

Meeting of the Advisory Committee on SPSVs – Minutes

Thursday 25th July 2024, 10.30am

Meeting Room 1

NTA, Dún Scéine, Harcourt Lane, Dublin, D02 WT20.

Present:

Chairperson	Mr. Cornelius O' Donohue
Representing:	
Small Public Service Vehicle and Driver Interests	Mr. John Murphy Mr. Francis Doheny
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
The Interests of Older Persons	Ms. Mai Quaid
The Interests of Business	Ms. Ann Campbell
The Interests of Persons with Disabilities	Mr. John Fulham

Apologies:

The interests of Tourism	Mr. Paul Keeley
Local Authorities	Mr. Brendan O'Brien
Small Public Service Vehicle and Driver Interests	Mr. Alan Cooley
The Interests of Consumers	Mr. Adrian Cummins
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.	Ms. Aisling Dunne

NTA Representatives:

In attendance: Mr. Jakub Szynal, Secretary to the Advisory Committee on SPSVs.

Partial Attendance: Ms. Wendy Thompson, Director of Transport Regulation
Ms. Roisin Cullinan, Head of Licensing

10.30am Advisory Committee

1. Minutes of meeting held on 27th June 2024 and Actions Arising

The minutes of the meeting held on 27th June 2024 were agreed with no amendments.

2. Correspondence Received

The Advisory Committee discussed the recent correspondences received from Minister Ryan and NTA. The Chair noted that the upcoming presentations from various representative groups, and brainstorming exercises will help shape the advice produced by the Advisory Committee.

The Chair had announced that he had been invited to meet the NTA board on the 26th July, which was warmly received by the Advisory Committee.

11.00am Advisory Committee and NTA

3. NTA update

The NTA draft Maximum Fares Order proposal was discussed. That public consultation opened on the 4th of July, running for 6 weeks, based on an independent report, commissioned by NTA, on the Taxi Cost Index and economic review completed by KPMG/AECOM and the IPSO/B&A driver and user surveys.

The proposed fare increase, reflecting on labour costs, inflation, the cost of living and fuel costs, is a weighted average of 9%. This average is weighted towards the Premium Tariff, 20:00-08:00. NTA acknowledged that, thus far, the most common SPSV operator submission in the consultation is that 9% is too light an increase overall. It was noted that the average fare increase following the 2022 Maximum Fares Order was 12%. However, importantly, rather than a single two year review period, the 2022 review period covered 2017-2022 (the proposed 2020 increase during Covid was not enacted), together with the extra cost to drivers of providing hardware and software for the cashless facility regulations.

NTA noted that although the Special Tariff extension proposal, where fare increases are substantially weighted towards nighttime economy (NTE) pinch-points, as advised by the rural and urban NTE hospitality sector (midnight to 4am), every driver will benefit from increased fares. It is crucial that the cost of living increase for all stakeholders, including passengers and NTE workers, is recognised in the fare review, hence the Special Tariff extension proposal for midnight to 4am only. The intention of this is to shift the operating hours of those who already work the Premium Tariff

(being 20:00-08:00) to beyond their current cut off point of midnight/1am and entice newer drivers to specific nighttime economy NTE work, together with attracting more drivers to the industry (1,991 new in 2023). This will be reviewed on the examination of the consultation submissions with any appropriate amendments made to the draft and, if it is enacted, a further review will occur at 12 months post enactment to estimate the success or failure of the measure for the NTE and will be reversed if proven unsuccessful.

The Advisory Committee noted that drivers need to be encouraged to collect in suburbs and rural areas. The proposed draft Maximum Fares Order booking fee increase was discussed, noting that private commercial booking service app “technology fees” in a hirers contract are completely separate and primarily city based.

The Chair encouraged the Advisory Committee to make submissions to the public consultation on an individual basis for those they represent or personally as well as being involved in the unified Advisory Committee submission.

Taximeter calibration (reprogramming) and verification (sealing) were discussed. NTA informed the committee that the taximeter programme approvals and each taximeter verification are managed by NSAI – Legal Metrology Systems – and not NTA. NTA receives no funds from any fare changes and those taximeter costs are accounted for within the Taxi Cost Index as part of each operator’s fixed expenses.

The Advisory Committee discussed the SPSV Driver Entry Test. NTA provided more data on those tests to the Advisory Committee. Garda vetting was discussed. An Garda Síochána will remain the licensing authority for SPSV Drivers. Vetting will at all times remain with An Garda Síochána even when the administrative aspects of driver licensing are transferred to NTA, under the Integrated Driver Licensing System currently in development. NTA agreed to provide a presentation on the Integrated Driver Licensing System when the Advisory Committee calendar allows.

WAV purchase/conversion was discussed. It was noted that updates are looking positive, however the parts shortage is likely to continue to be reflected in Q4. A query was posed about the entry age restrictions on WAVs. NTA informed the Advisory Committee that WAV vehicles must be under 6 years old to become newly licenced and can remain in the fleet until their 15th birthday. Second hand WAV numbers are likely to be positively affected by the return to vehicle production.

11.15am – 11.45am Advisory Committee and NTA

4. NTA gave a presentation on data sources for SPSV availability and demand. It gave an overview of their existing data sources, which included taxi linking data, regular taxi and driver user survey results, complaints, and compliance reports. NTA had also confirmed there would be significant evidence-based policy benefits to support the availability/demand assessment of SPSV services if the following was available:
 - Times of operation of SPSV drivers (anonymised)
 - Location of operation of SPSVs but particularly taxis at 84% of fleet (anonymised)
 - Local Authority taxi rank and hotspot CCTV Access (DPC)
 - Dispatch operator (app and traditional) data nationwide
 - Affiliate numbers (*caution: multi-apping*)
 - Affiliate areas of operation
 - Met demand detailed data - time and location
 - Unmet demand detailed data - time and location
 - WAV specific (un)met demand as above
 - WAV service levels provided
 - WAV user demand profile – requested unsuccessfully through multiple routes
 - ANPR (automatic number plate recognition)

Conor McAuley joined the meeting.

11.45am – 12.15pm Advisory Committee and ILMI

5. Independent Living Movement Ireland (ILMI) presentation on SPSV Availability and Demand.

The Chair introduced Conor McAuley (CM) of ILMI to the Advisory Committee, explaining the function of the Advisory Committee and what issues are being considered presently.

CM informed the Advisory Committee that an ATA working group has been established for over a year now in the ILMI. It consists of a group of people with disabilities who have completed a course run by the ILMI, and its overarching goal is to promote equal rights choices and experiences for people with disabilities.

Issues faced by wheelchair users accessing taxis were discussed. It was noted that drivers are often unsure about clamping wheelchairs into the vehicle. CM advised that it is common for taxi drivers to accept a booking through an app, drive by and see that the passenger is in a wheelchair and cancel the booking. There is a reliance on SPSVs as public transport options are not always accessible, with only 1 wheelchair space on buses and having to book ahead on trains where assistance is not always provided. A

lack of public transport in rural areas was also discussed. The removal of the Government mobility grant for people with disabilities and the difficulty obtaining a primary cert were also discussed, noting that the public transport options are limited and acquiring a vehicle has become more difficult and costly.

CM highlighted the reliance of wheelchair users on taxis, and the cost it incurs, suggesting a scheme for taxi drivers to take on passengers with disabilities.

Potential solutions were discussed. It was suggested that the UK model of standardised taxi vehicles could be adopted, making all taxis wheelchair accessible by default. It was noted that the iconic black cab is only available in some cities in the UK and minicabs are not wheelchair accessible. CM noted that people with disabilities should be consulted and invited to work with on these solutions. The United Nations convention on disabilities should also be consulted to make sure the rights of people with disabilities are being respected. The Advisory Committee agreed that feedback from persons with disabilities needs to be heard and considered.

CM advised that people are often unsure where to submit complaints, or if they will ever be tended to. This referred to booking service provider complaints in the main. The meeting acknowledged that people with disabilities might be afraid that the complaints won't get responded to. NTA encouraged all to submit complaints directly to NTA as the Regulator, via the multiple channels available, where they will all be investigated, unless the complaint refers to a contract matter between the service provider and the passenger. It was reiterated that the most effective complaint is to a regulatory authority, and people need to be encouraged to submit complaints.

CM played a video for the Advisory Committee created by ILMI which detailed frequent issues faced by persons with disabilities using taxis.

WT expressed interested in meeting with ILMI and IWA to discuss complaints and their submission, noting in particular that where there is no driver licence number, vehicle registration number or roof sign number in a complaint to identify the operator very little can be done. Complainants need to gather as much evidence as possible. WT also noted that although the ILMI video needs to be tweaked for accuracy, NTA would be delighted to help get the complaints message out to communities to improve the SPSV industry. She advised that there is a government commitment to have over 4,000 WAV vehicles in the SPSV fleet in 2025 and that drivers are fined €250 per instance of proven WAV refusal, the highest on the spot fine permitted under SPSV legislation. All WAV refusals are prosecuted where that fine is not paid and, crucially, the complainant is willing to attend the district court as a witness.

The Chair noted the value in ILMI meeting with NTA to shed light on what happens to complaints and what causes some to fail. The Advisory Committee requested that ILMI revert with proposed solutions at a later meeting, noting that whilst preferable the possibility of a standardised WAV fleet was not feasible at present. Driver training standards were also discussed, querying what can be done to ensure every driver knows how to clamp in a wheelchair. It was noted that evidence and collaboration will

be needed to tackle all these issues. The Chair suggested that ILMI come back for another session in November.

CM left the meeting.

The Advisory Committee agreed that the best step forward is to hone in all the experiences shared by people using wheelchairs to figure out what advices to put forward. Discussions of the night time economy will be deferred until the next meeting.

6. AOB

The Chair had asked the Advisory Committee if there was any other business, there was none.

Date of next meeting – Thursday 26th September 2024, 10.30.

NTA, Dún Scéine, Harcourt Lane, Dublin, D02 WT20.