

Meeting of the Advisory Committee on SPSVs

Minutes

26th June 2025, 10.30 am.

NTA Office, Haymarket House, Smithfield, Dublin.

Present:

Chairperson	Mr. Cornelius O'Donohue
<i>Representing</i>	
Small Public Service Vehicle and Driver Interests	Mr. Shajedul Chowdhury Mr. John Murphy Mr. Francis Doheny Mr. Alan Cooley
Special Interest or Expertise in Matters Relating to the Functions of the Authority, the Advisory Committee or Related Matters.	Mr. Harpreet Singh Mr. James O'Brien Ms. Christine O'Connor Mr. Der Calnan
The Interests of Consumers	Mr. Adrian Cummins
The Interests of Business	Ms. Ann Campbell
The Interests of Older Persons	Ms. Mai Quaid
The Interests of Local Authorities	Mr. Brendan O'Brien
The Interests of Persons with Disabilities	Mr. John Fulham

Apologies:

The Interests of An Garda Siochana	Superintendent Tom Murphy
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NTA Representatives in Attendance

Mr. Jakub Szynal, *Secretary to the Advisory Committee on SPSVs*

FREENOW Representatives in Attendance (Partial)

Mr. Danny O’Gorman

Mr. Sam Pooke

Minutes

Advisory Committee on SPSVs – June Meeting

1. Minutes

The minutes from the meeting held on the 29th May 2025 were discussed.

One item regarding UK WAV conversion standards was discussed, noting that it was captured accurately in the minutes. On the topic of this, a member added that the 2013 regulations would have to be amended to certify UK WAV converted vehicles.

It was suggested that NTA's technical adviser should be invited to attend a future meeting to discuss this.

2. Correspondence

The Chair had informed the Advisory Committee that he will be meeting the NTA board in September.

The Chair discussed recent correspondence received by the Committee, in which Minister O'Brien had reached out to the County and City Managers Association regarding taxi ranks.

3. Appointments

The vacancies for the positions on the Advisory Committee on SPSVs were discussed, noting that they are live on the NTA and DoT websites. There are 4 being advertised currently.

4. Role of Advisory Committee

The future of the Advisory Committee was discussed. It was emphasized that the combined experience of all Members is crucial to the committee's functioning. Members noted that the Advisory Committee should work more closely with the NTA Board. The expectations of the work should be set out and resourced, and a formalized structure should be put in place to give advice proactively rather than waiting for requests.

FREENOW representatives joined the meeting.

5. FREENOW

The Chair welcomed the FREENOW (FN) representatives to the meeting.

FN provided an overview of their recent merger with Lyft, a US company. They assured that services and branding would remain the same, with more technology available for service provision.

An overview of statistics was given, notably the number of drivers on FREENOW, supply hours and acceptance of journeys, noting improvement in all areas over the past three years.

FN noted that the Maximum Fares Order introduced in December 2024 has caused taxi fares to rise by 27%. According to FN's research, their impact in improving late night hour services has been minimal, with drivers still being concerned about their safety. FN will be investigating further to determine what concerns around safety exist currently.

The Local Area Hackney scheme was discussed with FN noting that they have one driver, for whom they had set up a bespoke LAH profile, free of commission and with business cards. It was noted that due to poor demand the driver may have to stop providing their services. Suggestions were made to allow LAH to drive passengers to their destination and have the ability to collect them (as this was seen as a barrier), and for NTA to provide some degree of local advertising funding.

FN noted that many drivers may be at risk of losing their licenses due to unknown VAT liabilities. They have called upon NTA and the government to mandate that all Irish operators invoice within Ireland.

The Chair asked for clarification regarding their "pro-taxi" approach, with FN noting that their priority is taxis first, private hire second. They reiterated that they are committed to keeping high regulatory standards and as part of the merger with Lyft, the operating model will remain the same.

According to FN's data, the general pick-up rate for FN taxis is [REDACTED] dropping to mid-[REDACTED] during pinch points. Job counts dipped in December, coinciding with the maximum fare increase. A member of the Advisory Committee queried FN if the taxis shown driving on the FREENOW map view are real. FN confirmed that they are indeed real.

The Local Area Knowledge exam was discussed. FN noted that if this exam was removed, it would lead to a two-tier taxi system with drivers who have completed the exam, and drivers who would never have to do so.

WAVS were discussed. FN noted that customers have the option to pick a WAV on the app, and to leave a note for the driver if any further assistance is required. FN can also see which drivers have refused wheelchair trips, and subsequent warnings are sent out.

The average waiting time for a taxi on FREENOW is [REDACTED] minutes, and [REDACTED] for the wheelchair fleet.

WAV requirements were discussed, emphasizing that wheelchairs have gotten more robust in the last 10 years and that some are now incompatible with wheelchair ramps and conversions. While WAV requirements factor in manual and motorised wheelchairs, the specifications don't cater for some motorised ones of size and weight now being used by wheelchair users. The scale of the issue hasn't been quantified, and the Advisory Committee will discuss with the NTA technical advisor.

FN noted that an action they will take after this meeting will be to consider implementing more consequences for drivers who refuse WAV trips.

FN was queried on complaints made to them in relation to drivers overcharging passengers. FN noted that this is monitored, with their IT system identifying journeys where the actual charge falls outside the estimated range of charge at the time of booking. Drivers are issued with warnings and if they don't comply, they risk suspension.

FREENOW representatives left the meeting.

6. AOB

The increasing cost of WAV vehicles was discussed.

The Chair gave his thanks to several long-term members of the committee as they finished up their final term. He wished them well in all their future endeavours.

The next meeting will take place on the 31st July.