 192 people left the rank in 133 vehicles, a low average occupancy of 1.4 persons per vehicle. 11% of vehicles arriving left empty.

During the period observed, 10 passengers arrived when no vehicle was available for immediate hire. These were in the 14:00, 15:00, 17:00 and 23:00 hours. The longest recorded wait was nine minutes, but many waited just a minute. When averaged over all passengers during this period of observations, the typical wait time was 14 seconds.

Daytime passenger flows (up to the 18:00 hour) were between 17 and 24 in any hour. The 19:00 hour was much quieter, but then flows were 13 to 24 in the hours up to and including the 23:00 hour. After this there were either three or one passenger in the next four hours, and in the 04:00 and 05:00 hours there were no passengers, although in the latter hour one vehicle did arrive and depart empty.

Generally vehicles waited two to 11 minutes for fares in the main part of the day. However, this wait was much longer in the evening, with one vehicle recorded waiting 70 minutes. Later on, waits reduced again but so did flows. The highest proportion of empty vehicles left in the midnight hour after the peak of 24 passengers had left.

Friday observations

The Friday covered a full 24-hours of operation and saw 661 passengers leave in 420 vehicles, a moderate occupancy of 1.6 per vehicle. A lower 6% of vehicles left empty.

There were eight passengers arriving to find no vehicle ready for immediate hire. These saw one 14 minutes wait in the 08:00 hour, but other waits in the 17:00 and 18:00 hours but of no more than four minutes. Averaged out over the full 24 hours of passengers, the average wait was just three seconds.

No vehicles or passengers used the location until the 08:00 hour. Flows then rose to 12 to 19 in the next four hours. Flows were then between 19 and 41 up to the 22:00 hour when they rose to 60, and remained between 54 and 65 through to the 01:00 hour, the peak being in that hour. Flows then fell to 44, 22 and finally 6 in the 05:00 hour.

Vehicle waits changed through the day. They were lowest in the 17:00 and 18:00 hours and highest in the hours between 20:00 and 01:00. However, longest waits were generally around the 35 minute mark, with the longest recorded being 53 minutes.

Saturday observations

On the Saturday, another full 24-hours of observations, 1,041 people left the rank in 646 vehicles, again a moderate average occupancy of 1.6 persons per vehicle. Again just 6% of vehicles arriving left the area empty, many of which were at the end of observations when the rank was closed.

During the observations, 32 people arrived when no vehicles were immediately available. The longest wait was 11 minutes. People waited in the 13:00 and 14:00 hours, with one other wait recorded in the 01:00 hour (but only for a minute). The average wait over the 24 hours that could be expected was some nine seconds.

There were no passengers until the 09:00 hour, but then the rank was used in every hour right through to the 05:00 hour on the Sunday morning. Flows were 10 to 17 from 10:00 through to 12:00. They were then between 37 and 41 in most hours from 13:00 to 17:00, apart from the 15:00 hour with just 21 people. After a quieter period in the next two hours, flows began to increase to a peak of 140 in the 01:00 hour. Flows were 126 or more in each hour either side of that hour. Flows then dropped to 51, 44 and finally just three in the 05:00 hour.

Vehicle waits were again variable, but often much longer than on other days, apart from the two hours when people had to wait for vehicles to arrive. Waits were much less in the hours after the midnight hour. In the morning there was a vehicle which waited 56 minutes, with many others waiting around the 40 minute mark.

Summary

Overall, this rank was used in most hours, although flows were variable, and generally higher from Thursday to Friday to Saturday, with the peak in the early hours of Saturday morning. There were, however, some hours in the very early hours of both Friday and Saturday where the rank was completely quiet of both vehicle and passengers. Given the busyness of this location, the service overall was **very good**.

Drapery, informal location

The Drapery is a two-way road which runs between Mercer's Row, where the main hackney carriage rank is, and Sheep Street, where the new bus station is located. This route then leads back on to the Greyfriars (outbound) section of the inner relief road. The section north of Mercer's Row is signed as accessible only to 'buses and taxis'. The road is lined by various shops including a large Macdonalds (on the left hand side looking northwards).

We were advised at inception that this area is one where both hackney carriage and private hire tend to pick up passengers. We observed the site from 23:00 on the Friday 11th through to 05:00 the next morning, and also on the Saturday night for the same hours into Sunday morning.

Friday observations

On the Friday into the Saturday, a total of 255 passengers were observed being picked up by hackney carriages at this location. This is a moderate occupancy of 1.7 persons per vehicle. A further 20 vehicles, 12% of those arriving were recorded leaving without passengers.

None of the high passenger flow ever had to wait for a vehicle to arrive. Vehicles waited for passengers between four and ten minutes. Some vehicles were recorded waiting here up to 15 minutes.

Flows rose from eight in the midnight hour (there were no passengers or vehicles in the 23:00 hour), to 25, the peak of 83 in the 02:00 hour, 70, 64 and then five in the 05:00 hour.

Saturday observations

The Saturday saw a lower total of 187 passengers leaving in 109 vehicles, a similar moderate occupancy of 1.7 per vehicle. A similar 13% left without passengers. During the departures, one person had to wait four minutes for a vehicle to arrive, but shared over the high overall flow this was a typical wait of just one second.

Passenger flows were three, two and five in the first three hours. They then rose to 50, the peak of 58 (03:00), 56 and finally 13. Vehicles tended to wait between one and nine minutes, though the 04:00 hour did see an average wait for vehicles of about 11 minutes, although one vehicle did appear to wait nearly 45 minutes. There were also longer waits in the 05:00, quieter hour.

Bridge Street

This road leads from the central area of Mercer's Row and George Row southwards towards the A5123 Victoria Gardens gyratory. The road is two way and not limited in access terms. It has many small shops including a number of bars as well as groups of Estate Agents and similar types of financial institutions. The rank is located on the left hand side heading away from the main central area. It formally operates from 23:00 until 05:00 only, and is otherwise a clearway, with a specific loading ban for a few particular hours. It is not, however, a no stopping zone.

This rank was observed on Friday 11th November from 23:00 until 06:00 the next morning, and again on the Saturday evening / Sunday morning for the same hours (its formal operating hours).

Friday observations

On the Friday/Saturday, 30 people used this rank to leave the area in 22 hackney carriages, a low occupancy of 1.4 persons per vehicle. A further 51 vehicles, 70% of those arriving, left without passengers. No passenger ever arrived and had to wait for a hackney carriage to arrive. The peak flow as in the 02:00 hour but was just 11 passengers. Other flows were generally just one or two, with flows of five and nine either side of the peak. However, there were flows in all observed hours apart from the 05:00, albeit small.

Vehicle wait times for fares were relatively short, between one and nine minutes, although some vehicles did wait up to nine minutes. In any event, this route is one where many vehicles may well pass, so that anyone waiting would probably be able to hail a vehicle if needed.

Saturday observations

The Saturday/Sunday observations saw over three times as many passengers, 93, but leaving in 87 vehicles, a very low occupancy of just 1.1 persons per vehicle. Just 12 vehicles, 12% left empty, much lower than the Friday. Again, there were passengers in all hours but the 05:00. Flows rose from six to 11, back to five, and then up to 25 and 32 (peak in the 03:00 hour), and back to 14 for the final hour.

In this set of observations, people did have to wait for vehicles to arrive. Waits occurred in each and every hour apart from the 23:00 and 05:00 hours, with the worst waits in the 01:00 hour when one passenger waited 12 minutes. The next longest wait was six minutes. When averaged over all using the rank, the typical expected wait was 48 seconds. Three of the five hours with waits had average waits for those passengers of over a minute, contributing to the unmet demand calculations.

With the passenger waiting, average waits of vehicles were low, but in fact very similar to the Friday, and even with the queueing there were vehicles which waited up to eight minutes before obtaining a fare.

Sheep Street, informal location

As noted above, Sheep Street is the short section of road lying between the northern end of the Drapery and one part of the inner relief road. It does not have traffic restrictions but is fairly narrow and has a layby to the northern end on the left hand side. Pedestrian access from the central area to the bus station passes through Sheep Street, and it is one of the closest roads to the bus station for those wishing to be picked up or dropped off by various vehicles, though parking has restriction in terms of some being allocated to disabled. There is no formal hackney carriage or private hire provision here, or in fact anywhere in or around the bus station itself.

This location was observed just on the Saturday evening from 23:00 until the early hours of Sunday. In that period, five people used the rank, leaving in three vehicles, a moderate occupancy of 1.7 per vehicle. People used the location in the 23:00, 03:00 and 04:00 hours, with the peak of three people in the 04:00 hour. None had to wait for a vehicle to arrive, although vehicles did wait between six and 19 minutes for fares, a long period given this location is not a formal rank.

Marefair

Marefair is a two way road linking the railway station to the central area. Towards the central area it is available to all vehicular traffic. Outbound it is restricted to buses and cycles only (no taxis). On the northern side the Vue Cinema is located, as well as a hotel. There is also a private hire office within the shops in the base of the Cinema. We understand that this office has closed since the date of the survey. This was located very close to the layby which contains the hackney carriage rank in this location. The rank is available at all times.

This rank was observed from 15:00 on Thursday 10th November through to 06:00 on the Saturday morning, 12th November 2016.

Thursday observations

On the Thursday a total of five passengers were observed leaving in three vehicles, a moderate occupancy of 1.7 per vehicle. The maximum passengers in any hour was two, with two people using the rank in both the 21:00 and 22:00 hours. 11 other hackney carriages used the rank but left empty.

In the first hour, the passengers had to wait three minutes for the vehicle to arrive. Over all the passengers using this rank in this set of observations, the typical wait was nearly 1.5 minutes.

Vehicles paused at the rank in every hour from the start of observations through to the 19:00 hour, but never waited more than nine minutes before leaving. The one vehicle taking away a passenger in the day time hours did not wait long before getting a fare.

Friday observations

Five people also used the rank on the Friday, leaving in four vehicles, a low average occupancy of 1.3 per vehicle. There were two passengers in the 09:00 hour, one in the 16:00 and one in the 01:00. 14 other vehicles at least paused at the rank, but never for more than four minutes, although one vehicle did sit at the rank for nearly two and a half hours, almost certainly on a break.

No passenger ever arrived without a vehicle being available, although the short wait times suggest most vehicles taken may well have been passing by rather than waiting.

Lady's Lane, Roadmender

The Roadmender club is located just off Lady's Lane with pedestrian access at its western end. Given that Lady's Lane is a part of a major access route, it has pedestrian barriers along the pavement in the section near the club.

Just before the vehicular access to their small car park, a hackney carriage rank is provided on the same side as the club. Vehicles can queue along the pedestrian barrier with passengers able to enter the first vehicle. The rank has fairly high capacity being along this section of Lady's Lane.

The rank was observed on both Friday and Saturday evening during the survey, when we believed there were events on at the club. However, on the Friday there were just five people leaving in two hackney carriages, in the 23:00 and 03:00 hours, with those in the first hour having to wait up to three minutes for a vehicle to arrive (suggesting they possibly hailed a vehicle passing). The average wait for all passengers was nearly three minutes.

On the Saturday night / Sunday morning just two people left in one hackney carriage, although they did not have to wait for the vehicle (although it appears they may well have actually either booked or flagged the vehicle as its wait for the fare was just a minute).

George Row

George Row is a one way street which leads back towards the main road network from the Mercer's Row rank. It provides a high level of kerbside parking, although the rank is located on the southern side and available from 23:00 to 05:00. The location was observed on both Friday and Saturday nights from 23:00 through to 05:00 the next morning and on neither night were any hackney carriages seen to wait nor pick up any passengers.

Lady's Lane, former bus station

The former large bus station site is now closed and demolished. Lady's Lane is the far side of this site away from the main central area. A small rank was provided here, but always on the opposite side of the road to the bus station. Although the rank is still faintly marked, at the time of our survey the area was completely derelict and there was no clear demand provider for hackney carriage, or private hire services, in this location. No observations were needed for this disused location.

Northampton Station

The railway station site has recently been completely rebuilt. Works were just being completed at the time of our survey. The hackney carriage rank has been revised, with a purpose built road loop accessible to all vehicles but mainly there to provide a header rank with feeder spaces, albeit perhaps less than previously. Vehicles arrive and depart via the car park access road onto St Andrew's Road. The rank itself is at platform level, and very close to several of the platforms. However, all passengers have to go up to the higher exit level of the new building and then descend to the taxi area, using two lifts if needed. The main pedestrian route out of the building is now facing the opposite way to the rank, and leads out to a level exit towards the bus stops and main road, and no longer passes the hackney carriage rank area. There is no effective pick-up area for either private hire or hackney carriage along this pedestrian route, and for some heading towards the centre the Marefair rank may be the first one they see unless they take care to observe the waiting hackney carriages or follow the signing.

The station rank was observed on the Friday 11th November, from 07:00 until the 03:00 hour. During the observations some 674 passengers were observed leaving in 556 hackney carriages (a very low occupancy of 1.2 per vehicle). 43 vehicles, 7% of those arriving, left without passengers.

Passengers had to wait for vehicles to arrive in the 15:00, 16:00, midnight and 01:00 hours. The longest recorded passenger wait was some 16 minutes in the midnight hour. Shared over all passengers, the typical passenger wait was 34 seconds. The two later hours both contributed to the unmet demand estimate through having average delays over a minute, whilst the first two hours with queues contributed to unmet demand by having a passenger wait of any size in off peak hours during the week.

Passenger flows were 40 and 45 in the morning peak hours of 08:00 and 09:00, then dropped to between 20 and 38 until rising again in the period from 19:00 to 21:00 to between 43 and 58. Flows then fell again until the peak of 62 in the midnight hour. The next two hours saw 39, then 15, until the area became quiet after the last train arrived.

Vehicle waits for passengers were typical of station ranks, being between four and 25 minutes, with some vehicles seen to wait nearly 40 minutes for their passengers, or before leaving empty.

Weston Favell Shopping Centre

The centre has a formal hackney carriage rank outside the main area of the centre, but on council land, and a privately provided section much closer to the exits from the shops. We were advised that the council section is not often used, and we observed activity at the privately provided section.

The location was observed on the Saturday from 08:00 until the 19:00 hour. In this period, 99 passengers left in 91 vehicles, a very low occupancy of just 1.1 per vehicle. Just 4% of vehicles left the area without passengers. No passenger ever had to wait for a vehicle to arrive.

Passenger flows were between 10 and 14 in every hour from 10:00 to 13:00 and the 15:00 and 16:00 hours. Other flows between one and nine occurred in the other hours, although the last hour was mainly quiet. Vehicles waited between three and 23 minutes for fares, with some observed to wait up to 35 minutes, although mainly in the quieter hours.

Review of hackney carriage vehicles active

A review was undertaken of the number of hackney carriage vehicles active on the busiest day of the survey. A sample of all plates observed during six periods, totaling some eight hours were collected at two key points where it was expected most hackney carriages might pass through. One was on the Drapery near the entrance to the main central rank, and the other at the entrance to Northampton station.

During the course of the observations, a total of 410 vehicles were observed. The plate numbers were validated against the current list of hackney carriage vehicles for the authority, and eight observations were discounted. The remaining 402 records represented 92 different hackney carriage vehicles, or 63% of the available fleet. Whilst this is a higher level than in other surveys, it does not suggest a level high enough that might suggest the fleet were aware of the survey, and had encouraged all vehicles to be active at that time.

Further analysis was undertaken and identified:

- 7% were only seen at the station
- 30% of the overall fleet were observed in total at the station
- The afternoon central observations saw 16% of the fleet
- The evening observations saw 14%
- The late evening observations found 29% of the fleet active
- 41% were active in the early hours.

No vehicle was observed in all six different location / time periods, with the highest number of different times/locations for any vehicle being four periods.

Rank use by those in wheel chairs or with disabilities

There were a total of 12 observations of people accessing hackney carriages in wheel chairs at ranks. All but one were at the main rank, with the other being at the railway station rank. The observations occurred at various times of the day and on different days.

A further nine people were observed as having a disability, one with a walking frame and all but two of the others having use of a walking stick. All these were at the main rank, but again on various days and at various different times.

4 General public views

It is very important that the views of people within the area are obtained about the service provided by hackney carriage and private hire. A key element which these surveys seek to discover is specifically if people have given up waiting for hackney carriages at ranks (the most readily available measure of latent demand). However, the opportunity is also taken with these surveys to identify the overall usage and views of hackney carriage and private hire vehicles within the study area, and to give chance for people to identify current issues and factors which may encourage them to use licensed vehicles more.

Such surveys can also be key in identifying variation of demand for licensed vehicles across an area, particularly if there are significant areas of potential demand without ranks, albeit in the context that many areas do not have places apart from their central area with sufficient demand to justify hackney carriages waiting at ranks.

These surveys tend to be undertaken during the daytime period when more people are available, and when survey staff safety can be guaranteed. Further, interviews with groups of people or with those affected by alcohol consumption may not necessarily provide accurate responses, despite the potential value in speaking with people more likely to use hackney carriages at times of higher demand and then more likely unmet demand. Where possible, extension of interviews to the early evening may capture some of this group, as well as some studies where careful choice of night samples can be undertaken.

Our basic methodology requires a sample size of at least 200 to ensure stable responses. Trained and experienced interviewers are also important as this ensures respondents are guided through the questions carefully and consistently. A minimum sample of 50 interviews is generally possible by a trained interviewer in a day meaning that sample sizes are best incremented by 50, usually if there is targeting of a specific area or group (eg of students, or a sub-centre), although conclusions from these separate samples can only be indicative taken alone.

It is normal practice to compare the resulting gender and age structure to the latest available local and national census proportions to identify if the sample has become biased in any way.

More recently, general public views have been enlisted from the use of council citizens' panels although the issue with these is that return numbers cannot be guaranteed. The other issue is that the structure of the sample responding cannot be guaranteed either, and it is also true that those on the panel have chosen to be there such that they may tend to be people willing to have stronger opinions than the general public randomly approached.

Finally, some recent surveys have placed an electronic copy of the questionnaire on their web site to allow interested persons to respond, although again there needs to be an element of care with such results as people choosing to take part may have a vested interest.

For this study, we sought to interview some 200 persons in the central area of Northampton. In the end, some 189 persons responded. Of these, 75% said they had used a licensed vehicle in the last three months, a fairly high level of usage. Full details of the results are contained in Appendix 5.

People were then asked how often they used a licensed vehicle. From the responses, we estimate around three trips per person per month, again fairly high. However, when this is narrowed down to use of hackney carriages, the usage is 0.7 trips per person per month, around 23% of the total.

People were asked their normal way of getting a licensed vehicle in the area. A very high 45% actually said from a rank – high compared to the 23% estimate from the usage figures and also from normal experience. However, there was no real quoted hailing. 35% said they phoned with a further 18% saying they used mobile or smart phones, with none using freephones or apps. This provides a total telephone estimate of 53%, not as high as in many places. Overall this suggests fairly high, albeit less frequent, use of hackney carriages in Northampton compared to other places.

When asked about companies used, 18 different names were given, and a very high total of 336 responses were provided – most people therefore giving two or three names. The largest number of mentions were 38%, followed by two others with 16% and 12% respectively. The next company obtained 9%. Five others each obtained 4%, with this top ten therefore having some 99% of the mentions. This suggests a high level of competition in the area for the demand for licensed vehicles.

Of those telling us about their use of hackney carriages, 42% of those replying said they could not remember when they last used one. However, just 5% said they could not remember seeing one, suggesting the black cab policy means that the vehicles are obvious to people.

In terms of ranks, there were some 324 mentions covering 30 names. However, nine of these names related to the Mercer's Row rank, with seven actual ranks covered. There were several other locations mentioned which it was not possible easily to link to a rank.

12% mentioned the 'bus station' but it was not clear if this was the old location or the new – though 1% did mention the new bus station specifically, which has no rank provision (and may relate to private hire pick-ups from our observations). It is also possible that those saying bus station actually meant getting a vehicle from the private hire office which is the nearest licensed vehicle provision to the new bus station. There is a lay-by near to the bus station which some private hire vehicles do pick up from, although we understand this may cease with potential road revisions in the area in the future. It does, however, raise the issue of the need for both hackney carriage and private hire pick-up provisions for this important transport interchange location.

The most common mentioned location, with 40%, all direct mentions, was the railway station rank. A total of 34% of mentions were for Mercer's Row, although only 13% actually named it as Mercer's Row. 12% said the 'bus station', 3% George Row, 2% Weston Favell, 2% Bridge Street and 1% The Drapery. 1% correctly named Lady's Lane, the old Bus Station rank. This suggests good awareness of ranks, albeit not by any specific name.

When people were asked about new locations for ranks, there were only 26 mentions, covering some 14 locations. Top mention was shared between Weston Favell (where there are two ranks) and Kingsthorpe, with the Old Bus station and Northampton hospital sharing the next two spots with 12% each. However, none of these were significant numbers.

When people were asked if they had issues with the hackney carriage service, there were some 81 responses. The biggest proportion said the issue was delays getting a hackney carriage (46%), followed by rank location (19%).

People were asked if they could get a hackney carriage when they needed one. Of the responses 38% were yes, daytime, 26% yes, night time, 31% yes if phoned for. Just 2% said only from the town centre with 4% saying they could never get one when needed. This is overall a positive view and counter to the previous response, although that was at a much lesser level of response.

As is usual, more people responded the matters that might increase their use of hackney carriages. Again, as usual, the top score was for if they were cheaper (41%), followed by better vehicles (21%), and better drivers (15%). The responses about more vehicles to hail or phone for were all lower (14% and 5% respectively).

Around the normal level, 91%, said they did not need nor were aware of anyone who needed an adapted vehicle. For those saying they did, nearly all preferred or said they needed a WAV. This reinforces the current policy in the area of having a fully WAV hackney carriage fleet. People were also asked if they felt people in Northampton with disabilities got a good service from hackney carriage vehicles and drivers. 67% of those responding said they felt they did. 13% said no, and 20% said they did not know.

People were asked if they had ever given up waiting for a hackney carriage anywhere in the Northampton area. Of those responding they had, most told us the location. This was evenly split between giving up waiting at the station and at Mercer's Row. If it is assumed those not answering had no issue, the latent demand factor is 9%, reasonable overall.

63% had regular access to a car and 91% lived in the area.

When comparing the gender and age profile to the current census proportions, the sample contained a higher proportion of females. The over-55's saw the same proportion sampled as the census expects whilst the under 30's were over-represented by 8% with the equivalent under-representation by the middle age group. This should not over bias the results.

5 Key stakeholder consultation

The following key stakeholders were contacted in line with the recommendations of the BPG:

- Supermarkets
- Hotels
- Pubwatch / individual pubs / night clubs
- Other entertainment venues
- Restaurants
- Hospitals
- Police
- Disability representatives
- Rail operators
- Other council contacts within all relevant local councils

Comments received have been aggregated below to provide an overall appreciation of the situation at the time of this survey. In some cases there are very specific comments from one stakeholder but we have tried to maintain their confidentiality as far as is possible. The comments provided in the remainder of this Chapter are the views of those consulted, and not that of the authors of this report.

Our information was obtained by telephone, email, letter or face to face meeting as appropriate. The list contacted includes those suggested by the Council, those drawn from previous similar surveys, and from general internet trawls for information. Our target stakeholders are as far as possible drawn from across the entire licensing area to ensure the review covers the full area and not just specific parts or areas.

For the sake of clarity, we cover key stakeholders from the public side separately to those from the licensed vehicle trade element, whose views are summarized separately in the following Chapter.

Where the statistical analyses in Chapter 2 demonstrate low levels of wheelchair accessible vehicle (WAV) provision, an increased emphasis will be given to the issue in terms of the focus of stakeholders but also in specific efforts to contact disabled users and their representatives.

Supermarkets

Four supermarkets were contacted including the Weston Favell Shopping Centre. During the time available, one responded to say their customers used licensed vehicles, mainly using the free phone they provided. There were no ranks they were aware of nor any issues ever reported to them.

Hotels

Four hotels were contacted. Two told us their customers did use licensed vehicles. One said staff would phone from reception if people asked for a taxi. Neither were aware of any ranks, and the only issue was one said vehicles sometimes took longer to arrive than they had advised.

Public houses

Six public houses were contacted. One appeared to have closed down. Three replied to tell us their customers did use licensed vehicles. Two said people made contact with the company they preferred themselves. The other would phone for people if they asked. None had received any complaints. Just one was aware of a rank, but named two private hire company offices that they were aware people used.

Night clubs

Five night clubs were contacted. One responded and told us their customers did use licensed vehicles, from the rank directly outside. They had not received any complaints about the service received.

Other entertainment venues

Three entertainment venues were contacted. Two replied telling us their customers did use licensed vehicles. One had a free phone it provided whilst the other provided business cards people could use from companies. None were aware of ranks or any issues.

Restaurants

Five restaurants were contacted. Three said their customers did use licensed vehicles, whilst one was not sure if they did or not. One was aware of a rank directly opposite (the Drapery), one said a private hire office was a rank, and the third said that staff would phone if people had not phoned for themselves. Only the rank at the Drapery was known about, and only to the location near by. None had received any complaints.

Hospitals

During the time available we were unable to get through to anyone willing to comment from the hospital site.

Police

The police told us that the current situation appeared to be well balanced, with no excess demand or supply. The hackney carriage and private hires together meant they were never aware of any shortage of transport home. Their major concern was a lack of rank space at night for hackney carriages, and flagging offences by private hire which led to traffic obstructions, mainly in Bridge Street at night.

Another stakeholder told us that demand varies through the month, with the highest demand on pay-day weekend. On other weekends there are always more than enough vehicles between private hire and hackney carriage. They agreed with the police issue about problems in Bridge Street. Some way of adding organization to this location would be preferable to the current apparent free for all that occurs.

Disability

No response was received during the time available for consultation.

Rail and other transport operators

No response was received during the time available for consultation.

Other Council contacts

Concern was raised that there was relatively little discussion between the County highways and the trade / licensing in regard to temporary or proposed changes to road that might affect the ability of vehicles to pick up passengers. A recent development had been introduced with no discussion about where the hackney carriages or private hire might pick up.

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6 Trade stakeholder views

The BPG encourages all studies to include 'all those involved in the trade'. There are a number of different ways felt to be valid in meeting this requirement, partly dependent on what the licensing authority feel is reasonable and possible given the specifics of those involved in the trade in their area.

The most direct and least costly route is to obtain comment from trade representatives. This can be undertaken by email, phone call or face to face meeting by the consultant undertaking the study. In some cases to ensure validity of the work being undertaken it may be best for the consultation to occur after the main work has been undertaken. This avoids anyone being able to claim that the survey work was influenced by any change in behavior.

Most current studies tend to issue a letter and questionnaire to all hackney carriage and private hire owners, drivers and operators. This is best issued by the council on behalf of the independent consultant. Usual return is now using an on-line form of the questionnaire, with the option of postal return still being provided, albeit in some cases without use of a freepost return. Returns can be encouraged by email or direct contact via representatives. Some authorities cover private hire by issuing the letter and questionnaire to operators seeking they pass them on when drivers book on or off, or via vehicle data head communications.

In all cases, we believe it is essential we document the method used clearly and measure response levels. For this survey, the council issued a total of 1,124 letters to all involved in the trade. A total of 52 responses were received, all using the electronic portal. This is a return rate of 5%, good for this type of survey, and particularly in an area without any limit on hackney carriage vehicle numbers.

Of the responses, 35% said they drove a hackney carriage with the remainder being private hire drivers. Given the survey is focusing on the potential for applying a limit to hackney carriage vehicle numbers, this proportion is surprising although given the proportions, it still represents a higher response from hackney carriage in proportionate terms.

For the whole sample, the average length of time in the trade in Northampton was 13 years, fairly significant, with responses from a minimum of a year up to some 43 years, very experienced.

Most told us how many days they worked. 42% said five days, and 33% said six. 11% said seven days, quite a high level, whilst 7% said just two days, 4% said three and just 2% said four. This provided an average working week in hours of 39, relatively low – though the range of hours quoted was up to 90, with some responding who were not active drivers as well.

Less responded to factors that affected their choice of shift. Of the 37 responses, the largest share went to family commitments, 27%, then working when demand was busiest (24%), and 'preference' (22%). 8% avoided times when they might come across drunken, violent or abusive customers with a further 8% avoiding times of congestion. Some confirmed they were part time or had other jobs, although this amounted to just one respondent each.

A very high 88% owned their own vehicle. A correspondingly low 6% said someone else also drove their vehicle. This is typical where people can get vehicles if they want them – most find it best to have their own vehicle so they can work when they prefer (matched with the high volume saying they chose when they preferred to work).

29% said they worked on a radio circuit. All but one of these were private hire vehicles, with 53% of the mentions of companies being one firm, and 20% another. Three other private hire companies were each mentioned once. The only hackney carriage said they worked for Station Taxis. 20 of the private hire respondents said they did not work for a company, suggesting a good response from those who were one-man bands. Several made clear comment that they were specific operators working very specific markets but still took time to respond.

There were some responses from private hire to the question seeking to understand the ranks which drivers made use of (and which private hire should really ignore) – three responded 'all' and three said 'town centre' but hopefully these were misunderstandings of the question. For the hackney carriages, there were a total of 26 responses. Of these, 42% said the town centre, with a further 12% saying Mercer's Row specifically, 38% said the station, and one respondent each (4%) said Bridge Street or Weston Favell. 24% said both the station and town centre. 15% said only the station. This effectively confirmed that most of the trade responding felt there were only two active ranks, though this was not the total picture (given that there were two mentions of other locations as noted above).

When asked about ranks, 57% of those responding said there were too few ranks and spaces available. Some were critical of rank locations, but generally other comments were specific to individuals.

Most told us the main method they obtained fares. Of those responding, 42% said phone (all private hire) and 32% rank (all but two of the hackney carriages). Just one person said hailing (a hackney carriage), whilst 12 % each said either school or private contracts. One of these was a hackney carriage, with the remainder private hire.

Over the full sample, most gave their view as to if the current policy of having no limit on hackney carriage vehicle numbers remained appropriate. Not surprisingly, 72% of hackney carriages felt a limit should be returned, mainly to allow them to earn a better living with less vehicles, or at least with no more introduced. There were however some strong views put forward by the remaining hackney carriages that they felt the status quo was best – one suggesting any limit would only benefit multiple owners.

On the private hire side, interestingly there was almost an exact split between those in favour of the current situation (51%) and those feeling a limit would be beneficial. Some of these, however, also wanted some form of limit either on drivers or on private hire as well, with many saying there was not enough work at present.

For the whole sample, the top reason given that a limit should be put in place was that it would allow a focus on better levels of service rather than trying to make ends meet. 19% said it would reduce pollution or congestion with a further 19% saying it would encourage clean, safe and well-maintained vehicles. A further 8% each said it would ensure there were always vehicles at ranks, or reduce over-tired driver levels, or would stop fares having to rise.

A lot of comments were made. Many focused on the felt difficulty of making a living at present. Some said that a limit would allow them to invest in newer vehicles through the added security the plate value would bring. Many felt they had seen a decline in driver standards as numbers had increased. Some of those opposing any limit put their views across – with some suggesting quality control methods rather than quantity might be more appropriate (principally more frequent testing or age limits).

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7 Evaluation of unmet demand and its significance

It is first important to define our specific view about what constitutes unmet demand. Our definition is when a person turns up at a hackney carriage rank and finds there is no vehicle there available for immediate hire. This normally leads to a queue of people building up, some of who may walk off (taken to be latent demand), whilst others will wait till a vehicle collects them. Later passengers may well arrive when there are vehicles there, but because of the queue will not obtain a vehicle immediately.

There are other instances where queues of passengers can be observed at hackney carriage ranks. This can occur when the level of demand is such that it takes longer for vehicles to move up to waiting passengers than passengers can board and move away. This often occurs at railway stations, but can also occur at other ranks where high levels of passenger arrivals occur. We do not consider this is unmet demand, but geometric delay and although we note this, it is not counted towards unmet demand being significant.

The industry standard index of the significance of unmet demand (ISUD) was initiated at the time of the introduction of section 16 of the 1985 Transport Act as a numeric and consistent way of evaluating unmet demand and its significance. The ISUD methodology was initially developed by a university and then adopted by one of the leading consultant groups undertaking the surveys made necessary to enable authorities to retain their limit on hackney carriage vehicle numbers. The index has been developed and deepened over time to take into account various court challenges. It has now become accepted as the industry standard test of if identified unmet demand is significant.

The index is a statistical guide derived to evaluate if observed unmet demand is in fact significant. However, its basis is that early tests using first principles identified based on a moderate sample suggested that the level of index of 80 was the cut-off above which the index was in fact significant, and that unmet demand therefore was such that action was needed in terms of additional issue of plates to reduce the demand below this level, or a complete change of policy if it was felt appropriate. This level has been accepted as part of the industry standard. However, the index is not a strict determinant and care is needed in providing the input samples as well as interpreting the result provided. However, the index has various components which can also be used to understand what is happening in the rank-based and overall licensed vehicle market.

ISUD draws from several different parts of the study data. Each separate component of the index is designed to capture a part of the operation of the demand for hackney carriages and reflect this numerically. Whilst the principal inputs are from the rank surveys, the measure of latent demand comes from the public on-street surveys, and any final decision about if identified unmet demand is significant, or in fact about the value of continuing the current policy of restricting vehicle numbers, must be taken fully in the context of a careful balance of all the evidence gathered during the survey process.

The present ISUD calculation has two components which both could be zero. In the case that either are zero, the overall index result is zero, which means they clearly demonstrate there is no unmet demand which is significant, even if other values are high.

The first component which can be zero is the proportion of daytime hours where people are observed to have to wait for a hackney carriage to arrive. The level of wait used is ANY average wait at all within any hour. The industry definition of these hours varies, the main index user counts from 10:00 to 18:00 (i.e. eight hours ending at 17:59). The present index is clear that unmet demand cannot be significant if there are no such hours. The only rider on this component is that the sample of hours collected must include a fair element of such hours, and that if the value is non-zero, review of the potential effect of a wider sample needs to be considered.

The other component which could be zero is the test identifying the proportion of passengers which are travelling in any hour when the average passenger wait in that hour is greater than one minute.

If both of these components are non-zero, then the remaining components of the index come into play. These are the peakiness factor, the seasonality factor, average passenger delay, and the latent demand factor.

Average passenger delay is the total amount of time waited by all passengers in the sample, divided by the total number of passengers observed who entered hackney carriages.

The seasonality factor allows for the undertaking of rank survey work in periods which are not typical, although guidance is that such periods should normally be avoided if possible particularly as the impact of seasons may not just be on the level of passenger demand, but may also impact on the level of supply. This is particularly true in regard to if surveys are undertaken when schools are active or not.

Periods when schools are not active can lead to more hackney carriage vehicles being available whilst they are not required for school contract work. Such periods can also reduce hackney carriage demand with people away on holiday from the area. Generally, use of hackney carriages is higher in December in the run-up to Christmas, but much lower in January, February and the parts of July and August when more people are likely to be on holiday. The factor tends to range from 0.8 for December to 1.2 for January / February.

There can be special cases where summer demand needs to be covered, although high peaks for tourist traffic use of hackney carriages tend not to be so dominant at the current time, apart from in a few key tourist authorities.

The peakiness factor is generally either 1 (level demand generally) or 0.5 (demand has a high peak at one point during the week). This is used to allow for the difficulty of any transport system being able to meet high levels of peaking. It is rarely possible or practicable for example for any public transport system, or any road capacity, to be provided to cover a few hours a week.

The latent demand factor was added following a court case. It comes from asking people in the on-street questionnaires if they have ever given up waiting for a hackney carriage at a rank in any part of the area. This factor generally only affects the level of the index as it only ranges from 1.0 (no-one has given up) to 2.0 (everyone says they have). It is also important to check that people are quoting legitimate hackney carriage rank waits as some, despite careful questioning, quote giving up waiting at home, which must be for a private hire vehicle (even if in hackney carriage guise as there are few private homes with taxi ranks outside).

The ISUD index is the result of multiplying each of the components together and benchmarking this against the cut-off value of 80. Changes in the individual components of the index can also be illustrative. For example, the growth of daytime hour queueing can be an earlier sign of unmet demand developing than might be apparent from the proportion of people experiencing a queue particularly as the former element is based on any wait and not just that averaging over a minute. The change to a peaky demand profile can tend towards reducing the potential for unmet demand to be significant.

Finally, any ISUD value must be interpreted in the light of the sample used to feed it, as well as completely in the context of all other information gathered. Generally, the guide of the index will tend not to be overturned in regard to significant unmet demand being identified, but this cannot be assumed to be the case – the index is a guide and a part of the evidence.

For this study, we estimated ISUD values for the council ranks, including the private Weston Favell rank where we understand there is no restriction on those servicing the area, for the station rank, and for all ranks. In terms of determination of unmet demand and its significance, only the council only set can be used for the purpose of determining if more vehicle licences are needed in an area with a limit. In theory, in Northampton where there is no limit, there should be no unmet demand which is significant as the market should have provided for any demand needs.

Component	All council	Station	All ranks
Average passenger delay	0.133	0.566	0.217
% hours with delay off peak	17.4	25	19.35
% passengers travelling in hours with over 1 minute average delay	3.8	15	6.1
Seasonality factor	1	1	1
Peakiness factor	0.5	0.5	0.5
Latent demand factor	1.045	1.045	1.09
Overall index	4.6	111	14.0

The table shows that, for the Council ranks, average passenger delay was low at just 0.13 minutes (or eight seconds). Just over 17% of observed off peak hours had queues of any size, with just under 4% of passengers observed travelling in hours with average queue times over a minute. All observations were in typical periods (November), so the seasonality factor was 1.0. Our review of demand suggests the area has peaky demand, giving that factor as 0.5. Total latent demand estimated was 9%, but this was shared equally between people giving up at the station and at the council ranks.

The estimated index of significance of unmet demand for the council ranks is 4.6, a long way below the level of 80 counted to confirm the observed unmet demand to be significant. Over all ranks, including the station, the value rises to just under 14. However, taking the station on its own, the index is nearly 111, showing the restriction on vehicle numbers at the station is in fact leading to periods of unmet demand which are significant. However, the main contributor to this was people waiting in the midnight and 01:00 hours which may have been due to less vehicles from the restricted numbers servicing this location at that time.

The overall pointer from the index is that, though there is unmet demand, it is far from significant across the council provided and controlled ranks.

8 Summary, synthesis and study conclusions

This Unmet demand survey on behalf of Northampton Borough Council has been undertaken following the guidance of the BPG and other recent case history regarding unmet demand and its significance. This chapter draws together the evidence from each chapter, provides a synthesis comparing the different elements, and provides conclusions from the study.

Policy Background

Northampton is a district of the County of Northamptonshire, with transport and highway policy set by the higher tier authority. This is summarized in the Northamptonshire Transportation Plan, the Northamptonshire Arc and the Northampton Town Transport Strategy. Key items affecting hackney carriages relate to seeking to reduce the impact of the ring road on connectivity, and considerations about reducing emission levels. There are no specific policies relating to hackney carriage or private hire within the higher tier policy documents.

Statistical Background

Since 1997, hackney carriages have grown by 122% during which time private hire numbers have grown a little more, by 152%. As neither are restricted, this should be the pure influence of market forces. Recent figures have seen a small decline in hackney carriage vehicle numbers but a larger growth in private hire numbers. This is mirrored in growth of private hire vehicle driver numbers. On the contrary, operator numbers have reduced.

Despite a fully WAV hackney carriage fleet, there are some WAV in the private hire sector, although this level had reduced in the recent information after a peak in 2015.

Rank Information

Our overall observations found that 68% of the vehicle observations at or near ranks were hackney carriages. 22% were private cars, although many of these were setting down or picking up near the rank at the station. Interestingly, there were also high levels of private car activity near the Bridge rank as well as near the Drapery, although in theory this section of road is only accessible to buses and taxis. Bridge Street also saw many private hire at or near this rank, as did Marefair which relates to the private hire office close to the rank. Mercer's Row was the best location in terms of lack of abuse.

In terms of usage from the surveys, Mercer's Row is clearly the dominant rank in passenger usage terms. However, the area sees peaks on Friday and Saturday nights, with other demand much lower.

When translated to average weekly usage, the Station private rank provides around 42% of the overall usage in passenger terms, related to the more steady and longer operating hours for this site. Mercer's Row provides 34%. After this, the Drapery informal site provides around 11% of demand, then the private rank at Weston Favell shopping centre. Bridge Street sees 3% of passengers, followed finally by the Sheep Street informal location. Marefair and Lady's Lane (Roadmender) see marginal usage. George Row is not used at all by hackney carriages.

There are times when there is unmet demand both at the main rank, at the station, and at various other ranks – including at some of the informal locations. Further discussion of this occurs below.

Our sample of plate activity on the busiest survey day found 63% of the fleet active. 7% were only seen at the station, with in total 30% of the fleet observed at the station location overall. General activity levels for the fleet rose from the afternoon to the early hours, with 41% of the fleet observed active in the early hours observations.

On-Street public attitudes

75% of those interviewed in the streets of the total of 189 respondents said they had used a licensed vehicle in the area in the last three months, fairly high. Typical usage per month is 3 trips per person for licensed vehicles but 0.7 trips for hackney carriages. 45% claimed their main way to get licensed vehicles was from a rank. 35% phoned and 18% used smartphones.

In terms of phoned for journeys, there appeared to be a high level of competition and no real dominant company in the area. Whilst 42% could not remember when they last used a hackney carriage, only 5% could not remember seeing one, suggesting the vehicles are visible, but not used.

After the station, which obtained 40% of mentions, people mainly knew the Mercer's Row rank, but called it a lot of different names. People called the 'bus station' a rank, but we consider this refers to the nearby private hire office which is long established in that area. Other ranks were known, albeit rarely by specific names. There were no significant requests for new ranks.

Whilst the number of issues reported was low, the proportions were highest for delays getting a hackney carriage (46%) followed by location of ranks (19%). However, 38% said they could always get hackney carriages when they needed them in the daytime and 26% at night.

As is usually the case, the main item that would increase hackney carriage usage was if they were cheaper, followed by better vehicles and drivers.

Around the typical level of people said they did not need nor were aware of anyone who needed wheel chair accessible vehicles. Of those saying they, or someone else needed a WAV, most preferred fully WAV style rather than any other adaptations. 67% of people felt people in Northampton got a good service if they had a disability.

The level of people giving up waiting for hackney carriages, the proxy for latent demand, was evenly split between people giving up at the station and at Mercer's Row, with the overall value being 9%

Key stakeholder viewpoints

The general view from the general key stakeholders across various groups (supermarkets, restaurants, pubs and clubs) was main use being private hire phone-calls, with some use of ranks if nearby. The concern rising from these discussions was that many thought that private hire booking offices were ranks. The police and street pastors both felt the current mix of vehicles was about right and sufficient. Both were concerned about a lack of night rank space and the need for resolving the way people obtained vehicles in the Bridge Street – Drapery axis.

There was also concern that links between highways, transport policy and licensed vehicles needed to be significantly improved.

There were 12 people seen accessing hackney carriages at ranks in wheel chairs, and a further nine seen accessing hackney carriages with disabilities we could observe. Most people were observed at Mercer's Row, with one wheel chair passenger at the station rank.

Trade viewpoints

The council sent a letter to all involved in the trade in Northampton. A 5% return was achieved, with 35% saying they drove hackney carriages. A fairly significant level of experience was identified, with an average of 13 years involved in the trade. Most worked five days and the average 39 hours per week was low compared to other locations.

88% owned their own vehicles, very high. All but one of those on radio circuits were private hire drivers, with 53% belonging to one company and 20% to another. Some private hire appeared confused about ranks and said they used them – but this was presumably use of booking offices.

Trade responses regarding ranks focused on the station and Mercer's Row. They suggested there were not enough spaces.

In terms of the limit on vehicle numbers, 72% of hackney carriages said there should be a limit, whilst the remainder said the current situation should remain. Private hire drivers were split 50/50 for and against a limit.

Guidance from the index of significance of unmet demand

The index of significance of unmet demand points towards the unmet demand identified not being significant across either council ranks or all ranks taken together. However, the station unmet demand was found to be significant.

The largest contributor to the index was off peak hours when people had to wait for a vehicle to arrive. However, at the station, the general average waiting time was also an important contributor.

Synthesis

The overall demand and position of both hackney carriages and private hire in Northampton seems to be healthy and balanced. There is clearly no shortage of vehicles, apart from at peaks and at the station (where the issues are outside the direct control of the council).

However, there are two principal issues which are partly related. The main activity axis for night passengers is along Bridge Street – The Drapery, but the main departure point for hackney carriages is a little off this axis at the far end of the main rank. Most vehicles heading to the main rank have to pass through or near the weight of passengers, and there will therefore be a strong temptation for hailing or for picking up before getting to the main rank. This is complicated by private hire mainly having to collect their passengers near to Bridge Street rank, and further complicated by at least one long established private hire office being in a location with high footfall but no rank. These issues are further complicated by the present system of differentiating hackney carriage and private hire.

Conclusions

There are more than enough licensed vehicles presently servicing demand across the Borough. Whilst we did not receive any representations about over-supply of vehicles, or issues from over-ranking at all we are aware this has been a problem in the past at both the main rank, and at the station, and could become such again were demand to reduce at all.

All the evidence allows the councillors the following options:

- Continue the status quo
- Reapply a limit on the number of hackney carriages

The related issues of night ranks, how people link up with private hire vehicles and vehicle identification need to be addressed, which also involves resolving the current tie-in with highway and overall transport policy to be improved.

In the present situation, our experience suggests that maintenance of the status quo is unlikely to lead to any encouragement or support for any other revisions to operating practices or policies. The present level of spare capacity in the hackney carriage fleet suggests any more new vehicles would further dilute the present demand and would encourage the continued focus on getting patronage from the busiest locations.

Were the option of applying a limit put in place, it would provide potential for the hackney carriage trade to support changes to rank provision and would increase willingness to work with new ranks to see them properly established and used. It may also help to see agreement on potential vehicle standard improvements in the future.

In the case of there being a limit in place, a procedure would be needed to resolve how returned plates were reallocated. A good system is already operated by Manchester City Council. This sees a selection criteria and ballot process applied. No waiting list is maintained to avoid difficulties experienced by other authorities that operate them.

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9 Recommendations

On the basis of the evidence gathered in this Unmet demand survey for Northampton Borough Council, our key conclusion is that there is no evidence of any unmet demand for the services of hackney carriages either patent or latent which is significant at this point in time in the Northampton Borough Council licensing area. The committee is able to choose between maintaining the status quo, or to consider introducing a limit on the number of hackney carriage vehicle plates. On the balance of our experience, and the evidence found, we would recommend a limit be introduced. This would need to be reviewed with fresh rank surveys no more than three years from those undertaken for this study to meet the guidance of the BPG.

Further, the benefits of the limit to the trade should be built upon by action being taken to resolve the current night time mismatch between rank provision, enforcement and passenger demand locations, including a much improved relationship with highway and transport policy at the County level which would also need to include night enforcement of current traffic regulations along the main axis.

Appendix 1 – Detailed statistics of fleet



Limit was removed on 29th April 1997
fully WAV fleet from 1983

	hcv	phv	lv total	hcd	phd	dd	total d		% phv WAV	% hcv WAV	operators
1994D	60		60	120				1994D		100	
1997D	66	300	366	104	586		690	1997D		100	
1999D	79	293	372	137	915		1052	1999D		100	26
2001D	90	330	420	156	540		696	2001D		100	28
2004D	97	350	447	84	576	42	702	2004D		100	36
2005D	97	366	463	84	576	42	702	2005D		100	36
2007D	106	470	576	83	655	65	803	2007D		100	44
2009D	106	470	576	83	655	65	803	2009D		100	44
2010N	123	549	672	<u>71</u>	<u>657</u>	<u>79</u>	<u>807</u>	2010N	1	100	<u>50</u>
2011D	136	549	685	59	659	92	810	2011D	1	100	55
2012N	136	580	716	<u>54</u>	<u>709</u>	<u>99</u>	861	2012C	1	100	<u>54</u>
2013D	136	566	702	48	758	105	911	2013D	1	100	53
2014N	138	591	729	<u>45</u>	<u>703</u>	<u>113</u>	861	2014N	1	100	<u>52</u>
2015D	148	648	796	41	648	121	810	2015D	3	100	51
2016C	147	757	904	35	878	134	1047	2016C	2	100	51





Appendices 2, List of Ranks

3, Rank sample details

4, Rank observation details

All provided as separate appendices



Appendix 5 – Detail of On Street interviews

See separate file





Appendix 6 – Key stakeholder contacts and response

Chapter	Stakeholder Group / Person	Views returned?
5	Supermarkets	
	Morrisons	N
	Asda	Y
	Waitrose	N
	Weston Favell Shopping Centre	N
5	Hotels	
	Ibis, Marefair	Y
	Park Inn	Y
	Langham Hotel	N
	Hopping Hare	N
5	Hospitals	
	Northampton General Hospital	N



5	Restaurants / Café	
	McDonalds, The Drapery	Y
	Les Olives	N
	The Church Restaurant	Y
	Buddies	Y
	Sorrentino's	Y
5	Public houses	
	The Bear	Closed
	The Mail Coach	Y
	Old Black Lion	Y
	The Wig and Pen	N
	The Lamplighter	Y
	Brampton Halt	N



5	Night venues	
	Roadmender	Y
	Fever	N
	Bar So	N
	Baroque	N
	Au-Ra	N
5	Disability representatives	
	None identified	
5	County Education and Social Services / Public Transport / Rail Operators	
	None responded	
5	Police	
	Northamptonshire Police	Y
	Street Angels	Y



5	Entertainment venues	
	Royal and Derngate Theater	N
	Grosvenor Casino	Y
	Whilton Mill	Y
6	Hackney carriage / private hire trade	
	Questionnaire	Y

