

Minutes
Advisory Committee on SPSVs
Hybrid Meeting, NTA Offices and MS Teams
Thursday, 28th July 2022, 10.30am

Present:

Chairperson	Mr. Cornelius O'Donohue
Representing SPSV and driver interests	Mr. John Murphy, Mr. Shajedul Chowdhury, Mr. Francis Doheny, Mr. Alan Cooley
Consumers	Mr. James Cawley Ms Michelle Reid
Representing the interests of Business	Ms. Ann Campbell
Special interest or expertise	Mr. Noel Ebbs, Mr. James O'Brien, Ms. Fiona Brady
Representing the interests of tourism	Mr. Al Ryan
Representing the interests of persons with disabilities	Ms. Joan Carthy
An Garda Síochána	Superintendent Thomas Murphy

Apologies:

Special interest or expertise	Mr. Paul Gregan
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NTA Staff in Attendance:

Ms. Wendy Thompson (Director of Transport Regulation)

Ms. Jackie Mullen (Secretary)

1. Minutes and Matters Arising.

The Chair congratulated new committee members Brendan O'Brien, representing local authorities and Alan Cooley representing SPSV and driver interests on their recent appointment to the Advisory Committee.

The minutes of the meeting held on the 30th June were approved without amendment.

The Chair reminded the Committee that there is no meeting scheduled for August.

(NTA's Director for Transport Regulation joined the meeting)

2. NTA Update

The statistical update to the end of July was previously circulated to the Committee. The Committee raised concerns regarding the number of new drivers entering the industry. Wendy Thompson informed the Committee that the NTA had recently launched a recruitment drive to encourage new drivers into the industry. Test bookings are up by 50% on the 2019 figures. It will take about 3 months for this to be reflected in the figures for new entrants. A query was raised in relation to the estimated target figures for new entrants. Wendy Thompson informed the Committee that there is no cap on the number of new entrants. Ireland has more drivers per capita than other European countries.

One Committee member raised a concern regarding the non-transferability of licences and its impact on driver numbers. In addition the cost of getting a vehicle on the road is very high with many drivers having to go into the rental market. The Chair stated that the issue of non-transferability has been discussed in detail by the Committee. The Committee needs to be conscious of the need to provide an accessible service for all. The Committee should now focus on a range of solutions to encourage new entrants and make recommendations on this. Wendy Thompson stated that the figures being quoted about vehicle purchase are inaccurate and for a top level new model only. Substantial grants of up to €32,500 must be factored in against the purchase price and the fact that new vehicles are not a requirement. There are cheaper alternatives available in the market together with the availability of Microfinance Ireland loans to help purchasers as well as the eSPSV and WAV grants.

3. Fixed Penalty Notices

Wendy Thompson informed the Committee that a proposal will be going out to full public consultation over the next 2 weeks in relation to the fines administered to non-compliant operators. This will have no impact on compliant operators. This proposal had been approved for public consultation by the Committee last November. However, the importance of the Maximum Fares Order was higher for drivers so it was completed first. This is the first time in over 11 years that this issue has been reviewed. Prior to 2013 all fines were fixed at a flat rate of €250, irrespective of the nature of the breach. The main change introduced in 2013 was a sliding scale of penalties. The new proposals will see some fines around the refusal of persons with a disability increasing to the maximum of fine permitted at law, €250, with the remainder increasing in line with safety and consumer protection concerns.. The NTA compliance officers exercise discretion in administering these fines, taking into account all circumstances.

An associated legal amendment will also be drafted for consultation. This relates to driver licence permits being valid *for up to* 5 years, rather than the current full 5 years with no ability to reduce that period in line with visa or other time bound factors.

4. Presentation Taxi Roof Signs / SMART Technology - Raef Mac Giollarnáth, Limatel Consulting

Raef Mac Giollarnáth gave a comprehensive presentation on Taxi Roof Signs, SMART technology and international experience.

The following issues were raised:

- The roof sign must clearly identify the vehicle as a taxi (entitled to ply and stand for hire)
- The vehicle licence number must be clearly visible at all times.
- The availability light should be clearly visible day and night.
- The sign should be aerodynamic particularly for electric vehicles
- There should be full consultation with disability user groups on any proposed changes
- We should design for the future – include a data capture facility which could then be enabled at a later date if so desired.
- In relation to trends data collection, NTA would anonymise individual data - it is not interested in individuals but needs to collect data on the overall service being provided when and where. All GDPR requirements must be followed.
- The copyright for any new roof sign will be maintained by NTA and approved suppliers only may supply same, in the same way as is NTA would require the sign to have an NTA copyright. This is required for safety/fraud reasons and the prosecution of unlicensed operators.
- The area code roof sign sticker should be removed. The Driver Check App now fulfils this function.

It was agreed to set up two Advisory Committee work streams – 1. Roof signs 2. Data capture

NTA formally requested the advice of the Advisory Committee in relation to suitable parameters for a new roof sign, with due regard paid to cost to the operator. Any new regulations will follow the prescribed process including a full public consultation on the matter inviting all submissions.

5. AOB

A query was raised in relation to a further extension to the 11 year rule. Wendy Thompson informed the Committee that there will be no further extensions granted in accordance with the Minister's statement on the matter.

(NTA's Director for Transport Regulation left the meeting)

A query was raised by a new Committee member in relation to the fixed penalty notice of €200 for the non-operation of cashless payment acceptance facilities and the circumstances in which a driver may be liable. The Chair advised that this had been dealt with in the guidance document relating to the acceptance of cashless payments and discussed in detail with Wendy Thompson at the June meeting. In summary, if the reason for not taking a card payment is outside the control of a driver, discretion will be shown by the compliance officers, for example a documented outage. If the terminal is broken or uncharged, for example, this is within the control of the driver and a fixed penalty notice may very well be issued. Equally discretion and common sense should be shown by the driver to the consumer if the card presented is not working or there are insufficient funds and the customer does not have cash.

The Chair wished everybody a restful summer break.

Date of next meeting – Thursday 29th September 2022 at 10.30am (Hybrid meeting)

Signed: _____ **Dated** _____