

## **APPENDIX 8: Hammersmith and Fulham Disability Forum Consultation response**

# **Hammersmith & Fulham Disability Forum**

## **Disability Forum response to Taxicard Consultation 2011**

1. Hammersmith and Fulham Disability Forum is a user led group of disabled residents supported by Hestia under contract with Hammersmith and Fulham Council. We had a discussion at a Forum meeting before Christmas on London Council proposals for the Taxicard budget. Members were very concerned about the proposals and asked me to find out if Hammersmith and Fulham Council planned to consult Taxi card users and the Disability Forum on the proposals. At that stage members were clear that their top priority was to retain double swiping.
2. I attach the email correspondence I had with Councillor Botterill on Taxicard and ask that issues raised be taken into account.
3. At the Taxicard focus group on 3 May 2011 Disability and Consultative Forum Taxicard users
  - Did not support restricting eligibility to the automatic criteria
  - Supported a fair way of assessing applicants for discretionary Taxicards. It was not easy to get consensus on which assessment method was the fairest that would also met the council's objectives.
  - strongly supported double swiping
  - Supported retention of an annual limit for trips that was not less than the current limit. Users did not believe that the council's concern that some people run out of Taxicard trips before the end of the year should mean monthly trips for all Taxicard users. Users felt that the Council should identify those Taxicard users that had difficulty managing their trips and find a way of assisting them.
  - strongly opposed mean testing
  - Reluctantly supported increasing the minimum member charge to £2.50 but did not support reducing maximum subsidy tariffs.
4. Various users mentioned problems using taxis with their Taxicard which we hope will be reflected in the report to Cabinet.

- The biggest problem is the amount on the meter when the taxi arrives. Despite members being told that it should be no more than £3.80 the run in charge frequently can range from £5 - £8 which can be almost the 1<sup>st</sup> swipe gone.
- Despite taking a booking the journey is not guaranteed as Comcab can ring back and say no cab is available. This causes difficulty with time specific journeys such as theatres, trains or appointments.
- Hospital transport and parking provision for blue badge holders are big issues for people who need door to door transport to access health services.

5. Amending eligibility criteria is a difficult issue for councils if one of the objectives is to promote independence and reduce health inequality.

- If any amended criteria meant some blind and partially sighted people are no longer eligible the consequence could be less independence etc. if they did not have access to someone to guide them on public transport. This may have a consequence for their mental health if they could not get out and about.
- Amended criteria for Taxicard such as reducing the distance could be counterproductive. Most people on Taxicard in practice would not be able to walk the minimum of 400 metres needed to get to the average bus stop as well as walk to their destination.

6. From the public policy perspective there is everything to be gained by a

- robust and fair assessment process with re-assessments at regular intervals such as with blue badge 3 years: freedom pass 5 years
- reviewing rules and closing any loopholes that encourage taxi drivers to abuse run in fees which mean users pay more; travel less far or find one swipe already gone
- rigorous monitoring of Taxicard contracts to ensure London Councils; TfL and the boroughs as well as Taxicard users are not ripped off by taxi companies or taxi drivers
- robust Taxicard system that does not result in Taxicard users paying for taxi drivers and taxi companies taking advantage of poor contract management
- Taxicard contract that achieves efficiencies: it is not acceptable for Taxicard users to be making all the efficiency savings needed to keep within a Taxicard budget at borough level. We heard evidence that the Taxicard budget may not have kept pace with recent taxi fare increases.
- innovative ways of providing effective door to door transport for those who cannot walk the minimum of 400 metres needed etc in all weathers to use public transport to access various services.

**Jane Wilmot**  
**Chair**  
**Hammersmith and Fulham Disability Forum**

Dear Cllr Botterill

We understand that TfL and London Councils are dealing with a deficit in this year's Taxicard budget and also agreed cuts to next year's Taxicard budget.

Taxicard members of Hammersmith and Fulham Disability Forum are very concerned about the proposals

- to end double swiping
- to increase the charge to Taxicard users from £1.50 to £2.50
- to reduce the subsidy per journey by £1
- to have a moratorium on new members between January and March 2011

and asked me to write to you on their behalf. We understand that each borough has to make a decision whether to implement the London Council /TfL proposals in full or in part.

**Hammersmith and Fulham already has a annual limit of 104 Taxicard journeys.** Taxicard users tell me that they often do not use their annual quota so are concerned that the council has a deficit on its Taxicard budget in the current financial year.

Members are querying London Council's belief that the current year deficit is solely caused by additional trips by Taxi card users rather than increased fares for the same or similar level of trips.

Are TfL and London Councils confident that their Taxicard contractor is giving them full value for money and not charging for unused journeys or unused portions of journeys? How can TfL and London Councils control how much is already on the meter before Taxicard users are picked up?

**Double swiping:** Taxicard users tell me that the value and distance travelled on each £1.50 swipe had reduced by about 50% in the last 10 to 12 years. Eg one swipe at one time took users for Covent Garden to Hammersmith. Now it takes 2 swipes plus a cash payment of £ 3 to £4 for the same distance. 1 swipe often only gets as far as Hyde Park Corner or Knightsbridge.

**Members tell me that double swiping is what makes the longer taxi journey affordable and strongly recommend that this council continues to fund double swiping for its residents.** We do not consider that the comparison between Taxicard fares of £1.50 with current bus and tube fares is correct. Most taxi card users also use Dial a Ride which is free of charge. Freedom Pass holders do not pay for public transport so Taxicard users feel it is not fair that they have to make any contribution to taxi fares.

**Increasing the Taxicard fare and reducing the subsidy:** Reducing the subsidy by £1 on top of an increase for one swipe to £2.50 means an overall increase to 3.50 for one swipe which is an increase of more than 100%. Members are not happy at this level of increase but I am told their top priority is that Hammersmith and Fulham Council continue to fund double swiping for its residents.

**Moratorium on new Taxicard members in current financial year:** we do not support this as it discriminates against new Taxicard applicants.

We do understand that every borough is facing difficult decisions over its Taxicard budget but members value double swiping and hope Hammersmith & Fulham Council will fund this for their disabled residents.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you need further information. I look forward to hearing the decision made by Hammersmith and Fulham Council on its Taxicard budget.

With best wishes for Christmas and the New Year

Yours sincerely

Jane Wilmot  
Chair  
Hammersmith and Fulham Disability Forum