

# Cheshire West & Chester Borough Council

## Consultation on rear loading Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles (WAV) for use as Hackney Carriages within the Vale Royal Hackney Carriage Zone.

**The closing date of the consultation will be 4<sup>th</sup> March 2018**

The Statement of Licensing Policy for Hackney Carriages, Private Hire Vehicles, Drivers and Private Hire Vehicle Operators (“the policy”) only permits the licensing of previously approved ‘side loading’ wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAVs) as Hackney Carriages. Hackney Carriages are available for immediate hire from a rank or by hailing them in the street.

The specification and models of vehicles permitted to be licensed as Hackney Carriages are set by the policy. Currently, only side loading WAVs that are capable of loading and carrying a passenger while they remain in their wheelchair can be licensed as a Hackney Carriage. Often passengers are loaded from the pavement/ kerb. In addition to the side loading requirement; there are a number of other hackney carriage vehicle requirements to assist in the carriage of disabled passengers. These include hearing loops (£210), high visibility grab handles (£50 each) and seat flashes (£350), additional steps at the side and a permanent partition between the driver and rear passenger compartment.

The Council has received a request to consider licensing rear loading wheelchair accessible vehicles as Hackney Carriages. Wheelchair passengers would still be loaded and carried while remaining in their wheelchairs but would be loaded from at the rear of the vehicle from the road.

Three converted manufacturers’ vehicles are being considered: Ford, Peugeot and Volkswagen. More details on the each of the models can be found at:

<https://www.cabdirect.com/car/peugeot-premier/#brochure>

<https://www.cabdirect.com/car/volkswagen-kudos/#brochure>

<https://www.cabdirect.com/car/ford-journey/#brochure>

There are no restrictions on rear or side loading WAVS being licensed as private hire vehicles; however these licensed vehicles must be pre-booked and cannot use a rank or be hailed in the street.

In considering the request, officers have identified both the advantages and disadvantages of licensing rear loading WAVs as hackney carriages:

### Advantages

- Many wheelchair users use rear loading vehicles in their personal lives (e.g. through the Motability scheme) and will be confident and comfortable using them and this may be their preference.
- Easier to load/unload in some locations compared to side loading vehicles (e.g. private driveways and locations where there is no kerb)
- Easier for the driver to load as some models can be fitted with an assistance winch (£500).

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- No need for driver to turn the wheelchair 90 degrees inside the vehicle which can be difficult for many drivers.
- More suitable for some people using larger, heavier electric wheelchairs.
- Provides disabled people with an additional transport option when booking (some wheelchair users find the side loading vehicles difficult to access).
- Cheaper to purchase; prices range from £19,000 to £24,000 whereas the currently approved larger, side loading vehicles range from £30,000 to £46,000.
- Petrol options are available which may be less polluting than diesel variants.
- A number of Local Authorities already licence rear loading vehicles as Hackney Carriages.

## Disadvantages

- Where there are no dropped/lowered kerbs it could be difficult or uncomfortable to move a wheelchair bound passenger from the kerb onto the road.
- Loading in the road may put passengers and drivers at greater risk from other road users.
- There is no additional space on most existing ranks to accommodate rear loading vehicles (up to 3000mm space is needed for rear loading).
- Could require expensive redesign of the majority of ranks as dropped kerbs could be needed and ranks may need to be extended in length with no current budget for this work. Any costs could be recovered through an increase in licence fees for the Hackney Vehicles in that Hackney zone.
- Some ranks could be located in heritage or conservation areas where modifications may not be permitted because of their location.
- As rear loading vehicles are cheaper (ranging from £19,000 to £24,000 ) than side loading vehicles, it could result in the entire fleet becoming rear loading, which would not be ideal in urban/city centre environments
- In most cases these vehicles are smaller and carry fewer passengers than side loading vehicles.
- Possible opposition from drivers who have recently purchased expensive side loading TX4s, Mercedes etc (£30,000-£48,000k).
- Wheelchair users would be positioned in the crumple zone at the rear – greater risk of injury in an accident.
- Confusion to the public with different vehicle style availability in different Hackney zones within the Borough.
- Drivers may not feel as secure as there is no partition between them and the rear passenger compartment.

This is a public consultation, however the council is particularly keen to hear from individuals, or bodies representing, the elderly or those with mobility issues and the hackney carriage vehicle owners in the Vale Royal area.

The consultation will be used to gather evidence/views to see if rear loading wheelchair accessible vehicles are appropriate to be licensed as hackney carriages in the Vale Royal zone. The consultation is open until the 4<sup>th</sup> of March 2018. The results of the consultation will be considered by the Licensing Committee, who set this policy.

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## **Ways to get involved**

There are a range of ways to express your views:

- Complete the online questionnaire
- Email [LEDO@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk](mailto:LEDO@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk)
- Write to us at: Licensing Consultation, The Licensing Team, 4 Civic Way, Ellesmere Port, CH65 0BE
- Telephone:0300 123 7737 (option 3)