

**Date: 25 February 2016**

**Item: Taxi and Private Hire Enforcement**

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**This paper will be considered in public.**

## **1 Summary**

- 1.1 The purpose of this paper is to update the Panel on activity undertaken as part of Operation Neon, a high visibility taxi and private hire enforcement operation to deter, disrupt and detect illegal cab activity.

## **2 Recommendation**

- 2.1 **The Panel is asked to note the paper.**

## **3 Background**

- 3.1 TfL continues its important work to combat touting, unlawful plying for hire and other illegal taxi and private hire activity. Illegal activity poses a serious risk to the travelling public and undermines the legitimate, law abiding Taxi and Private Hire trades.
- 3.2 In response to the issues raised through the London Assembly's *Future Proof* report, TfL put additional measures in place and substantially increased the levels of visible enforcement to deter and disrupt illegal private hire activity in hotspot locations in central London. Launched in May 2015, Operation Neon is a high visibility, multi agency operation involving police officers and Traffic Police Community Support Officers from the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) Roads and Transport Policing Command and TfL's Taxi and Private Hire Compliance (TPHC) Officers, Revenue Protection Inspectors (RPIs) trained in taxi and private hire law and Road Network Compliance (RNC) officers as well as local authority parking attendants. The operation runs every Friday and Saturday evening.
- 3.3 Operation Neon deployments are decided on the basis of recommendations from the taxi and private hire trade of the key locations, based on their experience, for touting and plying for hire. It is currently focussed on six routes covering priority venues:

Patrol Route 1: Dover Street and Berkeley Square

Patrol Route 2: Piccadilly and Shaftesbury Avenue

Patrol Route 3: Leicester Square

Patrol Route 4: Camden High Street

Patrol Route 5: Soho

Patrol Route 6: Shoreditch

- 3.4 The operation's priority is to deal with the issues identified by the licensed trades, in particular keeping roads moving and ranks clear so that the legitimate, law abiding trades can operate. It continues to have a high level of support from the taxi and private hire trades.
- 3.5 Operation Neon is just one element of TfL's robust enforcement action with police partners, which continues to tackle illegal and non-compliant taxi and private hire activity in Central London. It is run in parallel with plain clothes TfL and police activity to tackle taxi and private hire related sexual offences; forgery; fraud, unlicensed drivers and other illegal taxi and private hire activity that puts public safety at risk.

## **4 Results**

- 4.1 The operation has run over 76 evenings so far (between 9 May 2015 and 23 January 2016). The headline results from this activity includes:
- (a) 6,435 working PHV drivers advised and moved on to keep traffic flowing. 357 PHV drivers were reported for not having a badge and were stopped from working for the remainder of the evening;
  - (b) 3,827 PHV drivers were reported for not wearing their badge;
  - (c) 60 PHV drivers reported for plying for hire offences;
  - (d) 802 PHV drivers reported for parking on Taxi ranks; and
  - (e) 1,685 parking tickets issued.
- 4.2 Since the operation started, 199 repeat offenders have been caught through Neon and are now on a final written warning. A further 29 repeat offenders have been passed to TPH licensing to review their fitness to hold a licence. To date, one PHV has had his licence revoked but is appealing this decision.
- 4.3 The top 10 operators whose drivers have come to our attention as part of Operation Neon's enforcement activity are (in alphabetical order):
- (a) Addison Lee;
  - (b) Atlas Cars;
  - (c) Diamond Cars;
  - (d) Excel Cars;
  - (e) Green Tomato Cars;
  - (f) Marvel Cars;
  - (g) Swift Cars;

- (h) Swiss Cottage Cars;
- (i) Tony Cars; and
- (j) Uber.

## **5 Evaluation, Learning and Improvements**

- 5.1 High visibility on-street enforcement and compliance activity is an essential part of TfL's approach to tackling illegal and non-compliant activity. TfL has committed to continuing Operation Neon for at least another six months, continuing to improve and adapt it as necessary. Ongoing monitoring and assessment of tactics and deployments is essential for ensuring the operation remains an effective element of the overall taxi and private hire enforcement approach. During the period that Operation Neon has been running, the MPS has recorded a 14 per cent reduction in the number of arrests for touting and suggest that they have seen a significant drop in the number of drivers touting as a direct impact of Operation Neon.

### **Resources**

- 5.2 Operation Neon has shown that much of the perceived 'illegal' taxi and private hire activity can be tackled through robust parking enforcement as the problem at the hotspots identified by the trade is more often too many vehicles causing congestion, alongside drivers stopping and waiting for their customers rather than being engaged in touting or illegal plying for hire. The joint working with Westminster City Council (WCC) parking attendants has been critical to the success of Operation Neon. TfL has worked with WCC to formalise this arrangement through creating a dedicated WCC civil enforcement team for Operation Neon activity. TfL and WCC have also entered into a data sharing agreement so that information on drivers issued with a parking ticket by WCC can be shared with TfL and be included on a driver's record.
- 5.3 The operation is resource intensive and is currently resourced by Surface Transport's Enforcement and On Street Operations (EOS) TPHC officers and RPIs providing on-street activity and by RNC officers providing camera enforcement against stopping or parking on the red route. EOS is currently reviewing the officer mix to maximise coverage, visibility and deterrent effect while ensuring that there is a sufficient level of TPHC compliance resource to undertake complementary plain clothes and intelligence led compliance activity in the late evenings. TfL is in the final stages of doubling the number of TPHC officers to 82, which will give greater flexibility of coverage over evening and nights, and across priorities.
- 5.4 Operation Neon also generates a high level of back office processing requirements as all the on-street interventions need to be recorded, processed and or investigated. TfL has in the pipeline a number of enhancements to the technology used by both the police and our own compliance officers to streamline enforcement and increase the efficiency of taxi and private hire enforcement activity.
- 5.5 The high volume of 'minor' non-compliance issues identified through Neon's proactive enforcement, which do not pose a significant risk to public safety has

triggered a review of TfL's enforcement approach and the sanctions and penalties for non-compliant licence holders. As one element of this revised and strengthened approach TfL will be writing to the Secretary of State to commence existing provisions of the TfL Act 2008 on the use of Fixed Penalty Notice as a means to deal with minor taxi and private hire offences.

## **6 Financial Implications**

- 6.1 The full year staffing costs for Operation Neon in 2015/16 are estimated to be £0.5m which will be met through this year's existing TPH and EOS budget provisions.

### **List of appendices to this report:**

None

### **List of Background Papers:**

None

Contact Officer: Steve Burton, Director of Enforcement and On-street Operations  
Number: 020 3054 0755  
Email: [steve.burton@tfl.gov.uk](mailto:steve.burton@tfl.gov.uk)