

TRANSPORT AND WORKS ACT 1992
TRANSPORT AND WORKS (INQUIRIES PROCEDURE) RULES 2004
LONDON UNDERGROUND VICTORIA STATION UPGRADE ORDER

VICTORIA INTERCHANGE GROUP LIMITED

PROOF OF EVIDENCE SUMMARY OF STEPHEN SIMPSON
TAXIS

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1. As a resident in the Victoria area for 24 years I use taxis as a primary source of transport. In preparation for this paper I spent a number of afternoons walking all proposed routes, stands and pick-up points. I have also consulted with many other users of the taxi services in the affected area to gain a broad picture of how things work today and the likely impact of the proposed changes.

2. **Scope of evidence**

My evidence addresses two main issues these being (i) the relocation of taxi pick up points as a result of the closure of the area in front of the mainline station and (ii) the effect of Network Rail's position on the taxi strategy at the station in general.

3. **Scheme design and signage**

The plans for taxis will require passengers arriving at Victoria mainline station as well as those who arrive by underground, bus or local residents to choose three potential areas for taxi pick up i.e. Wilton Road, Buckingham Palace Road and the rail/air deck. Only the latter taxi stand exists today and the remaining stands have been created to cater for the closure of the existing area in front of the station.

With three options to choose from it will be critical to ensure signage is well thought through to avoid confusion and to ensure passengers have a clear route to their closest pickup point. The signage should include directions to the rank as well as an indication of the optimum rank for the desired direction of travel thus reducing lengthy and expensive detours around the construction road closures. An additional enhancement for the signage would be an indicator to include the volume of cabs available in the respective ranks so that passengers can make an informed choice of which point to choose with minimum waiting time.

4. Cover for inclement weather

Neither of the “new” taxi ranks in Wilton Road and Buckingham Palace Road has any cover for inclement weather and this is something that should be corrected if this proposal proceeds. The rail/air deck is covered.

5. Taxi rank safety concerns

One item of concern with the Wilton Road pick up point is the associated rank which runs down the length of Wilton Road and into Gillingham Street. Should there be any overflow of this rank, taxis, especially at peak times, will likely spill into Belgrave Road where there is an infant’s school. At peak morning and evening times there is already congestion here as parents stop to pick up their children. We are concerned about the additional safety aspects should an unauthorised extension of the rank occur.

6. Effect of road closures

One negative aspect of both “new ranks” is that taxis (during closure of Wilton Road) are forced to take a southerly route on leaving the station and this requires a circuitous and more expensive route for those passengers wishing to travel in a northerly direction. Studies of outbound taxi movements show that 50% of all taxi journeys head in a northerly direction.

In earlier proposals it was envisaged that taxis would avail themselves of a contra flow arrangement in Vauxhall Bridge Road that will be established for buses when Wilton Road northbound was closed. Now it has been decided to limit the period for which Wilton Road northbound will be closed and for which there will a contra flow to just five months. It is proposed that taxis should not be allowed to use the contra flow route for the five months. For up to a further 22 months Wilton Road will be open northbound to buses but taxis will have to continue to proceed southbound. The contra flow decision is apparently based upon TfL’s reluctance to allow taxis in contra flow bus

lanes. Serious reconsideration should be given to allowing taxis, in tandem with buses, to use the contra flow for 5 months as a short term way of avoiding longer and more expensive journeys for those heading northbound. There must be a better and more cogent reason put forwards than that TfL, as a matter of policy concerning contra flow bus lanes, does not like this sort of thing and prefers to stick to a blanket policy rather than showing the flexibility needed to accommodate taxi users.

For a period of up to 22 months and possibly 27 months if the contra flow is not available, taxis leaving Wilton Road southbound are likely to add to congestion when they filter east and north via Rochester Row or west and north via Eccleston Bridge. We have particular concerns that taxis will also find short cuts through residential areas to avoid traffic congestion. Thus Eccleston Square, Hugh Street and the roads bounded by Vauxhall Bridge Road, Rochester Row and Victoria Street could become taxi thoroughfares to the detriment of local residents.

7. Hudson's Place

We understand that Network Rail have refused permission for the use of Hudson's Place. This road is ideally suited for use as a taxi rank as it abuts the station, has an entrance to the station and is covered. There are also no roads to cross for those carrying luggage, the disabled, the elderly or parents with children. We understand that years ago this area was in fact a taxi rank for the station and as such it conveniently leads directly into Bridge Place. Observations on its use today suggest that it fulfils the role of a parking lot for contractor vans servicing the station, transport police, tour buses and for private vehicles. The use of Hudson's place for taxis should be re-examined constructively by LUL and Network Rail.

8. Rail/air deck

Network Rail has also been stated as being unwilling to commit the future of the rail/air deck as a permanent taxi pickup. We understand that Network Rail has indicated the potential to redevelop the rail/air deck and it is strongly implied that this will mean a loss of taxi facilities at this point. The current rail/air deck is well placed to support taxi pick up from the west side of the station but it needs some work to improve the efficiency of loading, improved signage and access from between platforms 13 and 14. Network Rail's decision effectively eliminates the potential to increase the use of this facility while the underground works are in process and should the rail/air deck redevelopment proceed will significantly increase the strain on an already inadequate taxi infrastructure. This is especially so since this provides easy access for passengers arriving and departing on the Gatwick Express. Most of these passengers will be transporting luggage and will be forced to trek to one of the new pick up points.

9. Inter-agency working

It is extremely unfortunate that Network Rail has not volunteered to do more to assist in offering taxi provisions. Most taxis taken by non-residents in the Victoria area are taken by people who have been brought to the area by Network Rail. Network Rail has created the demand by bringing those people in. Now that LUL proposes a scheme which is intended in large measure to benefit those of Network Rail's passengers who wish to travel on by the Victoria Line, an impartial observer might think co-operation with LUL over taxi provision is the least Network Rail could offer.

That said, LUL's status as applicant means that it is for LUL to devise and deliver a workable system for taxis. LUL's application must be judged on the basis that it has not succeeded in devising and delivering a workable system.

10. Conclusions

I propose the following requirements be placed on LUL should the application Order be granted:

1. The new taxi ranks in Wilton Road and Buckingham Palace Road should be provided with cover against the weather.
2. Sufficient new signage should be provided to enable passengers to easily find the most convenient pick up point. Consideration should be given to a facility that indicates taxi supply at each point so that passengers minimise waiting time.
3. LUL should re-examine with Network Rail the possibility of using the former taxi rank in Hudson's Place in lieu of the Wilton Road option.
4. In respect of the period of the Wilton Road closure, LUL should re-examine with TfL the possibility of taxis using the northbound contra flow facility which will be established in Vauxhall Bridge Road for buses.
5. During the closure of Wilton Road LUL should examine with the Public Carriage Office and Westminster City Council what step can be taken to prevent taxis using Eccleston Square, Hugh Street and the roads bounded by Vauxhall Bridge Road, Rochester Road and Victoria Street as taxi thoroughfares
6. LUL should seek to clarify with Network Rail their intent on the future of the rail/air deck. It is highly desirable that this facility be maintained in the long term and improved to provide better loading capabilities, signage and access from the platforms.

