

# Private Hire Vehicles in Bus Lanes

*A response from Portsmouth Cycle Forum*

Portsmouth Cycle Forum (PCF) are concerned to learn that consideration is being given to the use of Bus Lanes by Private Hire Vehicles (PHVs). We wish to register our strong objection to this idea.

The primary aim of allowing and encouraging cyclists to use these lanes is to make cyclists safer than they would be in general traffic. This is achieved:

- by reducing the number of vehicles they interact with, and where interaction *is* necessary,
- by ensuring the drivers they do encounter behave professionally, focusing on safety first.

In Portsmouth, there are incidents *daily* where this aim is not achieved. The nature of our objection to the use of Bus Lanes by PHVs reflects this as follows:

## 1. Increased cycle/vehicle interaction reduces safety.

The November 2014 report by PCC licensing manager Nickii Humphreys [1] highlights that the number of collisions between taxis/private hire vehicles and cycles is already shockingly high, as illustrated in this excerpt:

### Cycle collisions

- It is clear that cyclists are over represented in this data.
- Cyclists make up only 4.7% of traffic but 21% of Taxi related casualties.
- Taxis/Private Hire represents 0.9% of registered vehicles in Portsmouth (1000 out of a total of 110,000) but represent 8% of total cycle collisions.
- Most common contributory factor is driver failing to look properly.
- Most common manoeuvre is pulling out on cyclists at junctions and roundabouts and opening of doors into their path.

Allowing private hire vehicles to use bus lanes will increase instances of cycle/vehicle proximity and when considered with the evidence above, the conclusion that cyclist-casualties will increase significantly is inescapable.

For the last three years Portsmouth has had the worst or second worst rate of cycle casualties in the country, outside of London. PCC's own data indicates that the biggest contributors to these figures are Taxis/PHVs. It therefore seems extremely unwise to allow PHVs to enter one of the few spaces where cyclists are currently isolated from them.

## 2. **Pressure to compete makes PHVs more dangerous.**

Unlike Hackney Carriages which are metered, PHV driver-income is based on mileage: they make more money if they complete each fare as quickly as possible, and travelling to the next waiting customer as quickly as possible, so that they can fit the more jobs into a shift. Private hire drivers are thus incentivised to drive fast, and are under constant pressure to finish each job quickly and beat other cars to accepting the next job.

An increasing body of scientific evidence links stress and fatigue to altered cognitive function in drivers, this includes increased risk-taking, inattention and driver error (e.g. Rowden 2011 [2], Lin 2014 [5]). Increased risk-taking may take many forms, but the road users most *at risk* from it are the most vulnerable - i.e. cyclists and pedestrians. Whilst risk-taking can increase the likelihood of an accident; inattention and driver error decrease the possibility of accidents being avoided.

Allowing PHVs to use bus lanes therefore represents a significant increase in the danger to cyclists and pedestrians. For a pressured PHV driver, a cyclist in a bus lane may (at best) be considered an inconvenience that must be passed as quickly as possible, if they are noticed at all.

## 3. **PHV drivers are distracted by the tools of their trade.**

It is incumbent on hackney carriage drivers to be looking *out* of their vehicle for pedestrians when touting for work. Conversely, private hire drivers receive their jobs through a communications device which can distract them from the road (computer or radio). Such devices require physical interaction for use and remove attention from the road. For a private hire driver to maximise their income it is common for them to use these device to begin looking for the next job before they have dropped off a fare - i.e. whilst the vehicle is in motion.

Encouraging distracted drivers to use a lane that is more likely than any other to be populated with cyclists is of grave concern to us.

## 4. **The DfT advise against PHV use of bus lanes.**

"In some areas where taxis are permitted to use bus lanes there has been pressure from operators of cars available for private hire, most of which are indistinguishable from private cars, to be provided with the same priority; use of bus lanes by these vehicles is not recommended." - DfT LTN 1/97 Keeping Buses Moving [3]

## 5. **People are frightened.**

Portsmouth's record of vulnerable road user casualties is unenviably poor, with government data showing the city at the foot of the cycling-safety table for several consecutive years (e.g. [4]).

Portsmouth is a congested city but residents are reluctant to make the switch from

private cars to sustainable transport (such as cycling). Most cite the fear of traffic as the primary reason for this [6]. Given the disproportionately high number of incidents involving Taxis and PHVs, we can only conclude that allowing PHVs into these lanes would not only increase cyclist casualties, but would also increase fear of cycling.

The impact of this increased fear on city transportation would be felt in many ways, for example, it would lead to an increase in private vehicle use, increase vehicle pollution, and increase the likelihood of gridlock such as that seen in early 2014.

## 6. There are many more PHVs than Hackney Carriages.

There are currently around 300 licensed Hackney Carriages in Portsmouth but about 1000 registered PHVs [7]. Allowing PHVs into bus lanes would therefore quadruple the number of motor vehicles competing to use the bus lanes. This is likely to squeeze out cyclists, making bus lanes a no-go area.

In summary: Portsmouth has more cycling accidents per head than other cities, and Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles are responsible for a disproportionately large number of these accidents. There are scientifically demonstrable reasons why this correlation may occur. Increasing the incidence of proximity between cyclists and PHVs by **allowing PHVs to use bus lanes will increase cycling casualties** and increase residents' fear of cycling.

This will reinforce residents use of less sustainable modes of transport, leading to an overall negative impact on the city.

Portsmouth Cycle Forum  
January 2015

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3. Keeping Busses Moving, A GUIDE TO TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT TO ASSIST BUSES IN URBAN AREAS., 1997, ISBN 0 11 551914 9., <http://goo.gl/KzM670>
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6. Thornton et al, Climate Change and Transport Choices, December 2010.  
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