

Minutes of the Advisory Committee on SPSVs Meeting
Video conference, Thursday, 25th November 2021

Present:

Chairperson	Mr. Cornelius O'Donohue
Representing SPSV and driver interests	Mr. John Murphy, Mr. Shajedul Chowdhury, Mr. Kevin Finn
An Garda Síochána	Superintendent Tom Murphy
Representing the interests of consumers	Ms. Michelle Reid, Mr. James Cawley
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. James O'Brien, Ms. Fiona Brady, Mr. Noel Ebbs

Apologies:

Representing SPSV and driver interests	Mr. Francis Doheny
Representing local authorities	Ms. Mary Henchy
Representing interests of persons with disabilities	Ms. Joan Carthy
Special interest or expertise	Mr. Martin Plummer,

NTA Staff in Attendance:

Ms. Wendy Thompson, Director of Transport Regulation, Ms. Patricia Craven, Head of Taxi Regulation, Ms. Jackie Mullen (Secretary)

Others in Attendance:

Mr. Eamon Ryan, Minister for Transport (Item 3)
 Mr. Éanna O'Conghaile, Principal Officer, Public Transport Regulation Division (DoT) (Item 3)
 Mr. Carlos Acarreta, Public Transport Regulation Division (DoT) (Item 3)
 Mr. Naoise Grisewood, Public Transport Regulation Division (DOT) (Item 3)

1. Minutes and Matters Arising.

The minutes of the meeting held on 28th October were approved with no amendment. In relation to access to WAV's at Dublin Airport, the Chair has asked the NTA to liaise with the DAA on the issue. This is a DAA specific issue and is not within the remit of the NTA. The Chair agreed to re-circulate a copy of the Advisory Committee's submission to the Minister on eVehicles and the small public service industry.

2. Covid-19 Update.

The Committee had a brief discussion on the challenges currently facing the industry in relation to Covid-19 and the return to work for drivers. Drivers have been slow to return to work in the peak hours because of concerns regarding the spread of the virus, with Covid-19 protocols such as mask wearing and social distancing not always being followed by the public. Older drivers in particular are reluctant to operate in the peak hours. It was acknowledged that PUP payments would only be reintroduced if there was another lockdown.

An issue was raised in relation to hybrid cars and the cost of getting them back on the road after a period of inactivity. It would be useful to explore the possibility of a grant being made available to assist with the costs of getting these vehicles back on the road.

The Chair welcomed the Minister for Transport Mr. Eamon Ryan and the Department of Transport officials, Mr. Éanna O’Conghaile, Mr. Carlos Acarreta and Mr. Naoise Grisewood to the meeting.

The Chair conveyed both his and the Committee’s condolences on the loss of George O’Keefe a valued and respected colleague and acknowledged the work and support that George had given the Committee throughout the COVID-19 crisis.

3. Discussion with the Minister for Transport on COVID-19 and other issues relevant to the SPSV industry.

The Minister thanked the Chair and the Committee for their kind words and recognition of the efforts and support given to the Committee during this time.

The Committee thanked the Minister for his attendance and outlined some of the issues currently facing drivers trying to get back to work particularly during peak hours. Drivers have been slow to return to work due to health concerns, particularly drivers operating during peak hours. There are concerns regarding public health protocols not being followed (such as mask wearing and social distancing). These issues are of particular concern to the older drivers and drivers with underlying conditions.

There is enough capacity in the fleet to meet demand, but there needs to be some incentives to encourage drivers back, such as prioritising returning drivers for booster shots. The industry also has concerns regarding the high numbers of drivers exiting the industry. It would be good to simplify the process of getting new drivers into the industry.

The Committee acknowledged the success of the eVehicle grant scheme and urged the Minister to ensure the continuation of the scheme in 2022.

The Committee also raised the issue of return to work grants in relation to hybrid vehicles and the cost of getting such vehicles back on the road, particularly in relation to the costs of reconditioning batteries where the vehicle has been idle for a period of time.

The Minister acknowledged that reduced opening times in the hospitality sector and working from home advice will impact on demand for taxis. He informed the committee that Minister Humphries has advised that the PUP will continue till March 2022.

The back to work grant is in place until the end of the year and motor tax refunds and NCT waiver remain in place until the end of August 2022. The extension of the vehicle age limit till the end of next year is an emergency measure and will not be extended further.

The Minister acknowledged that the eSPSV grant had proved very successful. He expected that this grant will continue in 2022 but there are no further details on this at the moment.

The Minister informed the Committee that the roll out of charging points will continue nationwide and he acknowledged that the provision of such infrastructure was proving to be difficult in cities.

There are no new restrictions planned at the moment but this can change depending on the number of COVID-19 cases being reported. The Government is focussing on the roll out of the booster programme and best use of antigen testing. Major new restrictions are not planned at the moment and will only be introduced as a last resort.

The Minister acknowledged that growth and retention of divers in the industry is an important issue

The Chair stated that the industry is fully aware that the extension of vehicle age was introduced as an emergency measure and will not be further extended. In relation to eSPSV's there was an issue in relation to priority access to charge points. The Committees thoughts on this matter had been sent to the Minister recently.

Eanna O'Conngaile thanked the Committee for its recent submission on eVehicles and also for the condolences expressed in relation to his colleague George O'Keefe. He stated that the Department are looking forward to receiving the Committees views on Transferability. The Minister and Department officials left the meeting

4. NTA Update

The Chair informed the Committee that the NTA had issued the consultant's report on Transferability and a special meeting of the Committee will be scheduled for early January in advance of the regular January meeting of the Advisory Committee on SPSV's.

Wendy Thompson informed the Committee that there was an error in the draft Transferability Report. Transferability was prohibited in 2010 and not 2014 as stated. There was one transfer permitted for vehicles in the fleet but very few took up this option. Wendy Thompson will come back to the Committee with more accurate figures in relation to this.

In relation to credit cards 87% of drivers have the infrastructure to accept credit card payments, however some drivers are choosing not to use this facility. A public consultation on increasing fines is due to take place next year and cashless payments will be included in this.

A new maximum fares order will be put in place by the end of 2022.

Patricia Craven gave the statistical update. She informed the Committee that the closing date for the WAV grant is 30th November 2021.

Wendy Thompson and Patricia Craven left the meeting.

The Committee agree to set the meeting on Transferability for **13th January 2022 at 10.00am.**

The Chair asked that Committee members provide any information they have in relation to roof signs available in markets outside of Ireland. It was noted that past research indicates that drivers would be averse to incurring additional costs in relation to any new proposals.

5. AOB.

Date of next meeting – Thursday 27th January at 10.30am

Signed: _____ **Dated:** _____