

Commission for Taxi Regulation Begins Reform of Taxi, Hackney & Limousine Services

Action Plan 'Driving Forward' published 7th March 2006

The Commission for Taxi Regulation has published its Action Plan 'Driving Forward' which will see the introduction of fundamental reforms beginning this April with a new national vehicle licensing system. The reforms introduced will be across a broad range of areas to improve the quality of service delivered by Ireland's taxi, hackney and limousine industry.

The Commission for Taxi Regulation was given powers in September 2005 under the Taxi Regulation Act 2003 to implement a major reform of the taxi, hackney and limousine service in Ireland. Following extensive public consultation with members of industry, consumers, the Advisory Council to the Commission and various stakeholders the Commission has published its Action Plan for 2006-2007 entitled "Driving Forward" to inform of the upcoming changes that will be introduced in the provision of taxi, hackney and limousine services in Ireland.

Introducing the Action Plan, Commissioner for Taxi Regulation Mr Ger Deering said, "This Action Plan and its reforms are the culmination of a process that has seen widespread consultation with the industry, customers and a variety of experts. I am convinced that an enhanced service provision, improved accessibility and stringent enforcement will bring about significant benefits for both passengers and service providers.

The Commission will launch a major awareness programme in September of this year to ensure that customers and service suppliers alike are fully informed of their rights and responsibilities, while at the same time being aware of the level of service that they can expect or that is expected of them. The Commission also believes that the cornerstone of any regulatory process is good enforcement. In this respect the Commission is committed to ensuring that all existing and future regulations will be fully enforced throughout the country.

It is my earnest belief that implementing these changes will bring about improved levels of services for customers, an increase in Small Public Service Vehicle use and greater opportunities for service providers. This will result in benefits for all concerned and will be a positive change for a very important service."

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.

Improved accessibility is an overarching theme throughout the Action Plan and each measure or action in the Plan has been examined to measure its impact on or contribution to, improved accessibility.

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.

Highlights of the Action Plan include:

A National Taxi Fare

A new transparent and simplified National Taxi Fare structure with all taxi fares charged on the meter will be implemented throughout the country from September 25th for all taxi journeys.

Improved Accessibility Features

A range of improved accessibility features will include driver disability awareness training, improved in-vehicle information, customer guides in accessible formats, improved booking procedures and a more accessible complaints process

National Consumer Awareness Campaign

A National Consumer Awareness Campaign commencing in September 2006 will support the introduction of the new National Taxi Fare, Customers' Rights and Obligations and other Small Public Service Vehicle (SPSV) reforms.

Enhanced Safety & Security

A range of enhanced safety and security measures will be introduced for all licensed SPSVs in 2006/07 improving safety and security for both passengers and drivers.

Stronger Enforcement

The new code of regulations will be strongly enforced by a Commission enforcement team and the Gardai through the use of on-the-spot fines, court proceedings and revocation or suspension of licences..

New Skills Development Programme

A new code of good practice and mandatory skills development programme will be introduced for all new and existing SPSV drivers. Completion of the skills development programme will be required for all new drivers entering the industry from 2007 and all existing drivers on renewal of their SPSV licence from 2008.

Enhanced In-Vehicle Information

A designated display of customer's rights and responsibilities and fare information will be mandatory in all taxis and hackneys from September 2006. This information will detail how to access further information through easily accessible methods including lo-call, text, e-mail and post.

New National Complaints Process

The in-vehicle information and customer receipts will direct passengers to the Commission's new National Complaints and Commendations process through a variety of methods including lo-call, text, e-mail and post.

Mandatory Provision of Receipts

From September 2006, all SPSV drivers/operators will be required to give customers a receipt on payment with details of the duration and distance of the journey together with the SPSV licence number and the amount paid

New Customer Guide

The Commission will publish a user-friendly passenger guide in 2007. This easy to use guide will give the passengers all the information needed to make informed choices and know their rights and responsibilities in relation to SPSV services in a range of languages and accessible formats

New Service Provider Guide

The Commission will publish in 2007 a user friendly guide for drivers and operators of SPSVs to provide them with an easy-to-access comprehensive guide to their rights and obligations

New National SPSV Register

A new National Register of vehicle licences will be created in 2006 and a National Register of SPSV drivers in 2007

New National Vehicle Licensing System

The Commission will be the SPSV licensing authority for the country and will implement a new licensing system which will be administered for the Commission by the NCTS and available at 43 centres throughout the country

Notes for Editors

The Minister for Transport established the Commission for Taxi Regulation as an Independent Public Body under Part 2 of the Taxi Regulation Act 2003 on 1st September 2004. Gerard Deering was appointed Commissioner as the sole member of the Commission on that date.

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.

At the time of publication virtually all the powers conferred on the Commission by the Taxi Regulation Act 2003 (2003 Act) have commenced. It has for example the responsibility for the making of regulations in relation to the licensing, ownership, control and operation of taxis, hackneys, limousines and their drivers.

In addition, the Commission is responsible for fixing the maximum taxi fares in respect of any taximeter area and also has the power to declare an area to be a taximeter area and to alter or extend an existing taximeter area (this was previously managed by the local authorities).

The only remaining areas to be commenced are those relating to section 36, which provides for an automatic disqualification from holding a licence on conviction of certain specified serious criminal offences. The Minister for Transport is consulting with the Commission, the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform; the Courts Service, An Garda Síochána and industry representatives with a view to commencing this section.

There are a total of 20,744 cabs registered in Ireland. This is broken down into more than two-thirds being taxis (68.3%) 29.2% hackneys and 2.5% are limousines. The Commission for Taxi Regulation published this information in June 2005 in the National Review of Taxi, Hackney and Limousine Services Review.

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Full copy of Action Plan and National Taxi Fare Information Booklet available on www.taxiregulator.ie.