

Minutes of the Advisory Committee on SPSVs Meeting
Video conference, Thursday, 27 May 2021

Present:

Chairperson	Mr. Cornelius O'Donohue
Representing SPSV and driver interests	Mr. Kevin Finn, Mr. John Murphy, Mr. Shajedul Chowdhury, Mr. Francis Doheny
Representing local authorities	Ms. Mary Henchy
Representing interests of persons with disabilities	Ms. Joan Carthy
Representing the interests of business	Ms. Ann Campbell
Representing the interests of older persons	Mr. Peter Fleming
Representing the interests of tourism	Mr. Al Ryan
Special interest or expertise	Mr. Noel Ebbs, Mr. Martin Plummer
An Garda Síochána	Superintendent Tom Murphy
Consumers	Mr. James Cawley, Ms. Michelle Reid

Apologies:

Special interest or expertise	Mr. James O'Brien, Ms. Fiona Brady
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NTA Staff in Attendance:

Ms. Wendy Thompson, Director of Transport Regulation, NTA (Item 5) & Ms. Lauren Markey (Secretary)

Others in Attendance:

N/A

1. Minutes and matters arising.

- Minutes of 29th April 2021 approved.
- Request from Minister Ryan to provide advices to inform the State's sustainable mobility strategy in rural and urban areas. Special Advisory Committee meeting on 08 June 2021 at 11.30am for industry representatives, optional for other Committee members.

2. Advisory Committee 2021 Workplan – Transferability

The Chair opened the agenda item with a reminder of why transferability of vehicle licences (taxis, hackneys and limousines) was prohibited in 2010/2014 when a saloon licence held a considerable value. The industry representatives provided its updated advices in this regard commencing with an explanation of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013 excerpts:

“Prohibition on transfer of licence

14. (1) A licence, whether granted before or after the commencement of this section may not be transferred or assigned or be mortgaged or otherwise encumbered.”

“Revocation of licence on change of control of company

16. (1) Subject to subsection (2), where a company holds a licence, in the event of a change in control of the company—

(a) the licence stands revoked from the date of the change in control, and

(b) the company shall notify in writing the Authority of the change in control and return the licence to the Authority with the notification, not later than 14 days from the date of change in control of the company.[...]"

The Meeting recognised the differences between transferability for an individual and for a company noting the different provisions (sections 14 and 16) in place and agreed to separate the two in discussion.

The industry representatives advised that **individual** vehicle licence non-transferability provide no inducement for drivers who want to retire. Due to Covid, drivers don't want to lease or commit to long-term agreements.

A standard individual transfer was proposed, detailing three main criteria:

- The driver must hold the licence for 10+ years;
- The driver must surrender both licences (Vehicle and Driver Licence); and
- Once transferred, the vehicle must be changed to an eSPSV within 5 years or at the next change of vehicle whichever is earlier.

The Meeting considered this in light of the need for wheelchair accessible vehicles and while the most urgent issue is electric vehicles it was agreed that wheelchair accessible vehicles should remain under consideration.

The Advisory Committee also considered the price of vehicle licences rising due to the black market and making saloon plates extremely valuable. The industry representatives advised that in the 1980s and 1990s, only 2000 licenses were in the fleet, and scarcity inflated prices. With today's fleet at 10 times that, high prices were not envisaged.

It was noted that **corporately** owned vehicle licences are revoked on a change in control or ownership of a company. Companies who own vehicle licences cannot participate in mergers or acquisitions; it impedes company development and restricts competition.

It was advised that there is no way to replace revoked taxi and hackney vehicle licences. WAV taxis and hackneys, as well as limousine licences can be replaced when revoked but this licensing process can take 7-14 days; it is complicated and lengthy for a company to complete when they have a number of licenses.

It was proposed to remove section 16 from the Act to allow all licenses to remain in force.

The criteria would be similar to that proposed for individuals with the vehicles being changed to an electric vehicle within 5 years or at the next change of vehicle whichever is the earlier.

The Advisory Committee discussed the potential increase in vehicle licence value in the private market, and considered that companies to make value from vehicle licences; it is about shares and company progress.

The Committee raised the issue of future proofing for 5 years' time and providing flexibility for things that might be different in the future, and noted that in 15 years all licences will be wheelchair accessible, so for a company that will always be relevant.

The Advisory Committee noted that the electric options with Kia and Nissan, including grants available, make this viable. One or two manufacturers have new options coming in the next 2

years. It was noted that a dropped floor takes a lot of battery space. There is confidence that the manufacturers will solve this problem.

The Chair noted that consideration of the period for this change must be considered.

It was advised that new electric models in 2023, including the London Cab Company and various Chinese EV would likely become available.

The Chair confirmed that a full written proposal would be brought to the Advisory Committee for discussion.

Separately, the Chair confirmed in response to a query on insurance costs, that details on current insurance quotes had been requested of the industry and welcomed any detail from the industry representatives in this regard.

3. COVID-19

The meeting discussed the lack of funding available from the customary financial lenders post Covid, together with the Micro Finance Ireland offering.

The Enterprise Support Grant (€1,000 business restart grant) was discussed with the main impediment being the requirement to have signed off the PUP to avail of same.

Disappointment was noted at the limited uptake of the COVID training by the industry as publicised again in the SPSV Industry Update.

The Chair welcomed any solutions or ideas from the Committee to meet any of the issues Covid is presenting for the Industry.

4. Local Authority Update

Nil to report.

(Wendy Thompson, NTA joined the meeting)

5. Draft Small Public Service Vehicle (Emergency Measures COVID-19) Regulations 2021

The Small Public Service Vehicle (Emergency Measures COVID-19) Regulations 2021 were enacted on Friday 21 May last ensuring that no vehicles in the fleet would reach their final date of operation in 2021.

Some industry representatives asked that it be recorded that the taxi protest organised today did not represent all industry members and the criticism of the NTA and the Advisory Committee was misplaced. It was noted that the majority of taxi drivers were not getting the full picture. The 10-year rule has been extended, fees waived and many other things. The hard work of NTA personnel was acknowledged.

It was noted again, that misinformation was being raised in public fora by contrasting the Northern Ireland £3,000 restart grant with the Irish €1,000 restart grant; without noting that the PUP payment is not available in Northern Ireland and provides SPSV operators in Ireland with up to €18,200, with the €960 extra income disregard for taxi drivers over each 8 week period. A genuine comparison of financial supports shows Ireland to be have much greater supports in place for SPSV Industry members.

The Chair acknowledged the content of the Industry Update, particularly in relation to the encouragement to contact your SPSV representative on the Advisory Committee to raise issues.

The Meeting was also complimentary of the press release and media items promoting SPSVs as the safest / best mode of transport for many people.

NTA provided an update through correspondence on further industry supports currently being finalised at Ministerial level, in line with an overall reassessment of the Covid situation in Ireland. Specifically in relation to the SPSV industry, it is anticipated that further measures will be announced and some will go to public consultation in the coming week. The Taxi Regulation Act requires that any proposed change to an SPSV regulation must pass through a minimum 21-day consultation phase online prior to bringing the proposal to the NTA Board for approval and promulgation. The Meeting recorded its full support for the measures discussed.

With regard to loans and funding, NTA again stressed the availability of the Government funded [Microfinance Ireland COVID-19 Business Loan Scheme](#) as highlighted in SPSV Industry Updates for those who need finance for their businesses at this extraordinary time which is not available from pre Covid lenders.

The Chair confirmed that the Advisory Committee advices on sustainable mobility would be with the NTA after the next Advisory Committee meeting on 24 June.

(Wendy Thompson, NTA left the meeting)

7. AOB.

The Chair confirmed that the next matter on the 2021 Workplan was SPSV service availability in rural Ireland, focussing on isolated areas with limited public transport – local area hackney advices to NTA.

The Meeting recorded its thanks to An Garda Síochána for successful policing of the taxi protest to Leinster House today. It was also remembered that a taxi driver was the good Samaritan who brought Ms Morley to safety after her tragic incident with her children in Newcastle. The Industry can get a bad press sometimes, however, in times of real hardship they often assist by being on the ground. It is important to acknowledge the huge community service of taxi drivers nationwide.

The Meeting referenced the following from the Industry Updates:

[Pandemic Unemployment Payment \(PUP\)](#)

As confirmed by Minister Eamon Ryan when he met again with the Advisory Committee on SPSVs in April, self-employed people in receipt of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) who are looking to maintain their business can earn up to €960, *after expenses*, over an eight-week period, while retaining their full 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.

[COVID-19 Business Loan Scheme](#)

If your business has been impacted by COVID-19 resulting in a reduction of 15% or more in turnover or profit, and you are unable to secure finance from banks and commercial lending providers, the Government funded Microfinance Ireland COVID-19 Business Loan may be an option to help your business.

[COVID-19 Credit Guarantee Scheme](#)

The COVID-19 Working Capital Scheme offers an 80% state-backed guarantee for a range of different lending products through the participating finance providers.

[Enterprise Support Grant COVID-19](#)

This will provide business owners with a once-off grant of up to €1,000 to restart their business, which was closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The next meeting will take place on Thursday, 24 June 2021 (via video conference)

Signed: _____ **Dated:** _____