



### > What is the Public Carriage Office?

The Public Carriage Office (PCO) is part of Transport for London (TfL) and is responsible for licensing London's taxi and private hire services.

There are more than 22,000 licensed taxis in London and nearly 25,000 taxi drivers.

The private hire trade consists of more than 2,600 licensed operators, using around 56,000 licensed drivers and more than 48,000 licensed vehicles.

### > What does it do?

#### Taxis

Taxis can be hailed in the street or from one of around 500 designated ranks situated at prominent places including rail, Underground and bus stations. A telephone booking service is available from a number of providers.

London taxis are 100 per cent wheelchair accessible and many vehicles have other features to assist passengers including large coloured grab handles, swivel seats, intermediate steps and induction loops. Guide and other assistance dogs are carried free of charge.

All taxis must pass an annual inspection and all taxi drivers must be of good character, medically fit and pass the 'Knowledge' – the test for becoming a licensed taxi driver in the Capital. It requires detailed knowledge of roads and places of interest and takes between two and four years to pass.

As part of TfL, the PCO regulates taxi tariffs. It also appoints and regulates taxi ranks (outside the City of London) and has installed 'taxi poles' to help customers identify the ranks.

#### Private hire

The PCO licenses London's private hire trade, which includes minicab, executive car and chauffeur-driven services.

Operators are required to keep records of every booking they undertake and of the drivers and vehicles they use. All vehicles and drivers must be licensed.

The essential difference between taxis and private hire vehicles is that private hire journeys must be booked through a licensed operator. Private hire vehicles cannot legally ply for hire in the street or on ranks.



The licensing of drivers started in 2003 and involves the same checks as those for taxi drivers. All private hire driver applicants also have to demonstrate topographical skills such as map reading and route planning.

The licensing of private hire vehicles started in April 2004 and now all vehicles must pass an annual inspection and display a distinctive licence disc on the front and back windscreens. This shows that in addition to two MOT tests each year, the vehicle has passed an annual safety check and is fit for carrying passengers.

### **Enforcement and compliance**

A dedicated London taxi and private hire enforcement team, established as part of the TfL/Metropolitan Police Transport Operational Command Unit, doubled its numbers in 2009. The team targets illegal cab activity, unsafe vehicles and conducts on-street inspections.

A 'one strike and out' policy was introduced in July 2008 and any licensed private hire driver convicted of touting will have their licence revoked.

### **Safer Travel at Night**

In October 2002, the Safer Travel at Night initiative was launched to raise awareness of the risks of using illegal cabs. The PCO works closely with other parts of TfL, the police, the Greater London Authority and local authorities in a coordinated effort to make travelling at night safer.

A mobile text initiative called Cabwise has been introduced as part of the scheme. Customers can text the word 'HOME' to 60835 (60TFL) and receive the numbers for one local taxi and two licensed minicab operators

### **Information**

Part of the PCO's role is to improve the provision of information about taxi and private hire services, ensure they are integrated into the rest of London's transport network. To find out further information, use the following options:

- > Search facilities on the TfL website at [tfl.gov.uk/findaride](http://tfl.gov.uk/findaride). Here visitors can look for details of licensed private hire operators by area
- > TfL's 24-hour Travel Information Centre on 020 7222 1234