

Commission for Taxi Regulation Publishes Vehicle Standards Consultation Paper

(**December 18th 2006**) The Commission for Taxi Regulation has today published 'Consultation Paper No. 4, Vehicle Standards'. The Paper proposes reforms across a wide range of areas within the Small Public Service Vehicle (SPSV) sector. The proposed reforms relate to; vehicle condition, size, capacity, safety, security, accessibility and comfort for taxis hackneys and limousines. Following consultation, reforms will be implemented on a phased basis from 2008.

The Commission will make every effort to balance overall quality, accessibility and safety improvements that enable passengers to embark, travel and disembark safely and comfortably on the one hand, with the costs, technical, safety and other practical implications that these reforms will impose on drivers and operators on the other.

Commissioner for Taxi Regulation, Ger Deering said, "Following the publication of 'Driving Forward' earlier this year, much has been achieved towards our mission of achieving a first class, professional, efficient, safe, accessible and customer-friendly service. To date this includes the introduction of a more transparent and efficient vehicle licensing system, a national maximum taxi fare, the declaration of the entire country as one taximeter area, more accessible information, complaints and commendation system and access to more information.

We are now progressing the reform of vehicle standards and this document is aimed at everyone with an interest in the provision of public and private hire services in Ireland. This includes industry associations, representative groups, SPSV drivers and operators, people who use SPSVs and vehicle manufacturers and distributors. We have made a number of proposed changes, but we will take on board all views and seek to provide a solution that balances the wishes and needs of all parties.

It is essential that the final decision gives service providers an element of certainty to encourage maintained investment and to balance supply and demand, as well sufficient advance notice to enable future business planning. They must also provide passengers with the appropriate level and quality of service. Of course many SPSV operators maintain high standards and will have no trouble meeting the proposed changes."

The Consultation Paper sets out the current situation, issues for consideration and the Commission's proposed solution in relation to a range of vehicle standards. Unless stated, the timescale for the changes is 2008 for new entrants and 2010 for existing licence holders. Changes proposed include;

- A maximum age limit of nine years old for standard taxis and hackneys.
- Definition of a standard taxi/hackney as; a minimum four-door, mid-range saloon/hatchback/estate/MPV with a permanent roof, separate luggage compartment of 420 litres and seating for four adult passengers plus driver.
- New category of wheelchair accessible hackney. (Timing subject to new standards published separately in 2007)
- The interior and exterior of the vehicle to be clean and tidy (with due regard to weather conditions), with no repairs in progress. Overall, vehicles should meet a standard similar to a recently valeted vehicle.
- Taxi roof signs to be synchronised with taximeters so taxis show clearly if they are available for hire (illuminated) or not (not illuminated). (Proposed 2008 for new entrants and to coincide with fare review for existing licence holders)

- Vehicles should carry a fire extinguisher, first aid kit, warning triangle, high visibility safety vest and a torch.
- Temperatures inside the vehicle should be capable of being maintained at least 20°C
- Annual SPSV suitability test.
- Allowing in-car security shields or transparent divisor and/or in-vehicle CCTV cameras. (At driver's discretion)
- Provision of new in-vehicle signage.

In addition to the proposed changes above the Commission will carry out a number of Pilot studies commencing in 2007 to investigate;

- The possible inclusion of a 'swivel' passenger seat capable of rotating a seated passenger 90° for greater accessibility, for all vehicles and/or wheelchair accessible vehicles.
- Possible inclusion of an induction loop in wheelchair accessible vehicles.
- Possible inclusion of an audible taximeter.
- Effectiveness of in-vehicle security shields or transparent divisor.
- Effectiveness of in-vehicle CCTV cameras.
- Establishment of a 'Quality Mark' awarded for a high levels of service.

Proposals specifically relating to Wheelchair Accessible Taxis and Hackneys will be subject to standards published separately in 2007 (with implementation dates of 2008 for new entrants, 2012 for existing licence holders). Proposals for this include;

- Consistent accessibility requirements for doors and provision of access steps (where the vehicle is higher than 230mm from the ground), ramps or lifts.
- Provision of a forward or rearward facing (not side facing) space exclusively available for at least one wheelchair and occupant, plus seats for three additional adult passengers. Separate wheelchair and wheelchair occupant restraints should also be provided.
- Provision of handholds/rails and non-slip flooring.
- The Commission is making an application to the Minister for Transport requesting that a subsidy be put in place to assist with the purchase of wheelchair accessible taxis and hackneys.

The Paper also seeks to address the considerable challenge of providing in-vehicle information that meets the needs of all drivers and passengers for a diverse fleet comprising 44 makes and 250 models. The effectiveness of the window stickers currently in use has been under review and new in-vehicle signage is now proposed based on the outcome of this consultation process. In the interim period, 'passenger information cards' have been distributed to all SPSV licence holders.

The deadline for receipt of submissions on Consultation Paper No. 4 'Vehicle Standards' is 5.00pm on Thursday, March 15th 2007. When all submissions have been considered, together with any advice received from the Advisory Council, the Commission will publish a new code of regulations for vehicle standards in SPSVs.

Consultation Paper 4 – 'Vehicle Standards' is available on the Commission's website: www.taxiregulator.ie, from the Commission's offices at 35 Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin 2 or by calling the Consumer Information Line on 1890 60 60 90.

Ends

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.

Virtually all the powers conferred on the Commission by the Taxi Regulation Act 2003 (2003 Act) have commenced since September 2005. These include 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 a function of local authorities).

As of November 2006 there are a total of 21,347 active SPSV Licences. This includes 16,164 Taxis (14,861 Taxis and 1,303 Wheelchair Accessible Taxis), 4,051 Hackneys and 1,132 Limousines.

A full copy of the Consultation Paper is available on request or from the Commission website – www.taxiregulator.ie