



> The Official
Manual for
Operating in the
SPSV Industry

Edition 7.8 – December 2024

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more information.

The National Transport Authority is committed to continually refining and enhancing its activities relating to the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry and improving practices and procedures relating to licensing and compliance.

To receive updates to your phone or by email call 0818 064 000 with your details to hand or register on www.nationaltransport.ie.

Updates to this *Official Manual for Operating in the SPSV Industry* ('the Manual') will be published on the website to reflect changes in regulations and industry standards.

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The Official Manual for Operating in the SPSV Industry, Edition 7.8

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Preface

The purpose of this Manual is to help you develop the range of skills that you need in your day-to-day work as a driver, owner or renter of a Small Public Service Vehicle (SPSV).

Even if you are an experienced SPSV operator, you will find information that will help you stay up to date with developments in your industry and some ideas on how to grow your business.

Terminology

In this Manual the following terms are used:

Dispatch operator	An SPSV dispatch operator is an individual or organisation that provides a service for taking bookings for SPSV services that are delivered by someone else, or who provides a service that enables passengers to arrange the hire of an SPSV themselves.
Driver display card	A driver display card is an identification card that SPSV drivers must display in their vehicles. It serves as proof that the driver is licensed to provide SPSV services and provides essential information such as an identification photograph and licensed counties of operation to passengers.
Driver smart card	A driver smart card is an identification card that shows essential information about the driver. This must be carried by the driver at all times while operating.
Fixed payment offence	For certain breaches of the SPSV regulations, known as fixed payment offences, NTA is empowered to impose penalties, known as fixed payment penalties. These are commonly referred to as 'on the spot fines'.
Initial charge	When a journey begins, the initial fare charge is already on the taximeter. This covers the first 500 meters of a journey or a period of 85 seconds.
In-Vehicle Information Card	An In-Vehicle Information Card refers to the card that is displayed in an SPSV to provide fare information to passengers. This includes how to read a taximeter and information on extra charges that may be incurred.
Lease/Hire-purchase agreement	A lease/hire-purchase agreement is an arrangement where an individual or company leases or hires a vehicle for SPSV operations with the option to purchase the vehicle at the end of the lease term.
Maximum age	The maximum age refers to an age limit that is set for an SPSV. This is imposed to ensure safety and environmental standards are met. The maximum age can vary for different types of SPSVs, and generally aims to phase out older vehicles or apply additional inspections and

	requirements to ensure they remain safe and suitable for public service.
Modified vehicle	A modified vehicle refers to any vehicle that has been adapted for a specific use. For example, a vehicle that has been modified to be wheelchair accessible.
National Maximum Taxi Fare/ Maximum Fares Order	The National Maximum Taxi Fare / Maximum Fares Order is fixing the maximum fares that may be charged by the driver of a taxi. It serves to standardise pricing, prevent overcharging and ensure fairness in SPSV transportation.
Plying for hire	A taxi is 'plying for hire' when it is available for hire in a public area allowing a passenger to hail the taxi when in motion or enter a taxi at a taxi rank.
Private Limited Company	A private limited company is a where a business is owned by individuals or entities who hold shares in the company. It is legally separate from the owners and they are not personally responsible for the company's debts. These companies have specific rules to follow.
Sole trader	A sole trader is an individual who operates a business on their own without partners or a separate legal entity. The sole trader is personally responsible for all aspects of the business, including profits, loss and liabilities.
SPSV	This acronym stands for Small Public Service Vehicle. It is a generic term, covering the six categories of public service vehicle that have seating capacity for up to eight passengers, excluding the driver – taxis, wheelchair accessible taxis, hackneys, wheelchair accessible hackneys, local area hackneys and limousines.
SPSV driver licence	This is the licence that allows a person to drive a licensed SPSV.
SPSV operator	An SPSV operator refers to any individual or company responsible for providing passenger transportation services using an SPSV in compliance with relevant regulations and licensing requirements.
Standing for hire	A taxi 'stands for hire' when it is stationary and available for hire in a public area.
Tariff A	Tariff A is the standard fare charge that applies after the initial charge. This covers the next 14.5 km or 42 minutes.
Tariff B	Tariff B is the standard fare charge that applies after Tariff A. This covers the distance after 14.5 km or 42 minutes.
Taximeter / Meter	The term 'taximeter' refers to the meter installed in a taxi that must be used for calculating and displaying the fare. A taximeter is commonly referred to as a 'meter'.

Two-way radio	A two-way radio is used in taxis as a communication device that allows real-time, two-sided voice transmission between a driver and a dispatch operator, facilitating efficient and coordinated taxi services.
SPSV (vehicle) licence	This is the licence that allows a vehicle to be operated as an SPSV in a specific SPSV category. Throughout this Manual, the SPSV (vehicle) licence is referred to as a <i>vehicle licence</i> .

There are eleven chapters in this Manual.

1	The SPSV industry	Gives a general overview of the SPSV industry, the role of NTA and the objectives of the Skills Development Programme.
2	Driver licensing	Describes what is required in order to be licensed as an SPSV driver and sets out the procedures involved in applying for an SPSV driver licence and renewing such a licence. It also outlines the principal rights and responsibilities of SPSV drivers.
3	Choosing a vehicle to use as an SPSV	Describes the standards that your vehicle needs to meet in order to be licensed as an SPSV.
4	Vehicle licensing	Describes the processes involved in applying for a vehicle licence, renewing a vehicle licence, changing the vehicle on a vehicle, replacing a licence that has expired and surrendering a licence.
5	Working as an SPSV operator	Outlines the regulations that apply to vehicles being operated as SPSVs and to the persons driving them.
6	Finding your way around	Deals with map reading and other ways of working out the best route to take your passenger to his or her destination.
7	Fares	Describes how the fare is calculated and charged for each journey.
8	Delivering customer satisfaction	Looks at ways in which SPSV operators can deliver a high-quality service to all of their customers, including those with disabilities. It also looks at issues of equality and diversity and describes how customer complaints are dealt with.
9	Your SPSV business	Outlines the operational and financial aspects of running an SPSV business. It includes details of how to maintain business records and how to ensure that you remain tax-compliant, together with some ideas on how to identify opportunities for maximising your income.
10	Staying safe	Looks at a wide range of driver and passenger safety and security issues.
11	Preparing for your test	Describes the two modules of the SPSV Driver Entry Test and how the test is administered. It also provides some sample questions for both the Industry Knowledge and the Area Knowledge modules.

There are three appendices:

A	Vehicle age rules	Sets out the maximum age of vehicle for SPSV licensing under different circumstances.
B	Local area hackneys	Describes the requirements and procedures for licensing local area hackneys and local area hackney drivers.
C	Dispatch operator licensing	Describes the requirements and procedures for licensing SPSV dispatch operators.

1. The SPSV industry

This chapter gives a general overview of the role of NTA in relation to the small public service vehicle sector. It includes the following:

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■ The importance of the SPSV industry	4
■ Licensing vehicles, drivers and dispatch operators	4
■ Regulations that apply to SPSVs and their drivers	5
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Welcome

Welcome to *The Official Manual for Operating in the SPSV Industry*. The acronym SPSV stands for 'small public service vehicle' – vehicles that are used to carry up to eight passengers, excluding the driver, for hire or reward. The term covers taxis, wheelchair accessible taxis, hackneys, wheelchair accessible hackneys, local area hackneys and limousines. SPSVs play a key role in the delivery of public transport services.

This Manual has been produced by the National Transport Authority (NTA) to give SPSV operators the information they need to obtain and keep the relevant licences, and to help them develop the skills needed to operate successfully in the industry. It will be of benefit to aspiring and new entrants, as well as to those already in the industry.

In this Manual, existing SPSV operators will find information on the standards and regulations that apply in the SPSV industry and useful guidelines for the development and maintenance of a professional service to the travelling public. They can use this Manual to maintain and further develop their skills and knowledge. For the most up-to-date information on changes in the industry, refer to NTA's industry website, www.nationaltransport.ie.

New entrants to the industry can use this Manual to prepare for the SPSV Driver Entry Test, which they must pass in order to obtain an SPSV driver licence. The Manual will also help them in their day-to-day operations.

SPSV licence

Throughout this Manual, we refer to the SPSV licence as a *vehicle licence*. This is the licence that allows a vehicle to be operated as an SPSV (as distinct from the separate *SPSV driver licence*, which allows a person to drive an SPSV).

About the National Transport Authority (NTA)

NTA is a State body set up under statute in 2009.

In relation to the SPSV industry, the principal function of NTA is the development, operation and maintenance of a regulatory framework for the control and operation of small public service vehicles and their drivers in accordance with the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013 and 2016, and all associated regulations, orders and codes. NTA incorporates the functions of the previous body, the Commission for Taxi Regulation.

The objectives of NTA are to:

- Promote the provision and maintenance of quality services by small public service vehicles and their drivers;
- Pursue the continued development of a qualitative and customer orientated licensing system, regulatory code and standards for small public service vehicles, small public service vehicle licence holders and small public service vehicle drivers;
- Oversee the development of a professional, safe, efficient and customer-friendly service by small public service vehicles and their drivers;
- Encourage and promote competition in relation to services (including fares) offered by small public service vehicles;
- Have due regard to the protection of service users and providers alike;

- Promote measures to facilitate increased integration of taxi services in the public transport system;
- Promote the development of high quality cost effective services by small public service vehicles and their drivers which meet a wide range of customer needs including those of passengers with mobility or sensory impairments;
- Promote access to and the availability and affordability of small public service vehicles by persons with disabilities; and
- Encourage investment to support and enhance the services offered by small public service vehicles and to promote innovation in this regard.

The responsibilities and legal powers of NTA in relation to SPSVs

Regulation

NTA may make regulations and set standards in relation to the licensing, control and operation of SPSV drivers, vehicles, renters, dispatch operators, and booking and other services.

Licensing

Licences are granted only to SPSV drivers, vehicle operators, and dispatch operators or other booking services who meet the required standards. It is illegal to operate in the SPSV industry without the appropriate licence or licences.

Compliance

NTA monitors the industry to ensure nationwide compliance with the law. It investigates complaints from the public, and where necessary administers fines or prosecutes for breaches of the SPSV legislation.

Consumer and industry information

NTA provides a range of information services to the public and the industry, and operates a complaints process and a commendation scheme.

Skills development

NTA is responsible for ensuring that SPSV operators meet high standards of knowledge and skill, so that consumers can be confident of receiving quality services.

Policy development

NTA is committed to ensuring that SPSV services integrate into the overall public transport system; that adequate services are available nationally; and that people with disabilities can access suitable services. In developing policy, NTA works closely with Government departments and agencies, with local authorities and with An Garda Síochána to ensure that issues affecting SPSV services are taken into account in the development of national, regional and local policies. It also works towards ensuring that the interests of the wider community are reflected in NTA's own policies and standards.

NTA will continue to ensure a fair regulatory process which strikes a balance between the needs of the consumer and those of the licence holder.

Advisory Committee on Small Public Service Vehicles

The Advisory Committee on Small Public Service Vehicles (often referred to as the Taxi Advisory Committee) is appointed by the Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport to advise NTA or the Minister as appropriate in relation to issues relevant to SPSVs and their operators.

The Advisory Committee represents the interests of a wide range of stakeholders nationally, including:

- SPSV operators and drivers
- Local authorities
- An Garda Síochána
- Consumers
- Persons with disabilities
- Businesses
- Older persons
- Tourism interests
- Competition interests
- Specialist experts

NTA refers key issues that are relevant to SPSVs to the Advisory Committee for advice, which NTA then considers in arriving at final decisions. NTA is, however, not bound to act on the advice received from the Advisory Committee.

Further information

See NTA's industry website, www.nationaltransport.ie, for more information regarding:

- The functions and responsibilities of NTA;
- The various consultation processes and policy documents published by NTA; and
- The current membership of the Advisory Committee on Small Public Service Vehicles.

The importance of the SPSV industry

The six categories of SPSV – taxis, wheelchair accessible taxis, hackneys, wheelchair accessible hackneys, local area hackneys and limousines – together play a key role in the national public transport infrastructure. They are the only type of public transport service that operates a personalised service, door-to-door, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

NTA's overall objective is to ensure that the public can avail of a professional, regulated SPSV service, operated by professional drivers, vehicle owners, dispatch operators and booking services focused on providing quality customer service.

NTA recognises that people operating in the SPSV industry work hard, often under difficult conditions, and is committed to supporting them in their efforts to deliver an excellent service to the travelling public.

The standards that NTA has set for the industry aim to:

- Raise the quality of service provided by the industry;
- Increase public confidence in the service; and
- Enhance business opportunities for those who meet and exceed those standards.

Licensing vehicles, drivers and dispatch operators

There are three core areas of licensing in the SPSV industry:

- **Driver licences** are granted by An Garda Síochána with the support of NTA;

- **Vehicle licences** are granted and administered by NTA; and
- **Dispatch operator licences** are granted and administered by NTA.

The SPSV driver licence

The holder of a standard SPSV driver licence granted by An Garda Síochána is licensed to drive any category of SPSV. However, the holder of a local area hackney driver licence (which is a non-standard SPSV driver licence) is licensed to drive only local area hackneys.

When driving a taxi, the driver is licensed to stand or ply for hire only in the county or counties for which they have been granted a licence.

The SPSV driver may drive their own licensed vehicle, drive a licensed vehicle owned by another person or be employed as a driver by another person.

The requirements for driver licensing and the processes involved are described in Chapter 2.

The vehicle licence

An SPSV driver may drive for hire or reward only in a licensed SPSV. There are six categories of vehicle licences:

- Taxi;
- Wheelchair accessible taxi;
- Hackney;
- Wheelchair accessible hackney;
- Local area hackney; and
- Limousine.

The requirements for vehicle licensing are described in Chapter 3. The vehicle licensing processes are described in Chapter 4.

A vehicle may be licensed in only one category at any time.

The dispatch operator licence

An SPSV dispatch operator is an individual or organisation that provides a service for taking bookings for SPSV services that are delivered by someone else, or who provides a service that enables intending passengers to arrange the hire of an SPSV themselves.

NTA grants dispatch operator licences to individuals or companies that meet set criteria. NTA believes that dispatch operators have an important role to play in providing a first-class service to the travelling public. In particular, dispatch operators play a key role in improving the delivery of door-to-door services to people with disabilities.

The requirements for licensing and the processes involved are described in Appendix C.

Regulations that apply to SPSVs and their drivers

To achieve its objective of promoting a high quality SPSV service, NTA has been given powers, under the Taxi Regulation Acts 2013 and 2016, to make and enforce regulations in relation to the licensing, control and operation of:

- SPSV drivers;

- SPSVs (vehicles); and
- SPSV dispatch operators.

People working in the SPSV industry must also comply with a wider range of regulations that apply to them as road users and as business service providers. These regulations are enforced by a range of statutory bodies, including (but not limited to):

- | | |
|---|--|
| ■ An Garda Síochána | ■ The Department of Social Protection |
| ■ The Road Safety Authority | ■ The Department of Transport |
| ■ Local Authorities | ■ The Health & Safety Authority |
| ■ National Standards Authority of Ireland | ■ The Equality Authority |
| ■ Legal Metrology Service | ■ The Office of the Ombudsman |
| ■ The Health Service Executive | ■ The Competition Authority |
| ■ The Revenue Commissioners | ■ The Office of the Data Protection Commissioner |

NTA works closely with these bodies to ensure compliance with regulations and, where appropriate, shares information with them. This is to ensure that all SPSV operators work to the same high standards, that the service provided to the public is consistent and of high quality and that legitimate SPSV operators do not face unfair competition from others who do not comply with their legal obligations.

The benefits of regulation

NTA is responsible for setting standards that must be met by all operators in the SPSV industry. SPSV regulations are set in the context of the Government's White Paper *Regulating Better* and conform to the core principles of necessity, effectiveness, proportionality, transparency, accountability and consistency. NTA adheres to these principles through extensive consultation and in-depth research. NTA is committed to keeping all stakeholders informed of its work and research on an ongoing basis through its website, www.nationaltransport.ie.

Regulation benefits both SPSV operators and their customers.

- Regulation ensures that there is a level playing field for everyone in the industry, so that legitimate operators do not have to compete for business with people who have not met the relevant standards.
- Customers can reasonably expect high standards of vehicle comfort and safety, and a high quality of customer service.
- By helping to maintain standards, regulation raises the profile of the SPSV industry and presents a professional image of the industry to the travelling public.
- Consumers have greater confidence in the industry and are more inclined to avail of its services, knowing that it is operating to a set of well-defined standards that are monitored and enforced.

Compliance with the regulations

Compliance with SPSV regulations is monitored and enforced by NTA's dedicated compliance team together with An Garda Síochána. NTA's compliance team works closely with An Garda Síochána and undertakes joint operations with them.

Getting an SPSV on the road

Whether you drive your own vehicle, drive a vehicle owned by someone else or work as an employee for a third party, you must comply with the SPSV regulations.

SPSV regulations

To drive an SPSV, you must have:

- 1. An SPSV driver licence**
You must hold a current SPSV driver licence in addition to your regular driving licence.
- 2. A licensed SPSV**
The vehicle must be licensed to operate in one of the six categories of SPSV. The vehicle licence must be valid and in date.
- 3. A valid certificate of insurance**
The vehicle must be insured to operate as an SPSV.
- 4. A valid certificate of roadworthiness**
The vehicle must have a current NCT certificate.
- 5. Tax clearance**
You are required to be up to date in your tax affairs, and to maintain your tax clearance status throughout the period of your licence. Your tax clearance status will be checked online by NTA.
- 6. Driver to Vehicle Link**
You are required to provide NTA with details of the SPSV you are driving at all times. NTA maintains a record of each licensed SPSV and the driver currently associated with it. This is described further in Chapter 5.

Further information

Contact NTA's SPSV Information Line on 0818 064 000.

Visit the website at www.nationaltransport.ie.

The SPSV Skills Development Programme

Every successful business invests in ongoing training and skills development. The SPSV business, which operates in a constantly changing and challenging environment and relies heavily on personal skills, will prosper only if it too makes this kind of investment.

NTA's Skills Development Programme for SPSV operators, as set out in this Manual, is designed to help you develop the range of skills that you will need to operate in the SPSV industry on a day-to-day basis. NTA is committed to developing and maintaining a comprehensive Skills Development Programme in line with international best practice.

- If you are a new applicant for an SPSV driver licence you must pass the SPSV Driver Entry Test, which has two modules: the Industry Knowledge Module and the Area Knowledge Module (county specific). If you pass one module and fail one module of your SPSV Driver Entry Test you then have one year from that date to re-sit the failed module only.

- If you already hold an SPSV driver licence, you are encouraged to take the Industry Knowledge Test.
- If you already hold an SPSV driver licence and you wish to stand or ply for hire in a county other than the one in which you were originally licensed, you will be required to take the Area Knowledge Test for that county. In addition, you may be required to sit and pass the Area Knowledge Test before your licence is renewed if during the previous three years NTA receives three or more complaints relating to your area knowledge.

SPSV operators undoubtedly do a difficult and demanding job in which they can feel constantly challenged and tested. NTA believes that the information in this Manual will help them to deal with some of these challenges.

National SPSV registers (licence database)

Under Section 18 of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013 and 2016, NTA is required to maintain a national register of licences, which NTA makes available to other agencies to facilitate law enforcement and regulatory compliance as may be required.

The national register includes the following details:

- The name and address of the licence holder;
- The date on which the licence was granted;
- Details of any suspension applying to a licence, including the period of the suspension, a reference to the reason for the suspension, and particulars of all removals of such suspensions; and
- Details of the revocation of a licence and the reasons for revocation.

In relation to vehicle licences, the register includes the following additional details:

- The vehicle licence number;
- The registration number of the licensed vehicle;
- The category of SPSV to which the licence applies;
- Details of any changes of vehicle associated with the licence.

In relation to SPSV driver licences, the register includes the following additional details:

- The SPSV driver licence number;
- The SPSV driver licence photograph; and
- The county or counties for which the SPSV driver licence has been granted.

Public (online) register

As required by statute, a limited subset of the licence record information above is made available to the general public on NTA's consumer-facing website, www.transportforireland.ie.

NTA does not publish the address details of licence holders, details of suspensions or revocations of licences, or certain personal details about the licence holder on this website; however, it is obliged under Section 18 of the Taxi Regulation Acts 2013 and 2016 to supply details (including address details) of any licence holder on receipt of a written request for a certificate of information. Any such request must be accompanied by the relevant fee.

The information published on NTA's consumer-facing website, www.transportforireland.ie, includes the following:

- SPSV driver licence information
- Vehicle licence information

- ▶ SPSV driver licence number;
 - ▶ The holder's name;
 - ▶ Licensed areas of operation;
 - ▶ Licence status; and
 - ▶ Licence expiry date.
- ▶ Vehicle licence number;
 - ▶ Licence type;
 - ▶ Vehicle registration number;
 - ▶ The holder's name;
 - ▶ Licence status; and
 - ▶ Licence expiry date.
- Dispatch operator information
 - ▶ Dispatch operator licence number;
 - ▶ Company name;
 - ▶ Contact name;
 - ▶ Licence status; and
 - ▶ Licence expiry date.

Contacting NTA

You can contact NTA in a number of ways:

- By phoning the SPSV Information Line: **0818 064 000**;
- By email: taxis@nationaltransport.ie
- Through the Contact Us form on NTA's industry website:
<https://contactus.nationaltransport.ie/>
- By post: National Transport Authority
 - Haymarket House
 - Smithfield
 - Dublin 7
 - D07CF98

2. SPSV driver licensing

This chapter sets out:	Page
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■ The procedure for applying for an SPSV driver licence	11
■ The procedure for renewing an SPSV driver licence	16
■ The rights and responsibilities of an SPSV driver	18

There are two bodies involved in the SPSV driver licensing process:

- An Garda Síochána, the national police service of Ireland, as the SPSV driver licensing authority, is responsible for:
 - ▶ Making SPSV driver licence application forms (PSV 15/18) available at Garda stations;
 - ▶ Administering applications received;
 - ▶ Vetting applicants to assess their suitability; and
 - ▶ Where appropriate, granting and renewing SPSV driver licences.
- NTA is responsible for:
 - ▶ Administering the SPSV Driver Entry Test
 - ▶ Processing SPSV driver licence fees;
 - ▶ On receipt of the SPSV driver licence from An Garda Síochána, issuing the SPSV driver identification cards that an SPSV driver must have with them at all times while operating; and
 - ▶ Maintaining the SPSV driver licence register as described in Chapter 1.

Requirements for obtaining an SPSV driver licence

SPSV driver licences are granted only to people:

- Who are confirmed by An Garda Síochána to be suitable persons to hold SPSV driver licences;
- Who hold a valid driving licence– Class B or higher, and has held the driving licence without endorsement on a continuous basis during the period immediately preceding the application;
- Whose tax affairs are up to date;
- Who pass the SPSV Driver Entry Test (both modules) and obtain the SPSV Skills Development Certificate (see Chapter 11). (**Exception:** applicants for local area hackney driver licences are not required to pass the SPSV Driver Entry Test.); and
- Who have successfully completed the free, online professional development course for Safeguarding and Disability Awareness.

Tax clearance

Applicants must be up to date in their tax affairs. The applicant's tax clearance status will be verified online by NTA. Evidence of tax clearance must be submitted to An Garda Síochána with a licence application. Driver licence holders are required to maintain their tax clearance status throughout the period of their licence.

Applying for an SPSV driver licence

To apply for an SPSV driver licence, you must:

- Successfully complete the SPSV Driver Entry Test (both modules) and receive your SPSV Skills Development Certificate.
- Successfully complete the free, online professional development course for Safeguarding and Disability Awareness.
- Pay the relevant licence fee to NTA.
You can do this on the Information Line, 0818 064 000, using a credit or debit card.
As this fee is non-refundable, you should pay it only after you have passed the SPSV Driver Entry Test and you are confident that you can satisfy all the other conditions for licensing.
NTA will issue you with a receipt for this fee in hardcopy which you will need for your application to An Garda Síochána.
- Obtain a PSV 15 application form from your local Garda station;
- Obtain three identical photographs, each measuring approximately 10cm by 7cm, showing your head and shoulders and complying in other respects with standards for official photographs.
- Complete the PSV 15 application form and submit it to the Garda station nearest to your residence (if you live outside Dublin) or to the Carriage Office (if you live in Dublin) with:
 - ▶ The receipt for your licence fee;
 - ▶ Your photographs;
 - ▶ Evidence of your tax clearance status;
 - ▶ Your driving licence and driver licence history available from the National Driver Licence Service (NDLS);
 - ▶ Your SPSV Skills Development Certificate;

- ▶ A written undertaking that you will not drive an SPSV for more than 11 hours on any three consecutive days;
- ▶ Details of any other occupation in which you are engaged, including name and address of employer (if relevant), and, if that other occupation involves driving, evidence that you have informed the employer of your intention to apply for an SPSV driver licence;
- ▶ A declaration that your health does not materially affect your ability to drive an SPSV, and that you are not taking drugs or medication that would be likely to impair your ability to drive safely;
- ▶ A declaration that you have not been convicted of any of the offences specified in section 30(3) or the Schedule to the Taxi Regulation Acts 2013 and 2016; and
- ▶ Any other documents requested by An Garda Síochána.

There are some different requirements for local area hackney driver licence applications -- see Appendix B.

How your application is processed

Your application will then be processed by An Garda Síochána. The process includes an assessment of you as a suitable person to hold an SPSV driver licence. This vetting may take up to twelve weeks to complete. All queries relating to your application should be directed to An Garda Síochána.

Mandatory disqualification

If you have been convicted (in Ireland or elsewhere) of any of the offences that are specified in the Schedule to the Taxi Regulation Acts 2013 and 2016, you are disqualified from holding an SPSV driver licence. Any SPSV driver licence you hold will be revoked and no new licence or renewal will be granted for the duration of the disqualification.

For some convictions listed in Part 1 of the Schedule (including those for murder, rape and some sexual offences) this can be a lifetime disqualification. For other convictions, set out in Part 2 of the Schedule, the duration of the disqualification may be limited to 12 months, in the case of a suspended sentence, or up to five years after release, where a term of imprisonment was imposed.

Furthermore, where a driver is disqualified from driving for any of the following Road Traffic Act offences (or their international equivalents), the driver will be disqualified from driving an SPSV for the period of the standard driving disqualification plus a further three to five years:

- Careless driving;
- Dangerous driving;
- Driving under the influence of an intoxicant;
- Being in charge of a vehicle under the influence of an intoxicant;
- Failing to provide a specimen.

You are required to notify An Garda Síochána immediately of any relevant conviction.

If you have received a mandatory disqualification, you can apply to the appropriate or relevant court to be allowed to apply for an SPSV driver licence or to have the revocation of an existing licence lifted. You are required to notify both An Garda Síochána and NTA if you wish to appeal a mandatory disqualification. If you believe you may be affected by this, it is strongly advised that you consult the legislation and seek legal advice.

Licences and ID cards

When your application for an SPSV driver licence has been processed and approved, An Garda Síochána issues you with an SPSV driver licence and informs NTA. Your paper licence is sent to you directly from the Garda Síochána PSV Office.

NTA then sends you two forms of identification: a large driver display card for display on the dashboard of any SPSV you drive, and a smart card that you are required to keep with you at all times while you are operating as an SPSV driver. Both forms of identification show your photograph, your name, your driver licence number, the expiry date of your licence, and the area in which you can stand or ply for hire in a taxi. These are valuable items, essential to your work as an SPSV driver, and you must keep them safely. If you lose either of these identification cards, you must report the loss to the Garda Síochána PSV Office immediately.

Identification cards are issued in three different colours:

- **Purple identification cards** are issued to operators who have passed the SPSV Driver Entry Test (or, in the case of drivers licensed prior to the introduction of the Skills Development Programme, the Industry Knowledge Test). These cards confirm to customers that the driver is certified by NTA to have the relevant industry knowledge.
- **Yellow identification cards** are issued to drivers licensed prior to the introduction of the Skills Development Programme who hold a current, valid SPSV driver licence, but who have not yet obtained NTA's certification. Such drivers can apply to take the Industry Knowledge Test at any time – see Chapter 11.
- **Green identification cards** are issued to local area hackney drivers and show the specific area in which the driver is licensed to operate.

Once you have a valid SPSV driver licence (other than a local area hackney driver licence), you are entitled to drive any category of SPSV (taxi, wheelchair accessible taxi, hackney, wheelchair accessible hackney, local area hackney, limousine). The vehicle must be licensed as an SPSV. If it is a taxi or wheelchair accessible taxi, you may stand or ply for hire only in the county (or counties) for which you are licensed. An SPSV driver can accept a pre-booked journey for any area.

If you hold a local area hackney driver licence, you are entitled to drive only a local area hackney, and to accept passengers only in the specific area for which you and the vehicle are licensed.

Before you drive any SPSV, you must provide NTA with details of the vehicle – see Chapter 5.

The SPSV driver licence

What the SPSV driver licence permits

If you hold a regular SPSV driver licence you are entitled to drive any category of SPSV – taxi, wheelchair accessible taxi, hackney, wheelchair accessible hackney, local area hackney, or limousine. When driving a taxi or wheelchair accessible taxi, you are entitled to stand or ply for hire only in the county specified on your driver display card. When driving a local area hackney, you are entitled to accept passengers only in the specific area for which the vehicle is licensed.

What the local area hackney driver licence permits

If you hold a local area hackney driver licence, you are entitled to drive only a local area hackney, and to accept passengers only in the specific area for which you are licensed.

Period of validity

An SPSV driver licence (except for a local area hackney driver licence) is valid for up to five years. The renewal process is described on page 16.

A local area hackney driver licence is valid for three years and cannot be renewed. The holder can, however, apply for a new local area hackney driver licence.

Can an SPSV driver licence be transferred?

An SPSV driver licence or a local area hackney driver licence is issued to a specified individual and cannot be used by anyone other than that person.

The local area hackney driver licence

The local area hackney driver licence differs from other SPSV driver licences in a number of important respects:

- The holder is permitted to drive local area hackneys only.
- The licence specifies a restricted area, usually within a radius of 5 to 7 km from the holder's normal residence, within which the holder can pick up passengers.
- An applicant for a local area hackney driver licence must already hold a vehicle licence for a local area hackney.
- A local area hackney driver licence is valid for three years, and cannot be renewed. The local area hackney driver licence holder can, however, apply for a new local area hackney driver licence.

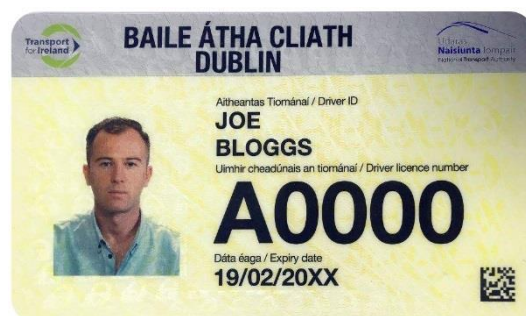
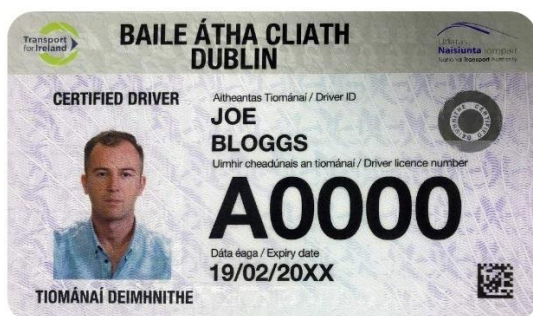
See Appendix B for more information.

Driver display card

Your driver display card must be clearly visible on the dashboard of the vehicle at all times when you are operating. The card shows the county in which you are licensed to stand or ply for hire in a taxi or wheelchair accessible taxi, or, in the case of a local area hackney driver licence, the area in which you are licensed to accept passengers.

While operating a taxi or wheelchair accessible taxi, you are permitted to stand or ply for hire only in the county specified on your driver display card. You can, of course, drive a passenger to a destination outside this area, and you are permitted to accept pre-booked journeys from other counties. However, if you want to stand or ply for hire in more than one county, you will need to pass the Area Knowledge Test for each additional county.

If you pass the Area Knowledge Test for more than one county, you receive a driver display card for each one. Then, if you are standing or plying for hire, you should display the card that relates to the county in which you are operating.



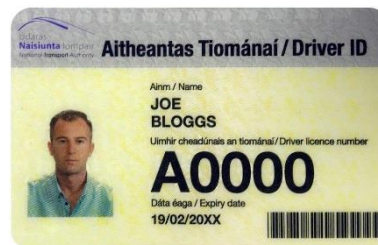
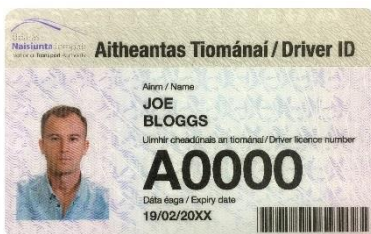
Driver display card (local area hackney)

Local area hackney drivers may accept passengers only within the area specified on their driver display card, although they may drive a passenger to a destination outside this area.

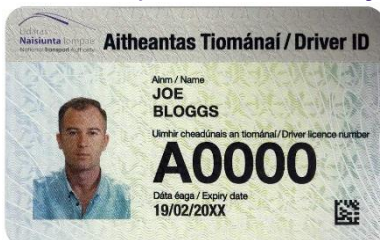


Smart card

You must carry your smart card with you at all times when you are operating as an SPSV driver.



Smart card (local area hackney)



Driver ID requirements

To comply with SPSV regulations, while operating as an SPSV driver you must:

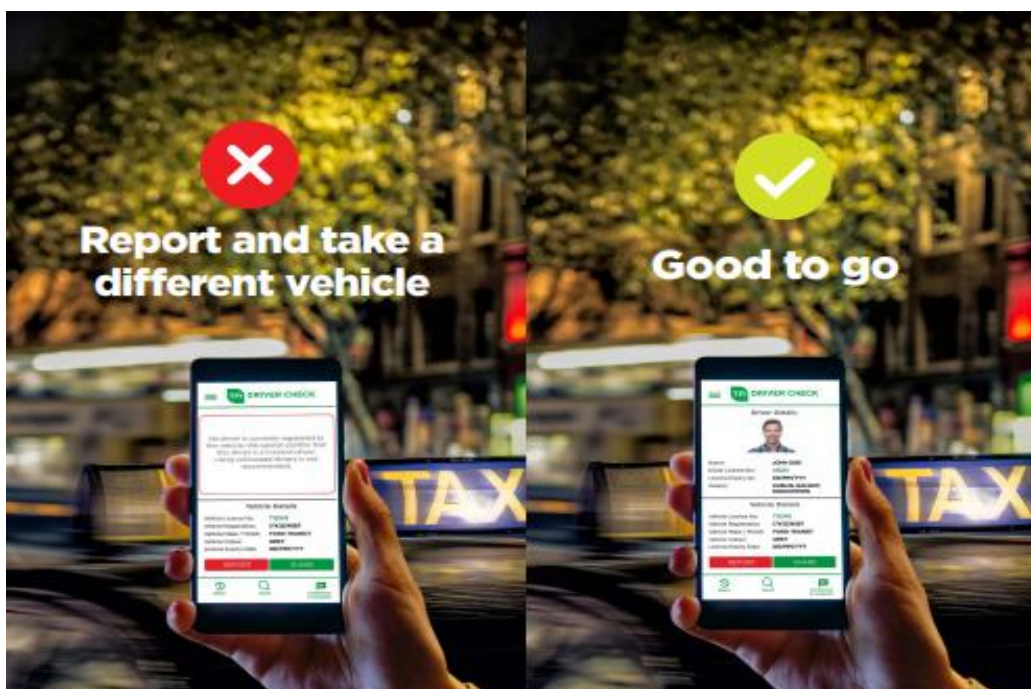
- Display your driver display card clearly on the dashboard of the vehicle; and
- Carry your driver smart card at all times.

SPSV Driver Check app

SPSV Driver Check is a public safety app that allows consumers to complete a search of active licences on the SPSV Public Register to verify that a vehicle and driver is properly licensed, and that a driver to vehicle link is in place (see page 47 for more information on how to link). Being a licensed SPSV driver means that An Garda Síochána has vetted and subsequently considered

a person suitable for holding an SPSV driver licence and only such drivers will appear on the app.

To allow this verification to take place, some personal data is displayed on the app, including the driver name and photograph included in the application to An Garda Síochána. This data is displayed to ensure the safety of consumers by providing a quick, private and safe way to verify that the driver is licensed. All active SPSV driver and vehicle licences will appear on this app.



Area stickers

SPSV Regulations stipulate that the driver of a taxi or wheelchair-accessible taxi must display an area sticker on their roof sign. The area sticker is a silver coloured sticker with a one- or two-letter code denoting the county in which the SPSV driver is licensed to stand or ply for hire. Multiple stickers can be affixed if the driver is licensed for more than one county. It is the driver's responsibility to ensure the correct area sticker is affixed to the operational roof sign. Drivers who fail to display the appropriate area sticker while standing or plying for hire may incur a fixed payment penalty.

Renewing your SPSV driver licence

SPSV driver licences (except local area hackney driver licences) are valid for up to five years. It is your responsibility to know when your SPSV driver licence expires and to make arrangements to renew your licence on time. (Local area hackney driver licences are valid for three years and cannot be renewed. The holder may, however, apply for a new licence).

NTA sends out reminder notifications advising drivers to renew their licence early in order to ensure that their licence does not expire and that they receive their updated driver display card and smart card in time to continue working without interruption. Drivers can apply for renewal of their licence up to three months before the licence expires. There is no disadvantage to

applying for early renewal – the period of validity of the renewed licence commences immediately after the expiry of the old licence.

You cannot operate if your SPSV driver licence has expired. The licence can be renewed for a period of twelve months from the expiry date for a higher, 'late', renewal fee. Any SPSV driver licence expired for more than twelve months cannot be reactivated.

SPSV driver licences can exist in one of three states:

Active: this means that the driver is licensed and can operate as an SPSV driver (provided all other regulatory requirements being met).

Inactive: this means that the licence has expired. However, the driver licence holder is entitled to apply for a replacement within twelve months of the expiry date. It is not permissible to operate on an expired licence.

Dead: the driver licence can no longer be replaced. A new licence application must be made starting with passing the SPSV Driver Entry Test.

SPSV driver licence renewal application fees	
■ Renewal submitted prior to driver licence expiry date	€250
■ Renewal submitted within 30 days after driver licence expiry date	€300
■ Renewal submitted more than 30 days after driver licence expiry date	€350
The licence application fee is non-refundable. Applicants are advised to ensure they can meet all licensing requirements set out by An Garda Síochána prior to making payment.	

Requirements

To renew your SPSV driver licence, you must hold:

- A valid driving licence;
- A valid SPSV driver licence;
- Confirmation from An Garda Síochána to be a suitable person to hold an SPSV driver licence;
- Up-to-date tax clearance status.

The details of these requirements are the same as those for licence application, as described on page 11.

Renewal application

To apply for renewal of an SPSV driver licence, you must:

- Obtain a PSV 18 renewal application form from your local Garda station.
- Pay the relevant licence fee to NTA. You can do this over the phone using a credit or debit card (phone 0818 064 000). NTA will issue you with a receipt for this fee which you will need for your application to An Garda Síochána. This fee is non-refundable: you should pay it only if you are confident that you can satisfy all the conditions for licensing.
- Obtain three identical photographs, each measuring approximately 10cm by 7cm, showing your head and shoulders and complying in other respects with standards for official photographs.

- Complete the renewal application form (PSV 18) and submit it to your local Garda Station (outside Dublin) or to the Carriage Office (in Dublin), along with:
 - ▶ The receipt for your renewal fee;
 - ▶ Your photographs;
 - ▶ Evidence of your tax clearance status;
 - ▶ Your driving licence and driver licence history available from the National Driver Licence Service (NDLS);
 - ▶ Your SPSV driver licence;
 - ▶ A written undertaking that you will not drive an SPSV for more than 11 hours on any three consecutive days;
 - ▶ Details of any other occupation in which you are engaged, including name and address of employer (if relevant), and, if that other occupation involves driving, evidence that you have informed the employer that you are applying for renewal of an SPSV driver licence;
 - ▶ A declaration that your health does not materially affect your ability to drive an SPSV, and that you are not taking drugs or medication that would be likely to impair your ability to drive safely;
 - ▶ A declaration that you have not been convicted of any of the offences specified in section 30(3) or the Schedule to the Taxi Regulation Acts 2013 and 2016; and
 - ▶ Any other documents required by An Garda Síochána.

How your renewal application is processed

Your renewal application will be processed by An Garda Síochána, and, if approved, you will in due course be issued with an SPSV driver licence (PSV17). An Garda Síochána will consider all parts of your application and can grant a SPSV Driver Licence Validity Period for **up to five** years. NTA will then process and issue you with your driver display card and smart card and update the Public Register

Remember: It is a serious criminal offence to operate as an SPSV driver without a current SPSV driver licence. A conviction for this offence attracts a penalty of up to €5,000.

Mandatory disqualification

If you have been convicted (in Ireland or elsewhere) of any of the offences that are specified in the Schedule to the Taxi Regulation Acts 2013 and 2016, you are disqualified from holding an SPSV driver licence. Any SPSV driver licence you hold will be revoked and no new licence or renewal will be granted for the duration of the disqualification.

Mandatory Area Knowledge Test

If NTA receives a number of complaints relating to your knowledge of the area in which you are operating during the period of your licence and these complaints are upheld, NTA may require you to sit and pass the relevant Area Knowledge Test prior to renewing your licence.

Your rights and responsibilities as an SPSV driver

If you hold a standard SPSV driver licence you are entitled to drive any licensed SPSV and to stand or ply for hire in a taxi or wheelchair accessible taxi in the county specified on your driver display card. If you hold a local area hackney driver licence you are entitled to drive a local area hackney and to accept passengers in the area specified in your licence.

Your rights

As an SPSV driver, you have certain rights, including the right to be paid in full for each hire and to reasonably refuse passengers who you suspect cannot pay or will refuse to pay the fare.

The rights of an SPSV driver

Fares

- It is your right to be paid the full fare as agreed in advance or as calculated on the taximeter, whichever is less, for each hire.
- You may terminate the hire of your vehicle if the passenger fails or refuses to pay that fare.

Right to refuse service

You may reasonably refuse:

- To allow passengers to consume tobacco, food or drink in your vehicle;
- To carry, or continue to carry, passengers who are acting in an aggressive, intoxicated, drunk or disorderly manner;
- To carry, or continue to carry, passengers who are likely to soil or damage the vehicle;
- To undertake journeys of more than 30km in a taxi or wheelchair accessible taxi;
- To undertake journeys where adverse weather or road conditions or traffic controls would make the journey unsafe or impractical;
- To carry passengers in a taxi which exceed the number of persons permitted to be carried under the vehicle licence; and
- To carry luggage or other articles in the person's possession which are in excess of the luggage carrying capacity of, or could cause damage to, a taxi.

Your responsibilities

As an SPSV driver, you also have certain responsibilities to the travelling public as outlined below.

The responsibilities of an SPSV driver

Unreasonable refusal of service

- You may not refuse service, except as outlined above. (In particular, a taxi may not unreasonably refuse service for a journey of 30km or less.)

Fares

- Taxis must have a working taximeter that has been calibrated and verified in accordance with the National Maximum Taxi Fare Order.
- Taximeters must be operated and calculate the fare for every journey taken, irrespective of whether a fare has been agreed in advance for the trip.
- Taxi drivers may not charge more than the National Maximum Taxi Fare for any journey.
- Hackneys and limousines may not charge more than the agreed fare.
- Taxi drivers must have an in-taxi point of sale cashless payment device and must accept cashless payments for taxi journeys when requested by customers.

Customer service

- You must have a good knowledge of major routes and destinations, and you must follow any direction or route chosen by the passenger.

- The vehicle must be clean and roadworthy.
- You must offer reasonable assistance with luggage.

Guide dogs/assistance dogs/mobility aids

- You must carry guide dogs, assistance dogs and mobility aids for passengers who need them, at no extra charge.

Receipts

- A taxi driver must print a receipt with the printer attached to the taximeter and offer it to the customer at the end of every journey (see Chapter 7 for details).
- A hackney or limousine driver must make a written receipt available to the customer at the end of the journey (see Chapter 7 for details).

Regulations

- You must have an understanding of the SPSV regulations.
- You must display the tamper-proof licence discs and driver display card (see Chapter 5).
- You must comply with seatbelt regulations.
- You must comply with all Road Traffic Act and other relevant regulations.
- You must stand or ply for hire only in the county (or counties) named on your driver display card(s) (in a taxi or wheelchair accessible taxi).

Operating a taxi in more than one county

If, as a taxi driver, you propose to stand or ply for hire in any county other than the one in which you were originally licensed, you will need to pass the Area Knowledge Test for each such additional county.

Apply for the test as described in Chapter 11. When you apply, specify that you want to take the Area Knowledge Test only, and you will be asked for your SPSV driver licence number.

Bring your SPSV smart card or display card with you to the test.

If you are successful, you will be issued with a driver display card and a smart card showing the additional county for which you are licensed.

Changing your address or contact details

If you change your address or other contact details, such as mobile number or email address, you are required to inform NTA as soon as possible by calling the SPSV Information Line (0818 064 000) or in writing. Failure to notify NTA within 21 days of a change of address is an offence.

Such notifications are important to ensure that you receive updates from NTA regarding your licence. NTA takes no responsibility if you do not receive important correspondence because you have not registered a change of contact details.

Holders of SPSV driver licences are also obliged to inform An Garda Síochána when they change address.

3. Choosing a vehicle to use as an SPSV

Before you buy a vehicle that you intend to use as an SPSV, you should make sure that it is suitable for use as an SPSV. NTA sets the minimum criteria that must be met by all vehicles in the SPSV fleet.

This chapter deals with the criteria that are applied to vehicles entering the SPSV fleet for the first time – either on new licences or as replacement vehicles on existing licences.

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■ Roadworthiness	22
■ SPSV suitability	22
■ Wheelchair accessible vehicles	24
■ Limousines	26

Vehicle standards

The standards that apply to SPSVs are of two kinds:

- **Roadworthiness standards**, which relate to the maintenance and safety of the vehicle; and
- **SPSV-specific suitability standards**, which relate to the vehicle's specification, age, condition and comfort, and, for wheelchair accessible vehicle licences, the additional equipment needed.

Roadworthiness

A vehicle must pass the National Car Test (NCT) roadworthiness test before it can be licensed as an SPSV. This is the same test as private motor cars are required to pass – the difference is that vehicles to be licensed as SPSVs must pass the test before they are first licensed and before each licence renewal. There is one exception to this: an NCT is not required for a vehicle that is less than three months old *and* that has travelled less than 3,000 kilometres.

The Road Safety Authority (RSA) sets the criteria used to assess the roadworthiness of all road vehicles; testing is carried out by National Car Testing Services (NCTS). The NCT Test Manual and information on the test procedures are available on the NCTS website at www.ncts.ie.

To find out how to book an NCT roadworthiness test, visit www.ncts.ie. When booking your NCT, you should specify that the test is for the purpose of SPSV licensing.

The NCT certificate must be issued no earlier than 90 days prior to the Initial Suitability Inspection (see below).

SPSV suitability

NTA has developed a comprehensive and detailed set of standards with which all vehicles operating in the industry must comply. These are explained in NTA's *Initial Suitability Inspection Manual*, which is available online at www.nationaltransport.ie. The primary aim of these standards is to ensure the quality of vehicles in the SPSV industry. They include minimum standards for age, size, accessibility and comfort.

All SPSVs are tested for suitability before they are first licensed as SPSVs and again prior to renewal of the vehicle licence. The criteria used in suitability testing depend on the vehicle licence category and when the licence was first issued. They include the vehicle's specification, age and condition, and, for wheelchair accessible vehicle licences, the additional equipment needed.

General requirements

All SPSVs must be mechanically propelled vehicles designed and constructed for carrying up to eight persons, excluding the driver, and weighing no more than 3,500 kilograms.

All SPSVs must have at least four wheels and, except for some limousines, all require four doors. There are specific technical requirements relating to the wheelbase, the track width, the side-to-side variation in wheelbase, the tyre load rating, and the operation of the doors. These are set out in the *Initial Suitability Inspection Manual*.

Vehicles must not be a 'crew cab' or 'pick-up'. In practice this means that the vehicles must be designed predominantly for the carriage of passengers rather than goods.

Age

The age of the vehicle is important because, while careful maintenance can keep a vehicle in good condition, modern vehicles incorporate safety and environmental features that were not available on earlier models.

The maximum age of a vehicle that can be licensed as an SPSV depends on a number of factors including:

- The category of licence;
- The licensing transaction – new licence, renewal, change of vehicle or change of licence category; and
- The licence history – when it was first issued (as indicated by the licence number), when the vehicle was first associated with it, and whether the licence category has been changed on it.

The age rules are detailed in Appendix A.

Size of vehicle

Vehicles for taxi and hackney licences (standard and wheelchair accessible) must meet the size requirements explained in the *Initial Suitability Inspection Manual*.

NTA has produced a list of vehicles by make and model that indicates whether or not a vehicle meets the size requirements. This is known as the '*Suitable Vehicle List*'. It is available on NTA's website. Before you buy any vehicle to use as a taxi or hackney, you should check the *Suitable Vehicle List* and the *Initial Suitability Inspection Manual* to satisfy yourself that the vehicle is suitable. If there is no information for the vehicle you are considering, or the entry in the *Suitable Vehicle List* is incomplete, you should contact NTA for advice.

Luggage area

The vehicle must incorporate a luggage area with a minimum total volume of 420 litres. This includes minimum box dimensions of 735 millimetres x 330 millimetres x 805 millimetres to be able to accommodate a folded wheelchair. It must be available for luggage – it must not contain any other unsecured items or be dirty or damp. A guard or cover must be fitted to a luggage compartment to prevent luggage from causing injury to a passenger in the event of an accident. The luggage capacity requirement does not apply to vehicles associated with local area hackney licences. The luggage capacity requirements may be reduced for certain hybrid or electric vehicles, however it must be noted that not all environmentally friendly vehicles will be waived of the requirements. Therefore all vehicles should be approved by NTA prior to purchase to ensure it meets the requirements for licensing.

Windows

The front windscreen must allow at least 70 per cent visible light transmission. It may have a darker band at the top, not exceeding 125mm in depth.

All passenger (side) windows must be clean and readily operable.

In vehicles for taxi and hackney licences (standard and wheelchair accessible), side windows next to passengers must allow at least 70 per cent visible light transmission. In practice this means that only glass behind the passenger area can be darker. Check the approval number on the glass: if there is a Roman numeral V next to the European approval number, the glass is too dark and will not pass the Initial Suitability Inspection.

Roof

Vehicles for taxi and hackney licences (standard and wheelchair accessible) must have a permanent rigid roof. A properly fitted sunroof is permitted.

Seats

The minimum dimensions of the passenger seats, their height from the floor, and the distance between them are specified precisely – see the *Initial Suitability Inspection Manual* for more details.

Side-facing seats are not permitted, except in limousines.

Seats, seat anchorages, seat mechanisms, head restraints, seatbelts and belt anchorages must comply with the relevant standards and regulations outlined in the *Initial Suitability Inspection Manual*.

Cleanliness

The vehicle must be in a good, clean condition. The seats must be properly upholstered, clean and in a hygienic condition. The exterior paint must be consistent. The vehicle must not have paint or bodywork repairs in progress.

Interior lights

The standard interior lights must be operational.

Temperature control

The vehicle must be capable of maintaining a passenger compartment temperature of 20° C while the outside temperature is –5° C.

Bull bars

A bull bar is a supplementary bumper or similar separate structure at the front of the vehicle. If such equipment is fitted, it must comply with EC Regulation 78/2009/EC.

Wheelchair accessible vehicles

Wheelchair accessible taxis and wheelchair accessible hackneys must be constructed or converted specifically to accommodate at least one person sitting in a wheelchair and at least one other adult passenger. When no wheelchair is carried, the vehicle must be capable of accommodating three adult passengers.

Wheelchair accessible vehicles must also have specialist equipment including:

- Wheelchair ramps or lifts;
- Approved restraints for wheelchairs and passengers travelling in wheelchairs; and
- The internationally recognised accessibility symbol on the roof sign (wheelchair accessible taxi) or door (wheelchair accessible hackney).

All wheelchair accessible vehicles are essentially 'modified' vehicles, and the structural changes need formal certification. Licences are issued only for vehicles that meet the standards explained in NTA's *Initial Suitability Inspection Manual* (available on NTA's website, www.nationaltransport.ie, and summarised on the next page). These standards must be certified by a qualified Technical Assessor (see below), who must complete a Technical Assessor's Full Report to certify that the vehicle meets the required standards. The template for this report is available from NTA's website, and this template must be used. In making the

assessment, the Technical Assessor will measure some items, and will rely on formal test data provided by the vehicle manufacturer, the vehicle converter or the supplier or installer of parts for others.

The Technical Assessor's Full Report must be dated no more than 60 days before the date of the Initial Suitability Inspection.

The Technical Assessor

The Technical Assessor who examines and certifies a wheelchair accessible vehicle must:

- Hold an engineering qualification (Level 7 or higher on the National Framework of Qualifications) having followed a course of study accredited by Engineers Ireland*, or be accredited by Engineers Ireland as a Chartered or Associate Engineer, or be a Member or Incorporated Member of the Institute of Automotive Engineer Assessors;
- Have a minimum of five years experience of working in a suitable technical environment (preferably automotive or engineering);
- Have access to adequate facilities to carry out a thorough vehicle examination; **and**
- Hold appropriate professional indemnity insurance.

Suitability requirements for wheelchair accessible vehicles

Requirements for wheelchair accessible vehicles are summarised in *Information Guide G9* (available on NTA's website). They include:

Element	Main requirements (For details and other requirements, see the <i>Initial Suitability Inspection Manual</i> .)	Documentary evidence required
Seatbelts	EC approval markings or labels ('e' or 'E' marking).	Y
Wheelchair occupant seatbelts	Approval markings or labels (usually ISO standard or 'e' or 'E' marking).	Y
Wheelchair restraint (tie-down)	Approval markings or labels (usually ISO, or DIN, or FMVSS/SAE standard).	Y
Seatbelt anchorages	Strength test reports (usually seatbelt to seat connection, based on Directive 76/115 EEC, as amended).	Y
Wheelchair and wheelchair occupant restraint anchorages	In-vehicle strength test reports. These tests are destructive, and cannot be performed retrospectively. They must have been performed on the same type of bodyshell and the results properly documented and certified. The suppliers of a flooring system may be able to provide the required test data.	Y
Seat and seatbelt anchorages		Y
Headroom	Minimum 1,350mm in vicinity of wheelchair occupant during turning and restraining.	N
Doors	Minimum one wheelchair accessible door, at least 745mm x 1,250mm, and one other door to passenger compartment.	N

* See www.engineersireland.ie, Accredited Courses

Element	Main requirements (For details and other requirements, see the <i>Initial Suitability Inspection Manual</i> .)	Documentary evidence required
External step at nearside or rear door (where opening height of door exceeds 1150mm)	If floor or integral step of passenger compartment is more than 230mm from the ground, an access step is required.	N
Continuous surface access ramp	Maximum slope of ramp 16°; capable of supporting 300kg. If detachable, ramp must be suitable for handling, securely fixed when in use, safely stored when not in use, and permanently marked with the vehicle registration number.	N
Seat height and legroom	Specified minimum and maximum for seat height, width and clearance.	N
Internal and entrance lighting	Adequate targeted or localised lighting is required at entrance steps, signage and floor areas and money slots in any dividing screen.	N
Window glass	Must be 'clear' (at least 70% visible light transmission).	N
Handholds	Must be provided in the vicinity of the doors, steps and central pathways. Must be in a colour that contrasts with adjacent surfaces, and approximately circular in cross-section and 35mm in diameter.	N
User manual	Must cover both the vehicle and any specialist equipment in it.	Y

Before you buy a vehicle for use as a wheelchair accessible SPSV, you should check that the vehicle meets these standards *and that this can be verified* by a qualified Technical Assessor. You must obtain several items of documentation from the vehicle manufacturer or converter to support your application. You will need manufacturer certification for any seats that have been added or adapted, and test reports or type approvals for the in-vehicle strength of these and the wheelchair tie-down anchorages and for the wheelchair occupant seatbelt anchorages.

Without this documentation, the Technical Assessor will be unable to certify the vehicle.

Important: the in-vehicle strength tests cannot be undertaken retrospectively.

Further information

If you are considering applying for a wheelchair accessible vehicle licence, or changing the vehicle associated with such a licence, you should read the *Initial Suitability Inspection Manual* and the associated *Information Guides*. If you are still unsure, please contact NTA for advice.

Limousines

Vehicles associated with limousine licences do not have any age limits and are not subject to the same 'clear glass' requirements as other SPSVs, although general road traffic legislation requires the front windscreen and front side windows to be clear.

The following are requirements for limousines:

- While there are no interior size limits on limousines, the vehicle must be a passenger vehicle, which by reason of its style and condition is evidently suitable for hire for ceremonial occasions or for corporate or other prestige purposes.
- For licences granted after 1 January 2013, the design gross vehicle weight must not exceed 3,500 kilogrammes.
- The vehicle must be a make and model specified by NTA or otherwise approved by NTA. An acceptable vehicle list is available on NTA's website. If your proposed limousine is not on that list, please ensure you confirm the vehicle's suitability with NTA prior to purchase.
- If the vehicle has been modified from its original specification (for example, a stretched vehicle or a kit car), and the assessor views the design characteristics to be unique, then you must obtain a Technical Assessor's Basic Report for the vehicle before it is first licensed. This must be dated no earlier than 60 days before the Initial Suitability Inspection. The template for this report is available from NTA, and this template must be used.

4. Vehicle licensing

This chapter describes the procedures relating to vehicle licensing.

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About the vehicle licence

If you want to operate a vehicle as a taxi, wheelchair accessible taxi, hackney, wheelchair accessible hackney, local area hackney or limousine, that vehicle must be licensed as a small public service vehicle (SPSV). These licences are issued by NTA to applicants who meet certain conditions* and whose vehicles meet the required standards.

A vehicle licence may be held by a person individually or by a company.

The vehicle licence

What the vehicle licence permits

The licence permits a vehicle to be operated in one of the categories of SPSV – that is, as a taxi, a wheelchair accessible taxi, a hackney, a wheelchair accessible hackney, a local area hackney or a limousine.

Period of validity

A vehicle licence may be valid for 12 months, 6 months or until the vehicle reaches its maximum age limit. See Appendix A for details of age limits.

Can the vehicle associated with a licence be changed?

Yes, under certain conditions. See page 39.

Can more than one vehicle be associated with a licence?

No. Only one vehicle may be associated with a licence at any time.

Can a vehicle be licensed in more than one category?

No. A vehicle may be licensed in only one category at a time.

Can a vehicle licence be transferred to another person?

No. However on the death of the vehicle licence holder, it can be reassigned to a prior nominee. See page 411.

Can a vehicle licence held by a company be transferred to another entity?

No: if the control of a company changes (for example, if the company is sold) the licence is automatically revoked.

Can a vehicle licence category be changed?

Yes, in specific circumstances, from taxi to wheelchair accessible taxi (and back again). See page 411.

At present, NTA is accepting new vehicle licence applications only for wheelchair accessible taxis, wheelchair accessible hackneys, local area hackneys and limousines.

* A person who is permitted to remain in Ireland as the holder of an Immigration Stamp 2 (student) visa issued by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service of the Department of Justice & Equality is not permitted to hold an SPSV vehicle licence, nor may they rent a licensed vehicle to operate as an SPSV nor, with effect from 1 January 2015, may they work as a taxi driver either as an employee or in their own right. Such students may not engage in self-employment.

Applying for a vehicle licence

There are five steps in applying for and obtaining a licence for an SPSV:

- **Step 1** – Getting the right vehicle;
- **Step 2** – Submitting the application;
- **Step 3** – Equipping the vehicle in accordance with SPSV regulations;
- **Step 4** – Preparing for the Initial Suitability Inspection; and
- **Step 5** – Submitting the vehicle for its Initial Suitability Inspection.

Step 1 – Getting the right vehicle

A vehicle licence can be issued only to a person who is the registered owner of the vehicle or is otherwise legally entitled to the use and possession of the vehicle (such as under a lease or hire-purchase agreement).

To obtain a licence to operate a vehicle as an SPSV, the vehicle must be:

- **Roadworthy:** You must have a NCT certificate of roadworthiness for the vehicle. This must be issued no more than 90 days before your Initial Suitability Inspection. See Chapter 3 for details.
- **Suitable:** The vehicle must meet the requirements for operation as an SPSV in the category specified on the licence application, including the relevant age and size rules – see Chapter 3. Check the *Suitable Vehicle List, Information Guide G9* and the *Initial Suitability Inspection Manual* (all available on NTA's website, www.nationaltransport.ie) for more details of the requirements and how the vehicle will be checked. See Appendix A for age rules.

Step 2 – Submitting the application

To apply for a new vehicle licence, complete Form VL1, which can be downloaded from NTA's website. Before submitting the form you should make sure that your tax affairs are in order, as NTA will verify your tax clearance status with Revenue before issuing a licence.

An application relating to a wheelchair accessible vehicle must be accompanied by a copy of a Technical Assessor's Full Report (and supporting test data), as described in Chapter 3. The VL1 form must contain the names of anybody who will drive the vehicle, the contact details for booking the vehicle, the area in which it is proposed to operate it and the days and times during which it will be available for hire.

An application for a limousine licence relating to a modified vehicle must be accompanied by a copy of a Technical Assessor's Basic Report, as described in Chapter 3.

An application for a local area hackney licence must be accompanied by documentary evidence of the need for a local area hackney service, as outlined in Appendix B.

Do not send your original documents. Photocopies are accepted.

If you are not an Irish national, your application should be accompanied by a declaration that the conditions of your permission to remain in Ireland do not preclude you from operating a business or being self-employed in the State. You may subsequently be required to produce evidence to support this.

Send your application, along with the relevant fee and any required supporting documents, to:

SPSV Licensing Section
National Transport Authority
PO BOX 436
City North Business Park
Tuam Road
Galway

NTA will verify your tax clearance status with Revenue. You do not need to supply a Tax Clearance Certificate with your application, just your PPS number.

If all the required information is received, NTA will process your application and respond within five working days. NTA reserves the right to return any application that has not been completed correctly and in full.

If the application is approved, NTA sends you a Conditional Offer letter, which specifies a five-digit provisional licence number. For taxis and wheelchair accessible taxis, this number is required for programming the taximeter and purchasing the matching roof sign and taxi branding. The Conditional Offer is specific to the vehicle identified in the application and valid for 90 days, during which you must complete the other steps in the licensing process.

Note: The Conditional Offer is *not a licence* to operate the vehicle as an SPSV.

Step 3 – Equipping the vehicle in accordance with SPSV regulations

Safety and passenger communication equipment

All SPSVs are required to carry the following safety and passenger communication equipment at all times:

- A **fire extinguisher** with a capacity of at least 2kg of dry powder (or equivalent) complying with EN3 standard, as shown on its label, in date and stowed safely in the vehicle.
- A **first-aid kit** that complies with DIN13164 standard or a comparable kit recommended by the Health & Safety Authority. Some of the items in the kit may have a 'Use By' date, and these will need to be replaced from time to time. All items should be in-date at the time of inspection.
- A high-visibility reflective **safety vest** that complies with EN471 standard, as shown on its label.
- An **advance-warning triangle** to ECE Regulation 27 standard.
- A working handheld **torch**.
- A **pen and paper** to help you communicate with passengers who have difficulty understanding you or making themselves understood.

You must also display in the vehicle the appropriate In-Vehicle Information Card, which provides passengers with useful information about their rights and responsibilities.

Advertising in all small public service vehicles

No advertisement (or sign or symbol) that contains threatening, discriminatory, obscene or offensive words or images may be displayed in or on an SPSV.

Unless otherwise approved in writing by NTA, no electronic advertising sign that can be seen from outside the vehicle may be used in or on an SPSV.

No sign providing the name, details or logo of any industry representative group that can be seen from outside the vehicle may be displayed in or on an SPSV.

Advertising in or on taxis

Apart from the official taxi branding, no sign or advertisement may be displayed on the front doors of a taxi. In relation to any side door other than the two front doors, the total area occupied by any advertisements and signs must not exceed 1,600 square centimetres. Only the approved card payment symbol (see right) may be displayed to indicate acceptance of card payments.



Any advertising in or on a taxi or wheelchair accessible taxi must:

- Not appear on the roof sign. (Taxis are, however, allowed to display their own or their dispatch operator's contact details on the roof sign.)
- Not reduce the visibility of the word 'TAXI' (or 'TACSAÍ'), the licence number, the area sticker or, if applicable, the accessibility symbol on the roof sign; and
- Not reduce the visibility of the passenger In-Vehicle Information Card inside the vehicle.

Advertising in or on hackneys and limousines

A hackney or limousine may not display any sign or advertisement unless it has been individually approved in writing by NTA.

Equipping a vehicle for operation as a taxi or wheelchair accessible taxi

Taxis and wheelchair accessible taxis must have a taximeter and printer installed and calibrated in line with the National Maximum Taxi Fare, have a regulation roof sign, and carry the approved taxi branding, as described below.

About taximeters

A taximeter is an electronic device that is programmed to automatically calculate and display the correct fare for a taxi journey, based on the formula set out in the National Maximum Taxi Fare. It must be securely attached where it is easy for a passenger in the vehicle to see and read it. It must be connected to a printer capable of automatically printing receipts. The best place to install a taximeter is centrally above the dashboard, subject to the location of any airbags.

Every owner or user of a taximeter is obliged to have it verified by the Legal Metrology Service (part of the National Standards Authority of Ireland) to confirm that it complies with legal requirements. NTA cooperates and shares information with the Legal Metrology Service on the regulation of taximeters.

About taximeters (continued)

Purchasing a taximeter

A number of commercial organisations supply and fit taximeters. The suppliers of taximeters are not regulated, but the taximeters installed in taxis must use programs approved by the Legal Metrology Service to calculate fares. New taximeters on sale must be EC-approved in line with the Measuring Instruments Directive 2006.

Choosing the right one for you

Compare models and prices before deciding on your purchase, as different models have different features and different costs. Consider the following when choosing a taximeter:

- Is there a suitable location to install the taximeter in your vehicle? Customers must be able to see the taximeter clearly, and it must not impede your view for driving.
- Does the cost of installation include calibration with the National Maximum Taxi Fare by the installer or do you have to have your taximeter calibrated by someone else? (Remember, if your taximeter is not calibrated correctly when you submit it for verification, it cannot be verified, and you will have to make a return visit which will incur extra cost.)
- Can the taximeter be easily reprogrammed if a new fare structure comes into effect? How much does reprogramming cost?
- What are the operating costs (receipt rolls, printer ink, etc.)?
- What after-sales service is offered by the supplier?

Installing a taximeter

If you buy a vehicle for use as a taxi or wheelchair accessible taxi, you must have a taximeter installed and programmed before you present your vehicle for the Initial Suitability Inspection. The taximeter must be programmed with the vehicle registration number, the vehicle licence number and the current fare structure, including correct time and date.

Once the vehicle has passed the Initial Suitability Inspection and the licence has been issued, you should make an appointment with Legal Metrology Services to arrange verification and sealing of the taximeter. You should keep the letter confirming your appointment to have it verified in the vehicle until the taximeter is sealed.

It is possible to remove a taximeter from one vehicle and install it in another (such as, for example, when changing the vehicle on a licence) but the program and the verification are unique to the vehicle and licence combination. In this case, you need to have the taximeter reprogrammed and verified for the new vehicle.

If you buy a vehicle that has been previously licensed as a taxi and has a taximeter already installed, you should ask the previous owner for all the relevant documentation (for example, operating guides, name and contact details of the supplier, and when it was last verified). The taximeter will need to be reprogrammed and verified with the new vehicle licence number.

Further information

For further information on taximeter verification and Legal Metrology Services, see www.nsai.ie.

Taxi branding

All taxis and wheelchair accessible taxis must have taxi branding in the format specified by NTA, including the vehicle licence number, applied to the front doors of the vehicle by a supplier authorised by NTA.



A list of authorised suppliers is available on NTA's website, www.nationaltransport.ie.

Taxi roof sign

All taxis and wheelchair accessible taxis must be fitted with a regulation roof sign displaying:

- The word 'TAXI' or 'TACSAÍ'
- The vehicle licence number and the words 'licence number' or 'uimhir cheadúnais'
- The area sticker (or stickers) indicating the county (or counties) in which the driver is licensed to stand or ply for hire. If the vehicle is driven as a taxi by more than one driver, each of whom is licensed for different counties, a different roof sign may be needed for each driver
- If the vehicle is licensed as a wheelchair accessible taxi, the accessibility symbol

Taxi and wheelchair accessible taxi regulation roof signs are also permitted to display:

- The official credit/debit card symbol to indicate that the fare may be paid by credit or debit card. Approved artwork for this symbol is available from NTA, and this can be used to produce an adhesive sticker for application to the roof sign. Other credit card logos must not be displayed on the regulation roof sign
- Contact details for the taxi operator or dispatch operator to which the driver is affiliated


No information other than that described above may be included on the roof sign.

Details of the taxi operator's representative body may *not* be carried on the roof sign.

Taxi roof sign (continued)


Standard taxi roof sign (viewed from front)

This space is available for additional area stickers or for dispatch operator / taxi contact details. Otherwise it must remain blank.




The vehicle licence number must be displayed front and back in this panel.

Standard taxi roof sign in Irish (viewed from front)



Wheelchair accessible taxi roof sign (viewed from front)

Wheelchair accessible vehicles must display the accessibility symbol prominently front and back.



The roof sign must incorporate internal electric illumination that is switched on when the vehicle is available for hire and switched off when the vehicle is hired. Additional lights must not be attached to the regulation roof sign.

The roof sign must be securely mounted on the vehicle, and also easily removable from the vehicle. It should be mounted in such a way that the details on it are legible from the front and rear of the vehicle, except on journeys that are likely to exceed 30 kilometres, in which case, with the passenger's consent, the roof sign may be positioned longitudinally on the roof of the vehicle to conserve fuel.

The materials, construction, colours and dimensions of the roof sign and the various elements on it are described in detail in the *Initial Suitability Inspection Manual*, and should be familiar to any reputable supplier of roof signs.

The roof sign must be removed from the vehicle when it is in a public place but not being operated as a taxi.

Step 4 – Preparing for the Initial Suitability Inspection

The next step is to make sure that you have all the required documentation, and to book the vehicle's Initial Suitability Inspection.

The *Initial Suitability Inspection Manual* (available on NTA's website) outlines the inspection criteria. Please read this manual to understand what items are inspected and how they are checked. If you do this, you will be better able to prepare your vehicle for the inspection and increase the likelihood that it will pass.

Required documentation

You will need the following documents to complete the licensing process:

- **Insurance:** You must have a valid **original** certificate of insurance in the name of the prospective vehicle licence holder (again, it is important that the names be identical), stating the vehicle registration number and specifying that the vehicle is covered for use as an SPSV;

- An **NCT certificate** for the vehicle you propose to license, issued within 90 days of the date of your inspection appointment. You do not need to supply the certificate, as this is verified online at the time of booking;
- The original **Vehicle Registration Certificates** (VRC – still commonly referred to as the log book). Alternatively, where a vehicle is held under a hire purchase or lease agreement a letter on headed paper from the registered owner of the vehicle confirming that the SPSV licence holder is legally entitled to the use and possession of the vehicle for a period of not less than 12 months; and
- A copy of the **Technical Assessor’s Full or Basic Report**, if relevant – see Chapter 3.

NTA validates most documentation online during the licensing process and checks your tax clearance status with Revenue.

Booking the Initial Suitability Inspection

Book your Initial Suitability Inspection by calling 0818 064 000. You must have your insurance and NCT certificates and your PPSN to hand when calling to book your Initial Suitability Inspection, as you will need to give the details over the phone. The booking must be made by the person applying for the licence; security questions will be asked to confirm your identity.

The booking agent will verify your insurance and NCT details, and your tax clearance status, and check that you own the vehicle or are otherwise legally entitled to the use and possession of the vehicle (such as under a lease or hire-purchase agreement). You will also be asked to confirm your acceptance of the terms and conditions associated with the issue of a vehicle licence. An appointment for an Initial Suitability Inspection will be offered only if all the documentation is valid and verified. The appointment can only be offered within the time period during which all of your documents are valid.

The vehicle’s age is calculated when an appointment is being made for its Initial Suitability Inspection. An appointment will not be booked if the vehicle will fail the relevant age requirement on the date of the inspection (see Appendix A).

Changing your appointment for vehicle licensing inspection

You can cancel or reschedule an appointment for a vehicle licensing inspection without charge up to **two working days** before the appointment.

If you cancel or reschedule on the **working day immediately before** the appointment, a late cancellation fee is charged.

You cannot cancel or reschedule a vehicle licensing inspection on the day of the appointment. If you do not present the vehicle for inspection at the appointed time, **the entire fee is forfeit.**

Step 5 – Submitting the vehicle for its Initial Suitability Inspection

The Initial Suitability Inspection takes place at one of the vehicle licensing centres around the country. The inspection is designed to verify that the vehicle meets the requirements for the category of SPSV for which you are applying.

The vehicle is expected to be in good and clean condition, inside and out, when presented for inspection. The luggage area should be free from personal objects, and the required safety

items should be readily available to the inspector. All windows and door catches and locks should be fully functional.

If the vehicle has been modified from its original specification, you must bring a **copy** of the Technical Assessor’s Full or Basic Report for the vehicle with you to the Initial Suitability Inspection (see Chapter 3).

Your tax clearance status will be checked again on the day of inspection, as will your insurance cover with reference to your insurance disc and certificate. Remember to bring your **original** insurance certificate along with you to the inspection and ensure that the name on the certificate matches *exactly* that on the licence application (see below). If your vehicle is not suitably insured on the day of your Initial Suitability Inspection, the licence cannot be issued.

Name on licence application	Name on insurance certificate	Suitable for licensing?
James Murphy	Jim Murphy	No
	James Murphy Jnr	No
	James J. Murphy	No
	Séamus Ó Murchú	No
	James Murphy	Yes

Once you have satisfied NTA’s licensing conditions and your vehicle has passed the Initial Suitability Inspection, the Licensing Inspector records the details on the Register of Licensed SPSVs and applies tamper-proof licence discs to the front and rear windows of the vehicle. (For more on tamper-proof licence discs, see Chapter 5.)

The vehicle may then be operated as an SPSV in the category to which the licence applies. A licence certificate is issued to the person presenting the vehicle.

The licence may be valid for one year, six months or until the vehicle reaches its maximum age limit (see *Renewing a Vehicle Licence*, below).

Remember: It is an offence to operate a vehicle as an SPSV without a valid vehicle licence. A conditional offer is *not a licence* to operate.

Taximeter verification and sealing (taxis and wheelchair accessible taxis only)

Once the vehicle has passed the Initial Suitability Inspection for operation as a taxi or wheelchair accessible taxi and the licence has been issued, you should make an appointment with Legal Metrology Services, part of the National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) to arrange verification and sealing of the taximeter. You should retain any verification appointment letter in the vehicle until the taximeter is verified and sealed (see page 33).

Renewing a vehicle licence

A vehicle licence is normally valid for twelve months from date of issue. Vehicles that are over ten years old are licensed for a maximum of six months at a time^{*}. Vehicles that are

^{*} An exception applies to vehicles licensed as limousines that were first registered before 1 January 1980. Licences for such ‘vintage limousines’ are renewed for twelve months.

approaching their maximum age limit are licensed only until that age limit (the vehicle's tenth or fifteenth 'birthday'). See Appendix A for details. A local area hackney licence can be renewed only until three years after it was first granted.

Note: It is a serious offence to operate a vehicle as an SPSV without an active vehicle licence. A conviction for this offence attracts a maximum penalty of €5,000.

The licence can be renewed up to 60 days before its expiry date. The new licence period starts the day following the expiry of the old licence, so there is no disadvantage in renewing early. There is, however, a significant additional fee payable for licences that are renewed late (after their expiry date) – see *Replacing an expired vehicle licence*, page 39.

A vehicle licence can be renewed only for the person who is the registered owner of the vehicle or is otherwise legally entitled to the use and possession of the vehicle (such as under a lease or hire-purchase agreement).

Vehicle licences in most SPSV categories will be renewed only for vehicles that meet the age requirements described in Appendix A.

As a vehicle licence holder, you are advised to allow adequate time to prepare for renewal of your licence. You need to obtain the necessary documentation and to arrange a Licence Renewal Assessment.

As a courtesy, NTA notifies the vehicle licence holder (by letter or by electronic communication) before the licence expires, with a reminder to renew.

The *Licence Renewal Assessment Manual* (available on NTA's website) outlines the inspection criteria. Please read this manual to understand what items are inspected and how they are checked. If you do this, you will be better able to prepare your vehicle for the inspection and increase the likelihood that it will pass.

Required documentation

You must have the following to hand when calling to book your Licence Renewal Assessment, as you will need to give the details over the phone:

- An insurance certificate
- An NCT certificate
- Your PPSN

These requirements are the same as for new licence application, described on page 35/36.

If your vehicle has been modified since its last inspection, you will need to obtain a Technical Assessor's Basic Report, as described in Chapter 3, and bring a copy with you to leave at the Licence Renewal Assessment.

Booking your assessment

Book your Licence Renewal Assessment by calling 0818 064 000. The appointment may be made only by the vehicle licence holder. Security questions will be asked to confirm the caller's identity.

NTA validates all documentation online at time of booking, verifies your ownership of the vehicle or your legal right to use and possess it, and checks your tax clearance status with Revenue. You will be unable to book a Licence Renewal Assessment unless your documentation is valid

and verifiable online. An appointment can be offered only within a time period during which all required documents are valid and your vehicle meets the age rules.

When booking your appointment, you will also be required to pay the licence renewal fee by credit or debit card.

Submitting the vehicle for its Licence Renewal Assessment

The Licence Renewal Assessment takes place at one of the vehicle licensing centres around the country. The assessment consists of a visual check of the vehicle's condition, along with inspection of key suitability items, to make sure that the vehicle continues to meet the legal minimum standards.

The vehicle is expected to be in good and clean condition, inside and out, when presented for inspection. The luggage area should be free from personal objects, and the required safety items should be readily available to the inspector. All windows and door catches and locks should be fully functional.

Your tax clearance status will be checked again on the day of inspection, as will your insurance cover with reference to your insurance disc and original certificate. To pass the inspection, the name on the insurance certificate must be identical to name on the vehicle licence (see page 37). If your vehicle is not suitably insured on the day of your Licence Renewal Assessment, the licence will not be renewed.

If your vehicle passes the Licence Renewal Assessment, the Licensing Inspector updates the details on the Register of Licensed SPSVs, removes the old tamper-proof licence discs and applies new tamper-proof licence discs to the front and rear windows of the vehicle. The vehicle may then be operated as an SPSV in the category to which the licence applies.

A licence certificate is then issued to the person presenting the vehicle for renewal.

Do not remove the tamper-proof licence discs from the vehicle yourself. If, for any reason, you do not have the tamper-proof licence discs, you should contact NTA on 0818 064 000 prior to the Licence Renewal Assessment, as the renewal cannot be completed unless they are surrendered to the Licensing Inspector. Tamper-proof licence discs remain the property of NTA at all times.

Replacing an expired vehicle licence

If your vehicle licence expires, you may, within 24 months of its expiry date, apply to have it replaced. (Exception: a local area hackney licence cannot be renewed or replaced after three years from its original first issue date.) There are additional fees for replacing an expired licence. **It is not possible to replace any vehicle licence that has expired for more than 24 months.**

Changing the vehicle on a vehicle licence

You can change the vehicle associated with a vehicle licence, provided the replacement vehicle is roadworthy, suitable for use as an SPSV and suitably equipped, as described in Chapter 3. It is your responsibility to make sure that the vehicle will meet these conditions **before** committing to a purchase. Check the *Suitable Vehicle List, Information Guide G9* and the *Initial Suitability*

Inspection Manual (all available on NTA's website) for more details of the requirements and how the vehicle will be checked. See Appendix A for the age rules.

A vehicle licence can be issued only to the person who is the registered owner of the vehicle or is otherwise legally entitled to the use and possession of the vehicle (such as under a lease or hire-purchase agreement).

What to do with the vehicle being replaced

Before you dispose of the vehicle that you are replacing on the licence, you should:

- Remove the tamper-proof licence discs from the front and rear windows of the vehicle – you *must* bring these with you to the Initial Suitability Inspection of the replacement vehicle;
- (On a taxi or wheelchair accessible taxi) Remove the roof sign – this can be used on the replacement vehicle once the change of vehicle process has been completed;
- (On a taxi or wheelchair accessible taxi) Remove the taximeter and printer – these can be used in the replacement vehicle, but they must first be programmed and calibrated specifically for the replacement vehicle; and
- (On a taxi or wheelchair accessible taxi) Remove the taxi branding from the front doors of the vehicle. The branding includes your vehicle licence number, and must be used only on the vehicle specified on your licence. You must get new branding for the replacement vehicle. Authorised suppliers of taxi door branding offer a removal service (fees may be charged).

Required documentation

You must have the following to hand when calling to book the Initial Suitability Inspection for the replacement vehicle, as you will need to give the details over the phone:

- Your PPSN;
- An insurance certificate for the replacement vehicle; and
- An NCT certificate for the replacement vehicle.

These requirements are the same as for a new licence application, described on page **Error! Bookmark not defined.5**.

You will be unable to book an Initial Suitability Inspection unless your documentation is valid and verifiable online.

Book an appointment by calling 0818 064 000. Booking appointments may be made only by the vehicle licence holder; security questions will be asked to confirm the caller's identity. NTA validates all documentation online at the time of booking, and verifies your ownership of the vehicle or your legal right to use and possess it.

When booking your appointment, you will also be required to pay the licence and inspection fees by credit or debit card.

Initial Suitability Inspection

The Initial Suitability Inspection takes place at one of the vehicle licensing centres around the country, as described on page 36.

Once you have satisfied NTA's licensing conditions and your vehicle has passed the Initial Suitability Inspection, the licence details are updated and the Licensing Inspector applies tamper-proof licence discs to the front and rear windows of the replacement vehicle. The licence

period for the replacement vehicle starts from the date of its Initial Suitability Inspection, irrespective of the expiry date of the licence for the previous vehicle.

Remember

You must not begin operating the replacement vehicle as an SPSV before you have completed the change-of-vehicle licensing process.

Taximeter verification and sealing (taxis and wheelchair accessible taxis only)

Once the vehicle has passed the Initial Suitability Inspection and the licence has been issued, you should make an appointment with Legal Metrology Services to arrange verification and sealing of the taximeter. You should retain any verification appointment letter in the vehicle until the taximeter is verified and sealed. See page 33.

Reassigning a licence on death of vehicle licence holder (Section 15)

The holder of an SPSV vehicle licence may nominate a person who, in the event of the vehicle licence holder's death, may apply to NTA to continue to operate the licence. This facility is available only for licences held by individuals: it is not available for licences held by corporate entities.

The first step for the vehicle licence holder is to make a nomination by completing a Form S15N. The nominee will be recorded against the vehicle licence specified on the form. In the event of the death of the vehicle licence holder, the nominated person so recorded may then apply to NTA to continue to operate the licence. The person applying to operate the licence must satisfy all the conditions that apply to a person applying for a new SPSV vehicle licence and must make this application to NTA within nine months of the licence holders death.

If the application is successful, the nominated person becomes the holder of the licence, and may renew and operate it as normal.

Exchanging a vehicle licence for one of a different category

The holder of a standard taxi licence, when changing their vehicle, can apply to exchange their licence for a wheelchair accessible taxi licence, provided that the replacement vehicle meets the required accessible standards. The original licence number remains unchanged.

Similarly, vehicle licence holders who have previously exchanged a standard taxi licence for a wheelchair accessible taxi licence can apply to revert to a standard taxi licence. The original licence number remains unchanged.

The age rules that apply to such changes of licence category are outlined in Appendix A.

Surrendering a vehicle licence

When a vehicle licence is surrendered, it is permanently and irreversibly deactivated. A vehicle licence should therefore be surrendered only by a vehicle licence holder who intends that the licence is **never** operated again. Before doing so, you should be certain that this is what you want to do.

To surrender your licence:

- Complete the 'I wish to surrender this Licence' section on the back of the licence certificate.

- Read the declaration and then sign and date it to confirm that you understand and accept it.
- Send the completed form and the tamper-proof licence discs to NTA at the following address:

SPSV Licensing Section
National Transport Authority
PO BOX 436
City North Business Park
Tuam Road
Galway

5. Working as an SPSV operator

This chapter outlines the regulations that apply to vehicles being operated as SPSVs and to the persons driving them:

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Vehicle requirements

Any vehicle being operated as an SPSV must comply with SPSV Regulations. If a vehicle is operated as an SPSV without a licence, both the owner of the vehicle and the driver can be charged with the offence. However, it always remains the *driver's* responsibility to ensure that the vehicle he or she is operating complies with the regulations, irrespective of who holds the vehicle licence or who owns the vehicle.

All SPSVs must:

- Have an active vehicle licence (as shown on the tamper-proof licence discs);
- Have the tamper-proof licence discs displayed in the front and rear windows of the vehicle. (Exception: vintage vehicles in the limousine category that are over 30 years old are exempt from the requirement to display a rear disc.);
- Be fully roadworthy (it is illegal to operate with a faulty vehicle);
- Carry the required safety equipment (see Chapter 3 for full details); and
- Not carry more passengers than indicated on the tamper-proof licence discs.

In addition, **taxis and wheelchair accessible taxis** must have:

- A taximeter calibrated and verified with the current National Maximum Taxi Fare and connected to a working printer;
- A regulation roof sign; and
- Approved taxi branding applied to its front doors.

In addition, **wheelchair accessible taxis** and **wheelchair accessible hackneys** must have:

- The required wheelchair equipment installed and functioning correctly.

In addition, **wheelchair accessible taxis** must have:

- The accessibility symbol displayed on the regulation roof sign.

In addition, **wheelchair accessible hackneys** must have:

- The accessibility symbol displayed on a passenger door.

Tamper-proof licence discs

The tamper-proof licence discs specify licence and vehicle details. These include the vehicle licence number and expiry date, the vehicle registration number, colour and type, and how many passengers the vehicle is licensed to carry.

The Licensing Inspector places the tamper-proof licence discs on the front and rear windows of your vehicle when it has passed the Initial Suitability Inspection or Licence Renewal Assessment. These discs remain the property of NTA at all times.

The colour of the tamper-proof licence discs indicates the category of SPSV for which the vehicle is licensed. The colours used at time of publication of this Manual are:

- Yellow for taxis and wheelchair accessible taxis;
- Blue for hackneys, wheelchair accessible hackneys and local area hackneys; and
- Silver for limousines.

All tamper-proof licence discs have a green surround, as below.



Taxi tamper-proof licence disc



Hackney tamper-proof licence disc



Limousine tamper-proof licence disc



Local area hackney tamper-proof licence disc

Removing and disposing of tamper-proof licence discs

To prevent their unlawful use on unlicensed vehicles, only Licensing Inspectors may ordinarily remove and dispose of tamper-proof licence discs. However, there are a number of circumstances where you might have to arrange removal of discs yourself, such as:

- Changing the vehicle associated with your licence to a different vehicle;
Note: the discs cannot be used on another vehicle – see below;
- Having your windscreen replaced;
- Selling or disposing of your vehicle; or
- Surrendering your licence.

Once removed, tamper-proof licence discs are not reusable. It is an offence to remove the discs for use on another vehicle. For any licensing transaction that involves the issue of new tamper-proof licence discs, you must return the old discs when presenting your vehicle for inspection, or provide documentary evidence that the discs have been destroyed securely. This could take the form of report from An Garda Síochána or the insurance company. Licensing staff will inform you of the procedure in such circumstances. Call the SPSV Information Line (0818 064 000) if you have any query in relation to tamper-proof licence discs.

Remember

It is a serious offence to operate a vehicle as an SPSV without a current, active vehicle licence. The driver of an unlicensed vehicle commits an offence, and the owner of the vehicle (if different from the driver) also commits an offence for allowing the vehicle to be operated as an SPSV. Both can be fined up to €5,000 on conviction for these offences.

Operating an SPSV owned by another person

The holder of a vehicle licence may permit the vehicle to be operated by any licensed SPSV driver. (Note, however, that the holder of a local area hackney driver licence may not drive any SPSV except a local area hackney.) The vehicle licence holder must:

- Ensure that the person driving is fully licensed to drive the vehicle as an SPSV;
- Provide and maintain appropriate SPSV insurance;
- Keep a record of the name, address and contact number of each person driving the SPSV and their SPSV driver licence details; and
- Retain these records and make them available for inspection by the National Transport Authority on request.

An SPSV driver who is operating a vehicle owned by someone else as an SPSV must make sure that:

- The vehicle licence is in date;
- The vehicle is roadworthy;
- The vehicle is appropriately insured; and
- The vehicle complies fully with the relevant regulations (see page 44).

Renting an SPSV

A vehicle licence can be held by a self-employed individual or a company. There is, however, no obligation on the vehicle licence holder themselves to drive the vehicle. The regulations permit a vehicle licence holder to rent the vehicle to a licensed SPSV driver for operation in a financial arrangement agree for between both parties. (Note, however, that the holder of a local area hackney driver licence may not drive an SPSV except a local area hackney.) The person providing the rental must own the vehicle and be the holder of the vehicle licence.

When renting a vehicle, both the licensed driver and vehicle licence owner have specific responsibilities.

The vehicle licence holder must:

- Ensure that the person driving is fully licensed to drive the vehicle as an SPSV;
- Provide and maintain appropriate SPSV insurance;
- Notify NTA of the rental agreement, including details such as the period of the arrangement, the vehicle registration number and the renter's driver licence number;
- Keep a record of the name, address and contact number of each person driving the SPSV and their SPSV driver licence details; and
- Retain these records and make them available for inspection by NTA on request.

The vehicle licence holder is the only party that NTA may engage with in relation to any licensing activity for a rented vehicle, for example, regarding an Initial Suitability Inspection appointment.

An SPSV driver who is operating a vehicle owned by someone else as an SPSV must make sure that:

- The vehicle licence is in date;
- The vehicle is roadworthy;
- The driver to vehicle link is created;

- The vehicle is appropriately insured; and
- The vehicle complies fully with the relevant regulations (see page 44).

Maintaining operational data

NTA maintains a database of links between each licensed SPSV and its current driver. It is the driver's responsibility to ensure that this information is current at all times by informing NTA whenever they take over the operation of an SPSV.

If you own and operate only one vehicle, and that vehicle is never operated by anyone else, you need notify NTA only once in relation to that vehicle. If, however, a vehicle is operated by more than one driver, each driver must notify NTA each and every time they commence operating that vehicle.

It is a criminal offence not to have a driver to vehicle link notified to NTA.

As a driver, it is your responsibility to create a new driver to vehicle link:

- Before you start driving an SPSV;
- If you change your vehicle; and
- If your driver licence or vehicle licence expires.

The driver link database feeds into NTA's public safety app, Driver Check. This app allows potential customers to verify the licence and registration status of any SPSV they intend to hire. NTA provides a number of ways for you to add and update both rental agreements and driver to vehicle links. You can do it by using:

- NTA's SPSV Online Services system, (<https://spsvonline.nationaltransport.ie/>);
- NTA's SPSV+ app (which can be downloaded free of charge from the Apple and Android App Stores);
- The SPSV Information Line (0818 064 000); or
- NTA's SMS service.

For more information on how to register and use these tools, please visit NTA's website.

Rules of operation

The rules of operation for different categories of SPSV are summarised on these pages.

Taxis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ May be hired only when standing at an official taxi rank, or while plying for hire on the street, or via pre-booking.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ May stand at a taxi rank (but only while the vehicle is available for hire) (see page 50)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ May use with-flow bus lanes when operating as an SPSV (see page 50)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Must use a verified calibrated taximeter to calculate the fare and charge the customer either the amount so calculated or a lesser amount
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Must operate the taximeter on all passenger journeys
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Must not charge more than the National Maximum Taxi Fare

- Must print a receipt from the printer attached to the taximeter and offer it to the customer (see Chapter 7)
- Must have approved branding on the front door of the vehicle and a regulation roof sign
- The driver should not leave a taxi unattended at a taxi rank
- The driver should keep a record of all bookings
- The driver must notify NTA each time they take over the operation of a vehicle

Wheelchair accessible taxis

- Must adhere to the rules set out above for taxis
- Must have specialist equipment including boarding aids, wheelchair anchorages and suitable seatbelts
- Must have the accessibility symbol displayed on their roof sign
- Must accommodate at least one person seated in their wheelchair and at least one other passenger at the same time
- Must give priority to bookings for people with disabilities
- The driver must keep a record of all bookings

Hackneys

- Must agree the fare to be charged in advance (the fare is not calculated on a meter)
- Must make a written receipt available to the customer (see Chapter 7)
- Must be pre-booked (may not be hailed on the street or stand for hire at a taxi rank)
- Must, from the time of receipt of the notification of the hire to its completion, carry a document in the vehicle showing the details of the booking (name of hirer, starting point and destination, fare agreed)
- Are not permitted to use bus lanes
- Are not permitted to display signs or advertisements except as prescribed by NTA
- The driver must notify NTA each time they take over the operation of a vehicle

Wheelchair accessible hackneys

- Must adhere to the rules set out above for hackneys
- Must have specialist equipment including ramps, wheelchair anchorages and suitable seatbelts

- Must accommodate at least one person seated in their wheelchair and at least one other passenger at the same time
- Must have the accessibility symbol displayed on a passenger door
- Must give priority to bookings for people with disabilities
- The driver must keep a record of all bookings

Local area hackneys

- The rules for hackneys, above, apply also to local area hackneys.
- The area of operation is specified on the local area hackney licence, and licence holders must not provide or advertise the provision of hackney services outside the area specified.

Limousines

- The rules for hackneys, above, apply also to limousines, with the exception, while engaged as part of a wedding or funeral service, of the requirement to carry a document showing details of the booking.

Operating sustainably in the SPSV industry

As an SPSV operator, you have a unique capacity to apply a significant environmental influence throughout your day. Your vehicle choice can either help reduce or worsen potential global emissions, and interactions with numerous customers can set the tone for a culture of either neglect or responsibility. SPSV drivers can serve as supporters of sustainable operations who engage in actions that use fewer resources, generate less waste and improve the overall footprint of their business, all while meeting operational goals.

To work sustainably as an SPSV operator, consider these factors:

- **Type of vehicle:** Choose an eco-friendly vehicle, such as a hybrid or electric vehicle which emit fewer pollutants.
- **Vehicle condition:** Keep your vehicle regularly serviced and maintained to help it run more efficiently and use less fuel.
- **Driving routes:** Consider your routes carefully to find the most direct way. Avoiding traffic jams reduces time spent idle and creates fewer emissions.
- **Carpooling and ridesharing:** Encourage passengers to share rides to lesson emissions.
- **Type of fuel:** Consider alternative fuels that are more sustainable than traditional fossil fuels, for example, biofuels and natural gas.
- **Style of driving:** Employ eco-friendly techniques, such as gradual speed changes and maintain a steady speed.

Sustainability as a competitive advantage

Sustainable operations can give you a competitive advantage. Products and services that are environmentally friendly are becoming more and more sought after. By employing sustainable practices, you can attract and retain customers who value sustainability. What's more, is that an SPSV driver employing these practices can benefit from a reduction in operating costs. The maintenance costs associated with an electric vehicle are much less than cars that run on gasoline. In terms of funding, as investors and banks are focusing closely on bringing together environmental, social and governance issues when considering funding requests, an SPSV driver who implements sustainable practices is more likely to get funding. Currently grants exist for those who may wish to purchase an electric SPSV or who would like to upgrade their current SPSV to an electric model.

Use of taxi ranks



Taxi ranks are identified by this sign.

Local authorities (in consultation with An Garda Síochána) are responsible for planning the location of taxi ranks, deciding on their size and hours of operation, building and maintaining them, and managing their use. NTA's role in this regard is limited to offering advice and guidelines to the local authorities.

Some taxi ranks are in operation permanently and full-time, some only at certain times of day, and some only temporarily, to provide service at a public event such as a concert.

In addition, some taxi ranks are provided by other bodies on their own premises (such as airports). For some of these taxi ranks, drivers are required to obtain a permit (and pay a fee) that allows them to stand for hire at the taxi rank.

- Taxis standing at an official taxi rank must be available for hire;
- Drivers should not leave a taxi unattended at a taxi rank;
- Customers have the right to choose which taxi they hire – they do not necessarily have to hire the first taxi in the queue;
- A taxi may be hailed and hired by a customer in close proximity to a taxi rank;
- Hackneys and limousines are not permitted to stand for hire at a taxi rank; and
- No extra charge is payable by customers for hiring a taxi from a taxi rank.

Use of bus lanes by taxis

The Road Traffic Regulations 1997 permit taxis in the course of business to use normal (with-flow) bus lanes.

A taxi can use a normal (with-flow) bus lane only while it is operating as an SPSV – carrying a passenger, on the way to pick up a pre-booked customer, or plying for hire. Taxis must not use bus lanes if they are not operating as an SPSV – for example, driving home at the end of a shift, travelling on personal business, or transporting only goods and not passengers.

Taxis are not allowed to use contra-flow bus lanes (in which traffic travels in the opposite direction to the traffic beside it) under any circumstances.

Hackneys and limousines are not permitted to use bus lanes.

Using your roof sign

You must have your roof sign in place when operating a taxi or wheelchair accessible taxi, and you must remove it when the vehicle is in a public area and not being operated as a taxi or wheelchair accessible taxi. Keep the roof sign light switched on when your vehicle is available for hire (including when standing at a taxi rank), and switched off when not available for hire (for example, while carrying a passenger, or while driving to pick up a pre-booked customer). There is no requirement to link the taxi roof sign light to the meter – each may be switched on and off independently.

If you are on a journey of more than 30km that takes you outside the urban limits, you may, with the prior consent of the passenger, position the roof sign lengthways for more efficient fuel consumption.

Using your cashless payment facility

You must have your cashless payment facility in full working order when operating a taxi or wheelchair accessible taxi. A driver is obliged to withdraw from service if their terminal is broken or out of charge.

Each cashless payment device must be associated with the driver providing the taxi service, rather than the taxi vehicle as some drivers use different vehicles, or rent or share a vehicle. It is necessary that the driver who takes payment for the journey is identified in the transaction history of the passenger's bank account/statement. This is required for both the passenger and NTA in the event of an error/complaint.

Visa, Mastercard and American Express cards via physical card and digital wallets must be accepted and the cashless payment facility must meet the relevant requirements and standards as stipulated by these card scheme companies.

A surcharge cannot be applied to cashless payments. A driver is also required to have the ability to refund a payment to the customer if an error has been made.

There is no obligation to have the cashless payment device permanently mounted and displayed in the taxi, however, should a driver wish to do so, the following points must be observed:

- The equipment should not obscure the view of the taximeter by any passenger in the taxi.
- The equipment should be designed, constructed, and carried in the taxi in a secure way that does not present a danger to passengers or the driver, including impact with the equipment in the event of a collision.
- The equipment should not obscure or interfere with the operation of any of the taxi's other standard or mandatory equipment (including the taximeter). In particular, it should not be mounted on or adjacent to air bags or other supplementary safety systems in a way that might compromise the performance and functionality of such safety systems.
- Any charging equipment used must not interfere with any other safety, control, electrical, computer, navigation, satellite, or radio system in the vehicle.
- The equipment should not obscure the driver's view of the road.
- Where such equipment is mounted, it should be located in a considerate way that facilitates passengers and seeks not to interfere with their comfort.

If a problem occurs with a passenger's card, such as insufficient funds or the card has expired, for example, they may use a different card or the passenger may be able to pay cash for the fare calculated on the taximeter. The passenger may wish to be taken to a cashpoint to get cash to pay the fare or have a third party pay on their behalf.

If a passenger refuses to pay and an amicable agreement cannot be found, drivers should consider involving An Garda Síochána. It is an offence under section 24 of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013 for a person who hires a taxi and, without reasonable excuse, does not pay the fare calculated in line with the National Maximum Taxi Fare Order by a verified taximeter.

Refusing a passenger

There are specific circumstances under which an SPSV driver may refuse to accept a passenger, request a passenger to leave the vehicle, or refuse to follow a passenger's instructions. These circumstances include:

- A request to take the passenger on a journey of over 30km in a taxi;
- A passenger who is, or becomes, disorderly, abusive or offensive;
- A passenger who is consuming food or drink;
- A passenger who is likely to soil or damage the vehicle;
- A passenger with too much luggage to be carried safely in the interior of the vehicle, or whose luggage poses a danger to the driver or others;
- A group of passengers who wish to travel together but who together would exceed the licensed passenger-carrying capacity of the vehicle, as shown on its tamper-proof licence discs;
- A passenger who asks the driver to put his health or safety at risk – for example, by asking the driver to lift an unreasonably heavy load;
- A passenger under the age of 17, but of adult size, who refuses to wear a seatbelt;
- A small child who, in the driver's judgement, cannot be carried safely in the vehicle;
- A passenger who refuses to show ability to pay the fare when asked, or who refuses to pay a reasonable deposit before starting the journey;
- A person attempting to hire the vehicle for the transport of goods without an accompanying passenger; and
- A passenger or intending passenger who refuses to extinguish a cigarette.

Where a dispute arises, you should keep a record of the event by writing down the details, so that you can explain the circumstances to NTA's compliance officers if a complaint follows a refusal of service.

Keeping your vehicle in good condition

You are required to keep your vehicle in a clean and roadworthy condition at all times when operating it as an SPSV.

What to check

The Automobile Association (AA) recommends that you check your vehicle regularly, as outlined on the next page. Prevention is better than cure: it is almost always cheaper, quicker and easier to fix problems as soon as they occur. If you wait, the problem is likely to become worse and more expensive to fix. Always consult the owner's handbook.

AA vehicle check

Tyres

Check your tyre pressures regularly, including the spare. Under-inflated tyres create more rolling resistance and result in higher fuel consumption. Most vehicles must have a minimum tread depth of 1.6mm. Replace your tyres before they become this worn or if they are damaged. Tyre pressure and condition are important, both for safety and for fuel economy.

Lights and mirrors

Keep your lights, indicators and mirrors clean and in good working order. Check that they are correctly adjusted. Rear light failures often go unnoticed by the driver; check rear lights at night by reversing up to a wall so you can view the light operation in the mirrors, or ask someone else to check them for you.

Oil

Check the oil level and keep it topped up between oil changes. Check for oil leaks underneath your vehicle. Make sure you use the correct grade of oil (see the owner's handbook).

Windscreen and wipers

Clean your windscreen regularly inside and out. Keep your windscreen washer solution topped up. Keep your windscreen wiper blades in good working condition.

Battery and warning lights

Check your battery: listen for signs of a weak battery when starting your engine. Check warning lights on your dashboard for other possible faults, in particular those relating to brake or engine management systems.

Other items to check include:

- **Fluid levels:** check fluid levels, including battery and brake fluid, and top them up if necessary.
- **Battery terminals and cables:** clean if corroded.
- **Hoses and belts:** replace if damaged.
- **Brakes:** inspect for signs of wear and tear, including the handbrake, and always investigate any brake noises or change in pedal travel.
- **Horn:** check it is working.
- **Exhaust system:** listen out for changes in exhaust noise. Fixing emission control components early – for example catalytic converters – will save money in the long run.
- **Shock absorbers:** worn shock absorbers can be both dangerous and uncomfortable. Be aware of changes in the car's feel, especially in relation to bumps, and investigate any unusual noises from the suspension system.

Further information

AA basic car checks: www.theaa.com/breakdown-cover/basic-car-checks.html

Keeping costs down

If your vehicle is regularly serviced and well maintained, the engine is likely to operate at its best. As advised by the AA, you can also reduce your fuel consumption and maintenance costs, as well as giving your passengers a more comfortable journey, by observing a few simple guidelines:

- Drive as smoothly as possible and brake gently wherever possible.
- Accelerate and slow down smoothly, by sensibly combining observation and anticipation.
- Drive in the highest gear possible without labouring the engine, and change up as soon as you can.
- Turn off your engine if you're likely to be standing still in a queue for more than three minutes.
- If you can do so safely and without affecting the comfort of your passengers, turn off unnecessary electrical loads such as air conditioning, fans and heated rear windscreens.

Compliance and enforcement

NTA is committed to ensuring compliance with the SPSV regulations, in order to ensure that legitimate, professional operators do not have to compete with others operating to lower standards, and in order to ensure continued public confidence in SPSV services.

NTA has a team of compliance officers who are empowered to investigate complaints or reports of non-compliance in all aspects of the industry, including vehicle standards, driver behaviour and identification, and issues relating to bookings and fares.

NTA has the right to prosecute for certain offences, including unlicensed drivers and unlicensed vehicles operating as SPSVs. Compliance officers may also issue on-the-spot penalties for a number of specified fixed payment offences. A summary of the fixed payment offences is provided in the table starting on page 566.

Fixed payment offences

Commonly referred to as 'on-the-spot fines', this term refers to breaches of SPSV regulations for which a penalty may be imposed. See page 56.

NTA's compliance team

NTA's compliance officers work for the benefit of the industry and the travelling public. They support the vast majority of SPSV operators who provide an excellent public service and ensure that standards throughout the industry remain high.

Compliance officers have the right to approach any SPSV operator while they are working. They will generally want to carry out some basic checks on the vehicle or the driver – sometimes this is a routine check, and sometimes it is part of an investigation into a complaint. NTA has a duty to investigate all complaints thoroughly – some of these, however, arise from an incorrect understanding of the rights and responsibilities of drivers and passengers and do not warrant any further action on the part of NTA.

As a driver if you are approached by a compliance officer, you can expect the officer to:

- Identify themselves and show you their warrant of appointment identity card;
- Be polite and civil;
- Understand that you are working, and not delay you unnecessarily;
- Check compliance with basic vehicle standards (tamper-proof licence discs, In-Vehicle Information Card, safety equipment, cleanliness, and, where relevant, roof sign, taximeter and printer, and wheelchair ramps); and
- Check that the driver display card is on display and that the driver is in possession of the ID card, and that (in a taxi) the fare information is displayed.

In order to help them to do their job, and allow you to carry on with yours as quickly as possible, you should cooperate with any reasonable request that the officer makes.

Compliance officers may impose fixed payment penalties for specified breaches of regulations, as outlined on page 566. Failure to pay these penalties could result in prosecution, heavier penalties, a criminal record and – in extreme cases – loss of licence.

Authorised persons

You must give reasonable assistance and information to authorised persons, including NTA's compliance officers and members of An Garda Síochána. It is an offence to obstruct, impede, fail to comply with, or give false or misleading information to an authorised person.

Authorised persons have the power to request and seize documents, and they can also enter premises connected with the provision of an SPSV service – for example, a dispatch operator's office – where they can secure evidence for potential prosecutions.

Mandatory Area Knowledge Test

NTA may request a licence holder to provide evidence that he or she has adequate knowledge of the area in which they are operating. If NTA receives three or more complaints relating to your knowledge of the area in which you are operating during the previous three years, NTA may require you to sit and pass the relevant Area Knowledge Test prior to renewing your licence.

Mandatory disqualification

If you have been convicted (in Ireland or elsewhere) of any of the offences that are specified in the Schedule to the Taxi Regulation Act 2013, you are disqualified from holding an SPSV driver licence – in some cases for life, in other cases for specified periods of time. You are required to notify An Garda Síochána of any such conviction.

If you are disqualified for this reason, you can apply to the appropriate or relevant court to have the disqualification lifted. If you believe you may be affected by this, it is strongly advised that you consult the legislation and seek legal advice.

Fixed payment offences

The principal fixed payment offences at time of publication are set out below. Other offences may be categorised as fixed payment offences from time to time.

Fixed payment offences – SPSV operators	
■ Removal or attempted removal of tamper-proof licence disc from a small public service vehicle	€150
■ Failure to display tamper-proof licence disc	€150
■ Failure to display required driver identification	€200
■ Failure to notify details of small public service vehicle being operated	€200

Fixed payment offences – vehicle equipment	
■ Failure to comply with taxi roof sign requirements	€100
■ Failure to display the required In-Vehicle Information Card	€100
■ Displaying on a hackney or limousine a sign or advertisement other than one prescribed by NTA	€80
■ Failure to comply with the vehicle standards and requirements applicable to the licence category	€100
■ Failure to have prescribed signage affixed to the front doors of taxi or wheelchair accessible taxi	€250

Fixed payment offences – taximeter (taxi only)	
■ Failure to comply with the requirements in relation to the calibration of taximeters	€250
■ Failure to comply with the requirements in relation to the fitting and operation of a taximeter	€150
■ Operating taximeter while taxi is standing for hire or plying for hire	€150
■ Failure to operate taximeter while taxi is on hire	€150

Fixed payment offences – standing or plying for hire	
■ Standing at appointed stand while the vehicle is not available for hire	€80
■ Standing for hire in a taxi otherwise than at an appointed stand	€100
■ Standing or plying for hire in a county without a licence to stand or ply for hire in that county	€200
■ Standing with a taxi on part of a public road adjoining or in proximity to an appointed stand when the appointed stand is full	€80

Fixed payment offences – fares and charges	
■ Unreasonable refusal to carry a passenger where the journey is not more than 30 kilometres	€150
■ Refusal to carry assistance dog or guide dog in a small public service vehicle	€250
■ Applying a booking fee in respect of a taxi which is engaged while plying for hire or standing for hire or without having been booked in advance by the consumer	€100
■ Failure to print and offer a receipt in the prescribed form to a passenger upon completion of a journey in a taxi	€100
■ Failure to make available a receipt in the prescribed form to a passenger upon completion of a journey in a hackney or limousine	€100
■ Failure of the driver of a hackney or limousine to carry the required booking record in respect of a hire.	€80
■ Failure to carry a cashless payment device.	€200
■ Failure to accept a cashless payment.	€200
■ Refusal by a driver to carry a passenger in a wheelchair	€250

The fixed payment notice specifies the amount of the penalty which you must pay in order to avoid prosecution, as shown in the table above.

- Within 28 days of the date of the notice, you can pay the amount specified in the notice, or
- Within 56 days of the date of the notice, you can pay the amount specified in the notice plus an additional 50 per cent.

If you do not pay within 56 days of the date of the notice, court proceedings are initiated.

Changing details

Change of address

If you change your address or other contact details, such as mobile number or email address, you are required to inform NTA as soon as possible, using the SPSV Online Services system, <https://spsvonline.nationaltransport.ie/>, by calling the SPSV Information Line (0818 064 000), or in writing. This is important to ensure that you receive updates from NTA regarding your licences – NTA takes no responsibility if you do not receive important correspondence because you have not registered a change of contact details.

Holders of SPSV driver licences are also obliged to inform An Garda Síochána when they change address.

Other occupation

If you hold an SPSV driver licence and you become engaged in another occupation, you are required to give An Garda Síochána details of that occupation, including name and address of employer (if relevant), and, if that other occupation involves driving, evidence that you have informed the employer that you hold an SPSV driver licence and that you drive an SPSV for hire or reward.

Control of company

If a vehicle licence is held by a company and control of the company changes, the licence is automatically revoked. The company must inform NTA of the change in control and return the licence with the notification within 14 days of the date of change in control. This requirement does not apply when the change in control of the company arises from the death of a member of the company.

Changes to the National Maximum Taxi Fare

If the National Maximum Taxi Fare changes, the taximeter in a taxi or wheelchair accessible taxi must be reprogrammed with the new fare structure. Most taximeter models can be pre-programmed within the 90 days prior to the fare change coming into effect. Pre-programming ensures a seamless transition to the new Fare without any loss of trade for operators. The taximeter must be verified by the Legal Metrology Service as soon as possible thereafter.

6. Finding your way around

This chapter deals with ways of working out the best route to take your passenger to his or her destination.

	Page
■ Route planning	60
■ Map reading and route selection	60
■ Using technology for route planning	64

Route planning

SPSV operators are required to have better area knowledge than most other road users, and they use this knowledge all the time to get passengers to their destinations quickly and safely. Sometimes, however, the best route from A to B is not the shortest in kilometres, and there are always different factors that can influence your choice of route – commuter traffic, school times, road works, sporting events, concerts and other events can cause congestion in particular areas. For example, you might want to avoid the Croke Park area in Dublin on the afternoon of an All-Ireland final. There are also some streets that become particularly busy during morning and evening rush-hours. Experience is the best teacher, and most drivers develop a sense of how long a journey will take at any particular time of day. If you believe that you should take a route that is not the most direct, you should explain your suggestion to your passenger and get their agreement.

If you are not sure of the best route to take to a particular destination, check it on a road map, or ask the passenger if they prefer any particular route. A passenger has the right to direct what route is taken – if they express a preference for a particular route, you should take that route.

Map reading and route selection

You should familiarise yourself with using maps to help you find your way around. Ordnance Survey Ireland (OSI) has published a range of maps that are invaluable in helping you to acquire the required level of area knowledge and map-reading skills. They are available online from www.irishmaps.ie or from OSI agents nationwide (see www.osi.ie for details).

A selection of other maps and resources is listed below. Each of these resources has different strengths and weaknesses. You should familiarise yourself with them all to see which ones best fit your needs, and you should avoid relying exclusively on any one.

Printed resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ OSI maps■ AA Ireland maps
Internet resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Google Maps■ Google Street View■ OSI maps online■ AA Ireland route planner■ Discover Ireland■ Trip Advisor■ Citizens Information■ Irish Rail■ Garda.ie■ An Post

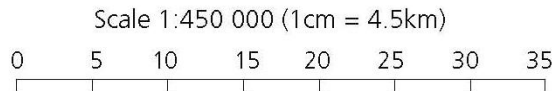
The more you use maps, the easier they become to use. Most maps present information in a standard way, and once you have used one, you will find that others are easy. The more common features of maps are described on the next pages.

Place names

Cities and larger towns are usually written in bigger or bolder letters, or in capital letters.

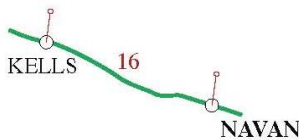
Scale and scale bar

The scale of the map tells you how to convert distances on the map into real distances. For example, if the scale is 1:450000, that means that everything on the map is 450,000 times smaller than it is in reality. In other words, a distance of 1cm on the map represents 4.5km on the ground. Maps usually have a scale bar so you can visualise the distances on the map.



Map distances

In some cases, maps include distances (in miles or kilometres) measured between two markers. The example below indicates the distance (in kilometres) between Kells and Navan.



Standard symbols

Standard symbols show the location of landmarks such as schools, hospitals, railway stations, parks and shopping centres.

A key or legend explains what the symbols on a map mean. If you do not know what a symbol means, check it in the legend.

Motorways and roads

Different types of roads are marked in different colours and thicknesses. Bigger roads are thicker; motorways are blue; national primary roads are usually green; national secondary roads are usually alternating green and white.



Motorway



National primary road



National secondary road



Regional road



Main road/street



Road under construction



Other road/street

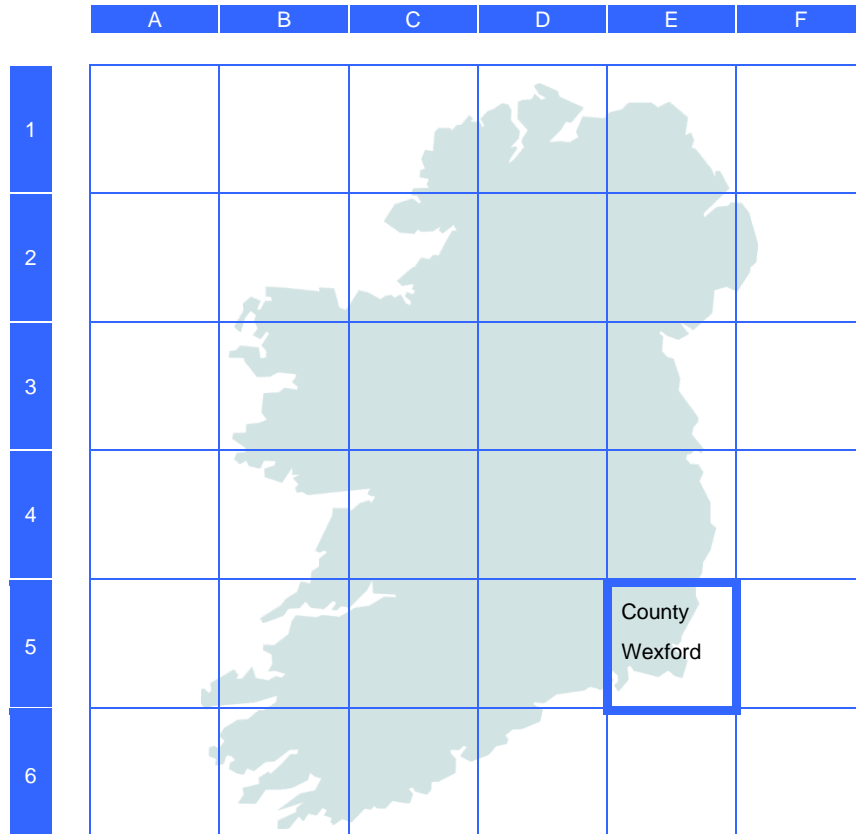


Pedestrian street (city maps)

Grid

The index to a road map generally identifies places by their grid reference on a particular page. This is a way of helping you to identify each square on the map. Usually, the areas between horizontal lines have numbers and those between vertical lines have letters.

In this example, the blue square is identified as E5 (corresponding roughly to County Wexford), and this combination of letter and number is the grid reference for that square.

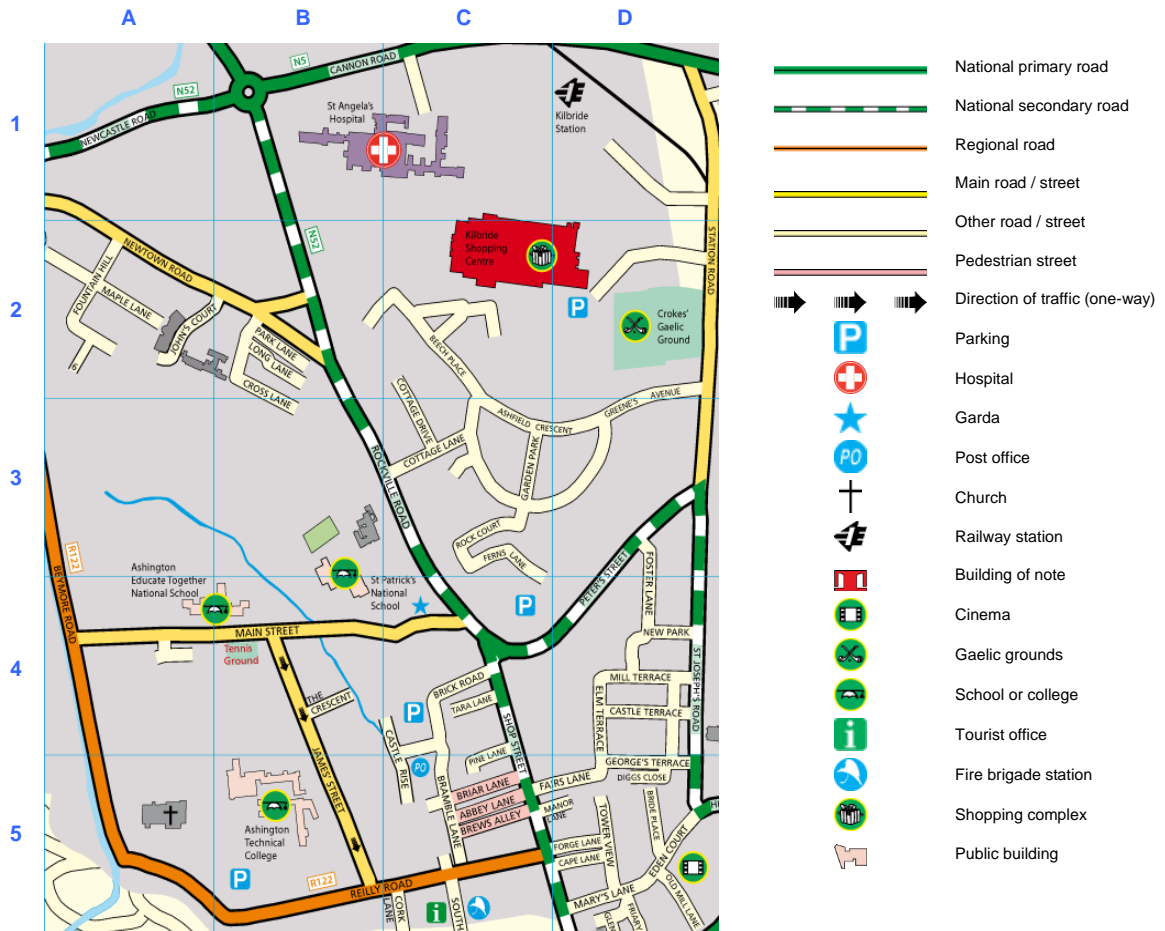


Index

In town or city maps, the index contains a list of all streets on the map and their associated grid references.

Map features

This fictional map shows many of the features you would expect to find on a town map.



How to find a location on a map

To find a location on a map similar to the one shown, first identify the square your location is likely to be in. If necessary, look up the location in the map index and get the grid reference for the square. Then pinpoint your location in the square. Very small streets may be indicated by number rather than name. In an index, the grid reference for such a street will be followed by the number in smaller type – for example, A2⁶.

Example number 1

To find the location of Kilbride Shopping Centre in the sample district map.

The map's street index tells you that Kilbride Shopping Centre is located in grid reference C2. The map legend tells you that buildings of note are marked as red shapes. In the square labelled C2 on the map Kilbride Shopping Centre is marked as a red shape.

Example number 2

To work out on the sample district map a route from Ashington Technical College on James' Street to Kilbride Train Station.

The map's street index indicates that James' Street is located in grid reference B5 and the station is marked in the map by an Iarnród Éireann (Irish Rail) symbol in square D1. One of the most direct routes is:

- Head south on James' Street as this is indicated on the map as a one-way street;
- Take a left onto Reilly Road and continue towards Shop Street;
- Turn left onto Shop Street and head north;
- Turn right onto Peter's Street;
- Follow Peter's Street and turn left onto Station Road; and
- Kilbride Station is located at the top of Station Road on your left.

Using technology for route planning

While a good knowledge of the operating area is essential for every SPSV operator, a number of technologies are available to help you plan your route and find your destination. More traditional sources include travel updates on the radio and telephone information services; newer technologies include online route planning on the internet, GPS phone apps, and satellite navigation systems (sat navs). Remember, however, that every technology has its flaws as well as its advantages – you cannot rely exclusively on any technology; your area knowledge, experience and judgement are always needed to plan the best route, to follow it, and to change it when necessary to take account of special circumstances.

The table on the next page lists some of the available technologies and some of the factors you should bear in mind when considering their use.

Technology	What it does	Notes
Radio	<p>Many national and local radio stations broadcast traffic and travel updates at regular times during the morning and evening rush hours.</p> <p>Some city and town councils have their own dedicated traffic news stations.</p>	Information is often out of date by the time it is broadcast.
Telephone	The larger motoring organisations have telephone lines providing traffic reports.	<p>Most useful when planning longer journeys.</p> <p>Phone cannot be used while driving.</p>
Internet	Some local councils and the larger motoring organisations publish details of roadworks, diversions and other traffic-related information on their websites.	<p>Only useful when planning longer pre-booked journeys.</p> <p>Route-planning facilities include estimates of time.</p>
Sat nav (GPS) and GPS phone apps	<p>In-car navigation systems generally come with preloaded maps for Ireland. They provide routing information on a display screen and may provide voice instructions.</p> <p>GPS apps are available for smart phones. These have much the same functionality as sat navs.</p>	<p>Destination must be specified before starting to drive.</p> <p>Voice commands may be distracting or irritating to passengers.</p> <p>Maps may not be up to date.</p> <p>Danger of confusing places with the same or similar names.</p> <p>Lack of knowledge of local traffic conditions but may be helpful in indicating one-way streets.</p>

Further information

- The AA lists details of its traffic and travel broadcasts on its AA Roadwatch website, www.aaroadwatch.ie.
- Dublin City Council, www.dublincity.ie
- Dublin City FM LiveDrive 103.2FM.
- Dún Laoghaire Rathdown Council, www.dlrcoco.ie.
- Cork City Council, www.corkcorp.ie.
- The websites of many other local councils also provide information on road works and closures.

7. Fares

This chapter deals with how the fare is calculated and charged for each journey.

	Page
■ Taxi fares	67
■ Hackney and limousine fares	70
■ Getting paid	71
■ Staying compliant	71

Taxi fares

In 2006, to assist in the development of taxi services nationally, the whole country was designated as a single taximeter area, and a national maximum taxi fare was introduced, to ensure that fares are transparent and predictable. The National Maximum Taxi Fare is set out in law in a Maximum Fares Order – the latest such Order came into law on 1 December 2024.

When does a taxi journey start?

For taxis and wheelchair accessible taxis, there is sometimes confusion about when exactly the hire starts, and when the taximeter can be started. The table below clarifies the situation.

How taxi is engaged	When hire starts	When to start the taximeter
By taking a passenger from a taxi rank or in response to being hailed on the street	The hire starts when you agree to take the passenger.	You are entitled to start the taximeter when you agree to take the passenger – for example, before you help the passenger with luggage.
In response to a pre-booked request (see page 69).	The hire starts when you present yourself to the customer at the agreed time.	You are entitled to start the taximeter if you are at the agreed place at the agreed time (not earlier). Any delay caused by the passenger at the beginning of the journey is calculated on the taximeter as a time-based charge. Similarly any delay in the course of the journey – for example, to pick up additional passengers – is also calculated on the taximeter.

How taxi fares are calculated

The maximum fares that taxis and wheelchair accessible taxis can charge are regulated by the National Maximum Taxi Fare Order.

The National Maximum Taxi Fare is programmed into the taximeter that must be installed in all taxis and wheelchair accessible taxis. Taxi customers are entitled to have the fare for their entire journey calculated and charged on the taximeter, and the fare calculated in this way is the maximum fare that the driver can charge for any journey. This is the case even where the fare for a journey has been agreed in advance. A taxi driver may charge the pre-agreed fare only if it is less than the fare calculated on the meter.

The calculation of the fare is based on:

- When the journey takes place (Standard, Premium or Special Premium rate may apply), and
- The length of the journey and/or the time taken (Initial Charge always applies, and additional charges based on Tariff A and Tariff B may also apply). The Initial Charge is fixed and covers any distance up to 500 metres or time period up to 85 seconds. After that, the fare is calculated based on the distance travelled or, if the speed drops below 21.2 km/h, the journey time.

The table on the next page summarises the main features of the National Maximum Taxi Fare Order, effective from 1 December 2024.

National Maximum Taxi Fare

		Initial Charge	Tariff A	Tariff B
		<i>Up to 500 metres or 85 secs</i>	<i>Next 15 km or 43 mins</i>	<i>Thereafter</i>
<i>Applies</i>				
Standard Rate <i>(displayed as 1 on the taximeter)</i>	8am to 8pm Monday to Saturday (except public holidays)	€4.40	€1.32 per km or €0.47 per minute Up to total €23.60	€1.72 per km or €0.61 per minute
Premium Rate <i>(displayed as 2 on the taximeter)</i>	8pm to 8am Monday to Saturday, all day Sundays, most public holidays. <i>Special Rate exceptions apply</i>	€5.40	€1.81 per km or €0.64 per minute Up to total €31.80	€2.20 per km or €0.78 per minute
Special Rate <i>(displayed as 3 on the taximeter)</i>	Special Rate for 00:00 to 04:00 Saturday and Sunday, Christmas Eve 20:00h to St. Stephens Day 08:00h and New Years Eve 20:00h to New Years Day 08:00h	€5.40	<i>This Tariff applies for the remainder of the journey after the expiration of the Initial Charge</i> €2.20 per km or €0.78 per minute	

Extra charges

Apart from the fare calculated on time/distance and rate, as outlined above, the driver can choose to charge extra for the following:

- Booking fee of €3 (see next page for details);
- Extra passengers – taxi drivers may charge a fee €1 for each adult passenger after the first. In relation to additional child passengers, one child under 12 years of age is carried at no extra charge; the fee for two or three children under 12 is €1; for four or five children €2; and for six or seven children €3;
- Road tolls – may be charged as incurred for toll schemes adopted by a road authority (see next page);
- Soiling – a fee may be charged where a passenger either soils the vehicle or damages it so much that the driver has to take it out of service or has to pay to have it cleaned or repaired. The maximum such fee is €140, but the actual fee charged may be lower – it should reflect the costs reasonably incurred by the operator.

These extra charges are listed on the In-Vehicle Information Card. They are discretionary – the driver can choose to impose them or not. However, if extra charges are likely to be significant, the driver should make them clear to the customer in advance.

Charges for booking and for extra passengers, where charged, are recorded on the taximeter.

An extra charge must not be imposed for carrying luggage or an assistance dog.

Booking fees

An SPSV driver may charge a booking fee of €3 for any method of engagement other than engaging at a taxi rank (including at an airport or other transport station or terminal) or hailing in the street, as summarised below.

You **may charge** a booking fee for:

- A booking made by telephone, email, smartphone app, fax, text or letter; or
- A booking made through a telephone call or a personal visit to a dispatch operator's office

You **may not charge** a booking fee if:

- A customer hails you in the street; or
- A customer engages you at a taxi rank, including an airport or other transport terminal taxi rank.

Road tolls

You should advise passengers of the alternative routes available, and the likely costs and journey times associated with each. If any of the alternatives involves a toll under a road authority toll scheme (for example the M50), you should tell the passenger what the toll charge will be. The customer is entitled to choose the route, even if you disagree with their choice. If the chosen route is subject to toll charges, you are entitled to include the toll charge in the fare charged to the passenger. Such toll charges should be recorded on the receipt. If you are using an electronic tag to pay the toll, it may not be obvious to the passenger what the charge is. You are advised to keep a schedule of toll charges in the car, so that you can show it to customers if necessary (for example, on the M50, or in the Port Tunnel).

Further information

See NTA's website www.nationaltransport.ie for more information on the National Maximum Taxi Fare.

Discounts

As a taxi driver, you have the right to charge the amount calculated on the taximeter (plus any permitted extras, such as road tolls). You must not charge more, but you may charge less if you wish. You should record any discount in writing on the receipt.

Payment by credit or debit card

As a taxi driver, you must have a cashless payment facility in full working order when operating a taxi or wheelchair accessible taxi. A driver is obliged to withdraw from service if their terminal is broken or out of charge. You may not charge any extra fee for payment by credit or debit card. No minimum fare may be set for payment by credit or debit card.

Taxi receipts

The taximeter must be on and calculating the fare in line with the National Maximum Taxi Fare for all passenger journeys, even if a fare is agreed in advance of the journey.

You must offer a taxi receipt printed by the printer attached to the taximeter (not handwritten) to all customers.

If the amount you are paid differs from the amount calculated on the taximeter, you should write on the receipt to show the difference and the reason for it – for example if the customer includes a tip, or you offer a discount on the metered fare.



Hackney and limousine fares

Customers must pre-book hackneys and limousines and agree the fare before the journey starts. Hackney drivers and limousine drivers (except limousine drivers engaged for weddings or funerals) are required to carry a document in their vehicle showing the details of the booking (name and contact details of hirer, starting point and destination, fare agreed) at all times from the time of receipt of the notification of the hire to its completion.

Hackney and limousine drivers should keep records that show:

- The journeys they have taken;
- The fares they charged for the journeys; and
- The receipts they issued.

NTA can ask to see these records at any time.

The driver of a hackney or limousine must make a receipt available to the passenger on completion of the journey, as illustrated below.



Sample hackney receipt



Sample limousine receipt

Receipts are not required for journeys in hackneys or limousines by passengers availing of pre-existing payment accounts, or for journeys in limousines hired for weddings or funerals.

Getting paid

At the end of the journey:

- It is your right to get paid the correct fare; and
- It is your customer's right to be charged the correct fare.

Taxi fares are calculated on the taximeter. The driver may, at his/her discretion, offer a discount on the metered fare but may not charge more than the metered fare. (See Discounts on page 69.)

Hackney and limousine fares are agreed in advance between the driver (or dispatch operator) and the customer.

Staying compliant

NTA's compliance officers will investigate complaints or reports of non-compliance in relation to SPSV fares and charges. They may impose fixed payment penalties for offences relating to fares and charges, as described in Chapter 5. Complaints may be submitted through NTA's website, www.transportforireland.ie.

8. Delivering customer satisfaction

This chapter deals with the topic of customer service.

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■ Good customer service is good business	73
■ The customer's rights and responsibilities	74
■ Aspects of good customer service	75
■ Assisting customers with disabilities	78
■ Diversity and equality	82
■ Dealing with complaints	85
■ Dealing with difficult customers	85

NTA's role in customer service

As an SPSV operator, you are in the service business, and it is very important that you deliver an efficient, safe and quality service, both for the sake of your customers and for the sake of your business.

SPSV operators work in a unique customer service business that offers a 24-hour, door-to-door public transport service. The nature of the business means that you are constantly dealing face-to-face with customers, most often in the confined space of your car. Operating in this environment presents many customer-service challenges – and the opportunity to deliver a quality service that will be appreciated by your passengers.

It is one of NTA's objectives to ensure that all SPSV operators provide a professional, efficient, safe, accessible and customer-friendly service to their passengers. NTA supports SPSV users in a variety of ways, including:

- A consumer app, Driver Check, that enables SPSV users to confirm the details of an individual driver and vehicle prior to or during a trip (downloadable from the Apple App Store for iPhone and iPad, or Google Play store for Android devices);
- NTA's website, www.transportforireland.ie, which provides consumer information relating to SPSVs and other public transport services. It provides the simplest and quickest means for customers to report exemplary service or make a complaint; and
- NTA's SPSV Information Line (0818 064 000) is available to provide SPSV users with information on all aspects of the service. Customers can also use this channel to report exemplary service or make a complaint.

Customers with disabilities or specific requirements are also an important focus of NTA's statutory objectives, and NTA is constantly examining ways to make SPSV services more accessible to all passengers.

Good customer service is good business

Customers have the right to expect their SPSV service to be delivered in a professional manner. When you treat your passengers politely, efficiently and with respect, they will have a more comfortable and pleasant journey, and are more likely to book your services again, to be generous with tips, and to recommend you to family, friends and work colleagues.

Delivering good customer service also means that you will have fewer complaints to deal with and be better able to handle difficult customers. This will help to reduce some of the potential stress of being an SPSV operator.

The customer's rights and responsibilities

A customer has certain rights and responsibilities – these are summarised on the In-Vehicle Information Card displayed in the vehicle.

The customer's rights

Fares and receipts

- Taxi drivers may not charge more than the fare calculated on the taximeter, even with a prior written agreement, and must offer customers the printed receipt for the journey which contains specific information.
- Drivers may not charge more than the agreed fare and must make available to the customer a written receipt containing specific information (hackney and limousine only).

Unreasonable refusal of service

- Taxi drivers may not unreasonably refuse service for journeys of 30km or less. This will occasionally mean that you must take a passenger for only a very short journey.

Customer service

- SPSV operators should be courteous, helpful and neatly dressed.
- SPSV operators should have a good working knowledge of major routes and destinations, and should follow any direction or route chosen by the passenger.
- SPSV drivers must offer reasonable assistance with luggage.
- The vehicle must be clean and roadworthy.

Regulations

- SPSV drivers must display their driver identification card and the In-Vehicle Information Card in clear view of the customer.
- At a taxi rank, the passenger may choose to travel in a taxi other than the one at the head of the queue.
- Taxi drivers must provide a cashless payment facility to the customer.

Guide dogs/assistance dogs/mobility aids

- SPSVs must carry guide dogs, assistance dogs and mobility aids at no extra charge for passengers who need them.

The customer's responsibilities

Fares

- Customers are required to pay the full metered fare or agreed fare, including booking fees and other permitted extras where appropriate, for each hire (taxi only).
- Customers must agree the fare before the journey begins (hackney and limousine only).
- The driver may request customers to give a deposit, or to show proof that they are able to pay the fare.

Behaviour

- Customer behaviour should be civil and orderly.
- Customers must not damage or dirty the vehicle, consume food or drink in it, or smoke in it.
- A soiling charge is payable by passengers who dirty or damage a taxi to the extent that it has to be taken out of service or will have to be cleaned or repaired.
- Customers should comply with any reasonable request by the driver to leave or not to enter the vehicle.

Safety

- Customers should not ask the driver to carry more passengers than the maximum number shown on the tamper-proof licence disc.
- Customers should not ask the driver to break any road traffic legislation – for example, to exceed the speed limit.

Aspects of good customer service

Delivering good customer service means looking after your customers from the moment they engage you to the end of their journey.

Professional presentation

The appearance and comfort of your vehicle and your own professional presentation are very important in determining the customer's experience of your service.

- Keep your vehicle clean and tidy, and store your own belongings away from the customer seats. You should aim to maintain your vehicle at all times at the standard required for the Initial Suitability Inspection.
- Make sure the customer information is clearly displayed inside the vehicle.
- Keep your vehicle in good repair and repair any faults quickly.

Professional presentation

An SPSV driver's attire and personal presentation is as important as the cleanliness and tidiness of their vehicle in portraying a professional image. Drivers should dress in such a way that their professionalism is immediately apparent to all prospective passengers. Clothing should be smart, clean and comfortable. SPSV drivers may be required to pick up or drop off passengers and luggage in locations such as hotels or office buildings, where more formal dress is expected and items of clothing such as shorts, vest tops or tracksuits are inappropriate.

Things to think about when agreeing the hire

Advance bookings

- Agree method and time of payment.
- Confirm destination and route.
- Identify any special requirements.
- Agree type of vehicle required.
- Agree collection procedure (such as a signal to indicate that you have arrived).
- Plan route.
- Allow sufficient times between bookings.

On-street hires (taxi only)

- Confirm destination and route.
- Ask for advance payment or deposit if required.

First impressions last

Customers will usually appreciate your efforts to deliver a good travelling experience. A well-presented vehicle, a friendly and welcoming tone, and an offer to assist with luggage all help to give a positive image of your service. Older customers or those with young children and pushchairs may particularly appreciate extra help.

You should always wear a seatbelt while driving, and if necessary, you should remind your customers courteously of the requirement to fasten their seatbelt. Remember, for customers under 17 years of age it is the driver's responsibility to ensure that they wear seatbelts or are otherwise suitably restrained – see Chapter 10 for more details.

On the right route

Ask your customer where they would like to go and, when practical, take the shortest route to get there. When there is more than one possible route, check which route your customer would like to take. Tell them the advantages and disadvantages of taking one route rather than another – for example, the route via the bypass might be longer in distance but quicker because it is not as busy as the route through town. If, after you have explained the options, your customer chooses a route that, in your opinion, is not the best, do not disagree with them. Give them an estimate of the time and cost of their journey.

Things to think about when starting the journey

- Confirm destination and route.
- Start taximeter (taxi and wheelchair accessible taxi only).
- Give reasonable assistance with luggage.
- Remind passengers of their responsibility to use seatbelts.
- Give the passenger an estimate of the journey time.

The right sort of communication

Of course you need to talk to your customer about their destination, but they may not feel like talking about anything else. Respect their right to silence. If you do strike up a conversation with them, do not ask personal questions; avoid controversial topics such as religion, politics and

nationality; and do not engage in any conversation that is, or could be construed as, offensive. If you disagree with something a customer says, do not show it; instead, try to change the subject.

How is your driving?

Drive safely and show respect and consideration to other road users. When you pull over to pick up a customer, do so legally and avoid blocking other traffic – for example, buses should always be able to access or depart from bus stops. Driving in busy traffic can be stressful – stay calm and your customers will respect your patience as well as your skills as a professional driver. They will also thank you for a more comfortable and relaxing journey.

Things to think about during the journey

- Drive safely and smoothly – observe and anticipate.
- Respect passengers' wishes for silence.
- Use radios, air conditioning, heater and windows with consideration for passengers' comfort, and respond to any reasonable requests they make.
- If possible, respond to passengers' requests for local information and advice.
- Advise the passenger of any unexpected delays or traffic problems that might affect your estimated journey time.
- Do not use a mobile phone (including a hands-free mobile phone) during the journey.

The end of the journey

When a customer pays the fare, you must give them the complete change due to them, even if it is a relatively insignificant amount. Ensure that you have sufficient change ready at the start of your shift. In a taxi, you must give a receipt printed by the printer attached to the taximeter (not handwritten) to all customers. In a hackney or limousine, you must give the customer a written receipt. Offer customers help getting out of the vehicle or unloading luggage and pushchairs.

Things to think about at the end of the journey

- Give reasonable assistance with luggage.
- Stop the taximeter (taxi and wheelchair accessible taxi only).
- Explain the fare, including any extras or discounts included.
- Offer a receipt (printed in the case of a taxi or wheelchair accessible taxi).
- Offer a business card with your contact details to help secure repeat business.

Remember

- You must maintain the appearance and comfort of your vehicle, and your own presentation must be professional and polite.
- You must give reasonable assistance with loading and unloading luggage.
- You must not invite or allow another person to travel in the vehicle without the consent of the hirer.
- You must drive a customer and their luggage to their chosen destination.
- You must use the customer's preferred route, or the shortest route if the customer has not stated a preference, and drive at a reasonable speed.

The role of dispatch operators

A customer may hire a taxi at a taxi rank or by hailing it on the street, but it is often better for the customer and better for your business to work through a dispatch operator. This gives customers more choice and flexibility, as they can arrange a service when and where it suits them.

Hackneys and limousines must be booked in advance. They may not pick up passengers from a taxi rank or respond to someone hailing them on the street. Many hackneys and limousines are affiliated to a dispatch operator.

Dispatch operators have a key role to play in providing a first-class service to the travelling public. The customer service advantages they offer include:

- A 24-hour, 7-day booking service (for some dispatch operators in urban areas);
- Standards of service required by NTA;
- The ability to identify special requirements in advance;
- The ability to confirm the route to be taken and the precise destination;
- Prioritising of booking for wheelchair accessible vehicles for people with disabilities as far as reasonably practicable; and
- Procedures for dealing effectively with any customer issues that may arise.

Dispatch operators must be licensed by NTA (see Appendix C). Drivers who are considering affiliating to a dispatch operator should make sure that the dispatch operator in question is properly licensed. Information on licensed dispatch operators can be found on NTA's website, www.nationaltransport.ie.

Two-way radios

The Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg) licenses two-way radios. It is illegal to operate a two-way radio without a licence. See www.comreg.ie for details.

Assisting customers with disabilities

Understanding different types of disability

Many people with disabilities are frequent users of SPSVs. There are different types of disability and they can make travelling in SPSVs difficult in different ways. If you know something about the various types of disability, you will be better able to give SPSV users the help they need, when they need it. Types of disabilities include:

- **Physical disabilities** that affect a person's ability to move;
- **Sensory disabilities** that may affect a person's ability to communicate – for example, impaired sight, hearing or speech;
- **Learning disabilities** that affect a person's ability to learn;
- **Mental health** problems that affect a person's behaviour; and
- **Hidden disabilities** that may not be readily apparent – for example, arthritis, diabetes and epilepsy.

These disabilities may make it more difficult for a passenger to get into and out of the vehicle, or may prevent them from understanding what others are saying or from making themselves understood. In each case, a driver who is aware and sensitive can help and make the passenger feel more comfortable.

How to give safe and appropriate help

Customers with disabilities do not necessarily want assistance. The most important thing is your attitude towards them. Show respect to all your customers, but be yourself. If you are relaxed and caring, you will put your customers at ease. Listen carefully to what your customers say and when you do offer help, give them a choice. Treat them as you would wish to be treated yourself and do not patronise. Keep all equipment in your vehicle in good working order. Ask customers if they prefer to use an aid such as a step or ramp. While operating equipment, involve the customer and explain what you are doing as you go along.

The most important thing is to take your time and be patient. Allow time at the beginning and end of a journey to get in and out of your vehicle and discuss the destination. Have a pen and paper available for writing down and confirming destinations with customers – particularly those who are deaf or hard of hearing.

The National Disability Authority has a number of recommendations on how you might help customers with disabilities to have a more comfortable journey – see next page.

Guide dogs and assistance dogs

A guide dog or assistance dog may accompany their owner free of charge. Allow the owner to direct the dog themselves. All guide dogs wear a harness that indicates the type of guide dog they are: guide dogs for the blind have a white and yellow reflective strip (older harnesses may have an orange reflective strip); assistance dogs (for families of children with autism) have a blue harness. Guide dog owners and assistance dog owners will often carry an ID card giving their name and the name of their dog.



Guide dog for the blind



Assistance dog

Recommendations from the National Disability Authority

- Speak clearly; do not shout or raise your voice, unless a customer asks you to do so.
- Determine an exact drop-off point for your customer. If you find it difficult to understand the customer, or you think the customer has difficulty understanding you, write down the destination and ask the customer to confirm it.
- Ask customers if they want help – never presume, as this might come across as patronising. Give them a choice and follow their requests.
- Look at your customers and involve them in your actions. Explain what you are doing as you secure equipment – for example, as you attach a wheelchair restraint.
- Do not take aids such as walking sticks and crutches from customers unless they ask you to. Avoid touching wheelchairs and other aids unless you need to in the course of assisting customers.
- Help customers to fasten their seatbelts if they say they want help.
- Drive carefully and pay particular attention to ramps and bumps; corner, brake and accelerate smoothly and at an appropriate speed.
- If a customer asks you to help them pay the fare, ask them for permission to remove money from a purse or wallet and remove it in full view, explaining exactly what you are doing. Complete the transaction and return their purse or wallet to where you found it.

How to assist customers who are blind or vision impaired

When you pick up a customer who is blind or vision impaired, introduce yourself and use the customer's name, if you know it. If picking up a pre-booked customer, do not sound the horn to let them know you have arrived. Instead, at the time of booking, you could arrange to do something like give them two rings on their telephone when you arrive and then escort them to your vehicle. Look at them and speak to them directly, as you would to anyone else; do not address your comments to a companion or interpreter. Ask them how you can help them and, if they want you to guide them, allow them to take your arm just above your elbow. Make sure they have a firm hold and allow them to set the pace; never grab them or push them forward. Warn the person about obstacles such as steps or them hitting their head off the roof of the car. When you stop guiding a customer, direct them towards a firm landmark such as a bench or wall and tell them where they are; never just leave them standing in the open.

Customers with guide dogs will be well able to handle their dogs and may prefer to have them sitting at their feet, so do not try to take a guide dog from a customer unless the customer asks you to. Guide dogs are working dogs, so do not be tempted to distract them – for example, do not be tempted to pet or feed them.

During the journey drive smoothly. Keep in mind that it may take your passenger longer to find the fare at the end of the journey.

How to assist customers who are deaf or hard of hearing

To get the attention of someone who is deaf or hard of hearing while you are not driving, tap them gently on the arm or shoulder and, if possible, approach them from the front. Do not shout or raise your voice, unless you are asked. Speak clearly and slowly. Customers may prefer to lip-read what you are saying and to use a combination of speaking and gesturing to communicate with you. It is important to keep your face turned towards customers who are lip-reading.

If a customer speaks to you through an interpreter, you should still look at the customer as you talk, but do not be put off if the customer looks at the interpreter and not at you. Finally, if you do not understand, say so.

During a journey avoid stopping suddenly, as this can give customers who are hard of hearing a shock. Switch your internal lights on and off to attract their attention. Point out destinations and point to the taximeter to show the fare.

How to assist customers who have difficulty speaking or communicating

When talking to customers who have difficulty speaking or communicating, give them your undivided attention and speak clearly. Be patient, wait for them to finish what they are saying and tell them if you do not understand.

Expect that people who cannot communicate verbally may still be able to communicate in some other way. For example, they may be carrying a communication aid: look for the instructions which may accompany it and take the time to read them. Ask them how they say yes and no, and how they point to objects. Ask them yes and no questions, one at a time, and wait for them to reply.

How to assist customers with reduced mobility

People with reduced mobility may find it difficult to walk or stand for long periods. They may also have difficulty using steps, bending, stretching or carrying heavy objects. Their reduced mobility may be caused by a hidden disability – for example, a heart condition, breathing difficulties or painful joints due to arthritis or some other medical condition.

Offer customers support by offering your arm for them to hold on to as they enter and leave your vehicle, but never grab them. Your patience is the most important factor in assisting customers with reduced mobility. Drive with consideration and take extra care to slow down at speed bumps and potholes; the impact from jolts may cause some customers pain. If a customer has poor hand coordination, it may take them longer to pay you the fare.

NTA strongly encourages vehicle licence holders and operators of wheelchair accessible vehicles to complete a recognised disability awareness training course. Such training is currently obligatory in some circumstances (such as obtaining a wheelchair accessible vehicle grant, when such grants are available) and may become a general requirement in the future.

How to assist customers travelling in their wheelchairs

Do not presume that a customer with a wheelchair needs assistance, but do ask them if they need help. If you are talking to a customer at the beginning or end of a journey, sit, kneel or bend down at their level. When a customer with a wheelchair is entering your wheelchair accessible vehicle you must:

- Always use the ramp and position it correctly;
- Ask motorised wheelchair users if they want to drive up the ramp themselves;
- Assist customers with manual wheelchairs in going up the ramp;
- Position the wheelchair facing either forwards or rearwards inside the vehicle and never sideways;
- Connect the restraints to the wheelchair and the passenger correctly and comfortably; and
- Ask the customer to apply the wheelchair brakes.

When a customer is leaving your wheelchair accessible vehicle, make sure that you position the ramp correctly and that the wheelchair is correctly positioned on the ramp.

Wheelchair accessible vehicle licence holders

To encourage the wider provision of an accessible service, the licence and renewal fees for wheelchair accessible taxis and wheelchair accessible hackneys are significantly lower than those for other categories of SPSVs. NTA does, however, require holders of wheelchair accessible vehicle licences to provide people with disabilities with the services they need.

It is a condition of wheelchair accessible vehicle licences that the details of such licences are held on NTA's register of wheelchair accessible licences and made available to intending passengers who contact NTA's SPSV Information Line (0818 064 000). For the purposes of this register, NTA requires all wheelchair accessible vehicle licence holders to:

- Provide NTA with contact details for booking their services – either those of the licence holder or those of the licence holder's dispatch operator – and details of their area of operation and times of service provision.
- Record the following details for all bookings: date and time of booking, name and contact details of the person who made the booking, the destination, and the time of arrival at the destination.

Holders of wheelchair accessible vehicle licences must give priority to bookings for people with disabilities. NTA will investigate complaints from people with disabilities who fail to obtain service from a wheelchair accessible vehicle licence holder.

Further information

Information on disability awareness training courses is available from the Irish Wheelchair Association, www.iwa.ie.

Irish sign language courses are available at the Irish Sign Language Academy (ISL). See www.deaf.ie/.

The National Council for the Blind in Ireland (NCBI), www.ncbi.ie, offers disability awareness training under the Services for Organisations link.

See the National Disability Authority's *Towards Best Practice in Provision of Transport Services for People with Disabilities in Ireland*, available from www.nda.ie.

Diversity and equality

Equality legislation and the SPSV operator

As an SPSV operator, you have the right to equal and respectful treatment, and you have the responsibility to treat all your customers equally and with respect. Treating your customers with the highest respect will make journeys more comfortable for customers and for you.

Demonstrating a professional standard of behaviour as an SPSV operator will also give your business a good name and help to generate more business.

The Equal Status Acts 2000–2011, which apply to all providers of goods and services, promote equality and positive measures to encourage equality. They prohibit certain kinds of discrimination across nine grounds:

- Gender
- Marital status
- Family status

- Age
- Disability
- Sexual orientation
- Religion
- Race
- Membership of the Traveller community

This legislation prohibits bullying, harassment (including sexual harassment) and victimisation. It also requires you to do all that is reasonable to accommodate the needs of a person with a disability. This involves providing special treatment or facilities in circumstances where, without these, it would be impossible or unduly difficult for a customer to avail of the service. For further information in relation to your duties in this area please visit the Irish Human Rights & Equality Commission website at www.ihrec.ie.

Your right to equal and fair treatment

You have the right to refuse to carry, or request to leave, any customer who, in your judgement, is behaving in a disorderly or offensive manner. It is also a customer's responsibility to behave in a civil and orderly manner, and to comply with any reasonable request you make to leave your vehicle.

It follows that if someone subjects you to discrimination or harassment, based on any of the nine grounds listed above, you have the right to ask them to leave your vehicle or to refuse to take the hire in the first instance. You can also report racist incidents to your local Garda station.

Your customer's right to equal and fair treatment

You must treat all your customers with respect. Any behaviour that could be interpreted as intimidating, racially prejudiced or harassing risks breaching this principle. Remember that matters of taste are subjective – a remark that you believe to be harmless might be seen by others as offensive. People from different cultural backgrounds or different age groups, for example, might not share your sense of humour. Bear in mind the needs of customers with special needs, including older people and those with disabilities, as they may be less able to assert their rights themselves.

The Irish Human Rights & Equality Commission has a number of recommendations that you should keep in mind when you are providing an SPSV service.

Recommendations from Irish Human Rights & Equality Commission

- Be sensitive as to what you display in your vehicle – pictures, signs and slogans that are racist or capable of inciting hatred are illegal, and those that you find amusing may not be amusing to others, or may be completely inappropriate.
- Treat all passengers respectfully and professionally.
- Do not make remarks or jokes about a customer's or anyone else's appearance, behaviour, preferences, views, race or disability.
- Do not ask your passengers personal questions and do not feel obliged to answer any; they have a right to privacy and so do you.
- Do not behave or speak aggressively.
- Avoid any form of behaviour that could be interpreted as sexual harassment, such as offensive jokes, asking about a customer's private life, or touching a person unnecessarily.

Operating an SPSV in a diverse Ireland

In the course of your work as an SPSV operator, you will meet people who now live and work in Ireland and who come from a wide variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Similarly, you might be one of the first people that a newly arrived visitor from another country meets, or you yourself might have recently come from another country. In every case, best practice includes giving excellent service to customers from all backgrounds, cultures and countries.

Operating an SPSV in a diverse Ireland

Communicating with your customers

Customers whose first language is not English may get frustrated if they cannot express what they want to say or tell you clearly where they want to go.

Be patient. It will help customers with little knowledge of English to understand if you speak slowly and clearly, using simple, short sentences, pausing after each sentence. Do not shout or speak in an exaggerated tone, as this will not make it any easier for customers to understand you.

Watch your language

It is best to avoid using very colloquial language. Expressions such as 'how's the craic?' or 'we could cut through the Park' may not be easily understood by someone from outside Ireland and may cause confusion.

Time to listen

If your customer is not very proficient in English, listen to them carefully and avoid interrupting them unless you need to clarify something. Summarise what they have said to show you understand. Do not pretend to understand if you do not – it is much better to say that you do not understand and ask them to repeat what they said. Your main priority is to get your customer to the correct destination.

Make a note

If you are not sure you have understood the destination the customer wants to go to, write it down or use diagrams or maps to confirm the destination. It might also be helpful to keep a few illustrated tourist maps in the vehicle.

Further information

For further information about equality legislation, see the Irish Human Rights & Equality Commission's website at www.ihrec.ie.

NTA is working with the Immigrant Council of Ireland to help eradicate racism. The Immigrant Council of Ireland provides a range of supports to people who have experienced or witnessed racism. See www.immigrantcouncil.ie.

Dealing with complaints

Most customers are happy with the journeys they take in taxis, hackneys and limousines. On the rare occasions when they are not happy with the standard of an SPSV service or vehicle, or if they feel they were overcharged or unreasonably refused service, they can make a complaint.

NTA handles complaints that relate to:

- The condition, roadworthiness and cleanliness of a vehicle;
- The conduct, behaviour and identification of a driver;
- Overcharging or other matters relating to fares, including the failure to issue a receipt;
- Matters relating to the hiring and booking of an SPSV; and
- Identification and the general appearance of an SPSV, including logos, stickers and advertisements on the vehicle.

Other complaints are handled by the appropriate agencies: for example, An Garda Síochána handles breaches of general road legislation and criminal matters; and the Office of Tobacco Control handles breaches of the ban on smoking in workplaces.

Customers can check driver and vehicle licence details using the Driver Check app, which is available for free download from the Apple and Android App Stores. Customers who wish to complain can do so online at <https://www.transportforireland.ie/support/taxi-compliments-complaints/>.

If a service was booked through a dispatch operator, the customer should make the complaint in the first instance to the dispatch operator.

It is essential that a person complaining identifies a driver or vehicle, by a reference to the name, SPSV driver licence number, vehicle licence number or vehicle registration number. NTA will investigate the complaint and in almost all cases will contact the driver. Based on the evidence, NTA will decide whether to:

- Take no further action;
- Provide advice to the driver;
- Issue a reprimand, caution or formal warning; or
- Proceed to prosecution.

You should keep a detailed record of any incident that may result in a formal complaint; you will then be able to refer to this record later, if you are questioned about an incident.

If NTA receives three or more complaints relating to a driver's knowledge of the area in which he/she is operating, NTA may require the driver to sit and pass the relevant Area Knowledge Test prior to renewing the licence,

Further information

NTA's consumer website, www.transportforireland.ie, has information on how to make a complaint regarding SPSV services.

Dealing with difficult customers

While most of your customers will be polite and friendly, at some stage you will probably have to deal with difficult customers. Some customers may be impatient, rude, demanding or simply

indecisive. Remember that you can only control your own behaviour, although your own behaviour could influence someone else's. Here are a few tips:

- **Interact:** greet your customers at the start of a journey and be friendly towards them. It is more difficult for them to be unpleasant to you if you are friendly towards them.
- **Stay calm and controlled:** avoid disagreeing with or raising your voice to customers. If you stay calm and speak clearly, you may also encourage your customer to remain calm.
- **Listen:** let unhappy customers speak, and listen carefully. Show them you are listening and let them see that you understand the source of their anger or impatience. Try to resolve any issue in an amicable manner.
- **Refer the matter:** if all else fails, tell unsatisfied customers they are entitled to make a complaint to NTA and give them the number of the SPSV Information Line (0818 064 000). Give them your driver and vehicle licence number.

If customers ask you to carry more passengers than the maximum number permitted in your vehicle (as shown on the vehicle's tamper-proof licence discs), explain that it is against the law for you to do so. Suggest that they take two SPSVs. If they repeat the request, refuse to take the passengers and safely drive away. Similarly, drive away or ask customers to leave your vehicle if they insist on asking you to break other regulations – for example, to exceed speed limits or to park illegally.

9. Your SPSV business

This chapter deals with some of the things you need to know about when you are operating an SPSV business.

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Working in the SPSV industry

There are many ways to work in the SPSV industry:

- **As a driver:** you can obtain an SPSV driver licence and drive a licensed SPSV that you own yourself or that is owned by someone else. (You must inform NTA as to which vehicle you are driving – see Chapter 5.) If you already hold a local area hackney (vehicle) licence, you can obtain a local area hackney driver licence and offer hackney services only in the area for which it is licensed.
- **As a vehicle owner:** you can obtain a vehicle licence and either drive the vehicle yourself (if you hold an SPSV driver licence) or allow it to be driven by another licensed SPSV driver. The vehicle licence specifies whether the vehicle can be operated as a taxi, a wheelchair accessible taxi, a hackney, a wheelchair accessible hackney, a local area hackney or a limousine. (If you rent out the vehicle, you must inform NTA – see Chapter 5.)
- **As a dispatch operator:** you can obtain an SPSV dispatch operator licence (see Appendix C) and can then take bookings for SPSV services (or put in place a system for taking bookings) and arrange for those services to be delivered by drivers with whom you have an agreement.
- **A mix of the above:** with the appropriate licences, you may fill more than one of the above roles.

Each of these options has advantages and disadvantages, different costs and different earning potential. It is important that you research the options and make choices according to what suits you best and will give you a satisfactory return for your investment and effort. Careful planning in the early stages will also help to avoid problems in the future.

Sole trader business model

This chapter focuses mainly on the business issues, opportunities and problems faced by an SPSV owner/driver established as a sole trader – the business model chosen by the majority of operators in the industry. However, many of the issues raised apply equally to other business models. Some other sources of useful information are listed on page 100.

While the SPSV Driver Entry Test may include some questions relating to running a business, NTA's remit does not include giving business advice to individuals. Independent experts will be able to give you the best advice. Talk to an accountant or someone else suitably qualified to guide you through the process of setting up and managing your own business

NTA's role in SPSV business operations

NTA is involved in a number of key activities that may directly impact your business:

- Setting standards for the provision of SPSV services, including vehicles;
- Licensing vehicles for use as SPSVs;
- Administering SPSV driver licences (after An Garda Síochána have issued them);
- Licensing dispatch operators;
- Providing SPSV Driver Skills Development programmes;
- Monitoring compliance with SPSV legislation;
- Investigating complaints; and
- Prosecuting breaches of SPSV legislation.

In order to obtain or renew any vehicle, SPSV driver or dispatch operator licence, you must prove that your tax affairs are up to date. NTA's interest in your SPSV business, however, is not

confined to tax compliance. NTA encourages all SPSV operators to conduct their business affairs efficiently and professionally, as this will help them to build sustainable businesses that will be better able to serve the travelling public.

Planning to become an SPSV operator

Before you decide to enter the SPSV industry, there are some important issues you need to consider. These issues also arise for existing operators who are considering a change or expansion of their activities. You must carefully weigh the advantages and disadvantages of working in the industry. Be realistic at this stage: get as much information and advice as you can, and decide whether or not setting up in the SPSV industry is right for you. If you are well informed and well prepared, you will have a far better chance of creating and running a successful business. Preparation is also important if you are applying for a bank loan or credit facilities – your bank manager will need to know that you have thought carefully about the decision, and have built a comprehensive and realistic business plan.

You need to decide what type of SPSV you want to operate – taxi, wheelchair accessible taxi, hackney, wheelchair accessible hackney, local area hackney or limousine. All of these modes of transport can operate 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

From time to time NTA may temporarily limit the issuing of new licences to one or more categories of SPSV, in order to improve the services available to the public. Details of any such measure are published on NTA's website and will be made available to all applicants through the licensing process. At the time of publication of this Manual, new applications for vehicle licences are being accepted only for wheelchair accessible taxis, wheelchair accessible hackneys, local area hackneys and limousines.

Have you considered the following?

Overall plan

- What is your overall plan for your business?
- How do you want it to develop?

Market

- Have you identified a market for your SPSV business?
- How will you promote your services?

Vehicle

- What type of vehicle do you need and how much will it cost?
- Remember it may be more expensive to run and maintain an SPSV than a private vehicle (See Chapter 3 for requirements.)

Operating costs versus profit

- Have you calculated your expected running costs and made an estimate of your income?
- Will you be able to generate sufficient surplus to pay yourself enough to live on?

Finance

- What finance do you have?
- Can you raise enough to start the business?

Creating a business plan

Writing a business plan is a useful way of clarifying your reasons for getting into the SPSV business, and the expectations you have for the business. It will also help you to plan your activities and finances, and to evaluate your performance. It will almost certainly be required by your bank manager if you are applying for a loan or overdraft facilities. Writing a business plan can be as simple as addressing the issues raised in the table below.

Business plan
About me <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Who you are, your background, your work experience.
Type of SPSV operation <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Taxi, hackney or limousine? Local area hackney? Standard or wheelchair accessible vehicle? Vehicle and/or driver or dispatch operator?
Who are my customers? <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Your target customers – for example, city centre shoppers and workers, customers requiring accessible services, travellers at transport terminals, corporate customers and late night revellers.
What makes me stand out from other SPSV operators? <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Distinguishing selling points, such as luxury car, eight-seater car, wheelchair accessible vehicle, discounts for multiple bookings.
Fares <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ How many customers you expect to have during each shift, how many shifts, how much customers will pay you on average for each journey.
Cost of each fare <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Average cost to you of each journey, taking into account fuel, insurance, tax, vehicle maintenance and other expenses.
Start-up finance <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ How much finance you will need to start up your business.
Operating costs versus income <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ How your SPSV business will be financially viable.

Identifying your market

Before you start your business, it is important to do some market research. Find out as much as you can about the demand for the service you are thinking of offering in the area in which you are thinking of operating, and the current supply of services in that area.

This involves finding out who your customers are likely to be, when and where you are likely to find them, and what you can do to attract them and build up repeat custom. Are there many hotels, restaurants, shopping centres, transport terminals, or large businesses in the area? If so, you may be able to secure a good deal of business from these sources. However, it is not enough simply to identify the opportunities – you should try to realistically determine your

likelihood of actually securing business from these sources. That means going to places where you think you might find customers, at different times of the day and night. Talk to potential customers and people who work with or near potential customers – for example, business managers. Find out what their needs are, how those needs are currently being met, and what type of service you could offer that would be attractive to them.

You should also try to find out as much as you can about the type and extent of competition you will face. Is your area already well served with SPSVs and other forms of public transport? If so, it will be more difficult for you to find customers. Think about what you can do to encourage customers to choose your service rather than another SPSV provider or another mode of transport.

Consider providing a fully accessible service in the area you propose to operate. Look up your local directory and look for hospital listings, medical centres or nursing homes and see if there is any contract work available.

If you already have your SPSV driver licence, you might consider renting a licensed vehicle for a short while to build your understanding of the demand for services and to identify the most profitable times of operation (See Chapter 5).

Doing your research

Consider the following questions when carrying out your research:

- In what area would you like to operate your business?
- When is the peak time for business in the area in which you propose to operate?
- What hours would you propose to work?
- Would you propose to operate your vehicle 24 hours a day (through renting or sharing your vehicle with another licensed driver)? If so, how would you organise additional drivers?
- What contract work may be available in the area, and how could you secure contract work?
- Are there dispatch operators in the area and what are their commercial arrangements? Is there an online booking service that operates in your area?
- Should you consider operating the business in partnership with another person?
- How could you promote your business in the area?

Financial planning

To see whether the business you are considering is viable, develop a set of financial projections that is as comprehensive and as precise as possible. This is not as complicated as it sounds. You should start with a list of the costs you are likely to incur, and then figure out when they are likely to arise. Start by grouping them by the frequency with which you think they will occur. NTA generally conducts a review of the Taxi Cost Index (the underlying basis for the National Maximum Taxi Fare) every two years: this contains helpful cost and operational information that can form the basis of your cost projections.

Once you have this projection of expenditure, you can work out how much you need to make on a monthly or weekly basis to cover the cost of operating the business. You will also be better able to predict when the peaks in your expenditure are likely to occur, and determine your need for overdraft or loan facilities to deal with them.

Projected expenditure for typical SPSV operator

Start-up costs

- Purchase of vehicle (see Chapters 3 and 4 for conditions)
- Initial vehicle licence fee
- Initial Suitability Inspection fee
- Purchase of roof sign, branding, taximeter, printer and cashless payment facility (taxi only)
- Calibration and verification of taximeter (taxi only)
- Fee for SPSV Driver Entry Test
- SPSV driver licence fee
- Safety equipment

Frequent

- Fuel
- Cleaning/valeting
- Servicing
- Advertising and promotion (advertising in local papers/directories, business cards, flyers etc.)
- Loan repayments
- Radio rental/affiliation to dispatch operator

Occasional

- SPSV equipment – pen and paper, receipt rolls, replacement safety equipment (including fire extinguisher, first-aid kit, reflective vest and advance-warning triangle)
- Spare parts/replacement tyres for vehicle
- Recalibration and re-verification of taximeter (whenever National Maximum Taxi Fare changes or vehicle is changed)

Every year

- Licence Renewal Assessment fee
- NCT test
- Insurance (must cover use of the vehicle as an SPSV). Some insurance companies facilitate payment over ten or twelve months
- Road tax (can be paid half-yearly or quarterly)
- Airport permit charges (if applicable)

Every five years

- SPSV driver licence renewal fee

Infrequent

- Decide how often your vehicle will need to be replaced. This will depend largely on the age, mileage and condition of the car. Remember that age and size restrictions apply – see Chapters 3 and 4 and Appendix A.

Unpredictable

- Repairs – you need to allow a contingency amount to cater for the unexpected.

Selecting the right business model

One of the most important decisions you must make when starting a new SPSV business or expanding an existing one is to choose whether to operate as a **sole trader** or to form a **private limited company**. Each of these business models has benefits and drawbacks, and you should seek independent expert advice before deciding on which business model to use.

Building up and promoting your business

Whatever type of SPSV business you decide to set up – vehicle operator, driver or dispatch operator – you will need to think carefully about how you design and promote your business – a process usually referred to as marketing. While market research is important in planning to set up as an SPSV operator, as mentioned above, marketing should continue after you are up and running.

When you are running a business, it is easy just to concentrate on the day-to-day activities. However, it is also important to spend time on activities that will keep your business going in the long term and secure your future. Depending on what part of the country you operate in and what times of day you operate, you might find that you have enough work to achieve your business aims. In other circumstances, however, you might need to think of ways of advertising and promoting your business, or of making the service you offer more attractive to customers.

Reviewing the market

Review the market on an ongoing basis, gather information about where and how to attract customers to your service, and assess where the best opportunities are. It is your business and you know it better than anyone else: your daily and weekly records of fares and expenses are a good source of basic information about where the current business opportunities are in your area, and may help you to identify further opportunities. Create a plan of action for breaking into new market areas.

Here are some questions to consider when reviewing your market:

- What are your busiest areas and times? Are there any opportunities you can build on?
- What are the specific requirements or expectations of the different types of potential customers? Consider the entire range of customer types, from late night club- and party-goers to business people.
- Ask your existing and potential customers what they are looking for in an SPSV service provider. What are they currently happy with? What are they unhappy with or what do they feel is currently missing?
- Ask customers what makes them decide between one SPSV service and another.
- Who are your competitors and how well are they meeting their customers' needs? Can you provide a better service or fill a gap in service?

Getting more business from existing customers

Think about how you can build up a list of customers who will choose you first when they want an SPSV. If you always look after their needs and never let them down, they will be less likely to seek an alternative supplier. This is especially true for wheelchair accessible services.

For taxi drivers, even customers picked up on the street can be turned into regular repeat customers. Encourage them to think of you any time they need a taxi, by meeting and exceeding their expectations. Arranging to collect them from wherever you dropped them off is

one of the first steps in building up a regular customer list. Follow this up by encouraging them to book you when they need to be collected from home or work, and remember always to give them a business card, or at least ensure that your contact details are printed on your receipts.

Remind passengers that the taxi fare as calculated on the taximeter is for the journey and, except for the small additional passenger charge, is independent of the number travelling. For a group of, say, four passengers travelling together in a taxi, the fare may be less per person than the equivalent bus or train fare.

Ask existing customers to mention you to their friends and colleagues if they are satisfied with your service. This helps to spread the word about your business and grow your potential customer base.

Data protection

If you collect personal information, such as customer contact details, you must not share it with anybody else and you must use it only for the purpose for which it was provided. The collection and storage of personal information is regulated by the Data Protection Act 2018. For more information, see the Data Protection Commissioner's website, www.dataprotection.ie.

Looking for new customers

Ask yourself how you decided to buy something you have come to depend on – for example, your mobile phone. Was it simply the phone itself? Was it the price you paid? Was it because the phone company was easy to find? Was it their advertising, or their reputation for reliability?

You will most likely find that the deciding factor was what others told you about the phone – that is, 'word of mouth'. Word of mouth is considered to be the most powerful and effective way for customers to learn about products and services. Imagine the sort of SPSV service that would make such an impression on you that you would tell all your friends about it. Then concentrate on delivering that service to your customers.

If you drive a taxi, it may be worthwhile planning your shift around a route that takes in local places that are likely to be busy at pre-determined times. Most local newspapers and websites list theatre times, concert details and local sports events and, with a little planning, it may be possible to be in the right place at the right time. Any major landmarks or establishments in your area, such as tourist attractions, airports and hospitals, can also be a major factor in defining who your customer base will consist of. Bringing people to and from these places is likely to be a major source of business for you. If you operate in a residential area, many of your customers will be local residents with whom you can build up a relationship with and offer your services to again and again.

Customers now expect the service to come to them – many customers will favour using taxis that they can book online or through an app rather than going to a taxi rank. However, some will still prefer using a local taxi business with whom they can call to book a transport service. Identifying who your customer base will primarily consist of can help you in defining what methods you will use to find clientele.

Standing out from the competition

Being available when customers need you is a very important part of any SPSV service. An SPSV service should also offer:

- Value for money;
- A comfortable journey for all passengers;
- Safe and legal driving;
- A clean, properly serviced and valeted vehicle;
- Door-to-door delivery to wherever customers want to go;
- Any assistance that customers may need with luggage and entering or leaving the vehicle; and
- Polite and courteous service.

All of these features combine to give customers a very good reason to call you again. Giving them a receipt or business card with your contact details will make it easier for them to call you than to look for another SPSV in the phone book or on the internet.

However, to become and remain a successful business you need to go one step further and consider how you can give your customers a compelling reason to call you rather than another SPSV operator. What can you do to make a customer's journey more enjoyable, more comfortable, better value, safer, more efficient or even more entertaining? To begin with, choose just one of these features and concentrate on applying it to your business.

You may also consider offering additional services that many other taxis may not. For example, providing baby seats to those travelling with young children, pet-friendly services or sustainable travel options by using a zero-emissions vehicle.

Advertising and promotion

Advertising and promotion are important to the success of your business and can help you to stand out in a busy marketplace. Look at the advertising and promotion that others are doing, assess how effective they are and where you might improve on what they are doing.

The type of SPSV you choose to operate will determine to a large degree how you advertise and promote your business. Here are a few typical ways to advertise and promote a business:

- Advertising in newspapers, in directories (for example, the *Golden Pages*), in shops, on notice boards, on local radio stations;
- Having an online presence in the form of a business website and social media accounts so that a wider audience can be reached. In this way you can showcase the services you provide, your rates and contact information. This can also open another channel of communication with potential customers who have specific queries;
- Partnership with local businesses, for example, with hotels who can recommend your services to their customers that may inquire about services like airport pickup and drop-off;
- Putting your contact details on your receipt to encourage repeat business;
- Giving out business cards;
- Implementing strategies to reach potential customers online such as search engine optimization (SEO), email marketing and pay-per-click advertising;
- Distributing flyers and leaflets to householders, businesses and wherever your customers are, including targeted promotion for specific events such as debts, weddings, etc.;
- Advertising in publications targeted at commercial and public sector organisations;

- Arranging for articles or features about you or your service to be printed in appropriate papers or magazines;
- Paying attention to any online reviews that can be easily searched by prospective customers and ensuring your business maintains a good reputation;
- Supporting and sponsoring local events and charities;
- If you have a taxi, advertising on your vehicle (hackneys and limousines are not permitted to advertise in this way). This is not only a way of promoting your own business, but may also be a way of generating additional revenue from other businesses;
- Joining a local business network; and
- Telling everyone you know about your business and asking them to support you and to pass your name on to others.

A key point is that one of your best forms of advertising is a satisfied customer who will advertise and promote your business by word of mouth, at no cost to you.

Note that the use of the word 'taxi' in advertising is restricted by law specifically to the SPSV categories of taxi and wheelchair accessible taxi.

Advertising and promotional materials featuring unlicensed vehicles are not permitted

Running your own business

Most people who work in the SPSV industry are self-employed. This gives them a certain freedom to work as much or as little as they would like, and to work hours of their own choosing. It also imposes certain legal responsibilities on them regarding how they conduct their business.

Being your own boss is a challenge that requires discipline and determination. However, running your own business gives you greater control over your working life. Ultimately, it can be a rewarding and fulfilling experience

Understanding some of the basics of running a small business, as outlined below and on the next few pages, will help you to earn more money and help you enjoy the freedom of being your own boss.

1. Keep good business records

Everyone who is in business needs to keep records, particularly records of income and expenditure. You will need good records in order to help you to manage your business, to make accurate tax returns, and to deal with NTA's licensing and other requirements. A professional accountant can advise you on what to record and what is required by law for taxation purposes.

As the SPSV business is largely cash-based, keeping the required records is relatively simple:

- Keep a manual or electronic diary to record daily and weekly totals of all the fares you receive; and
- Keep a record of everything you spend that relates to your business: fuel, vehicle maintenance and accessories will be the major items here. Keep all the receipts – the simplest thing to do is to staple the receipts to the relevant page in your diary.

Keep a diary

As a first step towards keeping good records, use a simple diary to note down income and expenditure. Do it every day – otherwise you will forget. Divide the page in two: on the left, note all your fares; and on the right, note all your expenses, particularly fuel. See the diary example below.

<i>25 July 20xx</i>	
<i>Fares</i>	<i>Expenses (receipts attached)</i>
<i>7.20 Drumcondra - Airport €19</i>	<i>Diesel, Raheny €40</i>
<i>8.00 Clonshaugh - Wilton Place €18</i>	<i>Puncture repair, Ringsend €10</i>
<i>9.00 Green - Lansdowne €7</i>	<i>Car wash Killester €6</i>
<i>9.40 RDS - IFSC €12</i>	
<i>10.00 Connolly Stn - Phibsboro €8</i>	
<i>10.30 Mater - Killester €12</i>	
<i>11.50 Killester - Malahide €19</i>	
<i>12.45 Malahide - Connolly €28</i>	
<i>13.00 Connolly - Heuston €9</i>	

An example of a daily record

Mobile phone apps and other technological devices are also available that can provide useful records of your activity – some simply record where you were and when; others provide more detailed logs of your journeys. Taxi drivers should also note that their taximeter may be able to maintain detailed records of their activity.

As well as helping to keep you tax-compliant, good records can help you plan your work – for example, you can identify the locations and times of day that are best for business. Good records are very useful when you are doing longer-term financial planning. Also, if you are applying for a bank loan, the bank will almost certainly want to see your records. The use of accounting software or apps can help you easily manage your finances and generate financial reports.

A diary is also a useful way of recording incidents that may subsequently come under investigation by An Garda Síochána or by NTA. A diary entry written at the time of the incident is a far more reliable record of the event than a verbal account based on your memory – and carries more weight as evidence in court.

You should also note in your diary reminders of important dates relating to your licences, because without valid licences, you are not allowed to operate. In particular, note the following:

- The renewal date for your SPSV driver licence. You should apply to have it renewed at least six weeks before the expiry date.
- The expiry date of your vehicle licence. You can start the renewal process up to 60 days before the vehicle licence expires.
- The renewal date of your insurance policy. While your insurance company or broker will almost certainly send you a reminder, it is a criminal offence to drive an uninsured vehicle.

- The expiry date of your motor tax disc – it is unlawful to drive an untaxed vehicle.
- The expiry date of your standard driving licence.
- The expiry date of your NCT test certificate.

Remember that keeping these things up to date involves other people and organisations, and can sometimes be delayed. If you start the process in good time, you reduce the risk of your licences becoming invalid, with consequent loss of earnings and possible penalty charges. For example, it can take 48 hours for Revenue or NCT information to update the system that enables NTA to verify your tax or NCT status; and when you change your vehicle or other details on an insurance policy, it can be a week before you receive the new documents.

2. Remain tax compliant

As a self-employed person, you must register for tax with the Revenue Commissioners and you are obliged to pay any tax reckonable on your income every year by 31 October. You are required to provide the Revenue Commissioners with details of all your income, from whatever source. NTA requires you have a satisfactory tax clearance status throughout the period of your licence, and to renew your SPSV driver licence or vehicle licence. NTA periodically shares information with the Revenue Commissioners, the Department of Social Protection and other relevant agencies in relation to its law enforcement function.

How to register for tax

When you start in business, you must register for tax by filling in the appropriate registration form. To register you must have a Personal Public Service Number (PPSN). If you are an Irish national you probably already have one; otherwise you can obtain one by registering with the Department of Social Protection.

How to pay income tax

As a self-employed sole trader, you are required to pay income tax through the self-assessment system. This involves submitting a return of your income each year (the amount by which your sales income has exceeded your costs), and paying the appropriate taxes on it. While you are not required to submit annual accounts to the Revenue, you are required to keep records of all income and payments, and you must include extracts from your accounts with your tax returns. Your accounts are subject to random inspection by the authorities for up to six years after filing.

Under the Revenue's Pay-and-File system, you must file a tax return (online or by post) and pay tax by 31 October each year. By this date you must:

- File your tax return for the previous year;
- Pay any balance of tax due for the previous year; and
- Pay your estimated tax (preliminary tax) for the current year. To avoid interest charges, the amount paid as preliminary tax must be 90% or more of your final liability for the current year or 100% of your final liability for the previous year.

Your tax liabilities (including preliminary tax liabilities) include income tax, self-employed PRSI (Pay Related Social Insurance) and Universal Social Charge, each of which is calculated as a percentage of your income.

VAT

Passenger transport services are exempt from standard VAT rules. As an SPSV operator you provide a VAT-exempt service. This means that you do not charge VAT on the service you provide. However, it also means that you are not entitled to reclaim VAT on any taxable business purchases (for example your taximeter or roof sign).

Motor tax

A vehicle that is licensed as an SPSV and is used for purposes incidental to SPSV use and for no other purpose is eligible for a reduced rate of motor tax. A vehicle that is licensed as an SPSV but is not used solely for that purpose is required to pay the full rate of motor tax. For further information, contact your local motor tax office.

3. Separate personal from business

It is good practice to operate separate bank accounts for your business dealings and your personal finances. Use the business account to pay business-related expenses, and lodge all business income to it. When you need money for personal reasons, you should transfer money from the business account into your personal account. This will make it much easier to make tax returns and to analyse the performance of your business.

4. Seek professional financial advice

Although there is no requirement to engage a professional accountant, doing so will make your life a lot easier when it comes to tax compliance and other aspects of financial management. Accountants understand how the tax system works. They know what your entitlements are in relation to tax credits and reliefs; and they sometimes even save you more in tax than they charge you. So it makes good business and financial sense to consider using an accountant. Remember, however, that accountants can only work with the material that you give them. The better your records are, the easier your accountant's job will be when it comes to preparing tax returns and giving you advice.

While Revenue may not require audited accounts, many lending institutions do, and not having formally and professionally audited accounts could reduce your chances of obtaining finance in the future.

5. Plan for financial security

As the SPSV industry is predominantly a cash business, you need to plan very carefully what to do with the money you take in fares. It is important to remember that not all the money you earn is profit. You have a responsibility to pay income tax and will need to set money aside if you are repaying a loan. You will also need to consider finances to cover other known expenses.

6. Consider affiliating with a dispatch operator

If you are considering affiliating with a dispatch operator, you should make sure you fully understand how they operate and the terms of their agreements with drivers – some dispatch operators just charge a flat fee for radio rental; others impose a charge for each job allocated. Some use vehicle tracking technology that enables them to provide an efficient service that benefits both customers and drivers. There are also a number of Internet and mobile phone app-based services for booking taxis and hackneys, and it may be useful to examine their terms and conditions and consider registering with one of them.

Further information

Revenue's website, www.revenue.ie, has information about the tax system for businesses and a downloadable guide, *Starting a Business*. The various forms that you need to register your business for tax are also downloadable from there.

The Department of Social Protection has a guide to setting up a business, *Toil and Trouble*, downloadable from their website at www.welfare.ie.

The Local Enterprise Offices offer information, advice and training to new and existing businesses. See www.localenterprise.ie.

The Department of Jobs, Enterprise & Innovation has a useful website with links to sites offering information about setting and up running a business on www.djei.ie/enterprise/smes/syob.htm.

The Companies Registration Office can provide details on the registration of companies and company names, and the requirements for filing accounts. See www.cro.ie.

The Irish Small and Medium Enterprises Association (ISME) is a membership-based organisation supporting and representing small businesses. Its website has a range of information and services. See www.isme.ie.

The Small Firms Association (SFA) is another membership-based organisation that offers advice and support for small businesses. Further information at www.sfa.ie.

Many banks also produce useful guides to setting up a business.

Additional considerations for dispatch operators

If you intend to set up as a dispatch operator, you will need to obtain a licence (see Appendix C). You will then need accommodation to use as an office and this may involve extra expense. You will need to furnish the office and equip it with telephone systems and driver communication equipment such as two-way radio. There are many other factors to be taken into consideration, relating to finance and accounting, staff employment, legal liability, insurance, health and safety. These are beyond the scope of this Manual, and you should seek professional advice before going ahead.

10. Staying safe

This chapter deals with the steps you can take to make your working life safer, more secure, and compliant with current health and safety legislation.

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NTA's role in safety

In pursuing its objective of developing a professional and safe SPSV service, NTA clearly defines the rights and responsibilities of both SPSV operators and customers. Under SPSV Regulations, a driver may refuse to carry a disorderly or abusive passenger, or one who is unwilling or unable to pay the fare. On safety grounds, drivers may also decline to lift or transport items that are too bulky, too heavy or otherwise unsafe.

Although NTA does not enforce regulations that relate to road safety or smoking in the workplace, it is important for you to be aware of these regulations and to understand the benefits of complying with them, as they directly affect your working life.

In addition to NTA, there are a number of organisations responsible for setting and enforcing the safety and security regulations that apply to you as an SPSV operator.

Organisation	Area of responsibility	Further Information
An Garda Síochána	Vehicle safety regulations (including the use of mobile phones while driving) Road and traffic legislation Criminal incidents: theft, robbery and assault	Local Garda stations nationwide www.garda.ie
Road Safety Authority	Vehicle standards regulations (other than those issued by NTA) Driving standards	www.rsa.ie www.rulesoftheroad.ie
Health and Safety Authority	Enforcement of the Safety, Health & Welfare at Work Act 2005 and associated legislation	www.hsa.ie
Health Service Executive	Compliance with smoke-free workplace legislation	www.hse.ie

Operating in accordance with the legislation and the associated regulations has benefits both for your customers and for you. Maintaining an excellent standard of health and safety is a crucial factor in offering a first-class professional service. A safer journey means a better customer experience, and that increases your chance of repeat business and more income.

Looking after your own safety and that of your customers

Avoiding driver fatigue

According to the Road Safety Authority, driver fatigue is a contributory factor in as many as one in five collisions. An over-tired driver is not a good driver, and you should plan your shifts carefully to make sure you get enough sleep and avoid fatigue. Whenever you have a short break, you should take a quick rest, get some fresh air or stretch your legs.

When you apply for an SPSV driver licence, you give a formal undertaking that you will not drive or use an SPSV for more than 11 hours on any three consecutive days.

This means that if, for example, you drive or use an SPSV for more than 11 hours on Monday and again on Tuesday, you may not do so again on Wednesday (and you must not have done so on the previous Sunday). You may drive on the Wednesday, but it must be for less than 11 hours.

Safer driving

Always drive with care and consideration for fellow road users. In particular, watch out for vulnerable road users such as pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists. As an SPSV driver, you are on the road much more than the average road user, you are probably more experienced than most, and you see all sorts of road behaviour, both good and bad. Developing good driving habits will pay, in terms of your own safety and that of your passengers and other road users, in terms of your personal health and well-being, and in terms of your running and repair costs.

The Road Safety Authority points out that aggressive driving is dangerous, stressful and expensive. You should avoid rapid acceleration and sudden braking, except where necessary. Do not use the horn to express frustration or annoyance. Observe the legal speed limits, and do not drive too close to the vehicle in front. And above all, do not respond to aggressive driving by other drivers.

Remember that you are a professional driver. Your customers place their safety in your hands, and they have a right to expect a safe and comfortable journey. If they get that, they are more likely to express their appreciation and to give you repeat business.

Penalty points can be awarded for poor driving – and these are much more significant for an SPSV driver than for an ordinary road user. Your insurance premium is likely to increase, and if you lose your licence, you lose your livelihood.

You might consider taking an advanced driver training programme. These are offered by a number of driving schools. Apart from making your work safer and more secure, it may qualify you for a reduction in your insurance premium. Ask your insurance company or broker for details.

Remember

You must take all reasonable precautions to ensure the safety of customers while they are in your vehicle, and while they are getting into and out of it. Make sure that you let passengers out of the vehicle only where it is safe to do so, and warn them of any potential hazards. Similarly, be aware of any danger posed to other road users (including pedestrians and cyclists) by alighting passengers.

Mobile phones

Holding a mobile phone while driving is an offence. It is unsafe because it prevents you from concentrating fully on your driving. For that reason, it is illegal when you are driving to hold a mobile phone in your hand or to support it with another part of your body (for example between your head and shoulder). You are permitted, however, to make emergency calls to 999 or 112.

Drivers charged with reading or sending a text message or email while driving face a compulsory court appearance and may be fined up to €1,000 for a first offence, and up to €2,000 and/or three months in prison for a third or subsequent offence within a twelve month

period. This applies even if the phone is held in a cradle in the car. There is no option to take the lesser punishment of penalty points on this offence.

Smartphone apps used by booking services to notify a driver that a fare is waiting, allow a driver to accept a fare by pushing a button, and display details of the pick-up location and a map of how to get there are not currently impacted by these regulations.

Using a hands-free kit with your phone is not illegal, but it is distracting and puts you, your passengers and other road users at risk. You could be prosecuted for dangerous driving, careless driving or driving without due care and attention. You are strongly advised not to use your phone while driving, even if it is equipped with a hands-free system. If you need to use the phone, stop the vehicle where it is safe and legal to do so and then answer or make the call, and read or send text messages.

The Road Safety Authority recommends the following guidelines while driving:

- **Never** attempt to write notes.
- **Never** try to look up a number on your phone.
- **Never** engage in long, complicated, emotional or stressful conversations.

While the use of two-way radios is not explicitly prohibited, it can be distracting or dangerous, and could leave you open to prosecution.

Smoking

A vehicle that is taxed as an SPSV is legally considered to be a place of work and therefore, under the Public Health (Tobacco) (Amendment) Act 2004, smoking is prohibited in it at all times. This means that neither you nor your passengers may smoke in the vehicle, whether or not it is in operation as an SPSV at the time. The same Act requires that a sign must be displayed in your SPSV stating that smoking is not permitted in the vehicle. It is the owner and/or person in charge of the SPSV who is responsible for ensuring compliance.

If the vehicle is not taxed as an SPSV, the prohibition on smoking applies while the vehicle is in operation as an SPSV, whether or not there are passengers in it.

The environmental health officers of the Health Service Executive are authorised officers with responsibility for enforcing the legislation. They will prosecute drivers and passengers who do not comply.

You have the right to refuse service to passengers who insist on smoking in the vehicle.

Alcohol and drugs

You must not drive under the influence of any intoxicant, including alcohol and/or drugs – to do so is against the law. Even small amounts of alcohol affect your judgment and ability to drive. The Road Safety Authority's recommendation is '*Never, ever, drink and drive*'.

The effects of alcohol, and the duration of those effects, differ from person to person. It is quite possible to have alcohol in your blood the day after a night's drinking. You should therefore consider very carefully the potential consequences of working the day after a night out when alcohol has been consumed.

If you are taking prescription medication, check with your doctor for any possible side effects, such as drowsiness, before driving.

Further information

For more information on safer driving, see the following:

- The Road Safety Authority, www.rsa.ie
- Drink Aware website, www.drinkaware.ie
- See 'Driving Schools' in the telephone directory or search the internet for advanced driver training

Seatbelts and child-restraint systems

The law requires all drivers to wear a seatbelt. Failure to wear a seatbelt while driving is a criminal offence. The only exemption, for SPSV drivers as for all other road users, is on specific medical grounds. Failure to comply leaves you open to a fixed payment penalty, penalty points on your licence, and prosecution in court. (Note that you do not have to wear a seatbelt while reversing the vehicle.)

Any person aged 17 years or over travelling in a motor vehicle – whether in the front or the rear seat – is required to wear a seatbelt. It is the responsibility of your adult passengers to comply with this legal requirement, but you might like to remind them of this responsibility. Failure to comply leaves them open to a prosecution in court and a penalty of up to €2,000.

In relation to persons under the age of 17, the situation is more complicated. It is the *driver's* responsibility to ensure that, where appropriate, a person under 17 wears a seatbelt. Failure to comply leaves the driver open to a fixed payment penalty, penalty points, and prosecution in court.

As seatbelts are primarily designed to accommodate adults, it is only children who are at least 150cm (approximately 4½ feet) in height who are required to wear a seatbelt in an SPSV. For smaller children and babies, the law normally requires special seats, harnesses or restraint systems, but SPSVs are exempt from this requirement. Such children are permitted to travel in SPSVs without seatbelts or other restraints, unless a suitable child-restraint system is available (in which case they must use it). However, they must travel only in the rear seats – under no circumstances is a child permitted to travel in the front seat of an SPSV unrestrained and without the appropriate child seat..

Recommendations from the Road Safety Authority

- Avoid driver fatigue: get enough sleep.
- Drive with care and consideration for all other road users.
- Drive within the speed limits.
- Do not use a mobile phone while driving: switch off before you drive off.
- Never drink and drive, and never drive under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol.
- Wear a seatbelt.
- Remind your passengers to wear their seatbelts and ensure that, where appropriate, children are suitably restrained.

Looking after your personal security

As an SPSV operator, the nature of your work presents some particular challenges. You work alone and often at night or in isolated areas; you carry cash, and you do not know your

customers. Most of the time, this poses no difficulty but occasionally SPSV operators find themselves in unpleasant or dangerous situations.

According to the Garda Crime Prevention Unit, violent incidents and robberies involving SPSV operators are more likely to take place on weekend nights between midnight and 4am and are more likely to involve customers hired on the street than pre-bookings. Drivers, therefore, should be extra vigilant in such circumstances.

If the driver is affiliated to a dispatch operator, detailed records of all bookings are taken, and this provides the driver with an added level of security. Having radio contact with the dispatch operator means that you can contact someone immediately if there is any problem or emergency. Some online booking apps maintain details of the driver, the passenger and the journey, and this provides further security.

Dealing with difficult customers

Customers are more likely to become aggressive if they are under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Be particularly careful and alert during higher risk times. An Garda Síochána recommends some extra precautions you can take for a safer journey:

- **Take extra care in isolated areas:** try to pick up customers in well-lit and well-populated areas; avoid getting out of your vehicle in isolated areas.
- **Make eye contact and interact:** look at all your customers when they get into your vehicle and continue to make eye contact with them in your rear-view mirror. This tells them that you have seen them and would be able to identify them if necessary. Interacting with your customers and being pleasant and non-confrontational to them may also deter aggressive behaviour.
- **Reverse into culs-de-sac:** where possible, reverse into single entry streets so that you can drive away quickly if necessary.
- **Arrange a code word:** agree a pre-arranged code word that you can use on a two-way radio or mobile phone to warn a dispatch operator or some other contact person that you have – or suspect that you may have – a problem.
- **Keep a spare key:** carry a spare key to your vehicle in your pocket. Then, if someone takes the keys from your ignition, or takes your vehicle and abandons it a short distance away, you will still be able to recover the vehicle and drive for help.

Reducing the risk of robbery

As an SPSV driver, you will usually have cash in your vehicle, which makes you more vulnerable to robbery. An Garda Síochána recommends a number of steps you can take to reduce the risks:

- **Avoid carrying large amounts of cash:** deposit cash at a bank or leave it in a secure place at home while on a break during your shift.
- **Do not show or tell your customers how much cash you have:** when they are paying for a fare, customers should only be able to see a small amount of your money (for change); keep the rest of your takings hidden. If a customer asks about your working day, do not tell them that you have had a busy or long shift.
- **Do not display valuables:** keep all valuables such as wallets and mobile phones hidden. Expensive-looking jewellery or watches could make you more vulnerable to an attack. Remove items such as sat nav or phone equipment when you leave your vehicle.

- **Lock your vehicle:** always lock your vehicle when you are not in it and when you are driving in isolated areas. Lock the doors and close the windows while parked on the street or waiting for a customer to arrive. Consider fitting an alarm or immobiliser to your car.
- **When picking up a customer in an isolated location,** contact your customer by phone rather than getting out of your vehicle.
- **When picking up a customer at night in an isolated location,** ask them to leave a porch or hall light on.

Reducing the risk of fare evasion

Fare evasion (customers not paying a fare) is a problem faced by many SPSV drivers and it can be difficult to avoid. An Garda Síochána suggests some guidelines to reduce the risk of it happening to you:

- **Ask for an exact address:** make sure you know the exact location of your destination before you start driving. If you work with a dispatch operator, tell them the destination if you are unsure about a customer's ability to pay.
- **Settle the fare inside the vehicle:** you are more at risk from fare evasion if you allow customers to pay their fare after they have left the vehicle.
- **Ask for a deposit:** if you have concerns that a customer might not be able to pay the fare, you have the right to ask them for a deposit or proof of their ability to pay before accepting them as a passenger. If they refuse to make an advance payment, you could reasonably refuse service. If you do ask for any advance payment, the amount should not be more than what you expect the metered fare for the journey to be, and if the metered fare turns out to be less than the deposit, you must refund the difference to the passenger.
- **Do not chase fare evaders:** do not put your own personal safety at risk for the sake of a lost fare.
- **Do not take any action that might be deemed to be illegal:** do not attempt to detain a passenger by force, or take them anywhere they do not want to go. If there is a problem, simply call An Garda Síochána and ask the passenger to remain with you until An Garda Síochána arrive.

Using security equipment

There are a number of products and safety devices that can reduce risk for SPSV drivers. For example, you could fit a safety screen that will protect you from attack by someone in the rear seat of the vehicle. Or you could install an additional rear-view mirror that enables you to see the entire width of the rear seat at once.

You can get additional protection by installing a security camera to record events inside your vehicle. Where the quality of such devices is sufficiently high, evidence from them may be used in court. If you intend to fit a camera, you should make sure that you comply with data protection legislation and that you respect your customers' rights to privacy.

Some global positioning systems (GPS) allow your position to be tracked. If you use a navigation device that has this capability, your dispatch operator or someone at home will be able to find out where you are at all times. These devices can be connected to an alarm that you can activate in an emergency. The dispatch operator can then direct An Garda Síochána to your exact location. Many mobile phones incorporate similar facilities. You might also consider using an emergency radio with an 'open mic' switch that will enable you to communicate quickly and easily with someone who can help.

Using CCTV

If you wish to use CCTV equipment you should contact a legal adviser or the Data Protection Commissioner (www.dataprotection.ie) for advice, and consider whether you have a reasonable basis for using such equipment – for example, for personal security reasons. You should also check your legal rights and obligations in relation to:

- The storage of and access to personal data and its use as evidence in the event of a security incident; and
- Obtaining the customer's consent – for example, through signs prominently displayed in the vehicle.

What to do after an incident

If you are the victim of an assault or robbery, An Garda Síochána recommends that you remain as calm as possible and do not chase the perpetrator. Raise the alarm and call for help as soon as you can and call an ambulance if you are hurt. Report the incident to An Garda Síochána and to your dispatch operator, if you have one. The incident may seem trivial to you, but it may be one of a series that An Garda Síochána are investigating, and it may help them with other enquiries.

If you have a security camera, make sure the evidence is locked and saved. Write down a summary of the incident as soon as possible, including details such as:

- Where, when and how the incident happened;
- A description of your attacker;
- A description of your own condition during and after the incident; and
- Details of who you reported the incident to.

Hazard avoidance and safety equipment

As outlined in Chapter 3, all SPSV drivers are required to carry the following items of safety equipment in their vehicles:

- A fire extinguisher;
- A first-aid kit;
- An advance-warning triangle;
- A torch; and
- A high-visibility reflective safety vest.

NTA has issued technical specifications for all of these items. In the event of a collision or fire, the safety equipment should be available for immediate use by anyone at the scene who is capable of using it.

Further information

For more information about safety and security equipment and schemes, see the *Initial Suitability Inspection Manual*, downloadable from www.nationaltransport.ie.

The *Initial Suitability Inspection Manual* also covers technical specifications for in-vehicle safety equipment.

For more information on using CCTV equipment, contact the Data Protection Commissioner at www.dataprotection.ie.

If you are working outside the vehicle in poorly lit places at night, you should wear the high-visibility vest – for example, if you are loading luggage or helping a person using a wheelchair into your vehicle on a badly lit road.

What to do in the event of a collision or other emergency

Road collision victims have a much greater chance of survival and their injuries are likely to be much less severe if they receive first aid and medical assistance immediately or within the 'golden hour' after the collision. Therefore, it is important to follow a few simple guidelines if you are at the scene of a collision or emergency:

- **Remain calm:** do not panic. Switch off your engine, apply the handbrake, and assess the situation.
- **Warn others:** switch on your hazard warning lights and place the advance-warning triangle a good distance away from the scene. Organise bystanders to warn oncoming traffic, but make sure that you and others are visible by wearing high-visibility vests, reflective armbands and bright clothing, or by carrying torches.
- **Call for help:** contact the emergency services on 999 or 112. Do not assume that others at the scene have already called for help. Give precise information regarding the location of the collision, the number of vehicles involved, and an estimate of the number of people who are injured.
- **Make yourself and others safe:** make sure that you are safe yourself before helping others. Place coats or rugs on anyone who is injured to keep them warm, but do not give them anything to eat or drink.
- **Do not move injured people:** to reduce the risk of making injuries worse, move injured people only if there is a risk of fire or of a vehicle turning over. Do not remove helmets from injured motorcyclists. Do not try to lift a vehicle off an injured person without help.
- **Do not smoke:** do not allow anyone to smoke nearby, due to the risk of fire.
- **Wait:** monitor the condition of anyone who is injured until the emergency services arrive. If there is any clear deterioration in the injured person's condition, phone 999 or 112 again and inform the emergency services.
- **Report the collision:** if you are involved in a collision in which any people injured, you are legally bound to report the collision to An Garda Síochána, either to a Garda at the scene or at the nearest Garda station. You must also give your personal and vehicle details, including insurance details, to anybody involved in the crash and to any independent witness who requests them.
- **Be aware of your own condition:** even after a minor incident, in which you have not received any visible injury, you will probably suffer from shock, which in some cases may not be immediately apparent. This may impair your ability to drive safely. Give yourself time to recover. If possible, get someone else to drive you home and rest until you have fully recovered.

The golden rule is 'do no harm'. Do not put yourself at risk by attempting heroic rescues in dangerous circumstances. If you do, you may reduce your ability to help others and may even make things worse.

In case of fire, make your fire extinguisher available to anyone at the scene who feels confident to use it. However, be aware that vehicle fires can burn very fiercely; they can be considerably more dangerous than they first appear.

Similarly, make your first-aid kit available to anyone at the scene of a collision who is competent to use it.

Further information

The following organisations publish useful information on first aid and what to do in the event of a collision or emergency:

- The Road Safety Authority, www.rsa.ie;
- The Irish Red Cross, www.redcross.ie;
- The Order of Malta, www.orderofmalta.ie; and
- The St John Ambulance Brigade of Ireland, <http://sja.ie>.

Consider doing a first-aid course with one of these or a similar organisation, so that you can provide competent assistance in an emergency situation.

Handling and transporting luggage and other heavy items

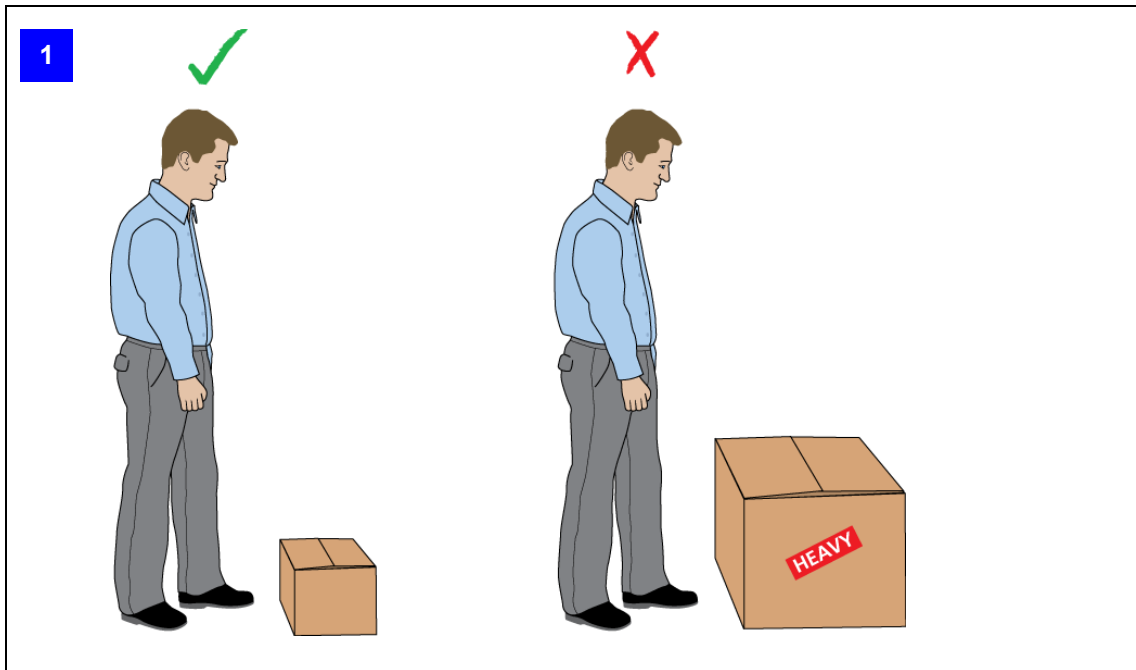
Many working days are lost because of injuries, including back injuries, caused by incorrect handling and lifting of heavy or bulky items. As an SPSV driver, you will frequently be asked to help customers with luggage, and it is worthwhile learning how to do so properly. All SPSV drivers are recommended to take a manual handling course with a professional organisation.

It is important to consider not only whether you can safely load an item into your vehicle, but also whether transporting the item presents a potential health and safety risk to you, your passenger, or others – for example, bulky luggage that cannot be suitably restrained, or that affects your ability to control the vehicle or to see through the windows.

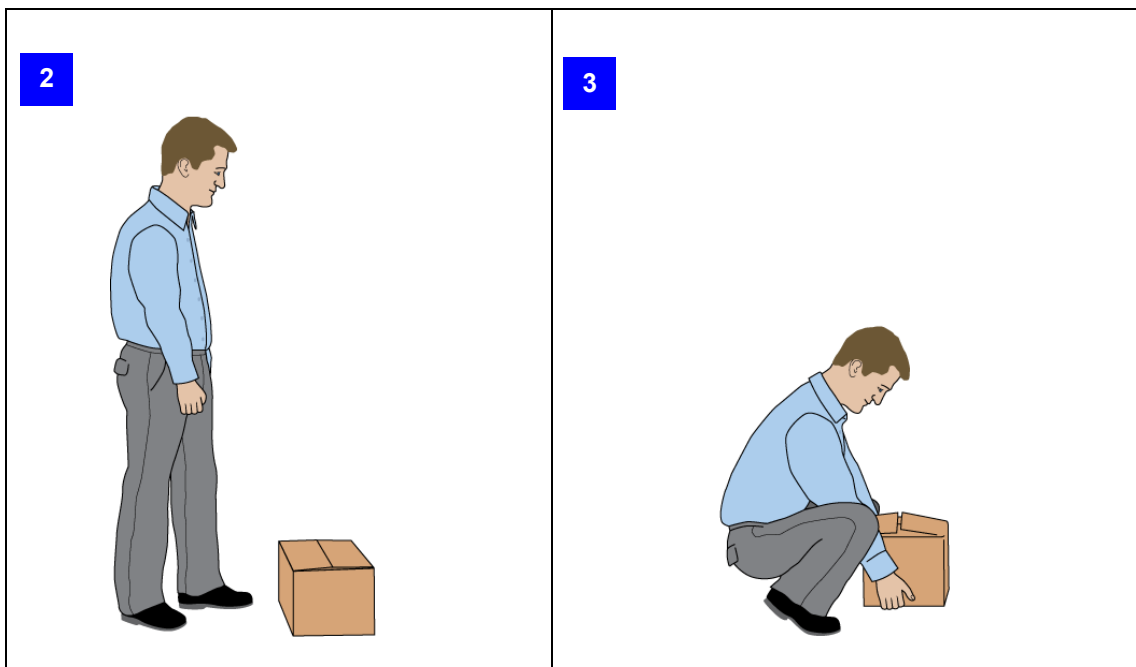
As an SPSV driver, you may refuse to lift or carry any item that, in your judgement, is liable to cause injury to yourself or to others.

Some guidelines for handling heavy or bulky items

The Health and Safety Authority offers some guidelines to help you reduce the risk of injuring yourself:

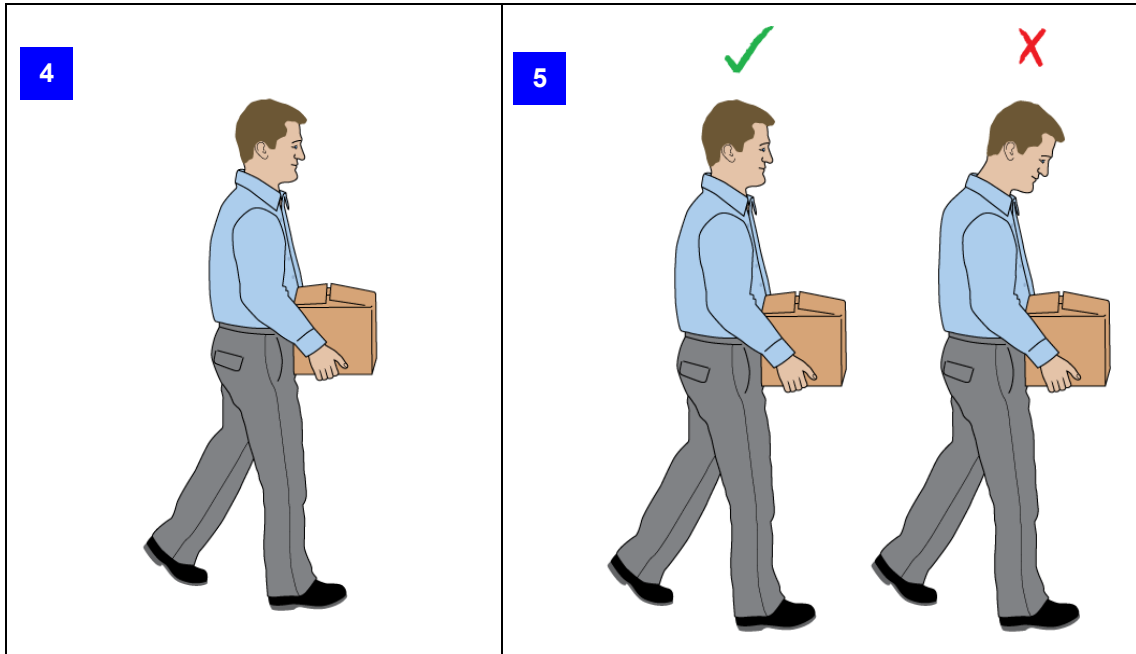


Lift only if it is safe to do so: Do not lift or handle anything if you believe it will put you at risk of injury. You may be able to lift something but you may not be able to do so safely. Remember also that it may be easier and safer to put something into the luggage area of a vehicle than to take it out.



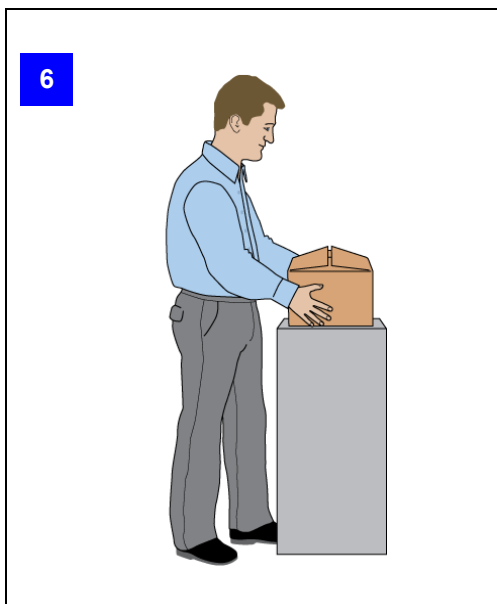
Think before you lift: Remove obstructions from around the item and decide where you are going to place it.

Start in a good position: Balance yourself by keeping your feet slightly apart and one foot slightly forward. Slightly bend your knees and back as shown. Do not stoop.



Keep a good hold on the item: Hold the item close to your body with the heaviest part of the item closest to you. Move smoothly and avoid jerking or snatching the item.

Keep your head up and look ahead: Keep your shoulders in line with your hips and look straight ahead. Do not bend or twist your back or lean sideways as you lift. Move your feet to turn.



Put down before you adjust: If you need to reposition an item, for example in the luggage area of your vehicle, put it down before sliding it into position.

Complying with regulations

Under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005, self-employed persons – and this includes the majority of SPSV operators – must comply with the same statutory requirements as apply to employers. This means that you must take all reasonable steps to ensure the safety, health and welfare of individuals at your defined place of work – your car.

You are legally obliged to identify and carry out a written risk assessment of any hazards to which you or your passengers are exposed, and to take reasonable steps to reduce or eliminate them. This means, for example, maintaining your vehicle in good condition, driving safely, and ensuring that your passengers do not engage in behaviour that puts you, them or others in danger. It also means that you must consider specific risks to you, as the driver, to your passengers and to other road users – for example, noise, exhaust fumes, extremes of temperature, danger of collision, fire and explosion, fatigue and stress.

Fatigue is a well-documented hazard associated with driving and appropriate measures need to be put in place to minimise the risk. If you are an employee you still have a responsibility to take reasonable steps to protect the safety, health and welfare of yourself and anyone who may be affected by your actions while working. This means that if anything may affect your performance while at work, such as fatigue, you are obliged to inform your employer.

When you have identified the areas of risk, you should take steps to manage and control them. This may mean obtaining relevant safety and health information, going on a training course, or investing in protective equipment. It may mean taking the time to study the manual that came with your vehicle to learn how to adjust the seat and steering column for maximum comfort and safety. Or it may mean ensuring that you control the ventilation, heating and cooling systems properly.

Further information

For more information about the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005, contact the Health & Safety Authority, www.hsa.ie.

11. Preparing for your test

This chapter gives details of the tests within NTA's Skills Development Programme and how they are administered. It also provides a sample of the types of question that you can expect in these tests.

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■ The SPSV Driver Entry Test	115
■ The Industry Knowledge Test	115
■ The Area Knowledge Test	116
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■ What you need to know for the Industry Knowledge Test	117
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Testing in the Skills Development Programme

NTA's Skills Development Programme for the SPSV industry includes procedures for testing and certifying operators' knowledge of the industry and its regulatory framework, and of the area in which they operate.

The principal test in the Programme is the **SPSV Driver Entry Test**, which must be passed by all applicants for an SPSV driver licence (with the exception of applicants for local area hackney driver licences). This test consists of two modules: the Industry Knowledge Module and the Area Knowledge Module. These two modules may also be administered as separate tests for existing SPSV driver licence holders:

- The **Industry Knowledge Test**: existing SPSV driver licence holders are encouraged to take the Industry Knowledge Test in order to obtain the Authority's certification; and
- The **Area Knowledge Test**: existing SPSV driver licence holders who wish to be licensed to stand or ply for hire in an additional county must take the Area Knowledge Test for that county.

The SPSV Driver Entry Test

The SPSV Driver Entry Test is designed to verify that, as a new entrant to the industry, you know the regulatory framework for the SPSV industry, as set out in the Taxi Regulation Act 2013 and the Taxi Regulation (Small Public Service Vehicle) Regulations 2015*, that you are familiar with good practice in the industry, and that you have a good working knowledge of the county in which you wish to operate.

To pass the SPSV Driver Entry Test, you must pass both the Industry Knowledge Module and the Area Knowledge Module for your chosen county. The pass mark for both is 75%.

When you first sit the SPSV Driver Entry Test you complete both modules. Should you fail one module but pass the other, you are then allowed to repeat the failed module only. However, if you fail to pass both modules within one year of your original test, you will have to start again by resitting the complete SPSV Driver Entry Test.

The Industry Knowledge Test

The Industry Knowledge Module consists of 54 questions relating to regulations and good practice in the SPSV industry, as set out in this Manual†. This Manual is the only study material required for the Industry Knowledge Module. The test lasts approximately 1 hour 10 minutes. You should allow an extra 20 minutes for a tutorial at the beginning of the test and a survey at the end.

For drivers who are already licensed

SPSV drivers who were licensed before the introduction of the Skills Development Programme are strongly encouraged to take the Industry Knowledge Test. Purple identification cards are issued to drivers who pass the Industry Knowledge Test having already been licensed in the industry before 2009.

* See www.irishstatutebook.ie for all legal texts.

† See www.irishstatutebook.ie for all legal texts.

The Area Knowledge Test

The Area Knowledge Test is designed to verify that you have a good working knowledge of the county in which you wish to operate. For each county, the test consists of 36 questions, and lasts approximately 35 minutes. You should allow an extra 20 minutes for a tutorial at the beginning and a survey at the end of the test.

NTA may also require a driver licence holder to sit and pass the Area Knowledge Test prior to renewal of their licence.

For drivers who wish to be licensed for an additional county

Existing SPSV driver licence holders who wish to be licensed to stand or ply for hire in an additional county must take the Area Knowledge Test for that county.

Test administration

Applying for a test

SPSV tests can be taken in any one of five test locations around the country and you can arrange to take your test at a time and location that is convenient.

When you feel that you are sufficiently prepared, you can apply for a test by calling 0818 064 000.

You will need:

- Your contact details;
- Your PPS number;
- A full Irish driving licence or a driving licence from another EU, EEA or other recognised state; and
- The test fee, which can be paid by credit or debit card, cheque or postal order.

If you have any special requirements please specify them at the time of booking. There are various options available to assist candidates with special reading needs in taking the test. You can apply to have extra time to take your test or request one-to-one assistance. For further information please call 0818 064 000 or visit www.nationaltransport.ie.

Your test appointment

When your application has been processed, you are notified by email or post of the date, time and location of your test, and reminded of the documentation that you must take with you to the test.

Before the test

When you arrive at the test centre, your identification is checked – bring your current driving licence with you for this purpose.

Once your identification and relevant documentation have been validated, your personal belongings are stored in a secure locker and you are taken to a workstation to complete the test.

Taking the test

To take the test, you use a mouse or a touch-screen to answer questions that are presented to you on a computer screen. Each question is presented along with a number of alternative

answers. In some cases, only one of the answers presented is correct and you are asked to select the answer you think is correct by clicking on or touching your chosen option. In other cases, you are asked to identify which two of the answers presented are correct by selecting them in the same way.

Before the test starts, a short demonstration will show you how to answer the questions. You do not need to be able to use a computer to take the test.

Within each module, you can cancel and change your answers. Where time allows, any questions that you have skipped along the way, will be highlighted at the end of the module for you to try again. However, once you finish the module you cannot go back, so you should ensure you have reviewed all questions in the module before concluding.

Conduct during the test

All tests are monitored by an invigilator and recorded on CCTV. Candidates must not confer with one another, must not refer to any written material, and must not use a mobile phone or other device during the test. Any breach of these rules will disqualify the candidate.

The results

Your test is scored automatically and you get the results immediately.

- If you pass both modules, NTA presents you with the relevant SPSV Skills Development Certificate at the test centre on the day.
- If you fail both modules, you are given a report with details of how to apply for a re-test.
- If you pass one module and fail the other, you are given a report with details of how to apply for a re-test in the module you failed. You must pass the second module within one year of passing the first.

What you need to know for the Industry Knowledge Test

This Manual covers the industry knowledge you need for the Test. If you study it, you will learn the SPSV regulations and other topics that may be tested. The questions in the table below will give you an idea of the type of questions asked in the Industry Knowledge Module of the SPSV Driver Entry Test or in the Industry Knowledge Test.

Sample questions – Industry Knowledge

Which of the following describes a taxi standing for hire?

- a. The taxi is parked on a road
- b. The taxi is stationary and available for hire
- c. The taxi is in motion and available for hire
- d. The taxi has a passenger and is on route

The Fixed Payment Offence 'Failure to display tamper-proof licence disc' carries a penalty of:

- a. €60
- b. €80
- c. €150
- d. €250

All SPSV drivers must provide NTA with details of the SPSV they will be operating.

- a. True
- b. False

How many weeks prior to the expiry date are drivers advised to renew their SPSV driver licences?

- a. 6 weeks
- b. 8 weeks
- c. 10 weeks
- d. 12 weeks

Which of the following is found on a taxi's In-Vehicle Information Card?

- a. Vehicle registration number
- b. Operator's name
- c. Taxi licence number
- d. Information on how to understand a taxi fare

What you need to know for the Area Knowledge Test

In order to deliver a quality customer service, SPSV operators need a comprehensive knowledge of the county in which they are operating. For that reason, the Area Knowledge Test is a core part of NTA's SPSV Driver Entry Test. Existing operators intending to ply or stand for hire in an additional county must also pass this test for the additional county.

The Area Knowledge Test is designed to ensure that you are sufficiently familiar with the county in which you wish to become licensed as an SPSV driver, so that you can provide an effective and efficient service to your customers. The table on the next page shows the main topics that are tested, and the table on page 119 provides sample questions which will give you an idea of the type of questions asked in the Area Knowledge Module of the SPSV Driver Entry Test or in the Area Knowledge Test.

Building up your knowledge

Here are some tips for building up the local knowledge you will need to pass the Area Knowledge Test:

- Examine street and road maps to get an overall view of the main roads and districts in the county;
- Focus on one district at a time and use a map to identify the location of all the main roads and places of interest, such as hospitals and stations, as listed in the table on the next page;
- Go out and physically explore a district, armed with a map. Walking or cycling may enable you to explore a district more thoroughly. (You might find it easier to do this at off-peak times.) You can stop and start as you wish, examine your map, and read place names. Pay attention to details such as one-way streets, culs-de-sac and street names; and
- Drive around the same district you just walked or cycled around and make sure you know how to find your way around the road layouts and one-way systems. Drive safely – refer to the map only when your vehicle is stationary.

Key information needed for the Area Knowledge Test

Urban centres

You will need a detailed knowledge of:

- One-way systems
- Street names
- Housing estates
- Districts
- Adjoining streets
- Routes to other towns or villages

National roads and motorways

You will need to know the numbers of national roads and motorways, for example, N3 or M1. Questions may reference the main routes out of the county being tested. For example, an applicant in Laois might be asked what road links Laois and Dublin.

Places of interest

You will need to be able to name the streets in your county on which places of interest in the following categories are located:

- Hospitals and medical centres
- Nearest airports (the nearest airport might not be located within your operating area)
- Local ferries and boat services
- Transport terminals (for example bus, train, Luas)
- Hotels and holiday centres
- Stadiums and prominent club grounds
- Sports clubs (for example golf clubs, yacht clubs, tennis clubs)
- Major landmarks and tourist attractions
- Sporting and leisure facilities (for example, swimming pools, bowling alleys, cinemas, theatres and libraries)
- Shopping centres and retail parks
- Public buildings and amenities
- Industrial estates and business parks
- Well-known pubs, restaurants and nightclubs
- Schools, universities and other educational institutions
- Garda stations

Towns and villages

You will need to know the location of all towns and villages within your operating area in relation to all regional and national routes. Questions in the test may reference towns and other locations in counties bordering on the county being tested. For example, an applicant in Kilkenny might be asked about routes to Waterford City or New Ross.

Sample questions – Area Knowledge

The table below shows the type of question you can expect in the Area Knowledge Module of the SPSV Driver Entry Test or in the Area Knowledge Test.

Urban centres – one-way streets.

Thomas Davis Street runs one-way between which of the following streets? (Dublin)

- a. John Dillon Street to Francis Street
- b. Francis Street to Meath Street

- c. Francis Street to John Dillon Street
- d. Meath Street to Francis Street

Urban centres – districts

Taking the most direct route from Blackrock to Merrion Square, which of the following districts would you pass? (Dublin)

- a. Booterstown, Merrion and Ballsbridge
- b. Booterstown, Mount Merrion and Donnybrook
- c. Stillorgan, Mount Merrion and Donnybrook
- d. Merrion, Sandymount and Irishtown

Urban centres – housing estates

Off which road in Arklow is The Maples housing estate located? (Wicklow)

- a. Dublin Road
- b. Sea Road
- c. Coolgreaney Road
- d. Wexford Road

Towns and villages/national roads and motorways

Travelling on the N25 from Midleton towards Youghal, which of the following town or village centres would you pass through? (Cork)

- a. Castlemartyr, Killeagh
- b. Ballynacora, Cloyne
- c. Carrigtwohill (Carrigtohill), Glounthaune
- d. Ladysbridge and Gortaroo

Places of interest – hospitals

On which street is the Coombe Hospital located? (Dublin)

- a. Dolphin Road
- b. Dolphin's Barn Street
- c. Cork Street
- d. Parnell Road

Places of interest – public buildings and amenities

Where is Nenagh Town Hall located? (Tipperary)

- a. MacDonagh Street
- b. Banba Square
- c. Sarsfield Street
- d. Kenyon Street

Places of interest – major landmarks and tourist attractions

Which of the following is NOT a tourist attraction in Cork? (Cork)

- a. Derrynane House
- b. Dursey Island Cable Car
- c. Schull Planetarium
- d. The Jameson Experience

Urban centres – street names

In Clonmel, which street does NOT adjoin Queen Street? (Tipperary)

- a. St Oliver Plunkett Terrace
- b. Bolton Street
- c. William Street
- d. Cashel Road

National roads and motorways

Which national road connects Galway City and Headford? (Galway)

- a. N6
- b. N17
- c. N59
- d. N84

Appendix A.

Vehicle age rules

The maximum age of a vehicle that can be licensed as an SPSV depends on a number of factors including

- The licensing transaction (new licence, renewal, change of vehicle or change of licence category);
- The licence category (taxi, wheelchair accessible taxi, hackney, wheelchair accessible hackney, local area hackney and limousine.); and
- The licence history – when it was first issued (as indicated by the licence number), when the vehicle was first associated with it, and whether the licence category has been changed on it.

The age of a vehicle is measured from the date of its first registration in any country. The date of first registration in any country is shown in the vehicle's registration certificate (the logbook) in Box B.

New licence transactions

The maximum age of a vehicle proposed for a new vehicle licence is:

Licence category	Maximum age
Standard taxi	(New licences not currently available)
Standard hackney	(New licences not currently available)
Local area hackney	10 years
Wheelchair accessible taxi	6 years
Wheelchair accessible hackney	6 years
Limousine	No limit

Licence renewal transactions

A vehicle licence can be renewed only until the vehicle associated with it reaches its maximum age, as follows:

Licence category and history		Maximum age
Standard taxi licence numbered below 45000, on which there has been no change of vehicle since 1 January 2013		15 years
Standard hackney licence numbered below 45000, on which there has been no change of vehicle since 1 January 2013		15 years
Wheelchair accessible taxi licence	No change of vehicle since 1 April 2014	No limit
	Change of vehicle since 1 April 2014	15 years
Wheelchair accessible hackney licence	No change of vehicle since 1 April 2014	No limit
	Change of vehicle since 1 April 2014	15 years
Limousine licence		No limit
Vehicle licences other than those specified above		10 years

Change of vehicle transactions

When the vehicle associated with a vehicle licence is changed, the maximum age of the replacement vehicle is as follows:

Licence category and history	Maximum age
Standard taxi	10 years
Standard hackney	10 years
Local area hackney	10 years
Wheelchair accessible taxi or hackney licence issued on or after 1 April 2014	The age of the vehicle it replaces or 10 years, whichever is less
Other wheelchair accessible taxi or hackney	10 years
Limousine	No limit

Exchange of licence category

The holder of a standard taxi licence may apply to exchange their licence for a wheelchair accessible taxi licence.

A person who has previously exchanged a standard taxi licence for a wheelchair accessible taxi licence may apply to revert to a standard taxi licence.

The maximum age of the vehicle in these transactions is as follows:

Licensing transaction	Maximum age
Wheelchair accessible taxi replacing a standard taxi	6 years
Standard taxi replacing a wheelchair accessible taxi	10 years

B. Local Area Hackneys

In most respects, the regulations that apply to local area hackneys and local area hackney drivers are the same as those that apply to hackneys and their drivers. There are, however, a number of important differences as outlined in this appendix.

Applying for a local area hackney (vehicle) licence

To apply for a local area hackney licence, the requirements are similar to those described in Chapters 3 and 4, with the following additions and exceptions:

1. You must provide written confirmation of the need for a service in the proposed area, from either a local business representative organisation or a local charity.
2. You must provide an analysis of the need for a local area hackney service in the proposed area, carried out by or on behalf of the local authority, and written confirmation from that local authority that the need is real.

Local area hackney vehicle licences specify the area covered by the licence. Licence holders must not provide or advertise the provision of hackney services outside the area specified.

The holder of a local area hackney licence is not permitted to hold any other SPSV vehicle licence during the term of the local area hackney licence.

Renewing a local area hackney (vehicle) licence

A local area hackney vehicle licence must be renewed annually, in the same way as a hackney licence (Chapter 4). It can be renewed only until the third anniversary of the date it was first granted. After that, an operator who wishes to continue to operate the vehicle as a local area hackney must make a new application, with documentary evidence, in the same way as described above.

Applying for a local area hackney driver licence

To apply for a local area hackney driver licence, the requirements are similar to those described in Chapter 2, with the following additions and exceptions:

1. You must first hold a local area hackney (vehicle) licence.
2. You must provide evidence that your application relates to the area for which the local area hackney licence was granted.
3. You are not required to pass the SPSV Driver Entry Test.

Renewing a local area hackney driver licence

Local area hackney driver licences are granted for a period of three years and are not renewable. A driver who wishes to continue in operation must make a new application, with documentary evidence, in the same way as described above.

C. Dispatch operator licensing

This appendix describes the licensing requirements and procedures that apply to SPSV dispatch operators.

Requirements for operating as an SPSV dispatch operator

A dispatch operator is a person who provides a service for taking bookings for SPSV services that are delivered by someone else, or who provides a service that enables intending passengers to arrange the hire of an SPSV themselves.

The Taxi Regulation Act 2013 gives NTA the power to regulate and license dispatch operators. Persons who wish to provide SPSV booking services are required to obtain a dispatch operator licence from NTA. (This requirement does not apply to booking services for limousines.)

The requirements and standards for an SPSV dispatch operator licence

The dispatch operator must:

- Be up to date in their tax affairs. This will be verified online with Revenue during processing of the application;
- Maintain up-to-date records of all drivers affiliated to the dispatch operator, including vehicle and driver licences and insurance records;
- Keep a record of all bookings received;
- Provide NTA with the contact information used for booking SPSV services, including any trading name used or proposed to be used;
- Have a procedure for recording and dealing with complaints; and
- Pay the relevant licence fee to NTA.

Drivers and vehicles

Dispatch operators who have drivers affiliated to them must ensure that:

- Each driver has a current full driving licence and a current SPSV driver licence; and
- The vehicles they drive are currently licensed and insured as SPSVs.

Dispatch operators must keep records of all of their drivers' contact details and licence information.

Booking service

Dispatch operators must have a system for recording bookings and must make these records available to NTA on request.

Dispatch operators play a key role in the provision of services to people with disabilities. They should coordinate the drivers affiliated to them to ensure that, as far as possible, a fully accessible service is available during operational hours. Operators of wheelchair accessible vehicles must give priority to bookings received from passengers who wish to travel in their wheelchairs.

As many bookings for wheelchair accessible services are booked through dispatch operators, holders of wheelchair accessible vehicle licences are strongly encouraged to affiliate to dispatch operators.

Customer complaints

Dispatch operators must have a complaints system in place that customers can use if they are unhappy with the service they receive. If a customer makes a complaint, the dispatch operator must record the details of the complaint and the action taken to remedy it.

If a customer has a complaint regarding a service booked through a dispatch operator, the customer should deal in the first instance directly with the dispatch operator, and refer the complaint to NTA only if they fail to resolve it with the dispatch operator. Dispatch operators must make their complaint records available to NTA on request.

Applying for an SPSV dispatch operator licence

To apply for a dispatch operator licence, download Form DO1 – Application for a Dispatch Operator Licence and its associated guidance note from NTA's website.

You must complete and return the form to NTA, along with the licence fee. Send them to:

SPSV Licensing Section
National Transport Authority
PO Box 436
City North Business Park
Tuam Road
Galway

Changing details on a dispatch operator licence

Changing your address or contact details

If you change your address, you are required to inform NTA within 14 days, either in writing or by calling the SPSV Information Line (0818 064 000). This is important to ensure that you receive correspondence from NTA regarding your licences – NTA takes no responsibility if you do not receive important correspondence because you have not registered a change of address.

Changing the name on your licence

If your name changes, or the name on your licence is incorrect, you can have the name on your licence changed. Any change of name or trading name must be notified to NTA within 14 days.

To effect such a change, download Form VL7: Change of Name on an SPSV Licence, complete it and send it to NTA, along with a copy of your passport or birth certificate. Any significant change in name, such as a change of name following marriage, may require further supporting documents.

Note, however, that this process cannot be used to transfer a licence from one person to another.

Renewing an SPSV Dispatch Operator Licence

Before the expiry of your licence, NTA sends you a renewal letter and a renewal application form (DO5).

You must complete and return the form to NTA, along with the renewal fee. Send them to:

SPSV Licensing Section
National Transport Authority
PO Box 436
City North Business Park
Tuam Road
Galway