

### MAXIMUM PERMISSIBLE AGE REGULATION 2021

NTA held a public consultation on a further COVID-19 emergency measure to support the SPSV industry. 733 industry stakeholders responded to the consultation on the final operation date of SPSVs during 2021 and 85% agreed with the proposed amendment to the maximum permissible age regulations.

The NTA Board approved the Small Public Service Vehicle (Emergency Measure COVID-19) Regulations 2021 to extend the final operation date (maximum permissible age) of vehicles due to reach their end of life during

2021 for one further year. Thus, no SPSVs will be forced by taxi regulation to exit the fleet in 2021. For those licences due to renew in 2022, normal maximum permissible age limits of 10 or 15 years will apply as the regulation only operates in 2021 on a COVID-19 emergency basis. Substantial grants are available towards electric vehicle and wheelchair accessible vehicle purchase for those who wish to change a vehicle in 2021. All licence holders covered by this emergency regulation will be contacted in writing by NTA.

### WAV GRANT SCHEME 2021

On 1 March, NTA opened the Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle Grant Scheme 2021 (WAV21). The purpose of the Grant Scheme is to support the wider availability of Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles (WAVs) in Ireland's SPSV fleet. It offers financial aid of up to €7,500 nationwide for the purchase of or conversion to a WAV – and a sliding scale, with lesser monies being available for older cars. Cars older than 6 years will not qualify for this Scheme.

Whilst only existing Licence Holders may currently avail of the scheme to purchase or convert a petrol or diesel WAV, the Grant Scheme is available to anyone who wishes to purchase an electric WAV (eWAV) with financing of up to €32,500 per vehicle.

This criteria will be subject to review at regular intervals throughout the duration of the Grant Scheme.

Further information about WAV21, including information on how to apply, can be found [here](#).

## eSPSV GRANT SCHEME 2021

In February, NTA opened the eSPSV Grant Scheme 2021 (eSPSV21) to assist in purchasing and replacing vehicles in the fleet. NTA operates this grant which is funded by the Climate Change Unit of the Department of Transport. A list of vehicles which are eligible for grant funding is published on the NTA website and updated as new models come to market.

Current SPSV licence holders can avail of an enhanced level of funding when scrapping their current vehicle, if it is approaching its end of life, and replacing it with a battery electric vehicle (BEV) or a fuel cell electric vehicle (FCEV). The maximum level of enhanced grant funding is:

- €25,000 for WAVs; and
- €20,000 for non-WAVs

Substantial grants are also available for replacing a non-scrappage vehicle. The maximum level of non-scrappage grant funding is:

- €12,500 for WAVs; and
- €10,000 for non-WAVs

eSPSV grants can be combined with WAV grants for eWAV purchase with financing of up to €32,500 per vehicle.

Further information about the eSPSV Grant Scheme 2021, including how to apply, can be found [here](#).

## REDUCED LATE RENEWAL FEES – 13 JUNE

Licence holders are reminded that the temporary waiver of late renewal inspection fees, introduced in March 2020, will be replaced with a reduced late renewal fee on 13 June. This fee will be the same as the pre-COVID fee for standard renewal inspections (see table below) and will remain in place until 31 December 2021. Change of vehicle inspection fees remain as is in addition to any reduced late renewal fee applicable. Standard renewal fees continue to be waived throughout 2021.

Licence Category	Licence Period	Reduced Late Renewal Fee
Taxi/Hackney/Limousine	1-year licence	€150
Taxi/Hackney/Limousine	6-month licence	€75
Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle	1-year licence	€75
Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle	6-month licence	€37.50

As always, suitability inspection bookings are subject to SPSV inspection centre availability and it takes 48 hours for NCT inspection data to be validated for NTA. All SPSV licences must be renewed within 12 months of their date of expiry. Legislation is very clear that there is no way to replace a licence after this period has ended. From 1 January 2022, all fees will return to normal. Please make your bookings early enough to ensure both an NCT and a Suitability Inspection are available.

## COVID-19 SUPPORT

To date in COVID-19, the following measures have been taken in date order to support the SPSV industry:

- Waiver of late renewal fees of up to €500 for vehicle licence holders from the start of COVID-19 to allow licences to enter inactive status without risk;
- Initial three month deferral of licence renewal dates of all vehicles due to renew from 13 March to 12 June 2020;
- Engaged with insurance providers to provide premium reductions including a private cover discount of up to a 60% whilst not providing SPSV services and up to a 90% discount for transferring to Fire and Theft cover only for “parking up”.
- Suspended licences without SPSV insurance cover rather than leaving licence holders open to prosecution and requiring a NCT and an SPSV suitability inspections prior to returning to work;
- 2020 enactment of emergency regulations to extend the final operation date of vehicles throughout Covid 2020;
- 2020 enactment of emergency regulations to extend the final operation date of vehicles throughout 2021;
- Completing rolling surveys of driver and user experiences in COVID-19;
- Waived standard licence renewal fees for 2021;
- Provided 2021 eSPSV and WAV grant schemes;
- Facilitated training on the Fáilte Ireland Infection Prevention Control training programme;
- Assisted Fáilte Ireland in relation to the Strategic Tourism Transport Business Continuity Scheme;
- 2021 enactment of further emergency regulations to extend the final operation date of all vehicles throughout 2021;
- Engaged extensively with the industry individually and through our website, providing advice and assistance on all aspects of operation in COVID-19, together with media campaigns on using SPSVs in Covid-19.

## COVID-19 FINANCIAL SUPPORTS

As confirmed by Minister Eamon Ryan, when he met again with the Advisory Committee on SPSVs in April, licence holders can earn up to €960 gross (before tax and PRSI), after expenses, over any consecutive 8 weeks and keep the full COVID-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) entitlement. There is no formal application process and licence holders simply need to inform the Department of Social Protection if they earn over €960 in any eight-week period. However, you must:

- ensure that your earnings do not go over €960 in an 8 week period;
- stop your PUP payment if your earnings go above this level; and
- keep evidence of your earnings and have them available for inspection at a later stage.

Further details are available on <http://www.gov.ie/pup>

Information on additional financial supports can be found by clicking on the below links:

- [Enterprise Support Grant COVID-19](#)
- [Part-time Job Incentive Scheme for the Self-Employed](#)
- [COVID-19 Business Loan Scheme](#)
- [COVID-19 Credit Guarantee Scheme](#)
- [COVID-19 Enhanced Illness Benefit](#)

## COVID INDUSTRY SURVEYS

A confidential telephone survey of SPSV drivers nationwide and an online survey of consumers were carried out in September/October 2020 and repeated in February 2021. The objective is to confirm and quantify the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic covering areas such as demand, operational and insurance expenses, customer satisfaction and other topical items.

### KEY FINDINGS FROM FEBRUARY 2021

- **90%** of passengers during Covid felt safe from the virus whilst travelling in SPSVs. Customers have witnessed a lot of measures being put in place for their safety including drivers wearing face coverings (**82%**) and a temporary dividing screen installed between the driver and passenger (**63%**). Operators say that **95%** of customers now wear face coverings.
- On average, the number of drivers who are working is down **62%** on preCovid numbers. While just over 9 in 10 (**92%**) drivers stopped working at some point since COVID-19 started, the majority of those drivers still not working have indicated they will recommence operating in line with the easing of restrictions and the advancement of

the vaccine rollout leading to an increase in demand.

- On average, taxi drivers advise that their income is down **68%**. Loss of earnings appear to increase with age, while those working outside Dublin have been hit the hardest. Owners and those who are likely going to work part time/retire in the foreseeable future show a bigger drop in income.
- **84%** of taxi drivers have implemented COVID measures now - up from 74% in September.
- **84%** of drivers surveyed confirmed they offered some form of cashless payment; most of the remainder indicated that they will do this when they return to work.

Behaviour & Attitudes, an independent research company, will continue these rolling surveys at the end of May. All industry responses are anonymous. Participation is voluntary and operators may choose to opt out. However, participating fully will greatly assist NTA's regulatory and strategic planning for the industry and would be very much appreciated. A report of each survey will be published [here](#), as it becomes available.

## ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON SPSVS

Established under Part 9 of the Taxi Regulation Acts 2013 and 2016, the Advisory Committee on SPSVs (sometimes called the Taxi Advisory Committee) continues to serve a vital purpose in advising both NTA and the Minister for Transport on matters relating to the industry. The Committee's paper, 'Small Public Service Vehicle Industry/ Proposals for Industry Recovery' which considered a variety of supports to assist the SPSV industry in its recovery from the enduring impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, was central to discussions between NTA and the Department of Transport in the latter half of 2020.

The Committee comprises a chairperson and 17 ordinary member positions. In recent weeks, five new members have been appointed to the Committee by Minister Ryan:

Mr Martin Plummer, Chairperson of the National Chauffeur Drivers Association Limited;

- Ms Michelle Reid, Business to Arts;
- Ms Fiona Brady, Head of Operations with FreeNow;
- Mr Shajedul Chowdhury, a taxi driver serving the Limerick area since 2016; and
- Mr Francis Doheny, Secretary of the Newbidge & District Taxi Association.

Further information about the Committee, including full details of its current membership and minutes of all recent meetings, can be found [here](#). Industry members who wish to raise matters for discussion or consideration by the Committee are encouraged to liaise with the appointed small public service vehicle and driver representatives.

## SUICIDE PREVENTION SKILLS TRAINING

SPSV operators may meet passengers who are contemplating suicide when providing SPSV services and a listening ear. Given the importance and potentially life-altering impact of such meetings, NTA with the assistance of the Advisory Committee on SPSVs, has undertaken some research into the availability of Suicide Prevention Skills training which may be of both personal and professional interest and benefit to the SPSV industry.

One such training resource is the **LivingWorks Start** a short online, interactive training programme.

This free programme, which uses a mix of guided online content, video and interactive questions, is accredited by the Psychological Society of Ireland and is one of several resources promoted by the HSE on its website. Further details can be found [here](#).

## DRIVER LINK NOTIFICATIONS

NTA reminds all SPSV operators of their responsibility to ensure they have an active driver to vehicle link when operating an SPSV. This reminder is particularly relevant to those operators who plan to return to work in the coming weeks and months when Government restrictions are expected to ease further.

Linking information feeds into the **Driver Check App** used by the public to ensure that the vehicle and driver they intend to use are licensed and registered with NTA. It is a criminal offence not to have a link notified to NTA when operating. This information is used by our compliance teams to detect and prosecute unlicensed drivers.

NTA provides a number of ways to keep this operational data up to date. Further information on maintaining driver links, including how to register for SPSV Online Services and SMS linking, can be found [here](#) or call the SPSV Information Line.



## VEHICLE REGISTRATION CERTIFICATE: EARLY WARNING

The original Vehicle Registration Certificate (VRC) will soon be inspected at all SPSV suitability inspections, in the same way as the insurance certificate is.

Sections 13 and 14 of the *Taxi Regulation (Small Public Service Vehicle) Regulations 2015*, state that the licence holder must provide evidence that the applicant is the registered owner of the vehicle the subject of the application.

Where a vehicle is held under a hire purchase or lease agreement, NTA will accept written confirmation from the registered owner of the vehicle stating the SPSV licence holder is legally entitled to the use and possession of the vehicle for a period of not less than 12 months.

## CONFIDENTIAL CUSTOMER SERVICE NUMBER

NTA is committed to maintaining the best possible standards in relation to the management of your personal data. With this in mind, NTA introduced a confidential customer service number called a 'CCSN' which is now your unique identifier as a licence holder. The number is included on letters and/or emails from NTA to SPSV licence holders. This number is exclusive to your SPSV profile and as such should be kept confidential. When contacting the SPSV Information Line please have your CCSN to hand as it will replace your PPSN as one of our security questions for data protection.

## NATIONAL LGBTI+ INCLUSION STRATEGY

Wishing everyone participating in Pride 21 a great June and beyond as NTA continues to support the implementation of public transport actions in the [National LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy 2019-2021](#).

# HAPPY PRIDE FROM NTA

