

Advisory Committee on Small Public Service Vehicles

Thursday, 28th March 2024, 10.30am-12.30pm.

Venue: Board Room, Dún Scéine, Iveagh Court, Harcourt Lane, Dublin 2

Minutes

Present:

Chairperson	Mr. Cornelius O' Donohue
Representing:	
Small Public Service Vehicle and Driver Interests	Mr. John Murphy, Mr. Shajedul Chowdhury, Mr. Alan Cooley
The Interests of Tourism	Mr. Paul Keeley
An Garda Siochana	Superintendent Tom Murphy
Special Interest or Expertise in Matters Relating to the Functions of the Authority, the Advisory Committee, or Related Matters.	Mr. James O'Brien, Mr. Harpreet Singh Ms. Aisling Dunne
Local Authorities	Mr. Brendan O'Brien
The Interests of Older Persons	Ms. Mai Quaid
The Interests of Business	Ms. Ann Campbell

Apologies:

The interests of Consumers	Ms. Michelle Reid
Small Public Service Vehicle and Driver Interests	Mr. Francis Doheny
The Interests of Persons with Disabilities	Mr. John Fulham

NTA Representatives:

Attendance: Mr. Jakub Szynal (Secretary).

Partial Attendance: Ms. Wendy Thompson, Director of Transport Regulation

Ms. Roisin Cullinan, Head of Licensing

Ms. Fiona Brady, Head of Regulatory Compliance

Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media Representatives:

Partial Attendance: Ms. Deborah Lawlor

Ms. Deirdre Currivan

1. Advisory Committee Membership Changes.

The Chair welcomed Aisling Dunne who was recently appointed to the Advisory Committee by the Minister for Transport. Ms. Dunne will represent the area of special interest or expertise in matters relating to the functions of the Authority, the Advisory Committee or related matters.

The Chair informed the meeting that John Fulham will be taking over from Joan Carthy on the Advisory Committee, representing the interests of persons with disabilities. John is a manager within the Advocacy Team of Irish Wheelchair Association

2. Minutes and Actions Arising.

The minutes of the meeting that had taken place on the 28th February 2024 were agreed with no amendments.

3. Public Consultation – Shared Mobility Hubs.

The meeting discussed the Shared Mobility Hubs public consultation, details of which were circulated to the Advisory Committee prior to the meeting. The Chair encouraged all members of the Advisory Committee to participate and share their views.

NTA Representatives joined the meeting

4. NTA Update

NTA presented the monthly SPSV statistics, which were previously circulated to the Committee. It was noted that the WAV24 numbers are strong so far, with over 100 vehicles licensed this year to date. There will be an assessment of the WAV24 grant mid-April. There has also been a spike in ESPSV grant applications this year.

NTA assured the Advisory Committee of its continued commitment to its 2015 position on the prohibition of unlicensed drivers or vehicles to operate in Ireland, highlighting the importance of a regulated, safe and transparent industry for the public. Unlicensed operator court prosecutions are significantly increased on previous years as a result of NTA's post Covid strategy implementation in this regard. Members of the Advisory Committee were encouraged to quell any industry rumours wherever possible, as they mislead operators and created unnecessary confusion, fear and frustration.

NTA informed the Advisory Committee that its aim is to have wheelchair accessible vehicle services available throughout Ireland by the end of 2035, with the Sustainable Mobility Policy target of over 4,000 wheelchair accessible vehicles in the fleet to provide services by end 2025

on track. The strategic actions now in relation to WAV service provision rest with the enforcement of the prioritisations within the Act, Regulations and Grant conditions, as Irish fleet penetration levels far outweigh other jurisdictions, even in those limited jurisdictions that do use independent SPSV WAV services as opposed to fully contracted government health and social services. The newly restructured Regulatory Compliance function has service provision as a prime responsibility.

*Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media Representatives
joined the meeting*

5. A) Night-Time Economy Presentation

The Chair introduced Deborah Lawlor and Deirdre Currivan, representatives from the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (DTCAGSM).

Deborah started the presentation on the Night-Time Economy by giving an overview of the task force, which was established by Minister Catherine Martin. A report was published in 2021 with 36 actions, pushing for a safe and inclusive night-time environment for people of all ages and backgrounds, where alcohol is ancillary and not the main focus. The DTCAGSM representatives note that this report was published during the COVID pandemic, and that it will need to undergo revisions in light of this.

To get a broader scope of the night time economy across the country, a 2 year pilot will be operating in 9 different towns/cities. This will entail the appointment of night time advisors in each town/city, working within a local authority structure in order to identify the area's specific night time needs. Each advisor will produce an action plan for their respective area.

It was highlighted that reviving the night-time economy will be an inter-departmental effort as the whole night time ecosystem will need to change. The DTCAGSM will need to work closely with various government bodies and agencies to bring the plan into fruition. Work is being done with the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications on noise mitigation laws, with the hopes of providing clubs and venues with soundproofing to facilitate later operating hours.

Transport

Actions regarding public transport are being revised. The DTCAGSM will work with the NTA, looking into the feasibility of later operating times for public transport in urban and rural areas.

Safety

DTCAGSM hosted Vulnerability Training in 2021 and 2022, training hospitality staff to recognise vulnerable people and how to intervene. Bystander Intervention Training was offered to 15-24 year olds, demonstrating how to safely intervene and help a vulnerable person. This campaign was a big success. The Youth Forum Report indicates that safety was the top concern young people mentioned.

2024 Plans

One of the key focuses for 2024 is destination development in Dublin City. Work will be done to facilitate positive activities, bringing people into the city to experience something new and different. Cruinniu na Nóg will work to provide more activities and events for children and teenagers. An Accessibility Survey will also be commissioned by DTCAGSM this year.

5. B) Night-Time Economy Presentation – Discussion

The DTCAGSM representatives finished their presentation and an open discussion ensued regarding the role of SPSVs in context of the night-time economy.

The Advisory Committee noted that a scarcity of taxis during very late night social hours on Fridays and Saturdays is not due to supply of licenced operators, but rather due to licenced operators choosing not to work in the cities, in particular, between 1am and 4am, with alcohol, drugs and safety issues pushing drivers away at night.

When pubs and clubs close for the night, there is an outpouring of people onto the streets all at the same time. Industry representatives on the Committee indicated that this presents challenges for drivers, as they often face anti-social behaviour from very intoxicated people, in terms of abuse (racism was specifically called out), assault and vehicle soilage (in terms of debris, urination and vomiting). The Advisory Committee noted that taxi drivers who have had or heard of unpleasant or violent encounters with passengers are deterred from working in the city during these pinch points.

The DTCAGSM is working with the HSE on a harm reduction piece. They noted that trends are leaning towards drugs nowadays more than alcohol, much like in the UK. This could be due to increased availability and inexpensive prices. The meeting discussed the possibility of extending vulnerability training to SPSV drivers.

The SPSV Drivers Representatives also noted the reduction in the number of taxi ranks around the city as a problem for taxi drivers and passengers. The lack of ranks causes drivers to drive around endlessly, checking for passengers that might be safe to take on board. It was noted by the Advisory Committee that this was a nationwide issue, with similar confirmed in Galway, Limerick and Sligo. The SPSV Drivers Representatives also referenced the risks attaching to the use of ranks as you often had to take passengers who were thrown into the back seat of your vehicle too intoxicated to control themselves and try to get them home. At ranks and on apps there is a lessor possibility of choosing safer passengers than on street hails. There is

also a remarkable difficulty in finding your app passenger, unhindered by intoxicated people, in the highly congested streets in the early hours. Driver prefer to work late nights in the suburbs where they feel safe and can be active for a full shift.

Night-time economy pilot towns were discussed. The DTCAGSM representatives explained that the elected advisors will map the existing nightlife of a town, creating a baseline against which to measure the scheme's success. They will get a sense of the infrastructure, communities and the availability of entertainment venues in order to assess what the nightlife in their respective town will demand. This pilot will serve as a blueprint for other towns and cities in the future.

There are around 70 active night clubs in the country. The Advisory Committee discussed the alcohol licensing bill, which would allow clubs and venues to stay open later, and how that could specifically affect SPSV drivers at night. One benefit could be the staggering of people exiting late night venues, resulting in smaller crowds and less opportunity for antisocial behaviour. It could also work in evening out the workload, allowing passengers to be collected by taxi drivers who start working at the tail end of the night or early morning. It was agreed that whilst there was likely to be an upsurge in antisocial activity for the first few weeks of any new opening hours, this would probably settle down quite quickly.

It was agreed that taxis cannot carry the entire weight of transportation during night-time pinch points. A whole array of public transport brings people into the city, but there are significantly less options for returning home during the night. This creates a very high demand for taxis. The Advisory Committee and DTCAGSM agreed that local transport providers should also be canvassed, creating as many transport opportunities as possible with examples from Kerry highlighted as successful.

The DTCAGSM representatives concluded by stressing that the night time economy is a whole of Government and interagency matter, including DTCAGSM, transport, HSE, AGS in terms of public order and safety, together with the suppliers of intoxicants which will require collaborative work to create a vibrant and safe ecosystem at night.

Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media Representatives left the meeting

The Chair asked NTA to provide a presentation on public transport plans for the night time economy.

Extensions on the maximum permissible age of vehicles over 10 years old were discussed. NTA reaffirmed that the emergency, temporary extensions provided during 2020-2022 were once off measures due to the industry decimating pandemic and subsequent supply chain issues with the end date clearly signposted in all communications. It was noted that some

licence holders felt they were being discriminated against as they had to change their vehicles earlier than others but it was agreed that this would be the case irrespective of the date of emergency provision termination. The cut-off point for those was made clear throughout the entire legislative process and further extensions would not be considered as consistently advised by NTA and the Minister for Transport.

AGS provided detail of the number (364) of SPSV Driver Licence applications provided to Chief Superintendents nationwide with a recommendation to grant or refuse as at 01 March 2024, noting a pinch point in approvals the Meath-West-Meath region. AGS will liaise with the Chief Superintendent in Mullingar in that regard.

On request, NTA confirmed that vehicle licence transferability remains prohibited and noted that this was also the advice provided by the Advisory Committee to NTA previously.

NTA Representatives left the Meeting

6. AOB

The Chair asked the committee if there was any other business, there was none.

The next meeting will take place on the 25th of April 2024, at 10.30 in the NTA Offices.