

MEETING: HACKNEY CARRIAGE/PRIVATE HIRE JOINT WORKING GROUP

DATE: Tuesday 2nd June, 2015

TIME: 10.00 am

VENUE: Bootle Town Hall

Members & Associations

South Sefton Hackney Carriage Drivers Association

Richard Jarman

Ian Stanton

North West Taxi Association

(Vacant)

North Sefton Night Drivers Association

(Vacant)

Southport Station Hackney Carriage Association

John Murrison

Barry Howard

Berry Street Garage

Joe Johnson

Brookfield Garage

Mike Denning

Delta Merseyside Ltd

Paul McLaughlin

Gary Beesley

Sefton Private Hire Fleet Operators Association

Mark Sanders

Ability Network

(Vacant)

Officers

Mark Toohey (Chair), Principal Trading Standards Officer

Mike Foulkes, Senior Taxi Licensing Officer

MEETING OFFICER: Colin Auty

Email: colin.auty@sefton.gov.uk

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AGENDA

- | <u>Item No.</u> | <u>Subject/Author(s)</u> | |
|-----------------|--|-----------------|
| 1. | Apologies for Absence | |
| 2. | Minutes | (Pages 7 - 12) |
| | Minutes of the meeting held on * | |
| 3. | Matters Arising from the Minutes | |
| 4. | Annual Statistics | (Pages 13 - 18) |
| | Licence applications & appeals, vehicle checks, prosecutions, OSS. Feedback from Aintree weekend. | |
| 5. | VRQ | |
| | Reminder that all drivers need the VRQ by 31 st December 2015 | |
| 6. | New Handbook | |
| | This went live on 1 st April 2015 and the latest version can be found on the Council website at www.sefton.gov.uk/taxi - we have previously discussed distributing paper copies of version 3. | |
| 7. | Taximeters | |
| | Taximeters – item raised by Richard Jarman:
To discuss the SI B2006 No. 2304 The Measuring Instruments (Taximeters) Regulations 2006 | |
| | This requirement does not <i>require</i> a meter to be as commonly used or prohibit one from being GPS derived | |
| | For example: | |
| | https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/cab-meter/id594380891?mt=8 | |
| | This even has a CE marking! Can SMBC use this device | |

8. **Ultra Low Emission Vehicles**

(Pages 19 -
24)

Item raised by Richard Jarman. See attached

9. **DBS Checks**

Item raised by Richard Jarman.

DBS annual checks

An explanation of these needs adding to the information portion of the handbook to be printed.

The employment details on the form are "Child & adult workforce – taxi driver; this is wide enough for most other positions; e.g. crewing a boat where there are young people, coaching a team & so on?"

10. **Local Transport Plan**

Item raised by Richard Jarman.

SMBC have been in discussion with Merseytravel.

Report on discussions; please do NOT to agree anything without referral planning, report to the trade please on discussions with Merseytravel.

Confirm that NO commitment is to be given without full consultation; especially not going forward to any new regional plan.

The trade has been let down by the current arrangement

11. **Data Protection**

Item raised by Richard Jarman.

CCTV is now a common insurance requirement.

Vehicle owners and data controllers should be

reminded of the code of practice.

ICO code can be found here:

<https://ico.org.uk/media/for-organisations/documents/1542/cctv-code-of-practice.pdf>

Extract from the code on disclosure:

“Disclosure of information from surveillance systems must be controlled and consistent with the purpose(s) for which the system was established. For example, it can be appropriate to disclose surveillance information to a law enforcement agency when the purpose of the system is to prevent and detect crime, but it would not be appropriate to place them on the internet in most situations.

It may also not be appropriate to disclose information about identifiable individuals to the media. Placing such information on the internet incorrectly, or without full consideration of what is being done, may cause the disclosure of individuals’ personal data and sensitive personal data. In severe cases, this may lead to the ICO taking enforcement action. In 2011 the ICO took action in a case related to streamed CCTV footage that ended up on the YouTube website. Information can be released to the media for identification purposes; this should not generally be done by anyone other than a law enforcement agency. This will help you to demonstrate compliance with Guiding Principle 7 of the POFA code.”

12. **Legal Expense Schemes**

Item raised by Richard Jarman.

Insurance against legal problems in the trade - the PHTM scheme is comprehensive.

It is not satisfactory that there is no scheme publicised locally

13. **Signs in Vehicles**

Item raised by Richard Jarman.

The Fraud Act notice seems often not to have penetrated public consciousness.

The no eating notice is increasingly ignored.

Could these be reprinted using a high visibility lettering?

Higher visibility may lead to a slightly smaller size of notice?

14. **Dual Plated Vehicles**

Chair to discuss recent issues.

15. **Fraud on Private Hire Accounts**

(Pages 25 -
26)

Item raised by Richard Jarman.

UBER – see attached.

16. **Date of next meeting ***

1st September, Southport Town Hall

17. **Any Other Business**

Agenda Item 2

HACKNEY CARRIAGE/PRIVATE HIRE JOINT WORKING GROUP

MEETING HELD AT THE SOUTHPORT TOWN HALL
ON TUESDAY 3RD MARCH, 2015

PRESENT:

Member/Association:

Southport Station Taxi Association

Barry Howard

South Sefton Hackney Carriage Drivers Association

Richard Jarman

Ian Stanton

Delta

Paul McLaughlin

Sefton Private Hire Fleet Operators Association

Mark Sanders

Officers

Mark Toohey (Chair), Principal Trading Standards Officer

Mike Foulkes, Senior Taxi Licensing Officer

MEETING OFFICER: Colin Auty

Email: colin.auty@sefton.gov.uk

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HACKNEY CARRIAGE/PRIVATE HIRE JOINT WORKING GROUP-
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APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Mike Denning – Aintree Garage

Joe Johnson – Berry Street Garage

Joseph Bridson – North West Taxi Association

MINUTES

Agreed as a true record

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

None raised.

HANDBOOK

Handbook amendments that have already been considered and agreed were endorsed by all members present.

Matters outstanding were then discussed in turn and are listed below.

1 – Statement on hours worked by drivers to be finalised and included. It will be a brief statement on hours worked in General. Paul to supply copy of the wording Delta use to the Chair

2 – Additional licensed driver disqualification following on from a DVLA ban in relation to ‘totting up’ offences. Members and the chair agreed that the licensed driver ban should be the same length as the DVLA and will run consecutively after the DVLA ban has expired.

3 – Current list of fees may be included with the handbook. Due to fees becoming out of date this may change to just a link to the website for the current fees.

4 – Reference/link to the council website for all up to date information is to be included.

5 – Updated list of ALL testing stations to be included.

6 – Updated list of all trade association to be included, this is to include websites and contact email addresses – not telephone numbers. A discussion was then held about how non attending group members should be dealt with. PM suggested a new group constitution on membership should be considered. No objections to this idea were made.

7 – Details where to locate VRQ providers are to be included

HACKNEY CARRIAGE/PRIVATE HIRE JOINT WORKING GROUP-
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8 – Guide/Assistance dogs. The requirement for drivers to carry these dogs was discussed. This requirement can only be set aside should a driver hold a valid medical exemption certificate. New annex will be in the handbook.

9 – PM suggested that a link to the latest version of the handbook should be included, as well as private hire companies and trade associations providing links to the handbook on their websites.

METERS

PM queries the use of GPS devices being used to calculate prices in PHV's instead of simply a distance with a price being calculated via a rate card. The Chair explained that taxi meters that calculate price require pattern approval and verification, but GPS devices that merely record distance travelled may not. PM stated that he would like SMBC officers to conduct test purchasing in order to establish compliance in the Borough.

ENFORCEMENT

No significant update since the last meeting – full update to be provided in June meeting

UBER

The group considered RJ's submission. This matter will be considered in due course if/when Uber have a presence within Sefton.

CROSS BORDER ENFORCEMENT

All group members voiced opinion that they wished for all taxi licensing enforcement staff on Merseyside to be standardised across the County. This is so that any enforcement taken within Merseyside is both uniform and consistent. The Chair advised that Sefton are ready to standardise procedures across the county but that the process has stalled due to other reasons. PM requested that Sefton push all 5 authorities to discuss the matter between them.

In light of the imminent deregulation bill, PM has requested an urgent update on cross border enforcement. He then stated that he believed that there should be national standards for taxi licensing enforcement as there is a national standard for drivers.

CROSS BORDER LIASIONS

Further to the statement on the agenda as provided by PM, he advised the group that Liverpool was gaining more drivers due to it being perceived to be easier to gain a Liverpool PHV drivers badge than a Sefton drivers

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badge. He also noted that convictions are treated differently in different authorities across Merseyside.

IS queried why the knowledge test cannot be a Merseyside wide knowledge test?

PM then re-iterated his stance as in agenda item 8, in that he is keen for all 5 Merseyside authorities to look at these issues urgently as more joined up thinking on taxi licensing is badly needed.

RJ then stated that in his opinion transport should not be a local authority issue and that taxi licensing would fit a lot better under the control of Merseytravel.

The Chair to update on cross border matters at the next meeting.

FULL LIVERY ON SALOON VEHICLES

Views of the members are that no further information has been provided on this issue and their previous stance is unchanged.

RJ reminded the group of the previous petition that was presented and agreed to L & R.

Chair to request further information on the matter.

GRAND NATIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

Arrangements provided to all members for circulation.

UPDATE ON ULEV

Information provided by John Smith of Merseytravel circulated to the group.

TUK TUKS

The proprietor in question holds a PSV license issued by the Traffic Commissioners. The Chair advised that enquiries have been conducted relating to allegations of activity in Sefton. The company has volunteered information about its workings and there has been no evidence of any illegal activity.

VRQ

The issue of all drivers requiring the VRQ by the close of 2015 is ongoing throughout the year. Delta are actively contacting all drivers who do not hold the qualification and offering their training services.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING *

HACKNEY CARRIAGE/PRIVATE HIRE JOINT WORKING GROUP-
TUESDAY 3RD MARCH, 2015

10:00am 2nd June 2015 at Bootle Town Hall.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

PM queried the fact that Delta now has over 2000 vehicles registered on their system. Their Operators licence to his knowledge states 'up to 2,000 vehicles'. PM enquired as to how this can be amended and any cost implications.

Chair advised that he would clarify why the licence said that as the biggest current operator licence should say it is actually for 100 plus vehicles for £175 and not be limited to a maximum number.

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Agenda Item 4

Contact Officer: Andrew Naisbitt
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Background Papers:

- Town Police Clauses Act 1847
- Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976

1. Background

1.1 The Taxi Licensing Service comprises two distinct service elements:

- a) The licensing function, administered by Arvato through the Council's two One Stop Shops; and
- b) The 'Enforcement' function provided by the Trading Standards and Licensing Section.

1.2 Policy is determined and reviewed by the Council's Licensing & Regulatory Committee and client feedback provided by an established trade consultation regime.

1.3 The primary role of taxi licensing is to ensure the safety of the travelling public by ensuring both the drivers, operators and vehicles meet standards of safety and good conduct.

2. Licence Applications

2.1 For the period 1st April 2013 to 31st March 2014, a total of 5,592 licence applications were received by the Council. As the table in paragraph 2.2 below illustrates this continues the downward trend in the number of licence applications since a peak of 7552 applications in 2010/11.

2.2 Licence applications year on year:

Month of	Number of Licence Applications	Number of Licence Applications	Number of Licence Applications	Change 2014/15 against 2013/14	Percentage change
	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15		
Apr	568	357	262	-95	-26.61%
May	645	369	297	-72	-19.51%
Jun	504	362	345	-17	-4.69%
Jul	640	387	377	-10	-2.58%
Aug	587	364	344	-20	-5.49%
Sep	597	430	416	-14	-3.26%

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Oct	684	549	474	-75	-13.67%
Nov	706	550	551	1	0.18%
Dec	284	454	467	13	2.86%
Jan	644	550	497	-53	-9.64%
Feb	585	597	529	-68	-11.39%
Mar	666	623	618	-5	-0.80%
Total	7110	5592	5177	-415	-7.42%

2.3 There is no empirical evidence to account for the declining licence numbers but anecdotal evidence suggests that drivers have to work very long hours to make ends meet and that the decline is due to oversupply in the driver market that has built up over the last few years, coupled with an upsurge in the local economy and alternative employment.

2.4 The decreasing licence numbers will have a knock on effect on taxi licence revenue and ultimately the value of the ring fenced Trade Account, however the level of the reserve (approximately £900,000, (*subject to ongoing review*)) means there is no need for immediate concern.

3. Licence Appeals

3.1 In order for the Council to grant a licence, drivers have to demonstrate they are a 'fit and proper person' to hold a hackney carriage or private hire driver licence. This is determined by the Council carrying out criminal record checks in general and also their driving history.

3.2 If the applicant receives an adverse report and falls outside Council Policy, then the application is refused. If this happens the applicant has a right of appeal to Magistrates Court.

3.3 The first step in the appeal process is for the Council to review the original decision made during the application process at the One Stop Shop. This appeal is considered by an independent panel of three officers who review the application data and hear representations from the applicant. This process is referred to as 'Mitigation'. In 2014/15, the appeals panel heard 85 mitigations, and allowed 23 applications. The remainder were refused. Seven applicants then appealed to the Magistrates Court, three of which successfully won their appeals and were granted a licence.

3.4 The Mitigation panel is also convened to consider reports of misconduct by existing licence holders. In 2014/15 the Mitigation Panel considered 32 cases, in which 12 licenses were revoked and 8 licenses suspended. A further 10 licenses were allowed to remain in force.

3.5 Typical reasons for withholding or revoking a licence include the possession of drugs, supplying drugs, theft, violence and driving offences.

4. Hackney Carriage & Private Hire Vehicle Checks

4.1 Vehicle checks are an integral part of the Council's enforcement regime. The checks are carried out to ensure vehicles are safe. At the time of every vehicle licence application or renewal, a satisfactory test certificate from a Council approved testing centre has to accompany the application. Once a licence is granted vehicles are subject to ongoing checks throughout the duration of the licence period.

4.2 During the period 1st April 2014 to 31st March 2015, a total of 476 vehicle checks were carried out, 283 were part of proactive checks carried out at locations throughout the Borough and a further 193 'on street' checks carried out on routine patrols; 17% of the checks were carried out on hackney carriage vehicles and 83% on private hire vehicles

4.3 The outcomes of the checks can be summarised as follows:

- a) Hackney Carriage On Street Inspections / Pre-Planned Inspections
 - 83 vehicles inspected
 - 70% Fault Free – 17 vehicle defect notices issued, 4 stop notices issued.
- b) Private Hire On Street Inspections / Pre-Planned Inspections
 - 393 vehicles inspected
 - 55% Fault Free – 143 vehicle defect notices issued, 35 stop notices issued.

5. Prosecutions

5.1 During the year the Council carries out targeted enforcement exercises to deter rogue drivers from illegally plying for hire, offenders are typically 'non-Sefton' hackney carriage vehicles plying for hire within Sefton or private hire vehicles taking a fare without a pre-booking. The high profile work in this area has seen a decrease in this type of unlawful activity. In 2014/15 there were 4 prosecutions compared with 7 prosecutions the previous year, despite the number of enforcement exercises being consistent (typically 15/18 exercises per annum). Details in paragraph 5.2

5.2

Defendant	Fine (£)	Costs (£)	Points	Trade	Offences
SA Goodwin	170	300	0	L'pool Hackney	TPCA
P McDonough	200	280	6	L'pool Hackney	TPCA & RTA
JS Mangan	400	250	6	L'pool Hackney	TPCA & RTA
DA Barry	165	100	0	L'pool Hackney	TPCA

Key: TPCA – Town Police Clauses Act
RTA – Road Traffic Act

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6. The Knowledge Test

6.1 An integral part of the licence application process is the geographic knowledge test. The test is designed to test a driver's knowledge of the local area and is administered by Arvato in the Council's One Stop Shops. The tables below illustrate knowledge test provision in the two One Stop Shops.

6.2 Knowledge Tests at the Bootle One Stop Shop

Thursdays	Total Spaces	Booked Test	"Did Not Attend"	Actual Attendance	Attended and failed	Attended and passed	Bootle % pass rate attendees	Bootle % pass rate against bookings
TOTALS	1736	1453	411	1334 (*)	1046	288	22%	20%
		(84%)	(28%)	(72%)	(78%)	(22%)	% -v- Attend	% -v- Booked

(*) Actual attendance figure 1042 – vacant places taken by 331 candidates on waiting list.

6.3 Knowledge Tests at the Southport One Stop Shop

Tuesdays	Total Spaces	Booked Test	"Did Not Attend"	Actual Attendance	Attended and failed	Attended and passed	Southport % pass rate attendees	Southport % pass rate against bookings
TOTALS	1067	662	89	533	315	218	41%	35%
		(58%)	(14%)	(86%)	(59%)	(41%)	% -v- Attend	% -v- Booked

6.4 The figures continue to highlight a low level success rate in the Bootle OSS shop however there has been a marked improvement in the pass rate at the Southport OSS compared with a 31% figure for 2013/14.

7. Process handling in the One Stop Shops

7.1 Taxi licensing clients utilise the Council's facilities in one of two ways; either by appointment or by simply dropping in and waiting to be seen. The tables below illustrate service provision in the two One Stop Shops.

7.2 Customer Contact at Bootle One Stop Shop

Appts Offered	Appts Booked	Appts Unused	Appts Kept	Appts Not Kept	Drop Ins Seen	Drop Ins Not Seen	Total Drop Ins
498	456 (92%)	42 (8%)	309 (68%)	147 (32%)	9295	12 (0.1%)	9307

7.3 Customer Contact at Southport One Stop Shop

Appts Offered	Appts Booked	Appts Unused	Appts Kept	Appts Not Kept	Drop Ins Seen	Drop Ins Not seen	Total Drop Ins
502	205 (41%)	297 (59%)	159 (78%)	46 (22%)	1409	0 (0%)	1409

7.4 The statistics show that the greatest demand is at the Bootle One Stop Shop and it is disappointing to note the amount of staff time wasted by clients failing to turn up. This is a perennial problem, but without a cost effective and lawful solution it is difficult to address.

8. Summary & the Year Ahead

8.1 The proactive approach adopted by the Taxi Licensing Unit is the key factor in ensuring the quality of hackney carriage and private hire vehicles and hence the safety of the travelling public.

8.2 The service will continue its 'plying for hire' exercises and will target vehicle defects by a combination of checks at Compliance Testing Stations and on district vehicle checks.

8.3 A new Taxi Licensing Handbook has been published following its approval by the Committee on 30th March 2015. The licensing service will also continue its program of ongoing review and improvement throughout 2015/16. This program of work will include a new system for conducting the geographic knowledge tests and a review of the Testing Stations.

8.4 The Council is currently carrying out a review of the Ring Fenced Taxi Licensing Trade Account and will reassess the licence fees in 2015/16 once the cost analysis has been completed. The implications of licence trend data highlighted in paragraph 2.2 will be assessed at that time. The findings of this review will be published during the summer 2015.

8.4 Further reports will be presented to the Licensing & Regulatory Committee detailing the service enhancements as they take place.

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LOG ON to the website that shows the locations of all London's charging points for electric cars, and you could be forgiven for thinking that they were almost as common as Fairtrade coffee outlets.

And you would be right: the stations — poles fitted with sockets — are becoming a familiar sight on street corners and in multistorey car parks. On the face of it, they are evidence of a 21st-century battery-powered utopia. But try to plug an electric car into many of them and it's a different story: chances are you will receive not an environmentally friendly surge of electricity but a flashing red sign telling you the charging point is out of order.

Five years after Boris Johnson, the mayor of London, promised to make the city the electric car capital of Europe with 7,500 charging points dotted around the metropolis, it has emerged that despite millions of pounds of public investment a high proportion do not work, suffer unexplained technical faults or have been installed in the wrong place, making them impossible to use.

Figures supplied to The Sunday Times show that Source London, which runs the recharging network, recorded 1,139 faults last year, affecting 355 of the 881 units. When Driving tried the network, more than half of the charging points we tested were unable to recharge an electric car adequately. And when they do fail, many remain out of action for weeks. Figures from Source London show that over a quarter of charging point faults take more than 20 days to be resolved.

Part of the problem may be that because so few drivers use the points, which are free once you have paid an annual £10 fee, the fact that many have fallen into disrepair has gone unnoticed. Last year, 378 of Source London's recharging posts (more than two in five) were not used by a single motorist.

The capital is not the only place with problems. Users of government-funded charging points in Milton Keynes and the northeast and southwest have also described repeated problems with unreliable charging points.

With Dominic Tobin from Sunday Times driving One of the main barriers to more widespread adoption of electric cars is the perceived problem of recharging them. Drivers worry about being stranded — so-called range anxiety. The fear among supporters of electric cars is that if charge points are unreliable, it may be worse than not having them in the first place.

“My view is that the current national infrastructure is not fit for purpose,” says Kevin Sharpe, a businessman from Bradford-on-Avon, Wiltshire. “It's why a number of drivers are transitioning from short-range cars to range-extended versions, which typically have a small petrol engine to charge the car on the move.”

Sharpe was so frustrated by problems with recharging his own electric car that he set up a charity, Zero Carbon World, which has built a network of free-to-use charging stations. It is one of several independent networks being set up by companies such as Tesla, Ecotricity and Chargemaster.

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How hard is it to charge an electric car in Britain? We took a range-extender version of the BMW i3 on a trip across London to Bristol to find out. We tried a total of 30 charging points that were installed using some of the £67m of taxpayers' money available nationally for this purpose. At 18 of these, there was a problem that meant charging was either impossible, unreasonably slow or worked for only a short period. Another seven were blocked by non-electric cars.

Snaresbrook station, on the eastern edge of London, was typical. It's the sort of place where you might drive in and park for a £6 fee, leaving your car to charge while you take the train to work. Once the BMW was plugged in to one of the points, however, it failed to charge. The same thing happened at the next charge point, with a message on the car's dashboard saying the voltage was too low. Source London's helpline was unable to assist. One final attempt to get some charge appeared to work at first — but the car's dashboard estimated a full charge would take 19 hours, rather than the four that it should have done.

In Stratford, east London, the first on-street charging point we tried promptly declared itself out of order on its digital display, although a second point did begin charging the car. Even the vast car park at the nearby Westfield shopping centre, next to the Olympic Park, failed to deliver. The charging points had stickers with Olympic symbols on them, but each attempt resulted in a false start: a brief burst of electricity before a light around the BMW's charging socket began flashing red, indicating that something was amiss.

A multistorey car park opposite the Tower of London with 10 charging points was next. Half were ruled out because conventional cars were parked in front of them, a problem known by the electric car fraternity as being ICEd — blocked out by vehicles with internal combustion engines. Others simply failed to work.

According to Source London, reasons for charging points being inoperative can vary. Some suffer mechanical failure and must wait for new parts, others fall victim to utility repairs that shut off the electricity supply. Some rely on a mobile phone signal to verify the driver has paid the annual fee; if they are installed in an underground car park, for example, where reception is patchy, this can mean they don't function.

The organisation says the charge points are owned by its partners, which include car park operators and public bodies. It says they should have agreements to maintain the charging points and that it is working on solving the mobile phone problem.

Are publicly funded charging points any more reliable elsewhere? In 2010 the Department for Transport (DfT) awarded the first of a series of grants, worth £30m, under its Plugged-in-Places programme designed to create a national charging network. So far, £17m of that has been used in areas from Northumberland to Norfolk and the DfT has made another £37m available for electric infrastructure projects.

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In addition, local authorities have taken advantage of other grants. Bristol was awarded almost £100,000 from the local sustainable transport fund and, more recently, won £562,200 to install rapid chargers. Recent figures suggest that the network, called Source West, is rarely used: in 2012 there were just 14 users of 36 charging points.

As in London, finding the recharging points in Bristol is easy, via an online map. But while the first two attempts worked well, by the third a familiar pattern was emerging: a lack of power. And that's if the promised charge point is there at all: one of the final sites, next to Temple Meads station, was no more than a wire protruding from the ground.

The irony is that the unreliability of the charging network is emerging as car makers report rising interest in their vehicles. After years of disappointing sales, electric cars appear to be slowly winning over buyers. New, stylish models such as the BMW i3 and Tesla Model S have joined the market alongside well-regarded cars such as the Nissan Leaf, Renault Zoe and Volkswagen e-Up!. Last month sales of pure electric cars rose to 823: a rise of more than 200% over the same month in 2013. But if new owners can't recharge, the uptake risks being choked off just when it appears to be getting going.

Look — no wires

Plug-in charging points may be suffering glitches but the Highways Agency is working on plans to test wireless technology that could make them as redundant as the typewriter and cassette Walkman.

The agency, which operates Britain's motorway and trunk roads, is drawing up an initial specification for a system of charging pads that can be placed underneath the road surface. When a car with a receiving pad passes over each one, an electromagnetic field is generated and energy transfers to the vehicle. A network of pads could provide a continuous supply of energy, eliminating range anxiety.

The technology will not be trialled for at least two years. The Highways Agency says that it will need to be developed to withstand constant pummelling by lorries, as well as the wind, rain, ice and snow of a British winter, for up to 16 years, after which the pads would be replaced at the same time as the road surface.

By that time, electric racing cars in the new Formula E championship, which begins later this year, are expected to be using wireless charging to keep their battery levels up during races. However, it is buses that are leading the way: electric buses in Milton Keynes already charge their batteries wirelessly while parked at each end of their route. Some in London will begin doing so within a year.

Ben Webster

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Published at 12:01AM, January 17 2015

Hundreds of subsidised electric car charging units are going unused for long periods and wasting valuable parking spaces, according to research by the RAC Foundation.

Almost two thirds (64 per cent) of the 905 charging units in London were not used at all in June despite a quadrupling in registrations of electric cars.

More than half the units, installed at a cost of more than £9million to the taxpayer, were not used in either June 2013 or June 2014, according to Transport for London data released under the Freedom of Information Act. The most heavily used units were in the congestion charge zone, in which electric cars are exempt from the £11.50 daily charge.

Professor Stephen Glaister, director of the RAC Foundation, said the low usage should prompt a review of plans to install thousands more units in the next three years. "The medium-term aim should be to encourage home, off-street and workplace charging, not turning valuable kerb space over to probably wealthy electric vehicle drivers so they can enjoy the benefits of cheap or free fuel and parking," he said.

A spokeswoman for Boris Johnson said the mayor of London wanted to "support a dramatic shift towards more environmentally friendly vehicles", adding that the extra charging points could also support fleets of electric taxis and car clubs.

Cutting emissions is going to bankrupt us

Matt Ridley

Published at 12:01AM, March 16 2015

We can't rely on nuclear or renewables, so we've pinned our hopes on carbon capture – but that's not working either

Carbon dioxide is not the most urgent problem facing humanity, compared with war, extremism, poverty and disease. But most presidents, popes and film stars think it is, so I must be wrong. For the purposes of this article let's assume they are right. What's the best way of solving the problem?

Whichever party wins the election will be legally committed to cutting our carbon dioxide emissions by 80 per cent by 2050. About 90 per cent of Britain's total energy still comes from fossil fuels and bio-energy, both of which produce carbon dioxide. The expansion of nuclear, wind and solar is

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not going nearly fast enough, because electricity comprises just one third of our energy use. If we are to decarbonise transport and heating too, we will have to switch to electric cars, and electric radiators, which means generating three times as much electricity. Only aeroplanes would be left using fossil fuels.

Leave aside for now the problem of the intermittency of renewables: how to charge your car, or cook on your electric hob when the wind is not blowing and the sun is not shining. Also, the rest of the world is not following suit: fossil fuel use is growing rapidly and maintaining market share. The concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, as measured on a Hawaiian mountain top, is climbing relentlessly.

The science and technology committee of the House of Lords (on which I sit) told the government last week in a report on the resilience of the electricity system that it has not sufficiently informed the public about the “trilemma” facing policymakers. We cannot — in the present state of technology — make the electricity supply low-carbon, resilient and low-cost all at the same time. Decarbonisation is not achievable if politicians wish to restrain energy prices.

Which leaves plan B: to continue using fossil fuels but extract the carbon dioxide from power station exhaust by “carbon capture and storage” (CCS). The Energy Technology Institute told our committee that CCS is the only way to keep the cost of decarbonisation from raising energy prices by an extra £10 billion a year by 2030 and “several tens of billions a year” by 2050.

When the topic of CCS comes up, I admit to being unsure whom to believe. On the one hand there are those who say: it is ready to go, it solves the problem, what are we waiting for? On the other, those who say it’s a costly white elephant going nowhere.

My own self-interest as a landlord of a Northumbrian coal producer would suggest that I should be in the first category, because it’s a get-out-of-jail-free card for the fossil-fuel industry. If CCS were to work, then we could press ahead with fossil fuels and stop worrying. But I’m not convinced it will do the trick.

It is technically possible to extract CO₂ from an exhaust stream. The recipe is as follows: bubble the exhaust gases through a caustic brew of chemicals called amines, which grab the CO₂. Then place the brew back on the stove, bring the heat up to 120C and the CO₂ fizzes back off again. Capture it and inject safely into an oil well to enhance the recovery of more oil, or store it underground. Save the caustic brew and re-use.

The first problem is that the process reduces the efficiency of the power station. A normal coal-fired power station runs at about 35 per cent efficiency — that is to say, a bit more than a third of the heat energy in the steam gets turned into electricity. Adding CCS means that the efficiency drops to maybe 26 per cent. The cost correspondingly goes up substantially, as do people’s

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electricity bills: according to the industry, it would roughly treble the price to about the same as power from an offshore wind farm.

The biggest working demonstration of CCS began operating last October in Saskatchewan in Canada, where SaskPower says its new coal-fired plant is exceeding expectations, generating about 160 megawatts, 40 of which are used to capture the carbon dioxide, leaving about 120 megawatts for the grid. The 2,300 tonnes a day of captured carbon dioxide are 99 per cent pure and are used to enhance recovery of oil near by. But this is a small unit by coal-fired power station standards and only pays because the nearby oil industry is prepared to buy the CO₂.

Nor is it without risks, so the greens are against it, though they would be anyway because they hate the idea of fossil fuels getting a new lease of life. Injecting huge quantities of carbon dioxide into the ground risks causing small earthquakes, and possible leakage, with the (remote) potential to suffocate a nearby town.

The British government has been dangling a £1 billion carrot in front of the energy industry to get CCS going. A few years ago, Eon and Scottish Power both dropped out. Then last year two projects signed contracts, one in Yorkshire, and one in Peterhead in Scotland. In the latter case, SSE, the energy company, and Shell propose to pump the CO₂ out under the North Sea, not to help to enhance the recovery of oil but to justify putting off the decommissioning of an oil platform called Goldeneye.

Similar delays and cancellations are affecting CCS around the world. Whereas the United Nations once forecast that at least 20 large-scale demonstration plants would be on line by 2020, in practice there will be none. Given that electricity is only a small part of the energy system, if CCS is to solve our problems it has to roll out to not just every coal and gas power station on the planet, but to three times as many — once we have electrified heat and transport.

However, all is not lost. Last week scientists at the University of California, Berkeley, announced the discovery of a new class of compounds that scrub carbon dioxide from exhaust much more cheaply. Called diamine-appended metal-organic-frameworks, they require only half as much heating as the conventional process. Another team at Lawrence Livermore Laboratory, also in California, is getting good results with microcapsules of baking soda. In other words, it is possible that chemists will come up with something much cheaper — but it will take time to find out if such ideas can be scaled up efficiently.

For now, though, there is no way to meet our self-imposed decarbonisation target without bankrupting the country. It's not more effort and political will we need; it's more research.

The Times 25th May

Nicola Woolcock

Last updated at 12:01AM, May 25 2015

US authorities are investigating claims that British users of Uber, the online taxi booking service, have had money taken from their accounts fraudulently for fictitious journeys often made abroad.

Among the victims is Anthea Turner, the former *Blue Peter* presenter, who tweeted: "Account has been hacked — nothing to help me on website." Another user said: "I woke up in London to find it said I had taken a \$260 (£170) ride in a limousine in California. Because of the time lag it had been ordered in the middle of the night here. I didn't receive the notification until I looked at my phone in the morning."

According to *The Observer*, Uber users' accounts have been sold on the dark net, a private network of websites, encrypted and controlled anonymously, that facilitates criminal activity.

It comes as pressure builds to restrict the growth of Uber, which connects passengers with drivers via a mobile app. Licensed taxi drivers are angered by its unrestricted expansion, which they say threatens their livelihoods.

Boris Johnson, the mayor of London, is understood to be pushing for legislation to be included in the Queen's Speech that would cap the number of minicab licences in the capital.

Jo Bertram, the head of Uber's UK business, said: "We take any issue of this nature very seriously and, after investigating, have found no evidence of a breach at Uber. Attempting to access and use Uber accounts fraudulently is illegal and we notify the authorities about such activity. Anyone who is charged for a trip they didn't book or take will get a refund."

A spokesman for Uber denied that the FBI was investigating the company and said that fraudsters had used passwords illegally obtained elsewhere.

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