

CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT – 14 FEBRUARY 2019
OXFORD, QUEEN STREET AND BONN SQUARE – TAXI ACCESS

Report by Director for Infrastructure Delivery

Recommendation

1. The Cabinet Member for the Environment is RECOMMENDED to approve making permanent evening/night time access (6.30pm to 8am) by taxis through Bonn Square and Queen Street in Oxford to a taxi rank at Carfax as provided for in a variation to an experimental traffic regulation order (TRO) which came into effect on 21 December 2017 and which expires on 12 April 2019.

Executive summary

2. This report presents the details of the statutory consultation on the experimental TRO which permits taxis licenced by Oxford City Council to access the Carfax taxi rank at the east end of Queen Street via Bonn Square and Queen Street (a pedestrian zone) between 6.30pm and 8am on all days of the week.

Background

3. A review of access arrangements to Bonn Square and Queen Street was carried out by officers in 2017 as a result of the major redevelopment of the Westgate Centre, taking account of the revised road layout adjacent to the centre and the anticipated significant increase in pedestrian usage of Queen Street and Bonn Square. The outcome of this review was a proposal to introduce an experimental TRO to prohibit buses, taxis and private hire vehicles (PHVs) from Bonn Square and Queen Street at all times so as to minimise (in accordance with section 122 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act) the danger to pedestrians posed by vehicular traffic in this pedestrianised street.
4. After considering the responses to an extensive preliminary consultation on the proposal, at its meeting on 18 July 2017, Cabinet approved the making of the experimental TRO, subject to Secretary of State for Transport consent due to objections having been received from bus operators.
5. The main comments and concerns made during the preliminary consultation relating to taxis and PHVs were about the operation of the Cornmarket Street taxi rank that would be needed to replace the Carfax rank in Queen Street. Also the need for additional rank provision in the city centre near Carfax, specifically on High Street.

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6. The Secretary of State for Transport subsequently did not give consent for the making of the Experimental TRO to remove buses from Queen Street. At the Cabinet Member for Environment decisions meeting on 12 October 2017 a proposal was approved to proceed with a revised experimental TRO prohibiting taxis and PHVs from using Bonn Square and Queen Street at all times.
7. The experimental TRO made on 13 October 2017 enabled taxis to enter/use part of Cornmarket Street near Carfax as a taxi rank in the evenings as an alternative provision to the Carfax taxi rank. However, the operational experience of the rank in Cornmarket Street proved unsatisfactory on road safety grounds and so a further variation to the experimental TRO was introduced on 21 December which restored access by taxis via Bonn Square and Queen Street to the Carfax taxi rank but only between 6.30pm and 8.00am on all days of the week.
8. The following table summarises the differences for taxis and PHVs in Queen Street and Bonn Square between the 'underlying' permanent TRO and the experimental TRO made on 13 October 2017 and varied on 21 December 2017:

Underlying TRO	Experimental TRO
Private Hire Vehicles permitted at any time to pick up or set down passengers	Private Hire Vehicles prohibited at all times
Taxis permitted at any time to pick up or set down passengers	Taxis prohibited 0800 to 1830
Taxis permitted 1830 – 0800, 7 days a week to access and use the Carfax taxi rank	No change
Taxis permitted daytime on Sunday (0800 to 1830) to access and use the Carfax taxi rank, which operated all day on Sundays	No taxis permitted daytime (0800 to 1830) on Sunday.

9. At the same time as the experimental TRO came into force, the bus operators agreed to reduce the number of buses running through the street from approximately 55 an hour to approximately 30 an hour to help minimise the impact of vehicle movements on the expected increase in pedestrian flow as a result of the Westgate reopening.
10. National regulations dictate that experimental TROs can run for a maximum of 18 months from the date that they were originally made, which means the provision of this experiment can only apply until 12 April 2019 unless approval is given to introduce the provisions on a permanent basis. This report recommends that approval is given.

Consultation on the experimental TRO

11. For an experimental TRO, while a preliminary consultation (as referred to above) is required ahead of a decision on whether to proceed, the formal consultation is carried out while the experiment is in progress; any objections or other representations must be made within a six-month period following the experimental TRO coming into effect or within six months of any subsequent variation being made. The last variation to this experimental TRO was made on 21 December 2017, with the consultation, therefore, formally closing on 20 June 2018.
12. Just one objection was received in this period from a member of the public on the grounds that the experiment was unfair to PHVs because only Taxis can drive through. However, taxis cannot “drive through” Queen Street (i.e. use it as a through route) but have only been allowed to access the Carfax taxi rank because the experimental rank in Cornmarket Street did not operate satisfactorily. By definition, only taxis (not PHVs) may use taxi ranks and as the TRO is designed *specifically and only* to allow access to the rank during the hours when it operates, it would be illogical to allow PHV access.
13. Whilst not formally made through the consultation process for the experimental TRO, the City of Oxford Licensed Taxicab Association (COLTA) has made a request to also allow taxis to use Queen Street during the day on a Sunday to access a daytime taxi rank at Carfax - as was available in the past.
14. Officers do not recommend that this is taken forward on the basis that this was first introduced before the redeveloped Westgate; in fact, it was first agreed in 1984 when bus services on Sundays from the city centre were much less frequent and when pedestrian flow in the street was generally much lower – this was ten years before the Sunday Trading Act. Certainly, daytime (10am to 6pm) flow in Queen Street on a Sunday is now only 9% lower than daytime flow during the week.
15. In recognition of the request by COLTA to re-introduce a daytime taxi rank at Carfax on a Sunday and daytime taxi rank capacity close to Carfax throughout the week, last autumn, officers consulted on proposals for ranks at the east end of New Road and by Turl Street on High Street. The New Road rank was approved at the Cabinet Member for Environment decisions meeting on 17 November last year; the city council will very soon be carrying out the required formal consultation to introduce the rank.
16. The High Street rank was not approved at that meeting due to concerns being raised by a number of respondents to the consultation. County officers are currently working on revised proposals for this rank to address those concerns; formal re-consultation is expected to start in March.
17. In July last year, the Cabinet Member for Environment agreed to make an experimental TRO to allow taxis and PHVs to use the Westgate bus link every day from 7am to 7pm to reduce the impact of city centre congestion on their

journeys to and through the city centre. This experiment is due to begin in March.

18. Additionally, later in the Spring this year, officers will be reporting to the Cabinet Member for Environment about whether an experimental TRO should be made for the removal of all buses from Queen Street.

How the Project supports LTP4 Objectives

19. The proposals would help facilitate the safe movement of traffic.

Financial and Staff Implications (including Revenue)

20. The funding required to incorporate the provision of the experimental order into a permanent order has been met from the revenue budget.

OWEN JENKINS

Director for Infrastructure Delivery

Background papers: Report considered by Cabinet on 18 July 2018
 Report considered by Cabinet Member for Environment
 12 October 2017

Contact Officers: Hugh Potter 07766 998704
 Craig Rossington 07880 945891

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