

A BETTER GIG

CAR SERVICES IN WEST YORKSHIRE
AND THE POTENTIAL FOR
PLATFORM COOPERATIVES

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the so-called gig economy, rewards are so far enjoyed by a handful of tech giants, and working conditions are being eroded. As part of the growing response to this, the New Economics Foundation has been supporting a group of private hire drivers in Bradford and Leeds to prototype a worker-owned private hire app ready for user testing and piloting. To inform this aim, this report presents research findings from target user groups based in Leeds and Bradford: residents not yet using Uber, and private hire drivers.

As the gig economy expands, increasing attention is being paid to the poor working conditions facilitated by platform apps. We posit that platform cooperatives – in other words, companies which use similar technology to the likes of Uber and Deliveroo but which are owned by their workers – can form an empowering response to the erosion of workers' rights. The gig economy has seen significant growth since 2010. Tracking this, there has been a surge in gig economy workers organising against poor pay and conditions. This has taken place at a time of increased precariousness across the UK labour market, which, combined with record lows in unemployment, points to a normalisation of precarious, flexible, short-term work with limited worker protection.

We carried out three focus groups to determine people's views on public transport in their respective cities; on private hire services including app-based services like Uber; and on the changes they would like to see in local transport. We met private hire drivers working in Leeds and Bradford; Leeds University students from the University's Disability Action Group; and older people from the Great Horton Live at Home scheme in Bradford.

Of the drivers we spoke to, security, risk, and status were prominent themes. Beyond this, a major focus they had was the negative impact of the Deregulation Act 2015 on their livelihoods and the perception that local authorities give preferential treatment to companies like Uber.

Overall, the drivers felt that the presence of Uber in the city was dividing drivers and turning them against each other. Despite this, it was also felt that Uber had 'revolutionised' the business for private hire drivers and had set a new standard for service delivery.

For the passengers we spoke to, accessibility, safety, and service quality were most salient features. For the students, this centred on emotional safety whereas the older people we spoke to were more concerned about their physical safety. Both groups emphasised the importance of a personable, tailored, and conscientious service. When discussing a cooperative model, the students were generally enthusiastic, focusing on workers' rights and challenging the hegemony of large companies. When discussing Uber and the development of a cooperative platform app, the older people we spoke to were sceptical.

The recommendations for change that emerged through conversations with drivers and passengers generally fell into three categories: safety (legal, emotional, and physical); access to a personalised service; and greater power transferred to drivers. The suggestions for change can also be thought of in terms of structural change (including improvements to public transport systems and legal protection for drivers); consumer choice and service (including the provision of consistent, reliable services with both phone- and app-based options); and awareness and training (including accessibility training).

There is growing dissatisfaction with the increases in the precariousness of the labour market in the UK. The findings presented in this report show that for many private hire drivers, their working lives are characterised by poor pay, poor conditions, and exploitation. They also show that passengers feel powerless to effect change and find that a lack of effective, accessible public transport leads to social isolation, exclusion, and dependence on support from others. We show that a private hire platform cooperative has the potential not only to improve working conditions for drivers but also to improve services for vulnerable communities.

1. INTRODUCTION

Our digital economy is becoming less equal, less democratic, and more monopolistic. In the gig economy, which we estimate has grown by 82% in London and 28% UK-wide in the past four years, rewards are so far enjoyed by a handful of tech giants, most notably Uber and Deliveroo. As affected sectors change, working conditions are being eroded. Nine out of ten private hire drivers in London surveyed last year said they had seen their take-home pay decrease since 2015; only one in five said they earned enough to support their families, with over half saying they had been racially abused on the job.

As part of the growing response to this, the New Economics Foundation has been supporting a group of private hire drivers in Bradford and Leeds to prototype a worker-owned private hire app ready for user testing and piloting. The drivers have set out to develop a cooperative platform app to challenge exploitation and take back more control over their working lives from large companies like Uber, who have increasing dominance in the sector.

The idea for the cooperative platform app began with a private hire driver protest against Uber outside Leeds town hall in March 2016. In the months that followed, four drivers started working together on developing the app idea whilst continuing their work as full-time private hire drivers. The platform, now called Yamuv, is a UK-registered, UK tax-paying company with four driver-owners. Yamuv is run on cooperative principles with drivers receiving a profit share based on their contribution.

The New Economics Foundation has carried out locally based research on how a driver-owned platform app could be successfully embedded in the local infrastructure through co-production and user testing with a range of stakeholders: residents, local businesses, local authorities, and transport providers. To inform this aim, this report presents research findings from target user groups in Leeds and Bradford: residents not yet using Uber, and private hire drivers. The report presents findings from focus groups and interviews conducted with older people, disabled students and private hire drivers as well as shorter interviews with councillors and a trade unionist.

Our second paper in this series will outline the challenges and opportunities faced by workers setting out to develop a cooperative platform start-up, and cover a range of business models available and their pros and cons.

This report proceeds in six sections. The first sets out the context of the gig economy as well as provides background information about platform cooperatives. The second introduces the cities of Leeds and Bradford and the national policy context for private hire drivers. The third and fourth sections present our research findings, and the fifth outlines key recommendations for change. The sixth concludes the report.

2. SETTING THE SCENE: THE STATE OF THE UK TRANSPORT GIG ECONOMY

As the gig economy expands, increasing attention is being paid to the poor working conditions facilitated by platform apps. We posit that platform cooperatives can form an empowering response to the erosion of workers' rights, particularly as a response to Uber's market dominance. The self-employed status of private hire drivers, as well as concerns about enforcement following the Deregulation Act of 2015, have contributed to low standards for worker rights. The rise of transport platform apps has the potential to impact public transport systems, potentially making them more competitive or accessible.

The gig economy has seen significant growth since 2010. There has been a 28% growth in the overall number of non-employing businesses in the UK.² Tracking this, there has been a surge in gig economy workers organising against poor pay and conditions. Campaigns and employment tribunals against Deliveroo and Uber have been particularly notable in this area, with workers campaigning against hourly wages as low as £2.50 an hour and against 'bogus self-employment' with no right to holiday pay or sick leave.³

WHAT IS THE GIG ECONOMY?

The gig economy is a term generally used to refer to low paid, flexible, piece work where workers are paid not for the hours they work but for the set number of tasks they perform. The gig economy is most commonly associated with platforms such as Uber, Deliveroo, and Hermes and has become synonymous with low-paid, high-surveillance, insecure work with next to no employment rights. Workers in the gig economy are usually classed as self-employed, a status which is currently being challenged through the courts.

This has taken place at a time of increased precariousness across the UK labour market, where we have seen a rise in the number of zero-hours contracts from 583,000 in 2013 to 1.7 million in 2016⁴ and where only 61% of the UK labour force has a secure job that pays at least a living wage.⁵ This, combined with record lows in unemployment, points to a normalisation of precarious, flexible, short-term work with limited worker protection.

As a response to this rise in insecure employment, the Taylor Review set out to consider the implications of new models of work driven by digital platforms for employee rights and responsibilities as well as employer freedoms and regulations.⁶

The review proposes a new category of employment – the Dependent Contractor – to refer to gig economy workers, thereby ostensibly ending bogus self-employment. This new category is intended to lead to access to sick pay, holiday pay, and the national minimum wage. Despite this, there are no clear indications of how Dependent Contractors might be identified or defined in practice.

The Review overwhelmingly places responsibility for the enforcement and promotion of workers' rights in the hands of employers. It does this by focusing on corporate governance and good management and by encouraging employers to 'consult' with employees.⁷ For global app-based companies such as Uber and Deliveroo, who are not in direct contact with their workers, however, opportunities for consultation, or even the enforcement of consultation, are sparse. Similarly, the Review does not recognise the power of workers, or their unions, to organise and advocate for their rights at work. For many unions, particularly those representing gig economy workers, this has led to the accusation that the Review refuses to tackle or begin to resolve the issues that surround the gig economy and precarious work in the UK. The Independent Workers Union of Great Britain (IWGB), for example, describes the Review's proposals as 'so vague as next to meaningless'⁸ and the GMB trade union argues that the Review 'goes nowhere near enough in fixing the broken system which sees 10 million UK workers trapped in precarious work'.⁹

What is of note however, is that the Taylor Review does create some space for cooperative practice. As Coops UK has drawn attention to, the provision made for WorkerTech in the Review may allow for the incubation of cooperative solutions to precarious work.¹⁰ The Review¹¹ defines WorkerTech as follows:

WorkerTech can be considered as constituting a wide range of tech-enabled innovations that support working individuals to achieve a range of aims. This includes some of those aims that might be traditionally pursued through more established collective rights/representation routes. This can include the facilitating of information sharing, bringing workers together, and calculating and accessing benefits.

Although the extent to which WorkerTech can transform precarious working conditions in the UK remains open to debate, many workers both in the UK and internationally are coming together to find alternative models of ownership and collective action. And it is the potential of this WorkerTech that we have been exploring through our attempts to develop a cooperative private hire company.

2.1 PLATFORM COOPERATIVES

Both in the UK and internationally, groups of people have been coming together not just to resist but also to provide alternatives to the conditions imposed on workers by companies like Uber. For Scholz, platform cooperativism sets out a positive alternative to the gig economy and has the potential to prefigure alternative futures.¹²

A platform cooperative is a cooperative that uses the Internet in the form of a website or an app to facilitate the

exchange of its goods or services. For Scholz, it has the potential to challenge the dominance of tech giants such as Amazon and Uber. In this way, in a period of aggressive tech monopolisation,¹³ it is possible to see platform cooperatives as a means of democratising and taking back control of the Internet. Perhaps more importantly, cooperative alternatives to the gig economy can be seen as a means for workers to challenge exploitation and poor pay and conditions as well as set a precedent for the rest of the economy.

There are many examples of platform cooperatives across the world; the website, platform.coop, has a directory listing 66 worldwide.¹⁴ In Brooklyn, New York, for example, *Si Se Puede* (We Can Do It) has established a cleaners' platform cooperative. The cooperative has 65 members, all of whom are women, all of whom have migrant backgrounds, and all of whom have equal say over the decisions made within the business.¹⁵ The cooperative uses an app modelled on Task Rabbit to 'create living wage jobs that will be done in a safe and healthy environment, as well as to provide social support and educational opportunities for our members'.¹⁶

In the UK, Cooperatives UK is exploring the potential of creating platform cooperative incubators to 'develop a global ecosystem that encourages replication of working models across industry verticals and geographies'.¹⁷ As a part of this, Cooperatives UK has launched a competition for tech cooperatives. The first winner was a platform cooperative, FairMondo, which models itself on Amazon and only sells ethical produce.¹⁸ In addition, through the Hive business support programme, Cooperatives UK offers tailored advice and support to people 'wanting to start or grow co-operative or community enterprises'¹⁹ and it is currently

working with a further three private hire cooperatives.

2.2 UBER AND PRIVATE HIRE SERVICES IN THE UK

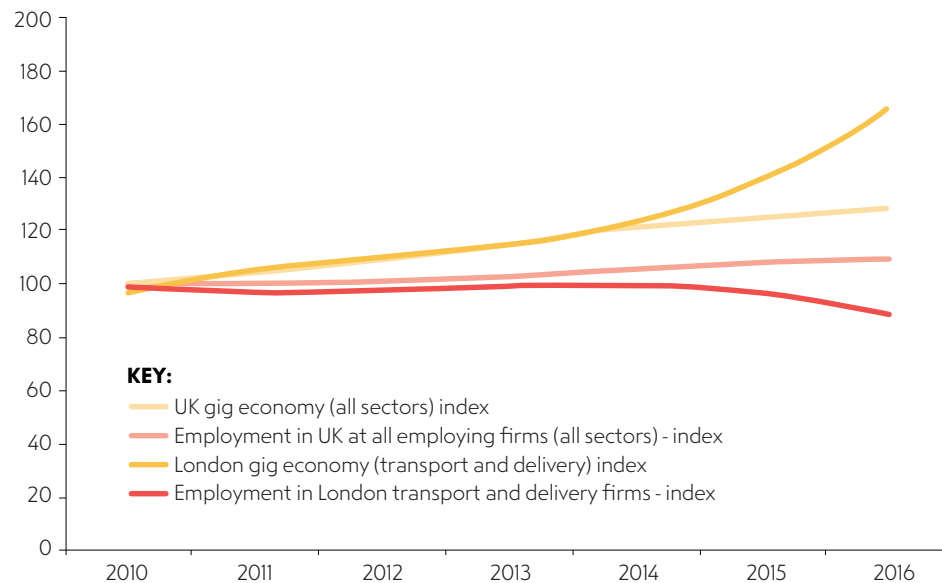
2.2.1 Uber

The Leeds- and Bradford-based private hire drivers we are working with initiated their idea for a platform cooperative in response to the growth of companies like Uber and the resultant changes to the sector and working conditions of drivers. Our research can begin to show where Uber is failing its drivers and users.

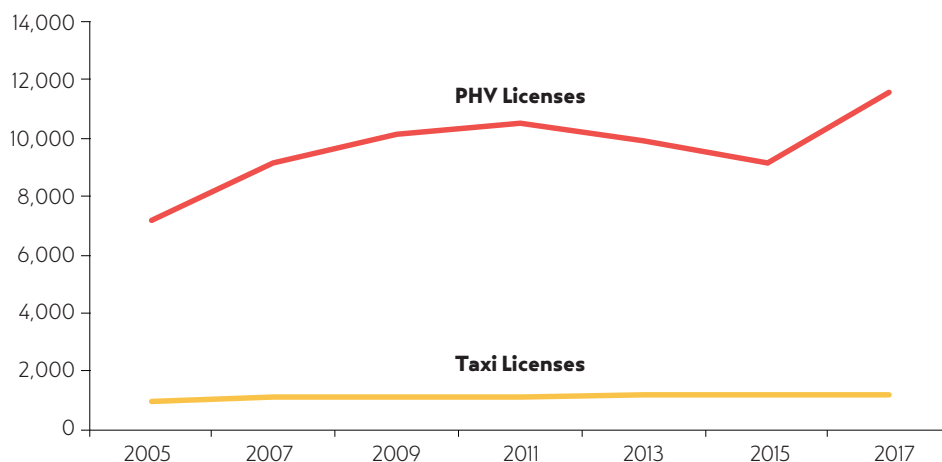
Uber was established in 2009, is headquartered in San Francisco, and operates in 633 cities worldwide. In 2012, beginning with London, Uber expanded its operations to the UK. It currently operates in 20 UK cities and has an estimated 40,000 drivers with 2 million passengers registered to use its services in London alone.²⁰

Official figures show that London's gig economy has grown significantly in the past few years. The data records the number of non-employing firms, i.e., businesses that do not employ anyone other than the proprietor; they include most people working in the gig economy. It also shows the level of employment in firms that employ at least one other person. Figure 1 shows that there has been growth in the overall number of non-employing businesses in the UK and less growth in employment at other businesses, but the trends in London's transport and delivery sector (where we expect to see the greatest impact from the gig economy) are much starker.

The same trend can be seen in data on the number of taxi driver licences in West Yorkshire. Figure 2 shows a surge in private hire drivers (which includes Uber drivers) at the same time as the surge observed in Figure 1 (i.e., around 2014).

FIGURE 1: NON-EMPLOYING FIRMS ARE GROWING MUCH FASTER THAN OTHER TYPES OF EMPLOYMENT.

Source: NEF analysis of ONS Business Population Estimates

FIGURE 2: NUMBER OF TAXI LICENCES BY TYPE.

Source: NEF analysis of Department for Transport data taxi and phv license data: TAXI0104

In 2015, Uber had a UK turnover of £23.3 million and paid £411,000 in UK tax.²¹ In 2016, Uber's global net revenue (excluding China) was \$6.5 billion.²² This is despite a number of prominent anti-Uber campaigns, including #DeleteUber in the USA; demonstrations in Spain; a high-profile Employment Tribunal case and protests in the UK; strikes in France and Italy; and protests in Indonesia.²⁵⁻²⁸ In addition, Uber has been banned in South Korea, Brazil, and Denmark;

and is facing criminal proceedings in Hong Kong and Finland, among others.²⁷ Protests against Uber have focused on a number of issues including worker exploitation, strike breaking, and driving down wages. Further to this, Uber has recently been at the centre of controversy over the leadership of its former CEO, Travis Kalanick, and widespread allegations of sexual harassment and gender discrimination.²⁸

One Leeds-based trade unionist we spoke to, whose union, Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), organises gig economy workers, made the following comment about Uber's employment practices in the area:

The bogus self-employment that Uber uses is a disgrace. We've seen this kind of practice before, with piecemeal work in the 19th century.

In 2016, Uber lost a landmark Employment Tribunal case where the judge ruled that Uber drivers should be recognised as workers as opposed to self-employed contractors.²⁹ The implications of the decision are far-reaching and, most importantly, rule that, as workers, Uber drivers are entitled to holiday pay, sick pay, and the national minimum wage. This ruling also has far-reaching consequences for other businesses in the gig economy and may mean that companies like Deliveroo will have to recognise their drivers as having worker status, too. Uber is currently in the process of appealing this. In April 2017, Uber introduced a voluntary sickness insurance scheme for its drivers, where for a contribution of £2 a week, drivers can access illness and injury cover.³⁰

As a result of mounting pressure about Uber's employment practices and fears about passenger safety, on 22 September 2017, Transport for London (TfL) decided against renewing Uber's licence to operate in London. The decision came about following an extensive campaign run by the union, GMB, and by the campaigning organisation, SumOfUs, which collected 106,313 signatures demanding TfL to 'not to renew the licence unless Uber guarantees safe working practices and basic employment rights.'³¹ In its decision not to renew Uber's licence, TfL concluded: 'Uber London Limited is

not fit and proper to hold a private hire operator licence.'³² The reasons given focused on public safety and a lack of corporate responsibility. The primary issue identified in choosing not to renew Uber's licence included Uber's approach to:

- Reporting serious criminal offences.
- Obtaining medical certificates.
- Obtaining Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks.
- Explaining the use of Greyball in London – software that could be used to block regulatory bodies from gaining full access to the app and to prevent officials from undertaking regulatory or law enforcement duties.³³

On 13 October 2017, Uber launched an appeal to overturn TfL's decision. Alongside this, an online petition on the campaigning website, change.org, demanding that Uber's licence be reinstated, received 855,836 signatures.³⁴ The petition asked for signatories to #SaveYourUber by arguing that the decision to not renew Uber's licence in London undermined consumer choice and put drivers out of work.³⁵

An increasing number of businesses aim to challenge Uber's dominance. Of interest are the many notable international examples of alternative private hire driver apps:

- VTC Cab in Paris, France
- Tappcar in Alberta, Canada
- Union Cab in Denver, USA
- Hailo, UK

Despite this, very few of these companies have been able to successfully compete with Uber.

YouGov data shows that Uber's brand rating has been consistently negative, placing it in the 12th percentile. In contrast, Deliveroo is seen to have consistently positive ratings and is placed in the 54th percentile.³⁶ In addition, YouGov survey data shows that:

- 66% of people would like to see Uber regulated in the same way as other cab companies.
- The words most commonly associated with Uber are sleazy, unethical, and convenient.
- The majority of Uber users are young.³⁷

2.2.2 Private hire and taxi services – the national context

There are 281,000 licensed taxi and private hire vehicles in England, 31% of which are taxis and 69% private hire vehicles.³⁸ Between 2015 and 2017, there was a 23.6% increase in the number of licensed private hire vehicles in England and the number of licensed private hire vehicles increased in 199 out of 326 local authorities in England.³⁹ Local authorities are responsible for licensing private hire drivers and each has their own requirements for training, renewals, applications, and minimum language thresholds.

The UK has a two-tier system for private hire and taxi services. Taxis can be hailed or can use taxi ranks in addition to being able to take pre-bookings. Private hire services on the other hand, can only be pre-booked. A Law Commission review into taxi and private hire services noted that the two-tier system should be maintained in order to 'protect consumer choice'.⁴⁰

Taxi and private hire services are currently regulated and have their standards set by local authorities. At present, legislation is concentrated in the Town Police Clauses Act 1847 and the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976.⁴¹ When licensing taxis and private hire services, local authorities are responsible for:

- Setting the local framework, which can include safeguarding standards, fares, vehicles standards, or limits on vehicle numbers.
- Considering applications and safeguarding the public by issuing, reviewing, or revoking licences.
- Undertaking inspection and enforcement activities to ensure the required standards are being maintained.⁴²

The current system, according to the Law Commission, has led to 'substantial regional variation'.⁴³ This has raised significant concerns about inconsistent enforcement and regulation of accessible taxi and private hire services.⁴⁴

Self-employment

The majority of private hire drivers in the UK are self-employed. In 2016/2017, 81% of drivers in England were self-employed, up from 74% self-employment in 2006/2007.⁴⁵ In the period April–June 2016, 23% of drivers worked 7 days per week. In the same period in 2006, 17% of drivers worked 7 days per week.⁴⁶ Depending on the firm they work for, many drivers are expected to pay a commission to their firm as well as rental costs for their car and/or radio equipment. Drivers are also often expected to pay their own fuel, insurance, and licensing costs.

The Deregulation Act

Concerns about enforcement more broadly have also been compounded by the introduction of the 2015 *Deregulation Act*, which allows taxis and private hire services to operate in local authorities other than the one they are registered in. The Law Society noted that this has led to cross-border working where local authorities are unable to enforce their regulations for drivers from outside their local authority boundaries. As a response to this, the Law Society proposed that national standards for taxis and private hire services be introduced.⁴⁷ The Government, however, is yet to act on these proposals.⁴⁸ Case studies 1 and 2 present some of the issues that licensing authorities face in their regulation of Uber.

**CASE STUDY 1: LICENSING
UBER IN BATH**

In March 2017, after a number of concerns raised by taxi and private hire drivers in Bath about Uber's practices in the city, the Council launched a three-month probe into how Uber's licence was awarded and its impact on other private hire services in the city.

Despite 44 allegations put to the Council about illegal practices, many of which were based on job poaching and cross-border working, the probe found that as Uber in Bath was acting in line with the *Deregulation Act* 2015, there was no reason to revoke Uber's licence, despite drivers' anger.

**CASE STUDY 2: LICENSING
UBER IN LONDON**

In May 2017, TfL extended Uber's operating licence for four months instead of the usual five years. The decision to grant Uber a temporary licence extension was unprecedented and coincided with mounting pressure on TfL to ban Uber for its employment practices; concerns around health and safety; and its negative impact on existing taxi and private hire operators in the city. At the time of the decision to grant Uber a temporary licence extension, TfL also launched a consultation into licensing reforms for private hire services in London. One notable aspect of TfL's proposals is to lift the cap on operator licence fees, which until September 2017 had Uber paying £2826 per year for its 42,000 drivers whilst operators with as few as 1–10 vehicles are expected to pay £1126 per year. The outcome of these proposals are likely to change over the coming months as a result of both the decision not to renew Uber's five-year licence in September 2017 and Uber's appeal against TfL's decision in October.

Impacts on public transport

In addition, in a period of technological transformation, it is likely that national, regional, and city-level public transport offers will also change rapidly. At present it is difficult to see how technological change and innovation will affect private hire services but there are existing concerns about how the rise of Uber may impact private transport more broadly and how, in the future, local and national governments will regulate competing transport services.

Clare Linton from the Urban Transport Group commented that the rise of private hire services such as Uber has pushed bus companies to innovate and create their own apps. Although there has been speculation that private hire services such as Uber will provide greater competition for public transport, Linton noted that there is as yet little evidence to support this. What is clear, however, is that an increasing number of transport services are adopting platform apps. This includes Mobility as a Service,⁴⁹ which operates in Helsinki and provides a monthly subscription service that covers both private and public transport – including taxis, on-demand car hire, trains, and buses; and on-demand buses such as Slide,⁵⁰ which is owned by the Parisian Transport Authority, RATP, and currently operates in Bristol. It is also worth noting the potential of technological innovation to improve existing community transport services. Whereas platforms like Uber have brought new technology into private hire services by shifting from phone-based to app-based services, in light of an aging population and the need for more accessible transport, platform technologies could bring improvements into publicly subsidised services such as Dial-a-Ride. Dial-a-Ride services, which exist under different names in different local authorities, provide subsidised or free door-to-door on-demand transport for people with additional access needs.

3. PRESSURES ON TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE IN LEEDS AND BRADFORD

The research presented, and its potential for the creation of a cooperative platform app, was conducted in Leeds and Bradford, two cities with very different economies and demographics, and both facing different transport challenges.

3.1 LEEDS

Leeds has a population of 819,000.⁵¹ As a city, it is experiencing rapid growth. This is linked to the city's recent economic successes as well as its large student population.⁵² The city has a highly diverse population both in terms of ethnicity, with a relatively high proportion of black and minority ethnic (BME) residents, and in terms of its spread across densely populated urban and rural areas.⁵³ In addition, Leeds is home to an aging population and expects 10% growth in people over the age of 75 between 2015 and 2021.

There are concerns that Leeds's transport infrastructure is not keeping up with the city's rapid growth and development⁵⁴ with the following cited as key challenges:

- **Congestion** on motorway corridors and junctions and routes into main urban centre.
- **Poor access** by road, rail, or bus to many key development sites, including Leeds Bradford International Airport.
- **Car dominance** in town and city centres due to a lack of orbital road capacity to remove through traffic, combined with past prioritisation of car parking in centres.
- **Severe crowding on trains** in the busiest periods, with peak period trains to and from Leeds having some of the worst crowding nationally.
- **Insufficient car parking at rail stations** and limited bus park-and-ride options to the city centre.
- **Slow or unreliable bus journeys**, which are held up by road congestion and long dwell times at stops because of on-bus payments.

- **Poor air quality** and the negative impacts of harmful pollutants produced by traffic linked with a range of illnesses and premature deaths.
- **Poor road safety** for cyclists, pedestrians, and motorcyclists.⁵⁵

3.2 INCLUSIVE GROWTH STRATEGY 2017–2023

The New Economics Foundation is pleased to be one of the contributors to the Leeds City Council's Inclusive Growth Strategy. The strategy is based on the need to create good local economies that start with the reality of local conditions and build upwards in a way that values each person and resource. The key priorities of the strategy include:

- Creating better jobs.
- Using digital technologies to reduce inequalities.
- Promoting and growing the digital sectors.
- Backing innovators and entrepreneurs in business and social enterprises.
- Supporting institutions embedded in and working for communities.⁵⁶

It is noteworthy that the strategy highlights the importance of improving the local transport offer.⁵⁷ In addition, in the context of a cooperative taxi platform coop, the inclusive growth strategy has the potential to support the growth of this type of enterprise through its commitment to creating good jobs for all, to making every business a digital business, and to supporting small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and social enterprises.⁵⁸

3.3 BRADFORD

Although Bradford is only 40 miles from Leeds, the city's economy and demographics are starkly different. Rather than experiencing a period of significant growth, Bradford remains one of the most deprived local authorities in England. According to the Indices of Multiple Deprivation, Bradford ranks 19th most deprived local authority in England, where 1 is the most deprived and 326 is the least deprived.⁵⁹ In addition, unemployment in Bradford is higher than the national average⁶⁰ and the city has proportionately undergone a greater rate of cuts under austerity than more affluent local authorities.^{61,62} Case Study 3 provides an example of the impact this has had on community transport services in the city:

CASE STUDY 3: SHIPLEY AND BAILDON SOCIAL CAR SHARE SCHEME

Between April 2010 and March 2015, the Shipley and Baildon Volunteer Bureau ran a social car share scheme for older people. The scheme provided a 'flexible responsive service aimed at those members of the community who, due to mobility problems [were] unable to use other forms of transport'. Volunteer drivers provided space in their own cars for transport to social activities, clubs, hospitals, health clinics, and shops. The NHS funded the scheme.

Between April 2014 and May 2015, 47 people used the service and there were 236 journeys. Ann, a former volunteer who joined the scheme through the Bradford Volunteer Centre, commented: 'I get a lot of satisfaction and enjoyment out of helping May and Vera. They have a lot of life experience and are fascinating to talk to.'

There are two car share schemes still running in the Bradford district: Ilkley Community Transport and Keighley Community Transport. Ilkley Community Transport operates on the same model as the Shipley and Baildon social car share scheme, where volunteers offer their own cars. Keighley Community Transport offers a minibus dial-a-ride service run by volunteers whose licences allow them to drive minibuses.

Ilkley and Shipley are both comparatively affluent areas of the Bradford district. According to 2011 Census data, 6.3% of people in Ilkley Ward have no qualifications in comparison to 21.6% for the local authority of Bradford as a whole. Similarly, in Shipley, the percentage of people who have no qualifications is 11.7%. The percentage of people with no qualification for the UK as a whole is 11.3%.

Bradford has a population of 531,000⁶³ and is the youngest city in the UK with 23.6% of its population aged 16 or under.⁶⁴ Like Leeds, Bradford is also a highly diverse city and has a high proportion of BME residents at 36%.

As with Leeds, Bradford has a high reliance on cars:⁶⁵ 69.5% of households in Bradford own a car.⁶⁶ As early as 2005, Transport and Movement reported a decline in public transport services in the city.⁶⁷ Since then, there have been regular reports of the further decline of public transport infrastructure in Bradford as a result of austerity.^{68,69,70} One local councillor we spoke to observed that there has been an increase in the demand for private hire and taxi services in Bradford at a

time of high pressure on the Combined Authority for funding public transport in the city. The councillor also noted that the primary focus for transport infrastructure investment in the city, in line with the West Yorkshire Combined Authority's Transport Strategy, is improved motorway links and high-speed rail.

3.4 THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT IN WEST YORKSHIRE

Since the establishment of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority in 2011, groups of councils have formed combined authorities in some areas of England. These combined authorities receive additional powers and funding from central government. They are particularly important for transport and economic policy across the regions in which they are based. There are currently nine combined authorities in England (Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Liverpool City Region, Sheffield City Region, West Yorkshire Combined Authority, North East Combined Authority, Tees Valley Combined Authority, West Midlands Combined Authority, and West of England Combined Authority).⁷¹

The West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) brings together five West Yorkshire districts and York. It covers the districts of Wakefield, York, Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, and Leeds and is the transport authority for West Yorkshire. In addition, the WYCA aims to increase economic growth in the region by creating the 'right environment for businesses to grow' and create 'good quality jobs' in the region.⁷²

The 2016–2036 Transport Strategy, which aims to help deliver the Leeds City Region Strategic Economic Plan, identifies the following priorities for transport in the region:

- Improve connectivity and reduce congestion, thereby increasing business productivity and providing access to wider labour markets.
- Have a positive impact on the built and natural environment, thereby increasing resilience against climate change.
- Create a sense of place, encouraging walking and cycling for health and other benefits and increasing access in a safe way.

Alistair Ryder, the Portfolio Development Leader for Integrated Transport, observed that companies like Uber have encouraged the bus industry to become more competitive. In particular, he observed that the technology used by firms such as Uber has forced bus companies to deliver on the demand for real-time service information.

In addition, Ryder noted that the on-demand transport – both in terms of provision and ticketing – is something that the WYCA is actively considering. One aspect of this is exploring the possibility of integrating types of private hire service into the public transport offer either through a hub and feeder offer or integrated apps that allow private hire and taxi services to provide initial transport for arterial routes.

4. OUR FINDINGS

We carried out three focus groups to elicit their views on public transport in their respective cities; on private hire services including app-based services like Uber; and on the changes they would like to see in local transport. Our findings were developed in order to inform our research on how a driver-owned platform app could be successfully embedded in local infrastructure.

Three focus groups took place:

- Private hire drivers working in Leeds and Bradford.
- Leeds University students from the University's Disability Action Group.
- Older people from the Great Horton Live at Home scheme in Bradford.

The latter two groups represent people who are likely to be excluded from existing public transport infrastructure or have specific access requirements.

The former was informal research with private hire drivers in Bradford consisting of unstructured interviews that took place during two five-mile journeys across the city. The drivers we spoke to were not involved with the cooperative app and consented to participating in an unstructured interview. During these interviews, we asked broad questions to gain insight into the drivers' experiences at work.

4.1 PRIVATE HIRE DRIVERS

In 2017, there were 3246 licensed private hire vehicles in Bradford and 4956 licensed private hire vehicles in Leeds. This equates to 4.4 and 5.1 private hire vehicles per 1000 people in the two cities, respectively.⁷³ In 2015, the number of licensed private hire vehicles in Bradford and Leeds were 2350 and 3877, respectively.

Both Leeds and Bradford licensing authorities have limits on the number of licences they grant. Both local authorities require drivers to undertake disability awareness training if they drive accessible vehicles.⁷⁴ In Bradford, drivers must pass a Driving Standards Assessment Test and a Driver Modular Training and Knowledge Test. Drivers must also hold a valid DBS check.

Drivers' applications need to be countersigned by a solicitor, and a GP who assesses their fitness to drive.⁷⁵ In Leeds, drivers are also required to take

an English-language comprehension test.⁷⁶ The Deregulation Act 2015 has allowed drivers registered in one local authority to drive and work in others.⁷⁷

In 2010, a Human Rights and Equality Commission Report found the 25% of all British-Pakistani men in the UK work as taxi or private hire drivers.⁷⁸ In Leeds and Bradford, McEvoy and Hafeez found that taxi driving is the predominant source work for South Asian men.⁷⁹ Although this research did not collect data on ethnicity, such statistics remain an important dimension of the study and experiences of race and racism were raised by all three groups of participants and by the drivers in particular.

We spoke to drivers who currently work for different private hire companies across Leeds and Bradford; they had worked across the UK and some had worked for Uber in the past. All were interested in becoming involved with the cooperative platform app.

Uber has been operating in Leeds since 2014 and Bradford since 2015.⁸⁰

4.1.1 Life as a private hire driver

Of the drivers we spoke to, security, risk, and status were prominent themes. Both the drivers we spoke to as part of our focus group and the drivers we spoke to during individual interviews described the ill treatment, violence, and physical abuse they have faced in their working lives.

Physical safety and security were paramount. The drivers we spoke to were often subject to abuse – both verbal and physical – and felt that they had little recourse to legal defence. They felt that their low status led to vulnerability. All of them said they had had fares withheld or stolen and felt powerless to challenge instances such as these.

You don't know whether you're going to be paid. The first thing you think when someone gets in your car when it's cash only, is: Will I get paid or not? Everyone comes across this. 5/20 jobs there will be someone who makes you think 'Will you pay?'

In our unstructured interviews, drivers were more explicit about the violent encounters they had had with customers. One driver shared the following:

One time, I got beaten up by a runner. It was really bad. I had bruises and cuts all over my face because I asked them to pay me. I reported it to the police, but they didn't do anything. They didn't even take a statement. After a week of the police not replying to me, my operator put some pressure on them. When the police finally turned up more than a week later, I was celebrating Eid, [a Muslim religious festival] so I had to stop celebrating for the police to take a statement. Again, the police did nothing. My operator was really angry and went to the media. I was in the paper, but I did not want to give my name or photo. This was a year ago and the people who beat me up weren't caught. I have CCTV in my car and I gave it to the police for evidence but even with that, the police didn't do anything. Drivers get beaten up often and nothing is done about it.

The same driver also explained that customers once stole his GPS navigation system and that

...the kids in Clayton throw rocks at private hire drivers' cars as they drive by.

Both drivers we spoke to as a part of our unstructured interviews spoke at length about customers who do not pay and, in particular, issues they have with customers who have been drinking:

I've only been working a week, but I've had lots of runners. It happens the most when people have been drinking.

For drivers, a key concern was a lack of status and respect in their work role:

Everyone just sees you as a taxi driver. You're not respected. You're treated as a taxi driver. It's difficult with the people you're dealing with.

There was a sense that private hire drivers are undermined and undervalued for the work that they do:

Sometimes you get treated as a servant; you're treated as a slave. People don't behave nicely.

Closely tied in with this was a sense that drivers have little or no ability to challenge the issues they face with aggressive and non-compliant customers, as well as customers who do not pay for services. It was highlighted that drivers can depend on neither the Council nor the police for support.

I went to the police. The police said I'm not here to cover your amount; I'm here to make sure you're safe. The police officer said it's a civil matter. They say get a lawyer but that costs £500-£600.

When somebody as a passenger complains to the council, the council should behave as neutral. The first thing the council does is say 'yes the driver did it.' They take your badge and suspend you. No one is responsible for the loss of your earnings. The council does not take you as neutral. This is the reality.

Beyond this, a major focus of the drivers was the negative impact of the Deregulation Act 2015 on their livelihoods and the perception that

local authorities give preferential treatment to companies like Uber. When discussing the Deregulation Act, drivers emphasised a saturation of the market which is jeopardising their livelihoods because of job poaching. They suggested the changes have led to a rise in dangerous practices because councils cannot enforce compliance for drivers registered in other local authorities.

If you're a different council driver, however you park, Leeds council can't do anything. No one is going to come from Bradford to challenge you. They are not going to take your plates off you.

They are taking our jobs. If it was only Leeds drivers working for Uber, that would be fine, but people are coming in from other councils then there are too many drivers and you can't get jobs.

Other operators have better relationships and get away with things with the council. It's about who is in bed with who.

These points were returned to regularly. Overall, the drivers felt that the presence of Uber in the city was dividing drivers and turning them against each other. Among the focus group participants, there was consensus that working for Uber was exploitative; it was felt that both the high commission rates and demands on drivers were detrimental to drivers' wellbeing.

Never again. I will never again be a slave... It's modern day slavery. They reduce fares. You don't get treated as a partner. Your concerns and views are not addressed. I'll give you an example: They started off at 20% commission then upped it to 25% and then upped it to 28% and to 30%.

In addition, one driver felt that only younger drivers are able to work for Uber:

I wouldn't want to drive for Uber because I'm an older man. For someone like me, it's nice to have an office that I can go to if I need to use the loo or take a tea break. For people who work for Uber, there's nowhere to go. People have nowhere even to use the toilet. I can't do that.

Despite this, it was also felt that Uber had 'revolutionised' the business for private hire drivers and had set a new standard for service delivery. Of particular note was that drivers were positive about features of the app such as being able to rate and report customers. Drivers felt that rather than having taken over in Leeds and Bradford, Uber has encouraged existing firms to compete by introducing new technology into their services. In particular, the drivers noted that Uber has not been able to compete with companies who work with communities who prefer to use cash, companies with large contracts, and block bookings.

Uber doesn't do contract work or advance bookings. We do jobs on accounts – hospitals and businesses. Uber is losing out on that. They don't compete in that area. Uber hasn't done well in the past year. Commission is up, fares are down; the only areas they work are student areas.

Of all the drivers we spoke to, one was positive about Uber. He had recently started working as a private hire driver and explained that for him, working for Uber was an aspiration and something that he would do as soon as he could afford his own car. For him, the major attraction of Uber was the fact that Uber users tend to be professionals:

The people who use Uber are cleaner; they won't hit or punch me. Uber is a lot safer, even if there are some problems with having a big company; at least if you don't like a job, you can cancel it.

Overall however, the drivers were vocal about the difficulties they had faced working with Uber:

Once, my payments for Uber were stuck for six weeks. I had to send emails because there was no direct line. I got in touch with the council about it and they said that that's Uber's problem. Nothing could be done about the payments. When I spoke to Uber they made me wait 6 weeks; they said the payments were coming from America and had to be checked by the US Treasury.

Finally, although flexible working patterns were seen to lead to greater control and improved quality of life, many felt powerless in the face of the council. In particular, perceived lack of neutrality of licensing authorities and their bureaucratic systems were seen to alienate drivers. Drivers felt unsupported and unable to advocate for their rights. Feelings of low status compounded this.

In terms of their experience as workers, a sense of control over working hours was weighed against poor, precarious pay. One driver had previously worked delivering takeaways and shared that as a delivery driver he earned £5 per hour. He then went on to explain that his ideal aim would be to earn £250 gross per week before petrol costs but to earn that, he would need to work 60–70 hours a week. The same driver also noted that he chose to be a private hire driver because of the flexible hours and needing to spend time with his young family.

4.2 PASSENGERS

4.2.1 Students

Leeds has a student population of 50,455.⁸¹ This figure includes the city's three universities. Of the city's two largest universities, 10.7% of students at the University of Leeds and 4% of students at Leeds Beckett University have a declared disability.^{82, 83} The overall percentage of people living with a disability in the UK is 19%.⁸⁴ There is no disaggregated data available from Leeds Council on the number of people living with a disability in the city.⁸⁵

Disabled people living in the UK have access to a disabled person's bus pass. This entitles individuals to free off-peak bus travel across the UK. On trains, disabled people are entitled to a Disabled Person's Railcard at a cost of £20. This card provides a 30% discount on travel. In larger cities, taxis must be wheelchair accessible. For private hire vehicles, there are no national regulations about accessibility, but providers are expected to make 'reasonable adjustments', not discriminate against disabled passengers and allow assistance dogs into their vehicles.⁸⁶

Beyond this, if they meet certain eligibility requirements, disabled people are entitled to grants towards their transportation needs. The Access to Work Scheme for example, allows individuals in work to receive grants towards private hire or taxi services if they are unable to use public transport.⁸⁷ Disabled students who meet eligibility requirements can also receive additional funds to cover 'extra travel because of [their] disability'.⁸⁸

To gain insight into the transport needs and views of disabled students in Leeds, we spoke to members of the university's Disability Action Group. Participants had a range of access needs including visual and mobility

impairments as well as needs relating to autism and mental health. The Leeds University Union's Disability Action Group meets regularly to 'come together and campaign for a better, more inclusive university for everyone'. They provide a safe and friendly way for disabled students to meet each other, share their experiences and lobby the University for improvements in access and inclusion'.⁸⁹

4.2.2 Older people

In Bradford, 13.4% of the population is over the age of 65.⁹⁰ Of these, 30% live alone and, according to the Department for Communities and Local Government, older people in Bradford are amongst the most deprived in the city⁹¹ with many experiencing increasing levels of social isolation.⁹² The Bradford Joint Strategic Needs Assessment cites barriers to transport as a contributing factor to increasing levels of isolation and emphasises the need to provide effective community transport schemes as well as greater training for bus drivers to support older people accessing bus services in the city.⁹³ The assessment highlights transport as a key priority for commissioning.⁹⁴

People over 65 living in the UK have access to a Freedom Bus Pass. This entitles individuals to free off-peak bus travel across the whole of the UK. On trains, older people are entitled to a Senior Persons Railcard at a cost of £30. This card provides a 30% discount. Most local authorities commission transport services targeted to supporting older people in the area. In Bradford, the council, through a levy paid to the WYCA, funds the Access Bus, which offers subsidised local travel to young people and adults who are vulnerable or have special needs.⁹⁵ Other community transport schemes catering to older people in the city are voluntary.

To gain insight into the transport needs and elicit the views of older people in Leeds, we spoke to people who use the day care centre run by the Great Horton Live at Home scheme. The scheme offers a range of day care services and community activities for older people in Bradford.

4.2.3 Life as a passenger: Disabled students and older people

For the passengers we spoke to, accessibility, safety, and service quality were most salient. Both groups were very vocal about the inaccessibility of both local public transport services and private hire services and raised several concerns about rates as well as poor or inconsiderate treatment. While safety was also a major concern, for the students, this centred on emotional safety whereas the older people we spoke to were more concerned about their physical safety. Both groups emphasised the importance of a personable, tailored, and conscientious service.

Disabled Students

The issues most often referred to by disabled students when discussing their use of private hire services were those of insensitivity and communication. As one student noted:

Taxi drivers ask lots of questions about blindness in the taxi and sometimes it feels intrusive.

Many felt that they had to explain themselves and their disability every time they used a private hire or taxi service. This point was one the students consistently returned to throughout the course of the discussion. This is of particular note when considered in light of the fact that second to accessibility, mental health and anxiety were the themes most often returned to during the discussion. Several students expressed that being in a taxi or private hire vehicle was more likely to trigger anxiety:

I don't use taxis much even though they'd be very convenient for me. It's because they set off my social anxiety more than public transport.

Small talk, combined with having to explain their disabilities were seen as major issues:

When you're having a stressful day, you don't want to have to explain your disability.

I don't always want to talk about why I'm in a wheelchair.

In addition, several of the students raised concerns around safety and vulnerability, citing a lack of security when they use taxis and private hire services. Several students expressed concerns about drivers being able to exploit or take advantage of them. In this respect, the ability to rate drivers on apps like Uber was seen as a positive thing, despite the fact that ratings 'could be bad for people from a minority'. A sense of vulnerability was returned to several times and it was felt that both mental health needs and access needs compounded this.

For a blind person or any other person who is reliant on taxis, you can be exploited. If you're in a wheelchair you may be taken an extra-long way and you are less likely to protest or complain as you can't get out and get home by yourself. People who are more vulnerable because they rely on it more can be exploited.

The students raised several concerns about public transport infrastructure in the city. They felt that much of the existing public transport network is inaccessible and that this forces them to use private hire services:

I use taxis pretty much all of the time. As I'm blind, walking in Leeds can be very stressful. There are lots of sirens and noises, which make me anxious,

and this can be emotionally draining. I can walk around the university campus and to very local shops. There's one bus that goes to the shops from my house, but I'm scared of using it as there's no announcement of the stops. I have an app, which uses GPS to alert me of my stop, but it's not always working well. I have to ask the driver and passengers to tell me, but this is not always reliable. Taxis can be brilliant, and they can be terrible. I feel slightly defeated by Leeds.

Overall, the students we spoke to expressed that they would rather pay more towards an accessible form of transportation. In particular, one student noted:

I would rather pay a bus fare and have an accessible bus system, rather than have it free as it is now but inaccessible.

Students also said that they would choose to pay more for a better service to avoid 'taxi roulette', despite there being cheaper alternatives.

None of the students we spoke to used or had ever used Uber for a number of reasons. For one it was because of an awareness of Uber's unethical employment practices, whereas for others it was because they did not own smartphones. For one student, the consistency of the service they received led to them being loyal to one company in particular.

When discussing a cooperative model, the students were generally enthusiastic, focusing on workers' rights and challenging the hegemony of large companies. In particular, the students were positive about the potential of a worker-owned service model to provide a tailored service that challenges the one-size-fits-all approach of large corporations. It was felt that a cooperative model might lead to improved service:

If drivers are less stressed, they might have more time to take account of specific access needs.

A coop feels like more of a real relationship between people as individuals – so people are less pushed to deliver a corporate type of customer service.

I like the idea of a coop because it could help drivers meet my accessibility needs better.

Older people

Despite this, it was clear that not all of the older people we spoke with were satisfied with private hire services in their area. Concerns around the safety and the cost of accessible private hire services were particularly salient. Three of the people we spoke said that they are charged double (and sometimes more) to use accessible private hire vehicles.

In a chair, they make you pay double as well and it's all wrong. Why should I get penalised? When I went to a meeting about disability they said it's equal rights, but taxis aren't equal rights.

I always get charged more for my wheelchair. People doing the same journey as me have to pay less. From where I live to Café West where we do a healthy eating café, a day centre, it's a quarter of a mile.[...] I get charged up to £10 and they expect to get it and that's wrong because if they're taking a normal person, it's £2.50, so I pay double for taxis.

In terms of safety, some of the older people we spoke to were worried about the lack of safety equipment in accessible private hire services.

Taxis need the connections to clip you in and some of them don't put the strap over you, they just bung you in and put the brakes on. Sometimes you go flying when the car turns a corner. Or, your chair turns over. This has happened to me and they had to take me to hospital. I could have got them done but I didn't get them done because I wanted to get home because I don't like hospitals.

Several older people also expressed concerns about the safety and accessibility of the local access bus. Although the local access bus provides free dial-a-ride services to older people living in the area, many felt that this service was underfunded, with people citing long waiting times, being turned away, and an inconsistent service. Crucial to this were concerns around safety:

I got injured with them [the access bus] because they let go of me and I banged off the bus and my face were black and blue. I had photographs taken and everything. I had to go to hospital and no one got sacked or anything.

They tend to make do with what they've got. Like this week, they didn't have a seat belt for me. You know, to go over me. And if he had to stop sharp which he did, I would have flown straight out of the chair. They really should have the full equipment.

All of the older people we spoke to said that private hire services were their key method of transportation. Older people with mobility or access needs emphasised that poor public transport provision and the lack of reliability of the local community transport scheme meant that private hire services were their only way they could travel to hospital appointments or leave their homes.

In response to the question, 'How would you get around if there were no taxi services?' all but one of the focus group participants responded: 'Stay at home.' The theme most often returned to was that the only thing preventing social isolation was the availability of private hire services.

...I can't go anywhere. I can't go. I have to have someone with me to go anywhere and certain taxis have problems with me being epileptic. So, I can't go. I can't leave the house, I have to stick at home. But since I joined this group, I get to come here. I have a taxi service that takes me here and a taxi service for Wednesday's group

I have to use a taxi, love, because I'm disabled. I had a fall and I can't walk unaided at all. I have to use a taxi.

When discussing specific private hire services, it emerged that people were loyal to their local private hire service. The majority of people we spoke to repeatedly highlighted the high-quality service they received from their local drivers.

Some taxi drivers will even pick up my friends. I know them really well. And they say, 'oh hello love'.

They're very good. Where I live they're very good. They look after me very well.

When discussing Uber and the development of a cooperative platform app, all of the older people we spoke to expressed scepticism. In fact, none of the older people we spoke to had heard of Uber and returned to the fact that they would prefer to remain loyal to the private hire services they have used for a long time.

I wouldn't think of going anywhere else.

There's more likely to be dissent from a cooperative than there is from a proficient boss who knows how to run a company. That would be more efficient. No one can make decisions or agree on things in a coop. It's better where there's a boss and you either like it or you don't or join or you don't.

Many of the people we spoke to felt that their local private hire drivers went 'above and beyond' what was expected of them and were pleased with the fact that private hire drivers often walked them to their doors.

Finally, despite concerns around the lack of public transport options, isolation, inaccessibility, and cost, the older people we spoke to expressed support for their local private hire services and a reticence to access other services.

Overall, both passenger groups raised safety as an issue. Older people were largely concerned about their physical safety when using private hire service and public transport. In particular, the older people we spoke to felt that private hire drivers, drivers of the community transport scheme, and bus drivers were ill equipped to respond to the needs of older people. One older person described bus drivers as 'inconsiderate', whereas others raised concerns around the lack of equipment available to provide security to wheelchair users. In particular, the older people felt that there was a lack of training around how to 'clip people in'.

Among the students, safety was also a concern. However, for this group, physical safety was secondary to emotional safety. Many of the students we spoke to were concerned about the possibility of unequal power dynamics between drivers and customers and raised concerns around vulnerability, anxiety, and mental health when using private hire services.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE – TOWARDS A COOPERATIVE MODEL

The recommendations for change that emerged through conversations with drivers and passengers generally fell into three categories: safety (legal, emotional, and physical); access to a personalised service; and greater power transferred to drivers. These findings point in the direction of a platform cooperative, which would be able to address the concerns of both users and drivers.

5.1 SAFETY

The drivers recommended the following to improve their own wellbeing at work:

- Legal protection
- Microphones and CCTV to record journeys

The emphasis on legal protection highlights that the ill treatment drivers feel that they are subjected to permeates the entire system; the drivers focused on a need to be able to defend themselves legally from passengers, companies, and local councils:

You need to be secure legally from abuse, from racial abuse. You need legal back up. No other company gives you legal back up. You are all alone.

Beyond these suggestions, the students we spoke to also raised the need for training that ensures that drivers do not ask insensitive questions about disabilities and do not patronise students. One student, who uses a wheelchair, noted:

If you book an accessible taxi, it takes around an hour. So usually, I just ask for a taxi with a slightly bigger boot. But sometimes drivers don't spend the time to try and to fit my wheelchair in, so they send another taxi, meaning I have to wait for another 20-30 minutes. When a driver treats you like the technology you use every day doesn't work, it's frustrating.

A key aspect of this was taking time to listen and to understand students' needs. Communication was a major issue for the students who also recommended that in the interests of creating a safer, more comfortable environment for people's mental health, a cooperative taxi app should have an opt-out-of-conversation option built in.

Similarly, many of the older people we spoke to emphasised the need for more accessible private hire services. Although there was a clear sense of loyalty for particular companies and a positive attitude towards communication with drivers, some of the older people we spoke to – particularly wheelchair users – had serious concerns about their safety:

You don't feel safe, do you?

I feel terrified in case they drop me.

5.2 TAILORING TO SPECIFIC ACCESSIBILITY NEEDS

Amongst the students, there was a clear emphasis on training and improving awareness of access needs. The idea that the one-size-fits-all approach does not always work was particularly salient. The students felt that they would be willing to pay more for a service that not only has a greater understanding of their access needs but also is able to tailor services to their specific needs. The following suggestions stood out:

- Being offered a choice between a phone-based and an app-based service
- Being picked up from the front door
- Having a system for taking note of a customers' access needs
- Being able to request the same driver
- Being able to pay by cash or card
- Having an audio description of routes

Both the disabled students we spoke to and the older people with mobility needs felt that private hire services are ill equipped to respond to specific access needs. Private hire drivers also raised this issue. The drivers expressed a desire for better training to support customers with additional needs.

Similarly, the drivers felt that high-quality service would be the major selling point of a cooperative model.

The older people we spoke to also emphasised service provision that meets specific access needs. In the case of the older people, however, greater weight was given to the lack of public transport infrastructure and support for older people to leave their homes:

If you can't drive or take the bus, you have to stick at home. You can't get out.

I haven't been on a bus in years. I dare not go on a bus on my own. I don't go out on my own.

Both the private hire drivers and the disabled students felt that private hire services are a necessity because of poor or inaccessible public transport. For the drivers:

Public transport isn't reliable, people need to get to hospitals, for example appointments, old people need taxis to go shopping. Taxis are a necessity. A taxi is cheaper than a bus fare.

And for the students:

The bus system is not great in Leeds as it is laid out like a star, meaning you have to go through the city centre to get anywhere. As there are no automated announcements of bus stops whilst on board, it's very stressful.

This was echoed by the older people we spoke to, who raised concerns about cuts to bus services in the city and buses being 'dangerous' for older people.

Some of these suggestions for change made by the disabled students overlap with the suggestions made by the drivers themselves. The drivers also raised the need to:

- Provide training on access needs that support and promote independence
- Have both cash and card payment options
- Have the option of making a phone call or use an app
- Be able to give notification of specific support needs

5.3 TRANSFER OF POWER TO DRIVERS

Ultimately for the drivers, there was a sense that power rests in the hands of the council, the customers, and the police. To challenge this, drivers were keen to explore a model of working where they are able to protect themselves collectively. A challenge to the perceived exclusion from legal systems and from being able to challenge decisions taken by the council was a cooperative model of working where drivers could share their knowledge and experience of the legal system. One driver highlighted that a coop would be:

...like being a family. If there's 400,000 drivers in the UK who are all in a coop, then they all band together to fix problems. We can support each other. Unions can learn from us.

Overall, it was felt that a cooperative model would allow drivers to work together to protect themselves. It was clear that both students and drivers wanted many of the same changes. The main difference was that the drivers wanted greater security and control over their workplace through legal protection and knowledge sharing.

5.4 SUGGESTIONS AT MULTIPLE SCALES

Across the three groups, key concerns and suggestions for change can be thought of in terms of:

1. Structural change (including improvements to public transport systems and legal protection for drivers).
2. Consumer choice and service (including the provision of consistent, reliable services with both phone- and app-based options).
3. Awareness and training (including accessibility training).

6. CONCLUSION

The rise of digital platforms has been marked by a rise in the criticisms levelled at them. Although impossible to cover all the critiques, one of the biggest is that as the power of the platforms has increased, along with their size, there has been a shift in the way that workers and users are treated.

There is growing dissatisfaction with the increases in the precariousness of the labour market in the UK. The findings presented here have shown that for many private hire drivers, their working lives are characterised by poor pay, poor conditions, and exploitation. This report has shown that not only are there failings on the part of employers to protect workers but also by local and national government. It was clear from our discussions with drivers that many felt marginalised and excluded from legal protection and were often subject to abuse and even violence.

The drivers we spoke to expressed feeling powerless to challenge exploitation and marginalisation. Despite showing support for the flexibility of working as private hire drivers, many felt that they had limited control over their work lives as a whole. Further to this, the findings presented here show that passengers also feel powerless to effect change and find that a lack of effective, accessible public transport leads to social isolation, exclusion, and dependence on support from others. For passengers with specific access needs, the growth of companies like Uber offers little solution to these problems and companies like Uber are seen to serve already privileged social groups.

The horror stories we heard from participants in the gig economy provide one of the main catalysing forces behind the platform cooperative model. Central to the idea is that with workers (and users) in charge of the platform, employment, and human rights of those who participate will be better protected.

It is clear that communities in Leeds, Bradford, and beyond are increasingly coming together to challenge these conditions and are seeking to take back control of their working lives and

of their cities. The findings presented here show that a private hire platform cooperative has the potential to not only improve working conditions for drivers, but also to improve services for vulnerable communities.

We have seen some of the early examples of platform cooperatives emerge in areas where specific communities or professions were seen to be particularly at risk from platforms. Examples include musicians who can become members of Resonate (a streaming music service cooperative owned by the people that use it), photographers who can join Stocksy (a platform cooperative that accepts and provides Royalty-free stock photography and stock video), or nurses who can become members of NursesCan (a California-based cooperative). Following close behind are a number of initiatives looking to improve the conditions for delivery drivers, taxi drivers, and care providers to name but a few.

By including users as members of the platform cooperative, you can also ensure that their voice and rights are respected by the platform.

A platform cooperative would be able to address the concerns of drivers and users by giving them a say in the governance and operations of the platform. This would ensure that it was focused on addressing the concerns of its members rather than on generating the profits needed to pay back investors. Then, if the drivers wanted to install CCTV systems, this would be easier to push through than when faced with trying to change the policy of a global corporation. Similarly, if users wanted to ensure drivers were properly trained or that the service offered certain types of services, then they would have a forum within which to do this.

Research carried out for report, as well as a roundtable held in Leeds to support its publication, found that there is a great deal of potential to work with an exciting cohort of stakeholders to develop this sector and to help improve the working lives of those who have been left behind by the gig economy. In particular, collaborative work with Cooperatives UK as well as with local authorities and grassroots workers and communities may challenge the exclusion of the gig economy and promote inclusive growth for all. It is evident that platform cooperatives have the potential to prefigure alternative futures for an economy that has become more and more dominated by the interests of a few global giants. This, within the broader context of a rapidly changing transport sector, raises exciting questions about how to ensure that the future of transport and technology serves social good and promotes good jobs, good growth, and social inclusion.

ENDNOTES

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