

Unite 3023 Consultation Response – CAA Surface Access Review 2016

Unite is the UK's largest transport union, comprising of over 1.5 million members from varying backgrounds within the public transport sector, such as airline employees, airport employees, bus employees and taxi (black cab) drivers.

Unite branch 3023 represent Taxi drivers based in the North East, Yorkshire and Humber region and as such are best placed as a transport union to respond on behalf of taxi drivers in this particular region and City of Leeds.

Our region covers the following airports:

- **Leeds Bradford**
- **Teeside**
- **Humberside**
- **Doncaster Robin Hood**

As such, we are familiar with surface access strategies in all of these operational airports. For the purpose of this consultation review we will concentrate on just one airport, Leeds Bradford, where we feel the surface access strategy has been woefully inadequate from the period where operations were taken over by Bridgepoint North, the venture capital business from the five West Yorkshire Authorities that shared the original operations both airside and land side including the surface access at the site under Leeds City Council Highways in late 2007/early 2008.

Our aim is to answer the consultation questions objectively and as thorough as possible, thus to give the CAA a comprehensive response from Unite the Union in the North East, Yorkshire and Humber region of England and the City of Leeds and its regional airport of Leeds Bradford.

Q: Have we identified the key issues on market structure within the scope of this review?

A: We feel that on the whole the key issues have been factored in to this review. However, one area within which we feel there could be more transparency is the evidence shown within specific data graphs.

While they are conclusive in their findings in relation to movements to airports such as Leeds Bradford, they do not identify the movements from airports such as Leeds Bradford. Additionally, in the sub sectors headed 'Taxi or Minicab' there is no compelling breakdown of the two sectors, which has a direct effect in surface access to and from all airports because of the nature as to how both formats operate. One being an 'on demand' service operated by black cabs and the other a pre-booked service mainly operated by minicabs.

This is fundamentally one area where future reports could become 'target specific' and have better target identifiers to establish correct modal figures in future reviews. This could be a roll out of 'best practise' for operational airports that submit to future surface access reviews as part of a better working overview of the public transport inclusion at those mentioned in your review consultation document.

It would also allow the CAA to identify where improved surface access and better links with public transport could be achieved going forward, especially with the development, expansion and improved movements both to and from airport terminal frontages and car parks.

However, more importantly within this consultation and from previous conversations with CAA employees, it is difficult to understand why specifically 'taxis and minicabs' have been excluded from the 'public transport' identifier and for that matter, why Taxis, Minicabs, Buses, Trams and other forms of public transport have not been narrowed down in such graphs and rather represented as whole entities for the purpose of percentile figures.

Another questionable element is the 'other' section and I refer directly to Fig.6 page 37, where there is no breakdown of what 'other' significantly represents. Are we to understand that this represents airport employee movements and loading/unloading logistics that were just taken as modal figures of movements from the airport. We feel that this requires greater clarity also.

In addition, there is no suggestion of specific timescales given to the collection of such data and indications of such would also give greater clarity to future reports.

Q: Have you any views and/or evidence on the market position of airport operators in the provision of airport services used to access the airport?

A: On this matter, Unite are best placed as a representative body to give clear, unequivocal and evidence based views.

Prior to late 2007 when Bridgepoint North took over control of Leeds Bradford Airport, the services accessing the airport were given flexibility and freedom of movement. Subsequently, the attack on Glasgow airport on Saturday 30th June 2007 changed that considerably for all forms of transport. Those especially affected were the providers that operated a dual role of both a 'from and to' service, namely for Leeds Bradford being those identified in the consultation document with the exclusion of trams or variants of.

Of course the concept of distancing vehicles from the terminal frontage did not actually become effective until the middle of 2008, by which time massive constraints had been placed on movements to the airport. The use of specified car parks for 'drop off and pick up' meaning that passengers were not given cover when they were waiting to be picked up either by taxi, minicab or by loved ones or anyone else.

The bus service or lack of one that was credible meant that most journeys were completed by motor car, be that taxi, minicab, long stay vehicles and loved ones etc etc. Over the years there have been suggestions of a train-airport link being developed but it has always fallen short due to the gradient required for such a scheme to access the airport directly and this has fallen once again on the above mentioned vehicle movements. Albeit that bus movements are more frequent, but on reduced services to the airport from Leeds City and Bradford City with no other connection to any other West Yorkshire city or town.

Fast forward to recent years and to the present and vehicle movements are much more difficult, especially for taxis, minicabs and loved ones etc with the introduction of the airports 'stealth drop off and pick up tax', payable at the rate of initially £2, which then rose to the current charge of £3 for the privilege.

For a brief time, a cost based element was introduced where drop offs and pick ups could be conducted at an annual rate, which recently was abolished and a free drop off and pick up area was constructed but which took no consideration for passengers with sizeable suitcases, children, the disabled or those arriving on international flights to meet with colleagues and arriving for the first time at Leeds Bradford.

This has been given the remit of purpose from the operators, Bridgepoint North of being a combined way of reducing the overall movements both to and from the airport, but has been lambasted by just about all concerned including the local council as being a method of increasing the airports income revenue generator as the consultation document has eluded to as one of the many reasons for such charges being implemented. Given the percentile figure as shown in Fig 6 it is obvious that it is primarily a cash cow for the airport to further swell the coffers of shareholders without due consideration for such services such as taxis and minicabs having to unduly increase fares to the travelling public because of such.

In addition to those points, there is and has always been concern over the collection of data at the entry points to the payable pick up/drop off zone. The obvious reader scanning the registration on entry thus accordingly displays the registration, time spent and amount payable in exit. Leaving users, with no information on the collection of data through such operations, exactly as to where and how this information is further used by Bridgepoint North and or its subsidiaries, affiliates and or service providers other than those with temporary access to services.

Q: Have you any evidence or views on how well informed consumers are of their airport surface access options and in what is most important to passengers in accessing an airport? Is this an area that merits further research?

A: Unite having numerous members that both transport passengers to airports and those that work within airports also, we are in an unique position to offer best views on this two-parted question.

Leeds Bradford airport that we have chosen to respond thoroughly in in this consultation offers many options for the travelling passengers travelling to the airport via their website.

Link: <http://www.leedsbradfordairport.co.uk/getting-to-the-airport>

This gives clear, yet somewhat secular information in how to arrive by public transport.

There is somewhat misleading information on the website suggesting firstly, that you can arrive at the airport by 'train', then to be met with an explanation that the train stations are not at the airport but located a distance away with a link bus service.

Link: <http://www.leedsbradfordairport.co.uk/getting-to-the-airport/travel-by-train>

We feel that this should not be used in this way as a first time visitor would be totally unaware of this situation.

Next, that the specified service providers of which, official 'taxi' provider is listed, is not a 'Hackney Carriage Taxi (Black Cab)' and this is totally misleading to the traveling public. Whilst it may be classified as a 'generic term', it is wholly inappropriate for an airport to using this terminology, especially when those travelling from outside of Leeds would be expecting a traditional 'Hackney Taxi' and not the minicab service to which they espouse.

Link: <http://www.leedsbradfordairport.co.uk/getting-to-the-airport/travel-by-taxi>

Consequently, on arrival at Leeds Bradford airport, the passenger is not given freedom of choice when wishing to choose a means of departing the airport via an 'official' Hackney carriage Black Cab due to the non existence of a rank for that provision, an issue that the CAA has in the past has suggested is the preferred standard at all airports. A particular issue that was raised with the CEO of Leeds Bradford airport during the period 2008-2009 and with the local council due to their subsequent sale of the rights to operate an airport.

Surface access information up to the end of 2007, from which time the current preferred service provider whom initially tendered for the right to stand at the airport without any other competition was brought in, was comprehensive and offered the travelling public both to and from the airport a great amount of choice and 'on-demand presence' facilities with a Hackney carriage taxi rank having been in situ since the end of 1947 when the airport started with commercial flights.

Today, the travelling passenger is met with one of four options on arrival at Leeds Bradford.

That is; to travel by bus, by private motor car (hire car included), by a privately booked taxi/minicab or via the minicab service, which operates from a portakabin on site, to which passengers must pre pay (at rates which are much higher than a standard Hackney Carriage fare) using postcodes and it being a 'postcode lottery' when being charged. Many business users whom have travelled into the centre of Leeds by the minicab service at the airport reporting that they have been charged as much as 1.5x the ordinary standard daytime Hackney carriage rate. However, when the original tender document (which I sadly cannot get hold of a copy) was put into the public domain, it was clearly stated that all fares must be bench marked against 'Hackney carriage rates'.

There have been many document incidents in the local media of passengers complaining because of the lack of immediate choice and the subsequent over inflated charges made by the minicab service provider incumbent.

Link: <http://www.yorkshireeveningpost.co.uk/news/no-go-to-plans-for-leeds-bradford-airport-taxi-rank-1-4625791>

(Most interesting are the comments from passengers and users on this article. An article, which I am sure that the CAA would not be aware of and that the operators of Leeds Bradford would not want to be shouting about to the CAA in this consultation review).

We feel that the many counts of this type of evidence supporting the lack of choice and freedom to choose an alternate 'on demand' service such as Hackney carriage black cabs has and is putting Leeds Bradford airport in a domineering position to both restrict access based on quantitative sums of money paid by the minicab firm year on year, set at approx £300,000 per annum and around 5% of each fare paid as a supplement and prevent competition by not further opening up a tender process by which other providers such as Hackney carriage black taxis could enter into legitimately.

However, Unite has and always will advocate a policy of 'free and open' access across all areas of public transportation networks and airports factor into that also.

We do fervently feel that the options open to passengers are both minimalistic, secular and restrictive. We understand that other airports where such incidents of surface access policies such as the one adopted by Leeds Bradford are concerned, do open up competition to other formats such as Hackney Carriage black cabs to give greater flexibility, especially to those who travel with disabilities given that in Leeds the fleet of Hackney carriage black cabs runs at approximately 60% of its 537 vehicles being disability compliant under the auspices of the Disability Discrimination Acts 1995 & 2005 and the Equality Act 2010. We know from compelling anecdotal evidence from disability groups within Leeds that the service level from the current minicab firm only compares to approximately 6% of the operating 120 cars. That is further reduced over a twenty four hour period

with the reduction in cars that will operate on a full 24 hour basis. A factor that was not an issue when Hackney Carriage black cabs were omnipresent at the airport until the end of 2007, 24 hours per day.

We feel the most important aspect to passengers accessing an airport and its surface access policies are:

- Ease and flexibility
- Accessibility
- Freedom of choice
- Multiple alternatives of credible and cost effective public transport
- Good levels of surface access for disability users
- Inexpensive and effectively safe 'pay for' parking
- Non restrictive cost element of drop off and pick up charges

Further research scope:

Unite 3023 feels that this area requires much needed further research with a view to scoping restrictions to surface access by other service providers, by making airport operators use transparent policies in relation to access policies and strategies and by such research and conclusions, finding that airports such as Leeds Bradford and others, that operate a single service provider and not allowing an open and transparent surface access to all choices to the travelling passenger, should be referred under the competition element based in relevant cases as mentioned in the consultation document.

Unite 3023 feels that any anti-competitive element that exists should not be allowed in so far as to give any airport operator the increased balance of upstream domination and such downstream domination as evidenced from the website of Leeds Bradford airport and its list of both upstream and downstream service providers. We feel that this is an area for further research on the simple basis that freedom of choice is a key identifier with all manner of public that arrive or depart from an airport via its surface access.

Q: Have we identified the key issues related to the distribution of airport car parking? Do you have any views on what, if anything, would improve outcomes to consumers?

A: In relation to the first part of this two-part question, Unite 3023 feel that most of the issues have been addressed with the exclusion of a number of points, which may not have been ordinarily noticed when this consultation was being formatted.

The first point in this matter is the ease of access, flexibility and cost of such.

Most users of airport owned short stay or long stay car parking tend to be those who either know very little about services offered at other non-surface parking facilities, those that cannot be transported easily from off site facilities due to disability issues and those travelling in business where the cost element is not of primary concern.

However, most users when questioned by our members in transporting them to Leeds Bradford airport often say that they would have driven to the airport to either drop off their loved ones or to park for a long time (greater than 1 day), had the information and charges been more illustrative on the website and more competitive to that of parking at an off site long stay provider or that of a journey by taxi/minicab or to not have the incumbency of a 'stealth charge' imposed on such.

The next most popular response we hear from those we transport to Leeds Bradford, is that they have used the facilities before and they were either; not expansive enough to cater for numbers of vehicles opting to use the short stay element, thus having to drop off and pay the charge of £3 for the privilege to ensure that they or their loved ones were able to check-in their corresponding flight and prior to that, hope that their loved one or they themselves would have sufficient time to spend in the terminal before a flight gate was to be called.

Lastly and not by any means the least, this is passengers whom we transport to Leeds Bradford whom suffer either a long term or short term disability. They comment that the facilities for parking being a disabled user are completely inadequate given the distance from the terminal frontage and taking into account that they may often have bags, children and any potential gradient to consider in their travel to and from the airport car parks. Hence the majority of times a disability user will prefer to be taken to and from Leeds Bradford by Hackney carriage black cab due to the propensity of fleet with that availability (as stated previously).

A positive outcome for these users and the comments we hear daily would be to review;

- How airports site their car parks (what inclusive involvement there is with users)
- How airports decide the scale of charges offered (perhaps a 'best practise' element would decide this factor)
- How airports present their rationale behind the charges placed in those dropping off/picking up. A clearer public announcement as to such using media etc and their website. And a much more holistic approach to open public debate considering the public are after all, the users who are affected by such

Q: Have you any views and/or evidence on how the information set that passengers have when choosing between airports surface access products could be improved for consumers?

A: Unite 3023 have taken a broadly holistic approach to this question and since being offered the opportunity to respond to the consultation, have questioned a sample of over ten passengers that were transported to Leeds Bradford over the space of just one week, between Monday May 2nd 2016 to Sunday May 8th 2016 inclusive. To give a sample response from those, coupled with a direct response from ourselves.

We found over the respondents comments and feel as a stakeholder respondent that products could be improved for consumers in a range of ways;

- Improved information in the 'in flight' magazines, where airlines would work more closely with outside providers and operators to give clearer, less ambiguous but greater choice and remove the upstream and downstream domination of airport operations

- Improved detailed ad plaques inside airports both arrival and departure side giving information on surface access choices other than those already present. Whether that would be by invitation or by application, would be the decision to be made in the interests of the travelling public. That would include all airports that currently only offer one 'official' mode of transport, to be encouraged to open up possibilities to greater choice by placements of taxi ranks for Hackney Carriage black cabs and increased waiting times for pick up/drop off car parks
- Improved 'on road' signs that would better allow those dropping off/picking up loved ones or passengers as to the scale and cost choice of either parking short stay, long stay or incidental instant pick up/drop off
- By permitting outside service providers to freely and openly display charges of services via interaction with their current social media platforms
- Improved truth and transparency when offering 'disability options' and even designated free 'no cost option' short stay or immediate drop off/pick up facility for those either transporting disabled passengers or those dropping off loved ones who are disabled
- A direct link on airport websites to that of the CAA itself and the best practise guidance that has been known prior to this consultation and after the findings are assimilated
- A direct link on airport websites to that of the Department for Transport and their recommendations on surface access provision across all regional airports. This could be tied in with specific airport security pointers (safe travel when departing and arriving). This would also give international visitors that can access the airports website extra and informed peace of mind of the facilities at the airport destination
- The removal of the often remarked generic term of 'taxi' if a minicab firm is used primarily in surface access provision. This word is globally known as a term which relates to vehicles, which operate a meter that is on display and to which the passenger is charged for their journey at the end of the trip and not prior. This we know causes much confusion especially at Leeds Bradford airport with arriving passengers from both domestic and international flights

Finally, we would like to thank the CAA again for the opportunity to reply to this consultation. We, at Unite 3023 hope that the answers given are comprehensive, informative and resolute in their construction.

We live in an age where the consumer wants to have improved information constantly, that due to the increase in smart phones, tablets and other devices. Also with the ever expanding use of social media as an outlet for information. Today, more so than even five years hence, the advent of apps and QR codes are increasingly becoming common place in life and maybe that is avenue that both airports, the CAA and other agencies could use to get much needed and often desired information out to the global travelling consumer.

By utilising the digital age in this way and with the others that we have mentioned, safety and security, transparency and service provision without the upstream and downstream domination, could see the choices that the aviation traveller/s make; further enhanced and catapult the British aviation scene in to one that other countries would seek to emulate as a 'best practise' ideology on a global scale.

By seeking not to penalise or impose stealth charges on those carrying out a public transport service, would in itself be self promoting through the greatest medium there is; the public word of mouth.

This in turn would effectively reduce carbon footprints across all airports and would ensure that passengers/consumers were offered the best deal that there was at that time that they needed or required it. When Hackney carriage taxis were present at Leeds Bradford airport there was a shift in travel arrangements seen across a decade prior to the sale in late 2007 of the use of Hackney carriage vehicles. This reduced the significant traffic element arriving and departing from the airport and reduced the need for airports such as Leeds Bradford to initiate a road improvement scheme nearby to allow for the increased traffic.

As these vehicles often travelled toward the centre of the city, there was less impact on the environment as the vehicles would carry out one journey away from the airport and would only return if they had a return fare or if they dropped close enough to warrant.

Current provision dictates that the impact on the environment is much more severe as the vehicles operating currently from the airport have no choice but to travel back to the airport for their place of business. Effectively increasing journeys by a factor of 2 every day. That coupled with inflated minicab prices that should have been bench marked with Hackney carriage black cab rates, forcing consumers to use either their own car and increase the airports coffers artificially at the current £3 per drop off/pick up or to remove their support and travel to other airports such as Manchester etc (evidence on this based in the link included).

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Dated: 16/5/16