

Summary of  
forthcoming  
reforms

# Progressing Quality Improvement in the SPSV Industry

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The reforms contained in this document are the culmination of a number of the Commission's activities. Firstly, they are a natural progression in our ongoing reform of the industry, having been shaped by continual planning and regulatory impact assessments. Some of these have been committed to in previous actions plans and have been either brought forward or progressed to a greater level of detail. Secondly, they are a proactive response to the recommendations contained within the Goodbody Economic Review. Thirdly, they reflect the views put forward in our recent public consultation, which included feedback from both industry and consumers.

It is important to consider the context of these reforms. The Commission has been in existence since 2005. During this time, it has been tasked with transforming a recently deregulated industry to achieve a first class, professional, efficient, safe and accessible, customer-friendly service for small public service vehicle passengers and service providers. The Commission acknowledges that many operators already meet this objective; however, reform is required to ensure that all operators meet it. This not only ensures a level playing field for operators, but also clearly benefits the consumer.

To meet this objective, the Commission has to consider the measures that are available within its remit. We must focus on raising standards through regulation, licensing and enforcement, taking into account that the industry now operates within a free market.

To this end, in the last five years, the Commission has undertaken a vast amount of work in bringing reform and improvement to the Small Public Service Vehicle industry. There is now a national maximum taxi fare and national taximeter area, ensuring ease for the consumer nationwide, a secure and transparent national vehicle licensing system, focussed industry enforcement and new vehicle and driver standards for all new entrants to the industry.

A key consideration during this period of reform has always been allowing time for those within the industry to adapt to the new measures. To this end the Commission has recently focussed a great deal on more stringent standards for those entering the industry and a phased period for existing operators to become compliant. However, it is clear that there is now an appetite for change sooner rather than later.

As such, the measures contained in this document are aimed specifically at continuing to improve the standard of the fleet and the knowledge of those operating in it. These reforms look to build on the previous success and immediately address a number of key concerns. Foremost amongst these is that the SPSV fleet meets its accessibility objectives. As it is individuals with disabilities who are often most reliant on the door-to-door service offered by taxis, the Commission believes that there is a need to increase the number of wheelchair accessible vehicles and improve the availability of those already licensed to provide a service.

Incentives offered to date, including a much lower licence fee have not been successful in increasing the wheelchair accessible fleet to achieving the Commission's stated objective of 10% of the overall fleet. The Commission has taken decisive action to address this by bringing in a period of issuing Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle Licences only, along with a number of initiatives aimed at better matching supply and demand for the sector.

Further to this, we are bringing in a number of measures that will increase standards and compliance within the industry, including fast-tracking of vehicle standards to ensure uniformity by 2011 and the driver skills development programme to ensure total compliance by 2012. New regulations in relation to transferability of taxi licences between taxi operators and new requirements for those applying for, and renewing, licences will increase accountability and compliance.

A period of reform is a difficult time for any industry, and the pace at which the SPSV industry has changed has magnified this, however, we firmly believe that at the conclusion of this reform period, that Ireland will have an SPSV fleet it can be proud of and that consumers and the industry will greatly benefit.

Although this package of reforms represents a major step in reaching our reform objectives, the Commission will not become complacent. It has already begun work on its next Action Plan which will be published early next year. It will have a strong focus on the move of the administration of driver licensing from An Garda Síochána to the Commission among other regulatory developments.

The Commission will shortly be holding meetings with industry representative groups around the country to explain the details of these reforms. The reforms will be introduced on a phased basis with the Commission informing all vehicle and driver licence holders directly of administrative changes to any systems currently in place.



**Kathleen Doyle**

Commissioner for Taxi Regulation

15 October 2009

# Changes affecting SPSV vehicle licensing

## Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle Provision

TIMESCALE

**2010**

### Reform

The Commission will only issue new taxi and hackney licences for vehicles which meet the Commission's new wheelchair accessible vehicles standards. The Commission will continue to monitor entry to the industry at regular intervals. Should service levels to consumers be impacted the Commission will reconsider issuing standard taxi and hackney licences to ensure effective competition and supply.

Existing wheelchair accessible vehicle operators are aware that they have to meet these new standards in 2012.

### Rationale

The issue of wheelchair accessible vehicle licences only will seek to bring a stock of new vehicles over the next number of years to offset potential loss of numbers caused by the necessary introduction of the new quality standards.

## Transfer of Licences

TIMESCALE

**2010**

### Reform

Existing saloon taxi vehicle licences can only be transferred one more time. These licences can only be transferred to saloon cars that are less than three years old.

All new taxi vehicle licences issued will be non-transferable between people.

The transferability of wheelchair accessible taxi licences will no longer be allowed.

### Rationale

A change to the transferability rules will improve quality standards, improve access to SPSV services for people with disabilities and enhance enforcement and compliance activities.

# Changes affecting SPSV vehicle licensing

## Change of Vehicle

TIMESCALE

**2010**

### Reform

Existing licence holders must meet the nine-year age rule when transferring their licence from one vehicle to another vehicle (while retaining ownership of the licence).

### Rationale

To ensure that the quality of the existing vehicle fleet does not deteriorate when a vehicle licence holder changes his/her vehicle.

## New Vehicle Licensing Administration Service

TIMESCALE

**2010**

### Reform

The Commission will begin its new vehicle licensing administration service. This will include:

- Annual vehicle assessment upon renewal of a vehicle licence, which affirms its continued suitability as an SPSV;
- Appointment-led service including set times, with appointments guaranteed;
- Simplified application and renewal processes;
- Mandatory registration on the Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle register for wheelchair accessible vehicles.

### Rationale

This is part of the Commission's objective of continued development of a qualitative and customer orientated licensing process. It is designed to ensure the vehicle licensing and renewal process is as time and cost efficient as possible, for all licence holders.

Enhanced data collection at the time of licensing and renewal will also facilitate the Commission's own compliance checks, together with assisting third party enforcement activities.

# Changes affecting SPSV vehicle licensing

## Fast-tracking of 9 Year Vehicle Age Rule

TIMESCALE

**2011**

### Reform

All existing taxi and hackney vehicles will be required to meet the nine year age requirement set out in the new Vehicle Standards (announced in November 2007), on renewal of their vehicle licence in 2011.

The remaining vehicle standards for incumbents will continue to be phased in on renewal of licence in 2012 i.e. vehicle size and specification.

### Rationale

This reform is being introduced to ensure a consistently high standard of vehicle is available to consumers at all times and ensure drivers operating with higher quality and newer vehicles are not competing with older vehicles.

In line with the recommendation in the Economic Review of the SPSV industry, and to stop the ageing of the fleet, this rule is being fast-tracked.

## Fleet Licensing

TIMESCALE

**2010**

### Reform

The Commission will investigate the feasibility of a fleet licence for multiple vehicle licence holders, considering the most appropriate licensing criteria and operational model.

### Rationale

Introducing a fleet licence could improve the monitoring and enforcement of compliance in the rental market. It could also help provide a more efficient licensing renewal process for multiple vehicle licence holders.

# Changes affecting SPSV driver licences

## Fast-tracking of Skills Development Programme

TIMESCALE

**2010–12**

### Reform

The Commission will fast-track the uptake of the driver skills development programme with the aim of ensuring that SPSV driver licence holders will have undertaken it prior to 1st January 2012.

The original decision was for all drivers to have undertaken the test on renewal of their licence from 2012.

### Rationale

The fast-tracking of the skills development programme will have quality and compliance benefits. It will help to drive a positive image of the industry and ensure drivers are up to speed on regulatory changes within the industry.

A significant proportion of drivers (55%) are scheduled to renew their driver licence before 2012, meaning that under the previous arrangements they would not have to sit the test until 2015/2016. This reform is in line with the recommendations of the Economic Review of the SPSV industry to fast-track quality improvement initiatives.

## Provision of Market Data to Potential New Entrants

TIMESCALE

**2010**

### Reform

The Commission will develop data and business planning information which will be made available to those considering entering the SPSV market. This will include the latest available data on operating costs and other market statistics.

### Rationale

The Economic Review recommended that data be provided to potential new entrants to ensure they make an informed decision on their market entry.

# Changes affecting SPSV driver licences

## More in-depth Driver Licence Data Collection

TIMESCALE

2010

### Reform

The Commission will introduce a new driver licence application and renewal forms capturing a greater degree of information on the applicant e.g. PPS number, tax clearance certificate, employment status and insurance details. This will be fully implemented when the Commission takes over driver licensing administration from An Garda Síochána, although the Commission will seek to progress this in the interim.

The collection and sharing of data will be subject to the usual legal and data privacy constraints.

The Commission will also reduce the driver licence period from five to three years.

### Rationale

The collection of additional information on application and renewal will enable a greater understanding of industry characteristics. It would also enhance third party enforcement checks by interested authorities.

## Working Hours

TIMESCALE

2010

### Reform

In line with the above, The Commission will seek to collect 'employment status' as part of the application and renewal process. This may be forwarded to relevant third parties.

The Commission, in conjunction with other agencies, will run information campaigns for drivers and employers on the health and safety implications of excessive working hours.

The Commission will also examine the potential to use in-vehicle technology to record working hours.

### Rationale

The Commission seeks to promote the health and safety for both operators and consumers.

These measures will highlight the obligations of drivers and employers regarding working hours and health and safety legislation.

# Compliance & Enforcement

## Area of Operation

TIMESCALE

**2010**

### Reform

The Commission will complete and announce the results of a review of potential approaches, including the use of roof signs, to make it easier to identify where a driver is licensed to stand or ply for hire.

### Rationale

Introduction of such a system will level the playing field for compliant drivers and give greater assurance to consumers that service providers have the required knowledge of the area they are operating in.

## Multiple Agency Operations

TIMESCALE

**Ongoing**

### Reform

The Commission will build upon information sharing programmes formally established between the Commission and third party agencies. This will be enhanced by the more in-depth collection of data as part of the licence application and renewal process.

The collection and sharing of data will be subject to the usual legal and data privacy constraints.

### Rationale

The sharing of information will improve detection levels for non-compliance with rules and regulations across multiple agencies.

## Measures to address failure to supply Wheelchair Accessible Service

TIMESCALE

**2010**

### Reform

The Commission will introduce stronger penalties for Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles operators who continually fail to provide a service to persons with disabilities when requested to do so.

Service provision will be monitored through complaints received and mystery trips.

### Rationale

Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle licence holders have received a discounted licence, which was subject to certain service provision conditions.

# Implementation

The Commission will finalise the regulatory, policy, operational and resourcing requirements to implement these reforms before the end of 2009. Some elements will be subject to a final regulatory impact assessment.

The Commission is working with SGS Ireland Limited to implement an enhanced vehicle licensing system which will provide an immediate platform for roll-out of reforms relating to vehicle licensing. It has also established a working group with An Garda Síochána to progress reforms relating to driver licensing.

The Commission's forthcoming Action Plan for 2010–2011 to be published early next year will provide further and final details of the timing and specifics of the reforms outlined.

Licence holders will be contacted on an individual basis to provide a reasonable notice period to prepare for any licensing changes that effect their particular licence.