

Taxi Commissioner meets with Industry Representatives

The Commissioner for Taxi Regulation, Mr Ger Deering, today (Monday, July 24, 2006) met with the National Taxi Drivers Union to clarify the new National Fare Structure and the implementation of Driving Forward, the Commission's Action Plan for 2006-2007.

The Commissioner confirmed that under the new National Fare Structure there will no longer be a specific airport pick-up charge at Dublin Airport and luggage charges for the travelling public are to be abolished. As announced on March 7th 2006 the only additional charges allowed by the new fare to be introduced on September 25th are those for additional passengers and a booking charge when a taxi is called out for hire.

Mr Deering pointed out that the airport pick-up charge, currently part of the taxi fare dates back to a time when both taxis and airport users were limited in number. Since that time the number of passengers travelling through Dublin Airport has increased more than tenfold and the number of taxis plying for hire in the Dublin area has also increased dramatically.

Referring to a report commissioned by the NTDU, the Commissioner commented, "The report does not accurately reflect the introduction of the new fare. By way of example it omits certain aspects of the new national fare set to be introduced on September 25th."

In arriving at decisions in relation to the Action Plan and the Fare Structure the Commission carried out the most extensive consultations and research ever undertaken in relation to small public service vehicles in Ireland.

"Representatives of the industry were heavily involved in all of the consultation process," Mr Deering commented. "I had numerous meetings with them individually and collectively. They were invited to put forward submissions in writing and they were fully involved in the consultation process through the Advisory Council to the Commission for Taxi Regulation. In fact, the representative bodies involved in the current dispute are all members of the Advisory Council, which includes six industry representative bodies. Indeed, many aspects of the new national fare and the changes to be put in place as part of Driving Forward were influenced by this combined input."

The Commission received over 500 submissions and held a broad range of meetings as part of the consultation process, which was carried out from last February to December. Having done so it arrived at its decisions as published in Driving Forward.

Mr Deering also pointed to correspondence with the National Taxi Drivers Union as part of this consultation process. "In April I received a response to the Action Plan as well a request of an urgent meeting from the NTDU. I responded in detail to each of the points raised by the NTDU and I agreed to a meeting to discuss the matters in further detail. I have always been, and remain, available for meetings with industry representatives at all times to discuss any and all of their concerns."

Describing the recent and planned future industrial action by taxi drivers as "counterproductive" Mr Deering said: "The withdrawal of services by taxi drivers on Monday

17th July was counterproductive and succeeded only in inconveniencing potential customers and causing drivers and operators to lose income. It was a poor reflection of the industry as a whole and played into the hands of those who seek to denigrate it.

“That said, I fully respect the right of self employed people to withdraw their services in pursuit of the settlement of what they perceive to be a legitimate grievance. On the other hand, I must also assert the right of drivers who want and need to work and earn an income to do so. There were numerous reports of intimidation of drivers who wished to work on last week. It is my earnest hope that this is not a feature of any forthcoming action by drivers, as it will only serve to further damage the image of the industry.

Mr Deering concluded by saying that the Commission’s decisions in relation to the National Fare Structure and the Action Plan will stand. “In regulating the industry the Commission has to take into consideration the views of all who have an interest in the sector, including passengers and the decisions arrived at strike a balance between what SPSV drivers and operators wanted and what members of the travelling public wanted,” he said.

“It is the nature of such a process, which seeks to reach a balanced approach that no party will be entirely happy with the result. As a result, it is not possible at this stage of the process for any one party, be it the industry or consumers, to operate a veto over the Regulator’s decisions,” Mr Deering concluded.

Ends

Notes to Editors

The principal function of the Commission is the development and maintenance of a regulatory framework for the control and operation of small public service vehicles (SPSVs) and their drivers. In fulfilling this role the Commission published Its Action Plan 2006/2007 'Driving Forward' in March 2006.

The new regulations, administrative structures, initiatives and services provided by the Commission will be put in place on a phased basis in 2006/07. Amongst the most imminent changes is a new fare system, which will see the entire country become one taximeter area and a new National Maximum Fare that will apply to all taxi fares for all taxi journeys from the 25th of September 2006. The new national Fare Structure will consist of an initial-charge, a distance-related charge or a time related charge, a premium at certain times and on certain days and extras where applicable.

The Commission decided a new National Fare structure and rate will apply across the entire country. This is the best way forward for the benefit of both consumers and service providers thus removing the complex fare structure and diverse elements currently in place around the country. The new National Fare will be simpler and more transparent making it easier for people using the service to understand how fares are calculated and ensuring that taxi operators are rewarded in a way that reflects their cost base.

Extra charges applying to luggage and other miscellaneous charges including a charge for hiring at the rank at Dublin Airport and charges for extra stops in some areas will be abolished.

Another key feature of the Action Plan is the introduction of a new vehicle licensing system that will be administered by National Car Testing Service (NCTS) for the Commission. It will replace the process where, to date, over eighty local authorities are licensing authorities. The Action Plan will also give consumers a more accessible complaints system and access to more information within the vehicle, with tamper proof licence disks, and consumer information displays in all taxis and hackneys.