

Written evidence submitted by the GMB Union, London Region (CIT0242)

Introduction

GMB is a trade union that represents all workers.

We have over 620,000 members who work in every type of job imaginable across public services and in private companies too. Our members work in full-time jobs, part-time jobs or are working while they study.

GMB London Region has members in a variety of roles in the Transport Sector from Aviation, Passenger transport, Food and Freight Logistics & Public Services transport roles as well as courier and package distribution.

GMB has its origins in the Gas Workers and General Labourers Union which was formed in 1889 by Will Thorne. Following the success of the Union's first battle in the campaign on working hours, workers flocked to join the new union and by 1911 its members numbered 77,000.

Over the last 130 Years Altogether over 100 smaller unions have joined together to form the modern GMB - Britain's General Union.

We are pleased to respond to this consultation and to restate our support for developing and maintaining a sustainable transport industry. We have already given evidence to the **APPG Heathrow Expansion & Regional Connectivity Inquiry** on “Building Aviation Back Better: Developing an Environmental Aviation Strategy”

Issues during Covid 19

Many notable issues have occurred during this. Including a slowdown in aviation Which has caused a major implication for GMB members working at Heathrow, Stansted and Luton Airport's as agents', front desk and retail as well as food provision services And baggage handling.

A general slowdown of airports has also led to a marked reduction in airport transfers for both the private hire and taxi trades as well as bus services we will touch in more detail within this response on these aspects.

Inbound and outbound freight Levels have increased at companies such as DHL, Yodel & Hermes Putting further pressure on members.

This is especially apparent in last mile deliveries which have seen a major increase in popularity.

Multiple issues exist in relation to those expediting these deliveries from lack of warehouse space and the close proximity individuals are sorting packages & items to the delivery of these items.

Those undertaking last mile delivery are highly susceptible to human contact and abuse from those not only who they are delivering to but other road users.

Many are supplying their own PPE and in the case of Yodel couriers they are expected to find their own coverage any event of being sick the company has an unreasonable contract in our opinion which exerts draconian measures on those who are unable to fulfil their obligations.

The sums paid to couriers in some instances throughout the sector is well below the equivalent of living wage especially when taking into account individuals provision of their vehicles the insurance, fuel and maintenance costs as well as other expenses they face with taxation and late deliveries.

In nearly all cases couriers are working extended hours to cover the higher level of deliveries including the delays in packages reaching their hubs due to the increase in volumes.

This increase is also leading to rounds being cut that should volumes drop in the longer term may influence incomes due to flooding of the market with no alternative job prospects.

Food delivery couriers are facing multiple issues including danger from interaction with customers to basic issues such as non-admittance to Business premises to use toilet facilities.

We believe the government must do more to document this sector and potentially consider regulation of both the Courier and food Courier sector to prevent sharp practises and put into place legislation protecting those carrying out these vital roles unless a legislative framework exists we are concerned that workers and consumers may fall through the cracks of protection.

At present these trades are self-regulated which allow no proper oversight.

Being self-employed in many instances drivers and riders do not have the protections of businesses that have been able to obtain grants weather has been a downturn this is especially noticeable in the private hire and taxi trades who have seen a marked downturn.

it will be a prolonged period Until private hire and taxi operators see unimproved income due to multiple issues such as working from home, reduced air travel and a drop in disposable income.

Private hire and taxi is one of the sectors that we envisage a further contraction of small operators and a growth of large app based providers squeezing the traditional model.

During the COVID period we have seen a disproportionate level of deaths with private hire and taxi followed by bus being in the highest percentile.

It is notable that many of the deaths come from BAME groups, however this is also due to the high proportion of BAME working in these sectors.

Despite GMB contacting DfT early during the pandemic to request better safety measures these were ignored for some time putting workers in further jeopardy unnecessarily.

The public often have put their own needs ahead of those providing service to them and view them literally as ghosts who are easily forgotten once they have rendered their service.

More recently where drivers have requested passengers wear face masks they have been open to verbal and physical abuse.

There is in some cases a facility to install partitions in private hire vehicles which in some cases has created ire from the taxi trade who see this as a passing off.

This is somewhat disappointing as one would think that all individuals would be keen to protect others and not make an issue out of this choice.

Fares and rates are still historically low in this sector and they are being artificially kept low to promote services to the consumer over the needs of those carrying the job out.

The same can be said for food and courier deliveries where consumers often forget that these services have a cost and where courier companies are providing onward transmission of items rates agreed are sometimes lower than is reasonable based on the desire of the courier company to obtain the business.

This is transmitted on to the courier in low rates.

Additionally, it is highly common for the company sending packages to understate the size of the package to reduce their shipping costs which then has an effect on the courier and their income.

The bus sector is under much greater strain especially community transport services and smaller route operators.

GMB expect to see further job losses in this sector

There have been major issues in relation to protections for drivers in these instances as is borne out by statistics (Note 1) in terms of death and contraction of COVID.

Appropriate protections within the cabin were not in place I'd have had to be retrofitted in most instances.

GMB would recommend that more thought is given in the future to integrating such protections when commissioning and building subsequent products be they bus, taxi or other Vehicles where the public interact with workers.

We cannot presume that this will be the last pandemic that occurs and putting in appropriate protections at the outset limits potential risks to workers and the public.

Installing antibacterial and antimicrobial surface's is clearly a logical step forward which in retrospect perhaps should have been the standard in the past and would be a further protection for all.

Whilst rarely given consideration it is GMB's opinion that parking wardens are linked to transportation and consideration to their safety is re-evaluated during the pandemic outset wardens were not provided with the appropriate PPE in many cases and whilst there has been an improvement there is still a major risk given the public interaction of these operatives.

GMB recently has been able to arrange for Harrow council to arrange for spit kits which can collect the DNA of individuals who may verbally or physically assault frontline staff it is our opinion that regardless of role where individuals have interaction with members of the public or shop staff that appropriate legislation exists to enforce provision of such kits for enforcement purposes.

Such kits have been instrumental in prosecution's on behalf of TfL and we believe with the increase of risk of using COVID as a threat that this will help prosecution of perpetrators.

There has been a drive towards introduction of low traffic neighbourhoods that have had several effects on the transportation industry. These include extended journey times for those with disability and or making deliveries or collections as well as increased journey durations for private hire and taxi with the enhanced level of pollution that those undertaking journeys are enduring.

Whilst everyone is striving for an improved environment proper advanced modelling must take place to prevent damage to both commerce and what is reasonable from a general public perspective.

We are in no doubt there may be instances where low traffic zones may be appropriate however reduction of road space especially in urban environments may not necessarily be practical or safe.

With increased journey times comes increased costs both to the provider and end user.

Across London, where these LTN's have been introduced, we have had requests from our members to oppose these schemes as residents in the areas have seen how difficult travel within the area has become for both residents, visitors, public services and the disabled.

Private hire taxi drivers as well as food delivery couriers obvious leaving your great deal of abuse due to the delays that ensue as a result of the increase in low traffic neighbourhoods.

Whilst these may appear desirable, we would say that those who chose to live in their neighbourhoods where these have been instituted were aware of the limitations when choosing to make them their habitat.

Certainly, in highly urbanised locations this was the reason for creating green spaces.

It is our opinion that unless a road is pedestrianised that its primary purpose is for use as a carriage way except on occasions where it may be used for purposes such as Street parties or as throughfare for special events such as occur in locations Such as Regent Street in London.

It is GMB union's position that minimum standards should be in place for deliveries and the public and corporate entities should follow these principles and standards.

As an example where GMB members working for Bestfoods are delivering to Pret A Manger & KFC Specific guidelines are in place to protect all concerned we note that practises such as this do not exist due to the size of food service company or the lack of management understanding in relation to good health and safety practice.

During the period of COVID Companies have been able to follow their own path in relation to furlough and sickness payments this has had a negative effect on many who have lost income through no fault of their own as an example during shielding or as a result of having contacted COVID.

Many grievances and disciplinary cases have and are taking place as a result of inconsistent and irresponsible policies taken by companies in this sector.

No one chooses to be sick unable to attend work to discipline individuals is wholly inappropriate.

On some occasions it is clear that disciplinary procedures are being used as a staff reduction measure under the guise of disciplinary proceedings.

GMB is extremely concerned that appropriate testing measures have not been in place during the pandemic causing a further delay two workers availability where are negative outcome would have been provided as a result of testing.

Whilst testing is symptom based or based on interactions with those infected it is clear that those especially working in passenger transportation should have regular tests as a matter of course.

Not only is there a risk two workers put those in public transport such as bus private hire and taxi can become super spreaders and therefore the risks are greater than many.

Impact on Aviation

We recognise that the aviation industry is facing new and unprecedented challenges like many sectors of the economy and we welcome the opportunity to work with employers, government and all stakeholders to support the industry to return to 2019 levels and build a sector for the future. All parties should work together to protect jobs as the industry prepares for a new uncertain future

Overall, GMB recognises the important role an integrated Environmental Aviation Strategy can play in society today and into the future and we recognise the need for improved and sustainable transport systems to meet the needs of our members and their communities.

We are ever mindful of the need to expand the use of green transport solutions to protect the environment and reduce pollution, but this needs to be looked at as a means offering cheap and reliable interconnecting services. However as stated in our paper to the Heathrow APPG GMB are asking the government to put together an aviation-specific economic package to protect the industry without the need for redundancies, to ensure that any 'state-aid' comes with strings attached that protect worker's rights and creates a greener industry. If the UK is serious about investing in cleaner and greener planes and the possibility of carbon neutral flights then making engineers and workers in the industry unemployed is not the solution.

GMB is calling on the government to **Step Up, Step-In and Save Our Aviation Industry now**, with a package to save further job losses by extending the furlough scheme and to give specific support to the aviation industry until the devastating effects of the pandemic subside

and airports start flying at near pre-pandemic levels. <https://www.gmblondon.org.uk/aviation-campaign>

The Government needs to save aviation now with a package that will support the industry until airports are back to passenger and freight levels seen before the pandemic.

With further restrictions on aviation quarantine rules and passenger recovery demand will be very long and slow for years to come, other contract companies within all airports supply chain may follow suite to cut its losses and drastically reduce its workforce or even just pull out of its contracts.

Impact on Communities

Across the transport sector but especially in aviation, job losses during COVID create financial hardship and have a devastating effect on the local economy.

There needs to be a sector specific or targeted action plan to protect and safeguard jobs in the aviation industry in the first instance with a support package that will stop further job losses and the decimation of aviation, communities and local economies.

Quarantine, recession and caution about infection are causing colossal damage to every aspect of transport. In aviation, we have heard that the industry forecasts that last year's passenger levels won't return until 2024, and long-haul international markets will take longest to come back.

As we stated, this disruption will be felt all along the transport supply chain, from those who manufacture aircraft and buses and taxis to those who clean and provide security services.

Mental Health

There has been a high level of mental health issues for workers in the transport sector which of many cases is an atomised and isolated role.

Pressure's being put on workers from delivery to passenger transport have not helped for mental or physical state and certainly are of concern we would add that unless further research is made into this area the cost to the National Health Service and to industry will only become greater.

Not only is this issue a great risk in the short term but in the longer term this will no doubt have further effects.

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Note 1

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/causesofdeath/datasets/coronaviruscovid19relateddeathsbyoccupationenglandandwales>