

Comments received from other Operators

I saw the post on social media from one of the local MP's having a meeting with yourselves and the three main taxi firms, complaining about the apparent 'red-tape' overload having an adverse effect on recruiting new drivers. I trust you are aware that this is all just a smoke screen for them to get more income themselves via increased circuit fee's being paid to them. There is , apart from maybe a friday afternoon and Saturday, not enough work to go around the existing drivers, let alone bringing more onto the circuits! They will say they can't provide a service as there is a lack of drivers, and will no doubt quote comments on social media backing this up. However, those comments are from people wishing to get a taxi at the peak times as stated above, plus at certain school times...which has always been the case even pre covid when there were more drivers available. It's all about the circuit fee's. If the firms were serious about recruiting more drivers, they'd increase the fares (currently the 4th cheapest in the UK) so that drivers had a chance to earn a decent level. The amount of the fare makes no difference to the firms as they collect their set fee's no matter how much the driver earns. No doubt the revised local plan will be available to assess shortly, and if the council think that drivers can afford to purchase new/newer vehicles on the income currently available , they'll be a further exodus of available drivers! I have no idea which side Mr Mckinley was on, but I very much doubt he has little or no idea of what the trade is like.

Hi there,

We specialise in long distance transport and it baffles me the test didn't relate to that in any way it also baffles me that the profession of private hire is a driving job and you're wanting people to sit an out of date knowledge test but have no care on the driving standards of said driver, a short driving examination would make a lot more sense. I personally hold a HGV licence and Coach driving licence and the Thanet private hire knowledge was by far the hardest and most pointless test I've ever completed. I failed the test first time round due to the questions being out of date and places no longer existing.

As a company that specialises in long distance and wants to grow into chauffeuring it is near on impossible for us to find drivers simply down to how unprofessional the taxi trade is and any new comers we get simply can't/won't do the test.

I fully understand the safe guarding and Highway Code side of the test however the rest of it is completely pointless and a short driving examination with the examiner asking the drive to take them to a set location would be much more sensible, as you then get an idea if the driver is safe enough to be on the road, a paper test doesn't show in anyway if the driver is actually safe or any good at being a taxi driver.

Thanks for providing a window to offer a perspective.

As far as I'm concerned, having a test is absolutely necessary. Making that test a little more in-depth and a little more challenging was certainly warranted.

However, the general consensus is that an over-zealous approach was adopted when designing the new test.

Basic competency is the level that passing the test should show, not a thorough understanding of the Taxi/Private Hire industry between 1842 and today.

When I passed the test myself in 1999, it was pretty easy but in the ensuing weeks, my local knowledge exploded in volume while on the job. It strikes me that this is as it should be, albeit with a marginally more difficult or lengthy test.

The main problem with having a test that is too difficult is that someone who has made the investment to become a driver but does not have a job or a job that pays enough to live on cannot afford to wait to pass the test if they have to take it more than twice.

On a positive note, I have noticed that it is much easier now to contact the licensing dept and generally the Council.

The process is draconian, it simply takes far too long. Most drivers on circuit have a phone with built in software for guidance. And on school runs you can pre plan the route. It seems pointless asking where all these random "difficult" addresses are on the test when google maps tells the driver at a fingertip. I believe a question was "where's finbars" on a test. It's far too isolated and unknown. A better question would be where's the "limes doctors surgery" or even where's Morrisons in Thanet or where's Joss bay or Viking bay? Just generic locations that private hire circuit drivers use ALOT in day to day operations.

I believe it should be more focused on driving standards, numeracy, communication and customer service skills.

With regard to the current knowledge test I believe its just too difficult in its current format.

I speak with experience on this subject as in the last 18 months I have had two potential drivers who have been unable to pass this test, both having lived in this area for many years so are familiar with Thanet. Both have now given up even though they had completed everything else.

In this day and age, we have satnavs, so even though I agree that drivers should have a certain knowledge, the knowledge needed, at the moment to pass this test, is off the scale. One of my potential drivers even informed me that one of the questions was " how long is a prison sentence for a convicted people trafficker" what has that got to do with being a licensed taxi driver ?

To encourage more people to become licensed taxi drivers I truly believe this test needs be modified and not limited to three per year, a fee is payable each time its attempted, so why limit the amount of times it can be competed ?

Hi Alison , the last thing anybody wants is a decline in the standards of drivers in this area , but in simple terms any test that effectively has a Failure mark of 89% must be considered unreasonable . improvements have been made by coming away from the maximum of 3 attempts in a year so well done to all concerned on that .

This is only a Personal View but i would rather see a more reasonable pass mark and perhaps a review at the end of the first year whereby any registered complaints or dissatisfactions could be reviewed and a decision at that point as to the issuing of a licence in year 2 and beyond.

With regards to the debate on the current knowledge test I wish for my comments to be taken into consideration by the committee.

With myself being an independent operator and only been in the industry around 8 years, some might say "I might not know anything or enough" however I believe my previous careers and my ability to talk with other drivers helps me have an understanding of the industry and the current state of the industry.

To the question of whether there should be a knowledge test... YES the question you then have to ask is how hard should it be to pass? Easy enough so you can basically turn up and pass or hard enough no one passes!

To be honest this question much depends on the person's taking the course, because one person's easy test is another's hard and vice versa.

I do believe that after a discussion with you last evening the elements involved in the test should remain with the exception of the highway code and my reason behind that is if a complaint came to council about a driver's driving then they would be told to contact the police.

I would also consider changing the name, from " Knowledge Test" to maybe "Private Hire/Hackney Competency assessment" or something similar this would then take in to consideration all elements of the current knowledge test.

It's imperative that we do not drop our standards in Thanet any lower, there are many complaints already that drivers don't have customer service, don't know obvious local knowledge locations. In my opinion the TPHA are wrong to ask this to be lowered to an easier level, we need the standards to be high.

The problem of lack of drivers is again in my opinion because of these factors.

- *Takeaway delivery*

*No specific vehicle type
No compliances
Lower insurance
No circuit fee
High rates of pay per job*

- *Retired drivers*

Drivers retired during COVID

- *Associated Costs*

*2x compliances a year
Licence fee
Expensive insurance
Servicing costs
Fuel cost
Circuit fees
Vehicle costs*

- *Support*

Increase in non payers

Lack of support from police during increase of violence or threats

These in my opinion are the factors behind the decline of drivers, not a test.

An example: the BII does not lower the standard of their Person License course just because a group of people didn't pass! Tests are there to challenge and test a person's knowledge of their chosen career.

So I urge the committee not to change the difficulty level of the course and let's raise standards together and the operators can encourage drivers by other means to their companies.

PH/Hackney is a profession and should not be a fast way to earn a few quid for drivers or operators.

Obviously I haven't had to do the test recently,

I have got someone looking at doing it

They have done the two on line parts

Thanet Visitor ambassador

Safe Guarding

Both seemed good and informative

The Knowledge test will be next

It's good to see you now have guidelines on the website which weren't there when I did mine so that's a plus

Only thing I find making a bit outdated is we all have Satnav so beat routes are always to hand

And as someone that only does airport and long distance work I don't really need to know where all the pubs are.

Also I feel for a profession where we drive for a living no one wants to check we can drive.

shortage of drivers

The message before lockdown was about vehicle age

Max 5 years diesel

Which adds a big expense

It would make more sense to be based Euro 6 and emissions not age

The sort of vehicle I use is £50k brand new

When a low mileage 3 year old is £20k that's a big difference in over heads

Also for long distance work electric cars just won't cut it yet and are another £20k on top

Also has the shortage of drivers coincided with the proof of tax as if it was a top up income if it's all taxed as allowance used up on pensions or full time job it may just not make any sense

Regards

I feel that the knowledge test is too difficult for most people to pass. I have sat the test 3 times. I have every other licence you can hold on a driving licence. There is nowhere to find the information as to what you are going to be tested on. Also they have made the test more expensive. I understand that we need fit and proper people to pass the test, however there are other ways around this, such as maths and English tests. Also the DBS check to find out if they have convictions relating to such a job roll. I also comprehend that we as a local economy need to generate capital due to the lack of funding in this area and the fact that the funding provided by the government in Thanet could and should have been utilised in a much better manner. I have loads of ideas that could generate money for the local economy. I have also been to a council meeting to become a councillor as was asked by most parties to join. However I found it to be a muck with people that have no idea about life and or business. They either had a good so-called education but no common sense or were mad as a box of frogs. Now I know why we are in such a position as a people.

I am aware of this meeting with the TPHA as I saw it on Craigs Twitter feed at the time it happened.

I concur that the knowledge test is now too challenging compared with the way it used to be. I have had one driver approach me for possible work who was a taxi driver for years but let his licence expire at the time of the pandemic (he did airport work). Trying to get his licence back again he has failed the knowledge three times that he has informed me of. That in itself does not sit right with me as if something is up with the system.

I believe the main part of the process that should have been tightened up on is the testing of a driver's comprehension, ability to speak English and the obvious one of a person's test of good character.

One of the main problems and I speak through my own experience was the pandemic. With my airport business the day Boris came on the TV and said stay at home I lost something like £20K worth of work within 48 hours, thankfully I was able to recover. For your rank and file taxi circuit driver who relied on the pub trade etc. for a living it was devastating, they went off to do other things and have simply not come back again, this is a major problem itself.

Unfortunately with the obsession with EV, Vehicle ages and making things a lot tougher (including proving tax status) it does not really incentivise anyone to want to join an industry I have been a part of for the last 12 years.

As a final thought, do you realise that the companies that make up the TPHA all charge the drivers that work for them at least £100 a week and more in a lot of cases so it would obviously be in their best interests to rectify this / get as many extra drivers in as possible.

I hope this feedback helps in some way.

Please can I raise the concerns below.

With the knowledge test being set to one day and time we have found some people that want to change careers are unable to attend due to current employment.

Restricted licence,(Not for circuit work) Would there be a possibility of a restricted licence for those that want to drive for companies that operate Kcc school contracts and do long distance work outside of the local area to which local road knowledge is not required

The Knowledge test, Is this out of date? The car driving test requires the learner to operate and read a sat nav within the driving test, The more you drive an area the more you remember the area.

We know of one person that knows the area very well but under test situation panics and would be unable to pass the knowledge test and having a restricted licence would help them get employment with Kcc contract work and long distance work