
Travel by taxi and private hire vehicle

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Key Findings

- There are about 20 thousand licensed 'black cabs' in London, an increase of about 40 per cent since 1985. In the rest of England and Wales, the number of licensed taxis has doubled over this period to over 42 thousand.
- The average number of trips by taxi and private hire vehicle (PHV) made in the late 1990s was three times as high as in the mid-1970s.
- The average taxi trip is 3.7 miles long, compared with 6.2 miles for PHV trips. Women use taxis and PHVs more than men, and use is greatest among 16-20 year olds.
- Taxis are used much more extensively by people without access to cars. On average, people living in households without a car made more than three times as many taxi trips as those in households with a car.
- About half of all taxi trips are made to leisure destinations, and only one in five for the 'essential' purposes of work and education. Shopping is the most common trip purpose for people in low income households.
- More taxi trips are made on Saturdays than other days, and taxis are used most heavily between 11pm and midnight on Friday and Saturday nights.

Introduction

Taxis and private hire vehicles (PHVs, often referred to as minicabs) are an important mode of local transport, particularly at times when local buses or trains run infrequently (or have stopped for the night) and in areas poorly served by other public transport. Taxis are particularly important to people without access to cars, including young and older people, people in low income households, and people with mobility difficulties.

Trends in licensed vehicles and drivers

London

About a third of all licensed taxis in England and Wales operate in London. There were 19,900 licensed taxis in London in mid-2000, of the purpose-built 'black cab' design. There has been a fairly steady increase in London taxis, of about 40 per cent since 1985 (*Chart D. 1*). There were 23,400 licensed taxi drivers in London in mid-2000, about a fifth of all licensed taxi drivers in England and Wales. The number of London taxi drivers has increased by a quarter since 1985 (*Chart D. 2*).

It has been estimated that there are between 40,000 and 60,000 PHVs and drivers operating in the London area, although there is currently no reliable source of data on numbers. *Box 1* contains the definitions and explains the differences between taxis and PHVs.

Chart D.1 Number of licensed taxis

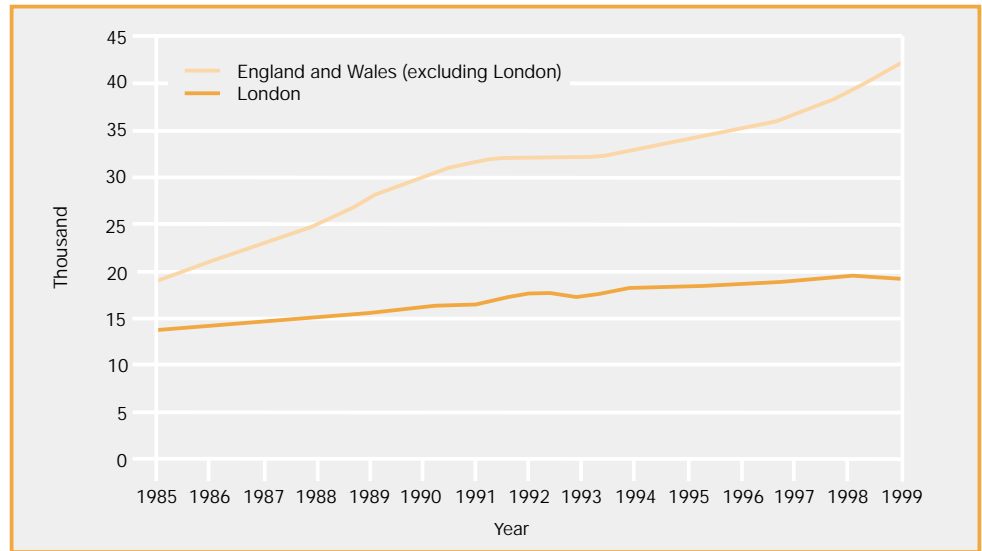
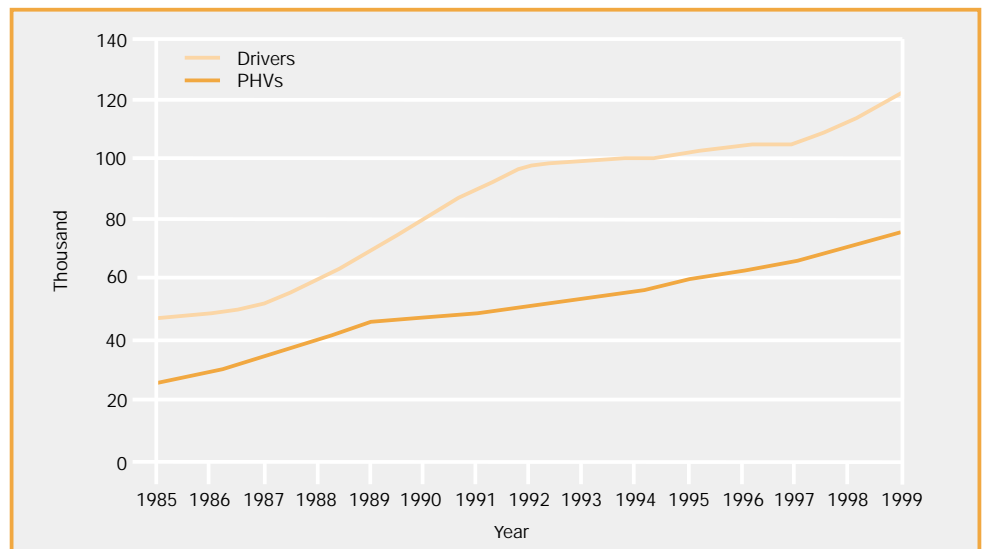


Chart D.2 Number of PHVs and their drivers in England and Wales (excluding London)



England and Wales (excluding London)

At the end of 1999, there were some 42,100 licensed taxis outside London. There has been an overall increase of around 5,600 licensed taxis since the previous survey in 1997. Since 1985, the number of taxis licensed has more than doubled. There were 98,200 licensed taxi drivers at the end of 1999, also more than double those in 1985.

There were about 75,800 licensed PHVs outside London at the end of 1999, nearly three times the number in 1985. There were 122,300 licensed PHV drivers in provincial England and Wales at the end of 1999, more than two and a half times the number in 1985. Some of these drivers have dual licences for both taxis and PHVs.

Box 1 Taxi surveys

DETR carries out occasional surveys of taxis, private hire vehicles (PHVs) and their drivers through local authorities outside London. The most recent of these surveys was for England and Wales for the year ending 31 December 1999. There had been similar surveys in 1994 and 1997. Data for London taxis and their drivers are obtained from the Public Carriage Office within Transport for London.

Legal definitions and licensing

A taxi is a public transport vehicle with no more than 8 passenger seats, which is licensed to 'ply for hire'. This means that it may stand at ranks or be hailed in the street by members of the public. PHVs must also have no more than 8 passenger seats but they must be booked in advance by customers through an operator and may not ply for hire in the street. (For vehicles with more than 8 passenger seats the Public Service Vehicle regulations for buses and coaches apply.)

Taxis and PHVs are classified in the Private Light Goods tax class along with private cars. They can no longer be identified through the Hackney tax class, which was abolished in July 1995.

London

In London, taxis and their drivers are licensed by the Public Carriage Office, which is now part of Transport for London under the Mayor and the Greater London Authority (GLA). A licensing system for PHVs in London is being introduced as provided for by the Private Hire Vehicles (London) Act 1998. The Public Carriage Office will license operators, drivers and vehicles. The Act is being implemented in three phases. Operator licensing began in January 2001, and will be followed by driver and vehicle licensing as soon as practicable.

England and Wales excluding London

In provincial England and Wales, taxis and PHVs are licensed by district and borough councils and unitary authorities. Despite rising numbers, many local authorities apply some form of quantity control of taxis. Under the Transport Act 1985 they may limit taxi numbers if they are satisfied that there is no significant unmet demand for taxis in their area.

Scotland

In Scotland, taxis and PHVs are licensed at the discretion of its unitary authorities (formerly by district and island councils). An authority which adopts licensing powers must license taxis *and* PHVs.

Scotland

In Scotland there were about 7,700 taxis and 20,200 licensed taxi drivers in 1999, but the drivers include dual licence holders for PHVs as well (see *Box 1* for definitions). Comparable 1985 data are not available.

Trends in taxi fares

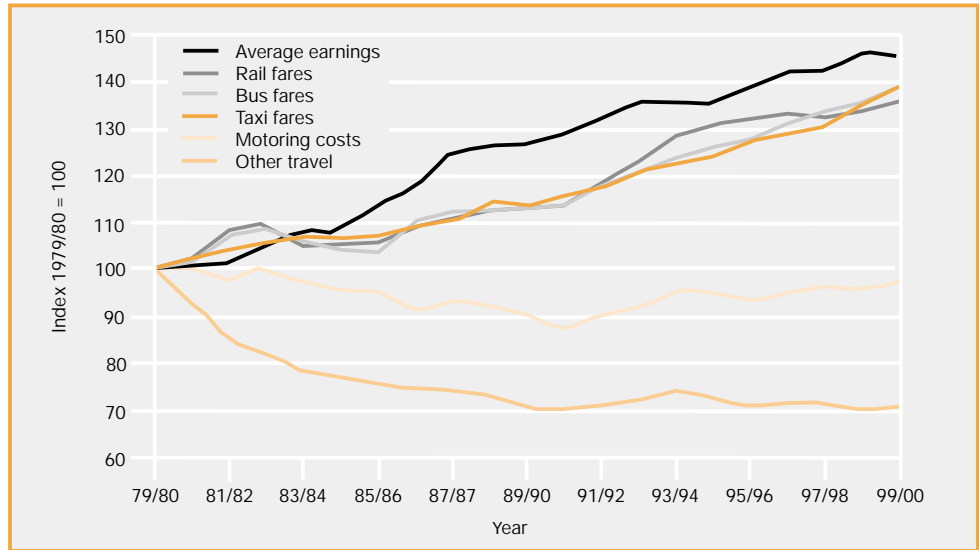
Historically, taxi fares have risen by more than the rate of general inflation. After a period of small real changes in fares in the early 1990s when the economy was less buoyant, annual taxi fare increases have accelerated and are now more in line with increases in average earnings.

Chart D.3 shows that taxi fares were rising steadily in the 1980s. This contrasts with a period in the early 1980s when rail and bus fares increased sharply. Bus fare increases then slowed in 1983/84, increasing again in 1986/87. Bus deregulation outside London began to take effect from October 1986. Rail and taxi fare increases were more gradual over this period. In recent years the rate of fare increases has been similar for all three modes.

When compared with other transport indices, in real terms, since 1979/80, taxi fares have increased by 45 per cent, whereas motoring costs have fallen by 3 per cent. Other travel, such as holiday travel, which has been the subject of intense price competition, has reduced in cost by 30 per cent over the same period.

In London, taxi fares came under the control of the Greater London Authority (GLA) from July 2000. In the rest of Great Britain, local authorities at district and unitary level control the fares of taxis in their areas. PHV fares are set by operators.

Chart D.3 Taxi and other fare changes since 1979/80 relative to earnings



Trends in use

Table D.1 shows the main trends in taxi/PHV use since the mid-1970s. The average number of taxi trips made in 1997/99 was three times as high as in 1975/76. The number of trips made, and the average distance travelled both increased until the late 1980s, followed by a decline in the recession of the early 1990s. Usage has since increased again, and the 1997/99 level was higher than that recorded in 1989/91, averaging 12 taxi/PHV trips per person per year, or 1.1 per cent of all trips made by individuals.

Table D.1 Trends in taxi travel: 1975/7–1997/99

	1975/76	1985/86	1989/91	1992/94	1997/99
Trips per person per year (main mode)	3	7	11	9	12
Percentage of all journeys	–	0.7	1.0	0.9	1.1
Distance per person per year (stage mode; miles)	13	27	42	38	56
Percentage of all distance	–	0.5	0.6	0.6	0.8
Average trip length (main mode; miles)	4.8	4.1	3.4	3.8	4.4
Average time (main mode; minutes)	20	16	16	16	17

The average length of a trip fell from 4.8 miles in 1975/76 to 3.4 miles in 1989/91, but has since increased to 4.4 miles. The average travel time of a taxi/PHV ride has been fairly stable, rising slightly to 17 minutes in 1997/99.

Taxis and PHVs

It is not possible to show separate trends in taxi and PHV use, since these have only been recorded as different modes since 1995. In the following sections, 'taxi' will be used to include both taxi and PHV use unless otherwise stated. Overall, taxis accounted for 72 per cent of taxi/PHV trips in 1997/99, for both men and women.

The average taxi trip in 1997/99 was 3.7 miles long, compared with 6.2 miles for PHV trips (Table D.2). Just under a quarter of PHV trips were over 5 miles long.

Table D.2 Length¹ of taxi and PHV trips: 1997/99

	Percentage/ miles		
	Taxi	PHV (minicab)	All taxi/PHV trips
Under 1 mile	8	6	7
1 to under 2 miles	26	25	26
2 to under 5 miles	48	44	47
Over 5 miles	19	24	20
All lengths	100	100	100
Average trip length (miles)	3.7	6.2	4.4

1. Main mode taxi/ minicab

Chart D.4 Age and sex of taxi users: 1997/99

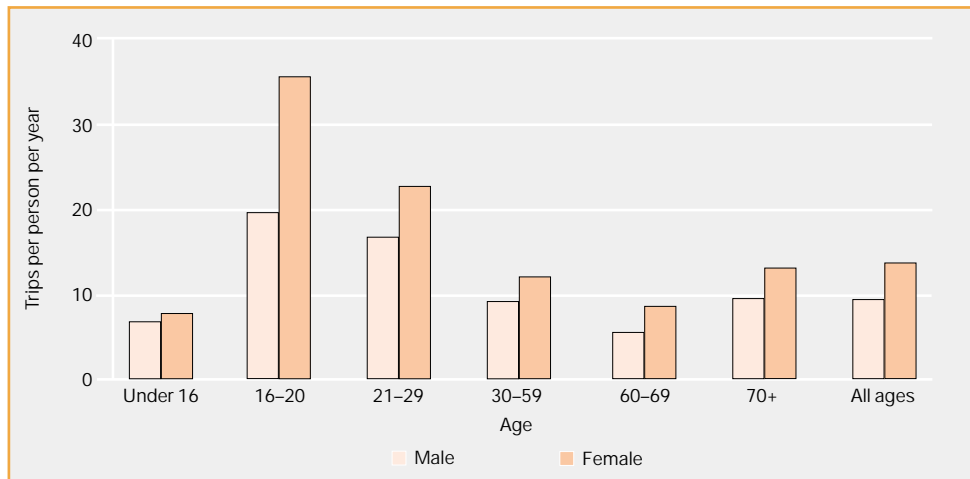


Table D.3 Taxi travel by age and sex: 1985/86 and 1997/99

	Trips ¹ per person per year							Mean trip ¹ length (miles)	Total distance ² travelled per person per year
	<16	16-20	21-29	30-59	60-69	70+	All ages	All ages	All ages
1997/99									
All people	8	28	20	11	7	12	12	4.4	56
Males	7	20	17	9	6	10	10	5.5	59
Females	8	35	23	12	9	13	14	3.6	54
1985/86									
All people	5	16	14	6	4	4	7	4.1	27
Males	5	11	11	6	3	2	6	5.7	27
Females	6	22	16	7	4	5	8	3.1	28
	Percentage of all trips							Percentage of all distance ²	
	<16	16-20	21-29	30-59	60-69	70+	All ages	All ages	
1997/99									
All people	0.8	2.6	1.7	0.9	0.7	1.7	1.1	0.8	
Males	0.8	1.9	1.6	0.8	0.5	1.2	0.9	0.7	
Females	0.9	3.2	1.9	1.0	1.0	2.2	1.3	0.9	
1985/86									
All people	0.6	1.4	1.1	0.5	0.4	0.7	0.7	0.5	
Males	0.5	0.9	0.9	0.5	0.3	0.4	0.5	0.4	
Females	0.6	1.9	1.4	0.6	0.6	1.0	0.9	0.7	

1. Main mode taxi.

2. Including taxi stages as part of a trip with a different main mode (see text).

Age and sex of taxi users

There is considerable variation in the average number of trips made by taxi, according to the age and sex of users. In every age group, women use taxis more than men (*Chart D.4 and Table D.3*). Overall, women made 14 trips a year (1.3 per cent of all trips) on average in 1997/99, compared with 10 trips (0.9 per cent) made by men. Usage is heaviest among young people in the 16–20 age group, who recorded 28 trips a year on average in 1997/99, more than twice the overall rate.

Between 1985/86 and 1997/99, taxi use increased in every age group. Overall, taxi use increased by about two thirds, but for people aged 60 and over, usage more than doubled over this period.

Although women make more taxi trips than men, these trips are shorter, averaging 3.6 miles in 1997/99, compared with 5.5 miles for trips made by men. Overall, there is little difference between men and women in the total distance travelled per year by taxi.

In addition to the 12 trips per person per year where taxi was the main mode of travel, another 1 taxi stage (see *Box 2*) was made as part of a trip with a different main mode. In about two thirds of cases, these additional taxi stages were part of a rail trip.

Taxi use by people with mobility difficulties

Taxis are a more important mode of transport for people with mobility difficulties. In 1997/99, adults (age 16+) with severe difficulties made 21 taxi trips per year on

Box 2 The National Travel Survey

The National Travel Survey is a household survey of travel. About 3 thousand households a year answer questions relating to their travel, and then complete a 7 day travel diary. Most data on the use of taxis and PHVs (often referred to as minicabs) are obtained from the diaries.

Definitions of terms used

For the purpose of diaries, a trip (or journey) is defined as a one-way course of travel with a single main purpose. A trip may be split into stages by different means of transport. For example, a trip may consist of a taxi stage to the station, a rail stage, and finally a walk to the trip destination.

For every trip made, the details recorded by respondents include the purpose of the trip, the methods of travel of travel for each stage of the trip, the distance, time taken, and the cost of public transport.

Most tables in this paper record details according to the main mode of the trip, which is the mode used for the longest stage. Percentages are quoted in relation all modes, including walking.

The main driver of a household car is the person who drives the car most in a single year. A household with more than one car will have a main driver for each car.

Personal business trips include visits to services, e.g. hairdressers, launderettes, dry-cleaners, betting shops, solicitors, banks, estate agents, libraries, churches; or for medical consultations or treatment; or for eating and drinking, unless the main purpose was entertainment or social.

Escort trips are when the traveller has no purpose of his or her own, other than to escort or accompany another person; for example, taking a child to school, or someone to the station. Many trips by children accompanying their parents are also recorded in this category.

The cost of taxi stages recorded in the diary should be split equally between the people using the taxi. However, some stages are recorded with zero cost, and it is not clear that this instruction has been followed in all cases. To avoid this problem, *Table D.10* is based on single occupancy journeys where a cost has been recorded.

average (4.7 per cent of all trips), compared with 16 per year (1.9 per cent) for adults with slight difficulties, and 12 per year (1.0 per cent) for adults with no mobility difficulty.

Car availability and taxi use

Taxis are used much more extensively by people without access to cars (*Table D.4*). On average, people living in households without a car made more than three times as many taxi trips as those in households with a car in 1997/99 although they made fewer trips in total. In households with cars, main drivers (see *Box 2*) made only 6 taxi trips on average, half the overall rate.

People with access to cars made longer taxi trips on average. Trips made by people living in car owning households averaged 5.8 miles in length, more than twice as long as those made by people in households without cars (2.8 miles).

Table D.4 Taxi¹ use by car availability: 1997/99

	Persons in households with cars				Persons in households without cars	
	Main driver	Other driver	Non-driver	All persons	All persons	All persons
Taxi trips per person per year	6	9	10	8	26	12
Total trips per person per year	1,264	1,077	914	1,116	785	1,046
Taxi as a percentage of all trips	0.5	0.8	1.1	0.7	3.3	1.1
Average trip length (miles)	6.4	5.6	5.2	5.8	2.8	4.4
Percentage of sample in each group	41	10	28	79	21	100

1. Main mode taxi.

Income and taxi use

On average, people living in households in the lowest income quintile made 16 taxi journeys per person per year in 1997/99 (*Table D.5*), just under 2 per cent of all their trips. In this group the average number of trips per year by all modes (including on foot) was 858, compared with 1,174 for those in the highest income quintile. This is a third more than the overall average, but this difference is much less than the difference between age and sex groups, or by car ownership noted above.

The average trip length increased with income, from 3.5 miles in the lowest income group, to 5.6 miles in the highest group.

Table D.5 Taxi¹ use by household income quintile: 1997/99

	Lowest	Second	Third	Fourth	Highest	All persons
Taxi trips per person per year	16	12	12	9	11	12
Taxi as a percentage of all trips	1.9	1.2	1.1	0.8	0.9	1.1
Average trip length (miles)	3.5	3.8	4.0	5.5	5.6	4.4

1. Main mode taxi.

Taxi use in urban and rural areas

The highest levels of taxi usage are recorded in London and the built-up areas of the former metropolitan counties (*Table D.6*), and the lowest levels in rural areas. This gradient of use is likely to be linked to lower levels of car ownership and greater availability of taxis in the most densely populated urban areas.

Not surprisingly, taxi trips are longer on average in rural areas. However, there is not a simple gradient in trip length, as the shortest trips in 1997/99 were made by people living in small towns (with populations between 10 and 25 thousand),

Table D.6 Taxi¹ use by area type: 1997/99

	Numbers/percentage/miles							
	London boroughs	Metropolitan built-up areas	Other urban areas with population:				Rural	All areas
			Over 250k	25k to under 250k	10k to under 25k	3k to under 10k		
Taxi trips per person per year	15	16	13	12	11	6	7	12
percentage PHV	48	28	21	23	19	18	48	28
Taxi as a percentage of all trips	1.5	1.6	1.2	1.1	1.0	0.6	0.6	1.1
Average trip length (miles)	4.5	3.4	5.0	4.7	3.0	5.4	5.6	4.4

1. Main mode taxi.

averaging 3.0 miles, and by people living in the built-up areas of the former metropolitan counties (3.4 miles).

PHV use is much higher than average in London and in rural areas, accounting for nearly half of all taxi/ PHV trips in these areas in 1997/99.

Frequency of use

In the mid-1980s, 16 per cent of people used taxis at least once a month (*Table D. 7*). This proportion had doubled by the late 1990s to 32 per cent. The proportion using taxis less than once a year declined from 60 to 39 per cent over this period.

The reported frequency of use of taxis by women shown in *Table D. 7* is only a little higher than that of men, in spite of the much higher overall number of trips shown in *Table D. 3*. In each frequency group, women used taxis more; for example, women who reported using taxis three or more times a week actually recorded an average of 2.6 taxi stages during the travel week, compared with 1.8 for men.

Table D.7 Frequency of taxi use by gender: 1985/86 and 1997/99

	Percentage					
	1985/86			1997/99		
	Males	Females	All	Males	Females	All
Three or more times a week	2	2	2	3	4	4
Once or twice a week	4	5	5	9	11	10
Less than once a week, more than twice a month	2	3	3	4	4	4
Once or twice a month	6	6	6	14	14	14
At least once a month	15	17	16	31	33	32
Less than once a month, more than twice a year	9	10	10	13	13	13
Once or twice a year	14	15	14	15	15	15
Less than once a year, never	62	59	60	40	39	39
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Purpose of trips by taxi

The pattern of taxi use by trip purpose was similar in 1997/99 to 1985/86 (*Table D.8*). About half of all trips were made for leisure purposes in 1997/99, and only one in five for the 'essential' purposes of work and education. However, there are noticeable differences in trip purpose for men and women (*Chart D.5*), and some of these differences have changed over time.

Table D.8 Purpose of taxi trips by gender: 1985/86 and 1997/99

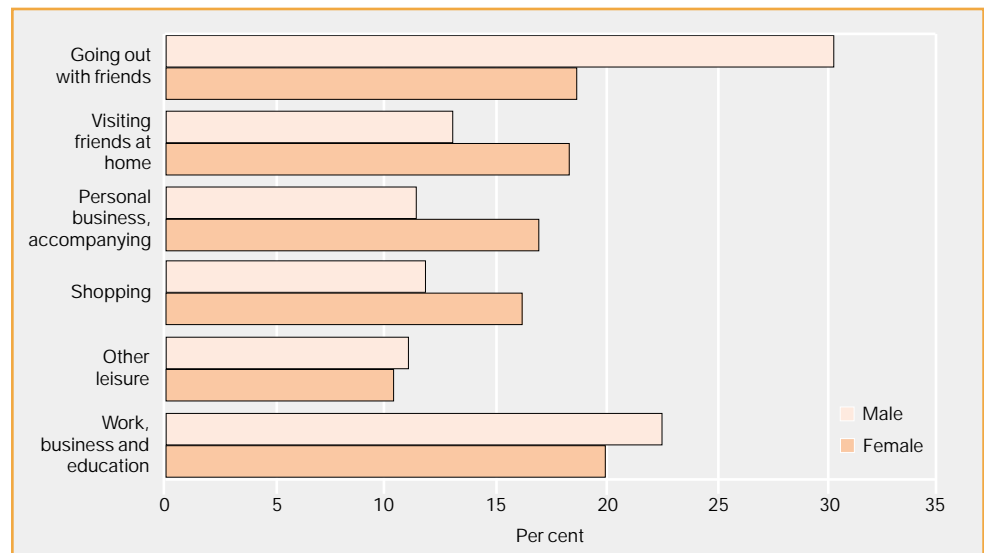
	Percentage					
	1985/86			1997/99		
	Males	Females	All	Males	Females	All
Commuting/ business/ education	25	19	22	22	20	21
Shopping	9	15	13	12	16	14
Personal business and escort	11	14	13	11	17	15
Visit friends at private home	16	20	19	13	18	16
Visit friends elsewhere	27	17	21	30	19	23
Other leisure	12	14	13	11	10	11
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

In the mid-1980s, more trips by men were for commuting, business and education, but levels of use for these purposes by men and women were comparable in 1997/99.

Women are also more likely to use taxis for shopping and personal business trips (see Box 2), and there has been an increase in the use of taxis for both these purposes since the mid-1980s.

Visiting friends dominates the uses of taxis for leisure trips. Men are more likely to use a taxi to go out with friends, but women are more likely to visit friends at home.

Chart D.5 Taxi trips by purpose and gender: 1997/99



The purpose of taxi trips also varies by income (Table D.9). Shopping, personal business and accompanying others (often described as ‘escort’) account for 45 per cent of taxi trips for people in the lowest income households compared with only 11 per cent in the highest income quintile. In the higher income groups, taxis are more commonly used for commuting, business and education, and for leisure purposes.

Table D.9 Purpose of taxi trips by income quintile: 1997/99

	Percentage					
	Lowest	Second	Third	Fourth	Highest	All persons
Commuting/ business/ education	14	12	24	29	29	21
Shopping, personal business and escort	45	42	23	18	11	29
Visit friends at private home	20	16	16	13	13	16
Visit friends elsewhere	14	19	26	27	33	23
Other leisure	7	11	10	12	14	11
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Taxi trips by day of week and time of day

Chart D.6 shows the variation in taxi trips by day of week. Saturday is the most popular day for taxi use, although the pattern has changed since the mid-1980s, with more trips being made on Sunday to Wednesday, and fewer on Friday. This is consistent with the increased use of taxis for shopping and personal business over this period.

Chart D.6 Taxi trips by day of week: 1985/86 and 1997/99

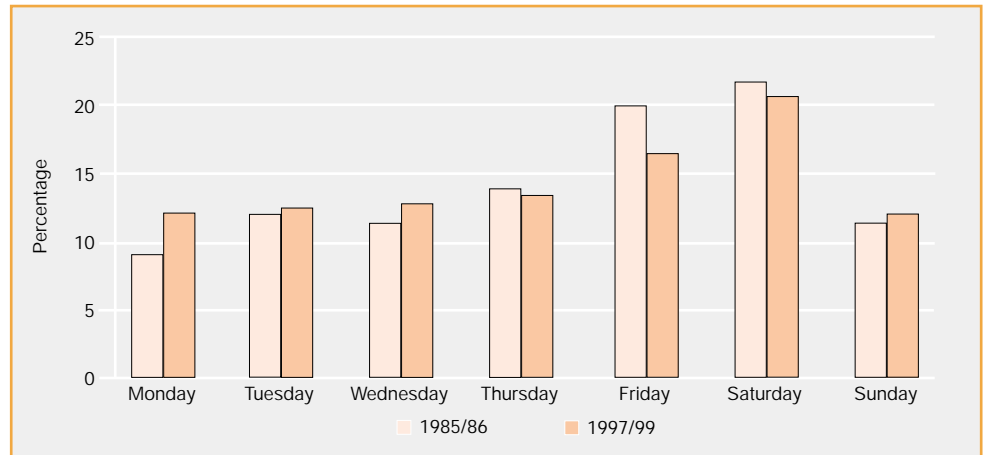
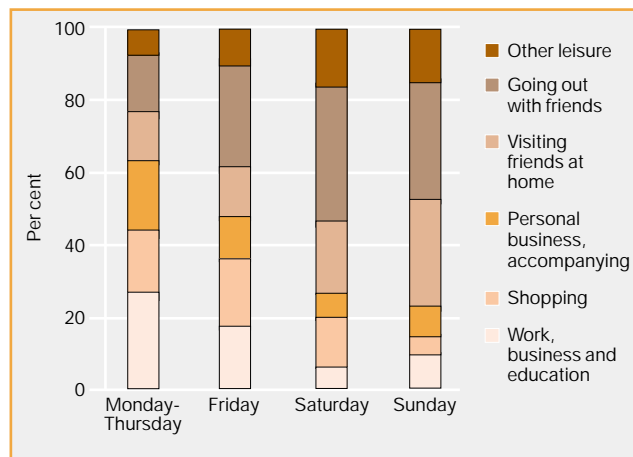


Chart D.7 gives more detail on the purpose of taxi trips by the day of week, using data for 1992–99 to get a sufficiently large sample size. On Monday to Thursday, all leisure purposes accounted for only 36 per cent of taxi trips. This increased to 52 per cent on Fridays, 73 per cent on Saturdays, and 77 per cent on Sundays.

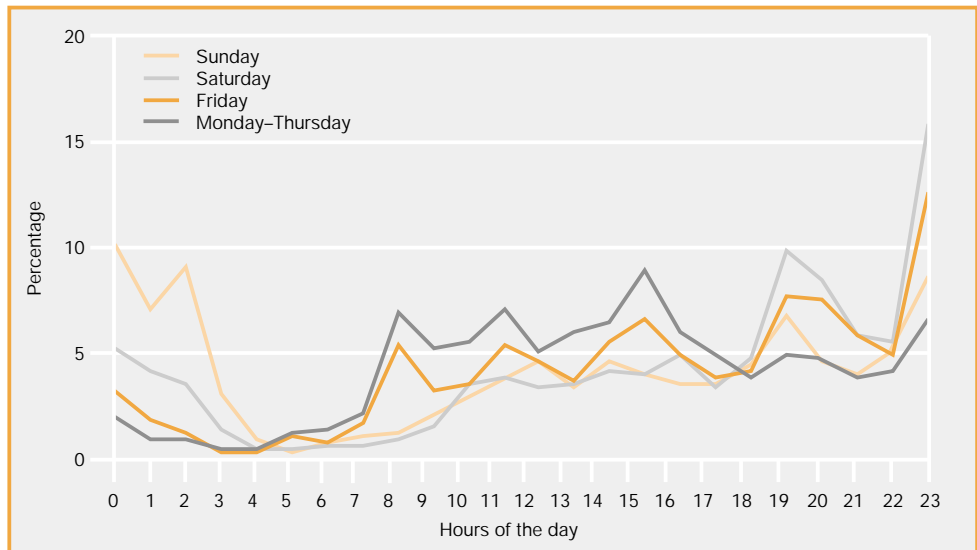
Chart D.7 Purpose of taxi trips by day of week: 1992/99



The start times of taxi trips also vary considerably by day of week (Chart D.8). From Monday to Friday, there were four peaks, between 8am and 9am, 11am and noon, 3pm and 4pm, and 11pm and midnight. Friday had similar day time peaks, with an extra ‘going out’ evening peak from 7pm to 9pm.

There is considerable taxi traffic early on Saturday and Sunday mornings, as travellers return home from the previous evenings’ outings. After low taxi use during the day, there is also a peak early on Saturday evening. Taxis are used most heavily between 11pm and midnight on Friday and Saturday nights. Levels of use up to 3am on Saturday and Sunday mornings are similar to day time usage on weekdays.

Chart D.8 Taxi trips by start time and day of week: 1992/99



Number of people sharing a taxi

Overall, about a third of taxi trips are single occupancy, a third are shared by two people, and a third by three or more.

The average occupancy of taxis was 2.2 people in 1997/99, compared with 2.6 for PHVs.

Cost of taxi and PHV stages

The average cost of taxis and PHVs is higher in London than elsewhere in GB. In London, the average cost of a taxi stage was £7.54 in 1997/99, compared with £3.49 elsewhere. However, London taxi stages were longer than elsewhere, so the average costs per mile differed less- £1.68 in London and £1.26 elsewhere. For PHVs, the average cost per mile was £1.54 in London and 93p elsewhere.

Table D.10 Cost¹ of taxi and PHV stages: 1997/99

	Miles/£					
	London			Rest of Great Britain		
	Taxi	PHV	All	Taxi	PHV	All
Average cost of a taxi stage (£)	7.54	4.60	6.29	3.49	2.77	3.35
Average stage length (miles)	4.5	3.0	3.8	2.8	3.0	2.8
Average cost per mile (£)	1.68	1.54	1.64	1.26	0.93	1.20

1. Single occupancy trips only – see Box 2