

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee
Wednesday 25 September 2024
14th Meeting, 2024 (Session 6)

PE1856: Support the taxi trade

Introduction

Petitioner Pat Rafferty on behalf of Unite

Petition summary Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to protect the future of the taxi trade by:

- providing financial support to taxi drivers;
- setting up a national stakeholder group with trade union driver representatives;
- reviewing low emission standards and implementation dates

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1856>

1. [The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on 20 September 2024](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to Transport Scotland, the petitioner and Glasgow City Council.
2. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee has received new written submissions from Transport Scotland and Glasgow City Council which are set out in **Annexe C**.
4. [Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the petition's webpage](#).
5. [Further background information about this petition can be found in the SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.
6. [The Scottish Government gave its initial response to the petition on 30 March 2021](#).
7. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 5,044 signatures have been received on this petition.

Action

8. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

Clerks to the Committee
September 2024

Annexe A: Summary of petition

PE1856: Support the taxi trade

Petitioner

Pat Rafferty on behalf of Unite

Date Lodged

24 March 2021

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to protect the future of the taxi trade by:

- providing financial support to taxi drivers;
- setting up a national stakeholder group with trade union driver representatives;
- reviewing low emission standards and implementation dates

Previous action

We have been in contact with MSPs to press for support and raised these issues in discussions with Scottish Ministers and Government officials. Questions have also been asked in the chamber.

Background information

An online survey of taxi drivers has revealed the devastating impact on the trade with many harrowing stories from drivers who are struggling to financially survive. Many drivers are regularly working 16-17-hour days with a shift being determined as having been 'good' if £50 is cleared.

Unite Scotland has highlighted 'loopholes' in a number of Scottish Government schemes which have led to drivers being unable to access financial support.

The Unite Scotland survey shows that 30% of drivers have been unable to access any financial help from government support schemes. For those that have been able to access financial help from government:

37% report that it represents less than 25% of their average earnings;
18% report that it represents between 25% - 50% of their average earnings;
20% report that it represents between 50% - 75% of their average earnings;
25% report that it represents over 75% of average earnings.

The COVID19 crisis continues to have a devastating effect on the cab and taxi trade. Our members are reporting a 90% reduction in income. This is unsustainable and means that many owners and drivers are unable to cover their costs, let alone make a living to support themselves and their families.

We feel our members are the forgotten spoke in our public transport wheel, too many of our members are excluded from the government help available. This is leading to savings being exhausted, families forced in to poverty, bankruptcy and a mental health emergency. In our opinion, promises have been made to the trade that have been broken. The Scottish Government must act now. We are asking parliamentarians to support taxi drivers across Scotland and to deliver financial support to save the trade.

Our members demand:

- Access to business support, grants and loans;
- Additional funding for operators and drivers;
- A national stakeholder group to be set up to safeguard the future of the trade with trade union driver representatives involved as a key stakeholder;
- A review of Low Emission standards and implementation dates to give the trade additional time to adjust to Environmental targets.

Unite Scotland is asking the Scottish Government to adopt targeted schemes similar to those in Northern Ireland and Wales to support the taxi trade.

Annexe B: Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE1856 on 20 September 2023

The Convener: Our first continued petition is PE1856, which was lodged by Pat Rafferty on behalf of Unite. It calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to protect the future of the taxi trade by providing financial support for taxi drivers, setting up a national stakeholder group with trade union driver representatives and reviewing low-emission standards and their implementation dates.

It was some time ago but, since our last consideration of the petition, we have received a written submission from Transport Scotland in response to our question about synchronising the roll-out of low-emission zones across Scotland, which taxi drivers were particularly concerned about. The submission states that local authorities are responsible for deciding the timing for introduction and enforcement. It states that LEZ enforcement began in Glasgow city centre on 1 June, which I think is well known by the public now, and that the council had introduced a grace period of one year for all and two years for residents within the zone. The council also developed a mechanism for taxi operators to apply for a temporary exemption beyond the June 2023 enforcement date.

In consequence, Transport Scotland is not minded to mandate a transition to electric vehicles at one point in time as an alternative to offering support with retrofitting. Its view is that it is for operators to decide how to meet the LEZ standards.

According to the submission, 250 taxis have now been retrofitted as a result of Government funding. It states that there are no plans to adapt LEZs beyond their current size or scope or to introduce new LEZs in other parts of Scotland.

Do members have any suggestions on how we might proceed?

Foyso Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): Could we write to Transport Scotland about having a department that recognises taxis as a form of public transport? We are not considering them as public transport and we are not giving taxi drivers the chance to speak.

The Convener: We have put the petitioner in touch with Transport Scotland, but it would be useful to follow up. We want to support the petitioner in that objective, because it seems that taxis were the one form of public transport that was excluded from the formal process. We could write to ask how those conversations have gone—or whether they have gone at all yet—and what the outcome was.

We might also write to the petitioner. Now that the LEZ has been running since June, we could write to ask what the impact of it on Glasgow taxi drivers has proved to be in practice. That would be useful to know. Do members have any other suggestions?

Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con): It is important to hear from Glasgow City Council, because Transport Scotland has referenced it significantly with regard to how many applications have been received from taxi operators for a temporary

exemption, how many exemptions have been granted, what criteria there are for receiving a temporary exemption to the LEZ and how long such exemptions will last.

The Convener: I am happy to include that, as well.

Foysol Choudhury: It depends how long it takes the taxi drivers to get in touch with the council. They have to go back to get MOTs and other things done, and it could end up taking two or three months, so, if the exemption is only for a year, they have already lost three months.

The Convener: That is a fair point. Are we content with following up, keeping the petition open and taking it forward with those further lines of inquiry?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Annexe C: Written submissions

Transport Scotland submission of 24 October 2023

PE1856/U: Support the taxi trade

Transport Scotland officials have confirmed that a meeting on 11 September 2023 took place with Unite the Union (Willie Thomson), Energy Saving Trust (EST) and Transport Scotland representatives. This meeting was initiated and facilitated by Glasgow City Council.

Concerns were raised by the Unions about the supply chain for retrofitting, citing members who had been on waiting list with their chosen supplier for a long time.

The Union representatives asked Glasgow City Council for a guarantee that LEZ exemptions for taxis would be extended beyond the current 12-month LEZ extension, which applies until 1 June 2024. Glasgow City Council advised that they have been open with the taxi trade in Glasgow about the potential for issues with the supply chain for over a year, and that warning was given.

Advice was given to the Union by EST and Transport Scotland in relation to applications for taxi grants, that over 300 taxis had already been retrofitted through the LEZ Retrofit fund, and taxi operators were encouraged to apply.

No engagement has taken place with the petitioner, Pat Rafferty, since the previous consideration of this petition on 21 December 2022.

Glasgow City Council written submission, 20 August 2024

PE1856/V: Support the taxi trade

The Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee considered a petition [PE1856: Support the taxi trade](#) at its meeting on 20 September 2023 and agreed to write to Glasgow City Council.

Committee requested information from GCC in relation to the process by which exemptions to the Glasgow Low Emission Zone are applied to the taxi trade and numbers of applications.

The Committee has requested the following information:

- how many applications it has received from taxi operators for a temporary exemption to the LEZ;
- of those applications, how many exemptions have been granted;
- what the criteria are for receiving a temporary exemption to the LEZ;
- how long the application process is, as concerns were raised that a lengthy process could result in drivers being unable to work while awaiting an outcome; and
- how long such exemptions will last.

GCC Response

One-year Exemptions

As detailed in Section 2.5 of the [LEZ Scheme Design](#), GCC committed to “develop a discretionary mechanism to ensure that (taxi) operators who can evidence a retrofit funding application or registration of interest (or alternative appropriate evidence of arrangements in place to achieve LEZ compliance) within the timescales of the funding round for 2022/2023, will not face penalty charges for a time limited period to allow the necessary upgrades to be undertaken.”

All Glasgow taxi operators were advised by letter in August 2022 of the exemption scheme and criteria for acceptance. This letter also advised on the availability of funding, the detail of the retrofit scheme and encouraged early uptake to guarantee exemption in the event of an issue arising relating to grant funding availability and/or retrofitting capacity which means that this work cannot be carried out prior to LEZ enforcement beginning.

The criteria for exemption was agreed at a meeting of the City Administration Committee on [8th October 2022](#) and a further letter was sent to all taxi operators in December 2022 advising of the specific criteria required for an exemption.

Exemptions would be considered for taxi operators who could evidence the following:

- The registered taxi does not have an accredited retrofit option available from the [CVRAS scheme](#).
- The taxi operator does not meet the [eligibility requirements](#) for the LEZ Support Fund.
- An application to the LEZ Support Fund has been rejected.
- A grant award has been received but retrofit has not yet been completed.
- A grant award has been received but rescinded following vehicle inspection.
- An application or registration of interest to the LEZ Support Fund has been made but not yet awarded.
- The maximum number of taxis have already been retrofitted under the terms of the scheme.

In advance of LEZ enforcement beginning on 1st June 2023, GCC received and granted 776 exemptions for Glasgow registered taxis. Each exemption was for a period of one year and successful operators were advised:

“This exemption expires on 31 May 2024. To continue operating beyond this date, the above vehicle must either meet the LEZ emission standards through an accredited retrofit process or be replaced with a vehicle which meets the LEZ emission standards.”

All taxi operators who applied received the requested exemption. Exemptions were administered typically within 10 working days of application and on most occasions within a considerably shorter timescale. All applications submitted prior to the beginning of LEZ enforcement were processed and the operator informed before 1st

June 2023. Operators who submitted applications on or after the 1st June 2023 were prioritised and typically received their exemptions on the day of application.

Exemption Extensions

Following the granting of extra time to become LEZ compliant via the above extensions, there remained a number of vehicles in the taxi fleet that were non-compliant and in January 2024 all operators in receipt of the time-limited exemption were contacted to make clear the Council's position with regards to these vehicles and the support on offer. Glasgow City Council remained determined to help operators in this transition period and therefore, at the meeting of the Net Zero and Climate Progress City Policy Committee on [27th February 2024](#) agreed the conditions under which any extensions would be considered.

Extensions would be considered for taxi operators who could evidence the following:

- An operator is in receipt of a grant from the Energy Saving Trust for the purposes of retrofitting their vehicle to LEZ emission standards, and this work has not been completed by 31 May 2024.
- An operator is already on the official waiting list for a grant from the Energy Saving Trust for the purposes of retrofitting their vehicle to LEZ emission standards, and funding has not yet been awarded.
- An operator has an active Expression of Interest for a grant from the Energy Saving Trust for the purposes of retrofitting their vehicle to LEZ emission standards. This Expression of Interest must have been registered prior to 31 December 2023. Previous Expressions of Interest which did not translate into funding applications during the last round of retrofit funding will not qualify.
- An operator has purchased an LEZ compliant vehicle with a delivery date later than 31 May 2024.

GCC received and granted 225 extensions for Glasgow registered taxis. The period of each extensions was determined by the reason for the extension. Those who evidenced that they had a valid expression of interest in a grant or were on the waiting list were given an extension until 31st August 2024. Those who had ordered a replacement vehicle were given an extension until 30th September 2024 and those in receipt of a grant award were granted extension until 31st October 2024 to allow the retrofit work to be completed. GCC will continue to show flexibility to those operators making efforts towards compliance should this be required.

All taxi operators who applied with the required evidence received the requested extension. Extensions were administered typically within 10 working days of application and on most occasions within a considerably shorter timescale. All eligible applications submitted prior to the expiry of the original exemption were processed and the operator informed before 1st June 2024. Operators who submitted applications on or after the 1st June 2024 were prioritised and typically received their exemptions on the day of application.