

Steve Cox
Principal Safety and Licensing Officer
Torbay Council, Roebuck House
Abbey Road, Torquay
TQ2 5EJ

PC 864 Moorhouse
NET/PACT TEAM
Torquay Police Station
South Street

04/02/2010

08452 777444

RE: Taxi Drivers on the Harbour Side

Dear Steve,

The intention of this letter is to clarify events of the last 9 months on The Strand involving Taxi Drivers and the issues being caused by them.

Over the last 9 months several problems have been caused and despite our joint efforts (and this includes Police, Council and NCP) the problems have continued and got worse. As you are aware a lot of work has gone in over this issue over the past few months (Inc the Night Time Economy Team) along with yourself and colleagues of yours from the council.

The main issues are with Hackney Carriage drivers. These primarily are constantly parking on the Debenhams side of The Strand, on the roundabout around the clocktower and parking on the exit of the roundabout where they are queuing to get on the bus stop on the harbour side of The Strand. The parking on the roundabout has already caused an accident in the latter part of last year involving a single decker bus which I am aware you know about. However there have been several incidents which have not been reported which have been very near misses. One was on Saturday night as I was issuing a ticket to a Taxi Driver who was parked causing an obstruction, when a double decker number 12 came around the roundabout and was confronted with a stationary taxi stopped in the same place. He slammed on his brakes and skidded on the wet ground missing the Taxi by cm. I am sure there will have been upset passengers, not to mention the driver. The taxi then sped off and unfortunately I did not see who it was.

With reference to parking on the Debenhams side of The Strand, the issue with this is there is nowhere for the buses to pull in causing them to have to block the road to set down passengers and then the passengers having to walk through parked cars to get to the safety of the pavement, which is completely unacceptable. After midnight when the busses stop, the problem is that there is nowhere for other taxis and members of the public to drop off or pick up, often drunk people again, causing the issues just described. Keeping that side of The Strand clear is also important just because often people who are drunk stagger into the road and the extra space can stop serious accidents. The fear is that a fatal RTC is only a matter of time away unless action is taken now.

I have also noticed that the number of Taxis on The Strand is increasing. I am not sure why, maybe more are just choosing to come to Torquay but there is definitely an increase. At one point over the weekend we had a line (parked every and anywhere they could) and I counted 41 Hackney Carriages, which I fear at the time was more than the number of people on The Strand. Also I have serious concerns about the rumours of de-regulation and the issues that it will bring. I spoke to a taxi driver who worked in Swansea when they did it and he said it was carnage, to the point it was reverted after 3 months. I would like to speak to you about this in more detail.

As you are aware I arranged with the drivers in consultation with you that they can use the first part of the bus stop from 21:00hrs in a bid to show that give and take is the best way to proceed.

However since that has been imposed our problem with drivers parking on the roundabout and blocking the exit has only started at 21:00hrs instead of 00:00hrs. Therefore as it was arranged that it would stay whilst it was used sensibly I recommend that this be removed with immediate effect. This is to ensure the continued safety of pedestrians and road users alike. I will have no issue with explaining to the drivers why that privilege has been removed.

I know that the council face difficulties as we do in dealing with this issue, but I must stress that something must be done. I know that space is limited and that there are too many Taxi's using Torquay at the moment. In response to this I have had an idea which involves closing the Vaughn Parade Taxi rank and utilising other currently unused space which will increase the number of Taxis able to fit on a rank. I promise that it is not as crazy as it sounds however it will be easier to discuss with you in person.

I look forward to your reply and please do not hesitate to contact me via email should you need to do so. Also I have emailed you reference meeting up with you in Paignton.

Yours Sincerely,

PC 864 Anthony Moorhouse
P.A.C.T Traffic SPOC
Torbay P.A.C.T Team / Night-Time Economy Team
Devon BCU
TEL : - 41520 / 41424

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