

Joint Health Scrutiny Committee – 11 February 2014

Briefing note on the use of patient transport in bus lanes.

1. I have been asked whether Patient Transport might be permitted to use bus lanes.
2. Bus lanes are provided in order to promote public transport by improving journey times and journey time reliability by giving priority to buses on key transport corridors.
3. Each additional type or class of vehicle permitted to use a bus lane may undermine the effectiveness of this objective and exemptions are therefore limited.
4. Vehicles permitted to travel in a bus lane in Nottinghamshire are currently buses, pedal cycles, emergency vehicles attending an emergency and police vehicles in certain other circumstances. In Nottingham City wheelchair accessible taxis are also permitted to travel in bus lanes.
5. It will be noted that the classes of vehicles entitled to use a bus lane are very few. Pedal cycles are permitted to use bus lanes since this enables cyclists to proceed adjacent to the kerb and is arguably the safest location for them, although it is recognised that this does impede motor vehicles using the bus lane. All other exempt vehicles are undertaking a specific time critical activity.
6. Some specific activities may be undertaken in a bus lane (as opposed to travelling in a bus lane) including maintaining the highway, refuse collection and other local authority statutory functions (where these cannot be undertaken in any other way), removal of vehicles and gaining direct access to premises.
7. A bus is defined as a motor vehicle constructed or adapted to carry more than 8 passengers (exclusive of the driver). Therefore some larger patient transport vehicles may be permitted to use bus lanes.
8. It is appreciated that the committee will be interested in the possibility for the above limitations being changed to include patient transport.
9. It is understood that Patient Transport is provided by a number of providers using a variety of vehicles. In addition patients frequently make their own transport arrangements.
10. Therefore, identifying Patient Transport is a potentially complex matter. Currently all vehicles permitted to use a bus lane are immediately recognisable but this would not be the case for this additional category of vehicle. Patient Transport vehicles would in many instances be identical to other vehicles not carrying out that function. In addition Patient Transport vehicles might be engaged in activity other than that of transporting patients and would potentially not be permitted to use the bus lane; thereby creating confusion to drivers and enforcers.
11. Allowing an additional class of vehicles to use bus lanes would also require changes to traffic signs. This would be an extensive and costly exercise also requiring specific authorisation from the Department for Transport.

12. It is also important to note that the sight of apparently ordinary vehicles using a bus lane would be likely to prompt unauthorised vehicles of a similar nature to use it too, leading to a hinderance to buses and enforcement complications.
13. Whilst the current system, where additional classes of vehicles are not permitted, is relatively easy to efficiently enforce, there would be resource implications in monitoring and enforcing against unauthorised vehicles if additional more generic classes are exempted.
14. In addition, bus lane offences are not decriminalised in the same way as parking offences and a bus lane TRO may continue to be enforced by the police as a criminal offence as well as through the Council's civil procedure. Whilst there may be steps which could be taken to assist in remedying the procedural difficulties in enforcement, such mechanisms wouldn't prevent wasted-resource implications for the police, especially in terms of being able to readily identify potential contraventions whether in undertaking active enforcement or investigation into traffic incidents.
15. For the above reasons there are therefore no plans to allow additional vehicles to use bus lane.

Peter Goode, Nottinghamshire County Council Traffic Manager, 24/1/14