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Transport for London Faces Legal Action Over Licence Delays Affecting Private Hire Drivers

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Transport for London is facing legal action from the Independent Workers' Union of Great Britain over ongoing delays in licensing private hire drivers, with claims that the delays have severely impacted drivers' livelihoods and well-being.

The legal challenge, described by the union as “unprecedented,” stems from what it says are systemic failures in the timely processing of licences required for drivers to legally work in the capital. While TfL has acknowledged and apologised for the delays in the past, the union contends that the problem remains widespread and unresolved, affecting a significant number of the 108,000 private hire drivers operating in London.

According to the union’s president, Alex Marshall, a dedicated WhatsApp group created for affected drivers includes around 1,000 members currently experiencing licensing issues. Many of these drivers work for ride-hailing platforms such as Uber and rely entirely on valid licences to earn their income. The union claims that even short delays in licence renewals can have devastating consequences, particularly for low-income drivers with little or no financial cushion.

Some drivers have reported losing their homes or having their vehicles repossessed as a direct result of being unable to work due to licensing delays. The union argues that these consequences reflect not only operational failures but also a lack of adequate support or alternatives during the processing period. It is calling for systemic changes within TfL’s licensing operations to prevent further harm to vulnerable workers.

The issue gained further urgency following the death of 65-year-old private hire driver Robert Dale, who suffered a heart attack in November last year while waiting for his licence to be renewed. His family believes the stress and anxiety caused by his inability to work contributed to his declining health. The case has become a focal point in the union’s campaign, highlighting the human cost behind the delays.

The IWGB's legal action seeks both accountability and reform, urging TfL to overhaul its licensing process and implement safeguards to protect drivers from financial and emotional distress during licence renewal periods. The union argues that the current system leaves many without income or support for extended periods, in what it sees as a failure of public administration.

The legal proceedings are expected to draw significant attention as they touch on broader issues of worker rights, regulatory responsibility, and the treatment of gig economy labour in the capital.