

Approaches to the use of screens in private hire vehicles (PHVs) and taxis

Brief guidance note



Purpose

Councils have been receiving queries from taxi and private hire vehicle (PHV) drivers and operators about the use of temporary screens or partitions as a way of providing physical separation between drivers and passengers in order to reduce the transmission of COVID-19.

Whilst we have asked the Department for Transport (DfT) to give licensing authorities a clear steer on the installation of screens to support consistency, in the absence of this, it will remain a decision for individual licensing authorities and local operators.

However, there is currently limited evidence about the effectiveness of temporary screens in reducing the risk of transmission of COVID-19. There is also a lack of clarity about the safety of fitting these types of screens in vehicles. This has created a challenge for authorities who are being asked to approve the fitting of screens.

To support authorities in considering this, this note signposts councils to relevant general guidance, as well sharing approaches taken by authorities which have taken a position on the use of screens.

This is an area that is developing quickly, and we will update this note as necessary.

Overview of government guidance

With a gradually easing of coronavirus restrictions underway in England, government has published updated [guidance for those operating transport services](#) which is relevant to all taxi and PHV licensees and [specific guidance](#) for those using taxi and private hire services. The DfT has also published [a set of taxi and private hire Q & A's](#) which includes questions around the use of PPE and protective screens. The DfT's position is that it will be up to individual authorities and operators to decide whether screens should be used, based on a risk assessment.

The Driver & Vehicle Standards Agency's (DVSA) Vehicle Approvals Technical Team have indicated that, if the vehicle has been approved then the temporary fitment of partitions would not invalidate that approval, if the vehicle was registered. It is important to note, whilst adaptations are permitted, this does not mean that it is safe for the passengers.

DVSA have advised that authorities should look at the suitability of the screen material to The Road vehicle (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986 and whether it has an effect on side curtains, side seat air bags, seat belt restraint systems or any other safety systems if these are fitted.

Approaches to the use of partitions or screens in taxis and PHVs

In the absence of more detailed guidance from DfT, a number of authorities have set out position statements or guidance for their local trade.

Given the lack of evidence about the efficacy of screens in preventing transmission of COVID-19, and the apparently limited safety testing of these products, there is a judgement

call to be made by authorities about whether their use should be permitted, and if so under what conditions.

Operators should be able to evidence that a product complies with government and industry regulations, as well as any additional requirements the licensing authority has.

The following may be a useful starting point when considering what local requirements around the use of screen could include:

- Assurance that a product is compliant with government and industry regulations, for example the Road Vehicle (Construction and Use) Regulations and relevant safety, UK and European Community (EC) legislation.
- Evidence that the product has been tested to relevant EU standards and approved by appropriate certification organisation.
- Directions about how screens should be fitted, for example by a professional in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.
- Specification of what screens should be constructed of, for example PETG (Polyethylene Terephthalate Glycol-modified) or polycarbonate.
- That screens do not impede the driver's vision, movement, or communication with passengers, or the driver or passenger access or egress to the vehicle.
- Insurers should be notified of any modifications made to the vehicle.
- Confirmation from the manufacturer that the installation does not compromise the integrity of the vehicle's structure and safety features

Prior to installing a screen, drivers should be encouraged to contact the licensing authority to check that they will permit the installation and ensure that the screen and installation will meet their requirements.

The following examples demonstrate how different authorities have sought to balance this:

Transport for London

Transport for London (TfL) have issued [a notice](#) for licensees which provides advice and guidance for licensees around the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and screens which has been informed by advice from the London Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell (STAC).

Manchester Council

Manchester have temporarily allowed vehicle owners to fit screens but accept no liability.

https://www.manchester.gov.uk/info/200094/taxis_and_private_hire/7954/Coronavirus_updates_for_Taxi_and_Private_Hire_Licensing/9

Durham, Sunderland and Newcastle Councils

Three authorities in the North East have developed a regional approach to the fitting of screens.

<https://www.durham.gov.uk/article/23316/Installing-temporary-protective-screens-in-taxis>