

MEDIA RELEASE GREENHALGH: LONDONERS MUST BE ABLE TO BENEFIT FROM NEW APP-BASED TECHNOLOGY

Earlier this month I received an email from the first love of my life. Debbie, Michael and I always played together in East Sheen and it is always so nice to hear from long-lost friends. Debbie still lives in London and is married to a London taxi driver and she has two sons. Her boys are just a little older than mine. I have been thinking about what is the right approach to Uber. This is a challenge for Boris and will be a challenge for a future Mayor. Transport for London is the regulator of private hire companies and the Mayor is taking the bullet currently. Debbie described her husband's job as "the dreaded profession to the Mayor of London.

I strongly believe that you cannot stand in the way of progress but regulators cannot be stuck in the past. Uber have been in London for barely a year and they have over a million people signed up. Uber is popular and Uber drivers are ubiquitous with the streets of the Big Apple now. However Uber has not had its path to world domination made easy and I understand that the company is banned in France, Germany, parts of Belgium, New Zealand and Nevada in the United States, as well as facing a potential ban in California. Uber operate a surge pricing policy during times of high demand as I discovered on the day of the Tube strike when I had to appear before the Police and Crime Committee in City Hall. That day the price of getting an Uber has rocketed as London's Tube network was shut down by strike action. £2.40 fares went up to £11 during rush hour on that day far more than the press reported at the time. I live in Fulham and I planned to get to Waterloo by rail and take a bus or walk to City Hall. The buses were packed and the cab rank queue was a mile long that morning. I shared a black cab to City Hall and was informed by the driver that there have been more sexual harassment charges in one year involving Uber drivers since they started operating than the black cabs have had in their 350 year history.

However I like this technology and it will not go away. However Uber London should pay their VAT in this country rather than a 7% rate in the Netherlands via Uber BV and the technology should be available to all private hire vehicles and that includes both black taxi cabs and all minicabs. Private hire companies are a vital part of the transport infrastructure in London. London taxi and private hire employs more than 160,000 people, carries out 210,000 journeys a day and this contributes an estimated £2.5 billion to London's economy. The Private Hire Vehicles (London) Act 1998 was made law due to widespread public concern over the safety of passengers, and particularly women, travelling in unlicensed cars. The Act requires private hire operators to ensure that all of their drivers and vehicles are properly licensed and that bookings are only made through a licensed operator. TfL are the regulator and expect private hire companies and black cab drivers to comply with the regulatory requirements that they enforce. The industry believe that TfL are poor regulators and believe that new app-only car booking services, such as Uber, are using their business model to opt out of these regulations. In March 2015, TfL launched a private hire regulations review consultation in response to the Greater London Authority's concerns over new developments within the taxi and private hire industry.

Stephen Greenhalgh, Conservative Mayoral hopeful, said: "The answer cannot be for TfL to regulate the past. Londoners must be able to benefit from new app-based technology provided that there is a level playing field for everyone involved in the private hire industry. TfL should enforce rules that recognise progress and Uber should pay their taxes in this country."

