

Taxi Regulator
An Rialálaí Tacsaithe



COMMISSION FOR TAXI REGULATION

END OF YEAR STATEMENT

2008

January 2009

Contents

Highlights of 2008	3
Overview of the Year	4
Fare Revision	5
Transferability of Taxi Licences	6
National Register of Licences.....	6
Preparation with Dispatch Operators for licensing	6
Preparation of Wheelchair Accessible Taxi Register	7
Bookings for Wheelchair Accessible Taxi licensed vehicles	7
Introduction of colour-coded tamper proof vehicle licence discs	7
Joint Activity with the Road Safety Authority	7
Provision of Information	8
Enforcement	9
Outlook for 2009.....	11
Editor's Notes.....	12

HIGHLIGHTS OF 2008

- **Publication of 'Always Driving Forward' Action Plan for industry 2008-2009**
- **Public consultation regarding the revision of the National Maximum Taxi Fare**
- **Introduction of Dispatch Operator licensing process**
- **Introduction of small public service vehicle (SPSV) colour coded tamper-proof licence disc system**
- **Joint advertising campaign with Road Safety Authority (RSA) launched as part of ongoing awareness campaign**
- **Preparation of a Wheelchair Accessible Taxi Register**
- **Policy agreed on transferability of licences**

OVERVIEW OF THE YEAR

2008 has seen a number of key developments towards the Commission's mission of achieving a first class, professional, efficient, safe and accessible, customer-friendly service for small public service vehicle passengers and service providers.

Notably, we have begun the process of licensing dispatch operators, a key element in quality SPSV service provision and have introduced extra security measures including colour coded tamper-proof licence discs for taxis, hackneys and limousines.

Overall, the industry is now more secure, transparent and accountable than ever. As a result of new measures in vehicle and driver licensing and identification passengers can be increasingly confident of a safe and secure journey.

This year also saw the Commission carry out a revision of the National Maximum Taxi Fare, something we committed to when the fare was introduced in 2006. A full public consultation and the Commission's own research, along with a number of meetings with key stakeholders resulted in the Commission implementing an 8.3% increase. This figure is in line with revisions in fares for other public transport in Ireland and is a reflection of the increased costs of operating in the industry. It continues to be a maximum fare.

As of December 2008 the Commission records indicated a total of 27,429 active SPSV licences.

This includes:

Hackneys	4,914
Limousines	1,338
Taxis	19,577
Wheelchair Accessible Taxis	1,600
TOTAL	27,429

This is an increase of 1,734 active vehicle licences since the previously published figure in the Commission's End of Year Statement for 2007.

There are a couple of notable trends in this respect.

Firstly the Commission welcomes the increase in the numbers of wheelchair accessible taxis. As the door-to-door service offered by taxis is of particular use and relevance to persons with disabilities the Commission is committed to further increasing the number of wheelchair accessible taxis and requiring those already licensed to prioritise bookings from persons with disabilities.

Secondly, the number of new licenses being issued is now dropping month on month and this year has seen an overall decrease in new licences issued. This may be an indication of a natural equilibrium coming to the market as the forces of demand and supply take effect.

As of the December, 2008 the Commission records indicated a total number of 46,845 active SPSV driver licences. The Commission continues to issue driver identification cards for display on the dashboard of the vehicle and a smart card to be held by the driver whilst operating.

FARE REVISION

The Commission for Taxi Regulation completed its public consultation process on the revision of the National Maximum Taxi Fare and announced changes to the fare effective from November 1st 2008. Drivers had a three-week period from that date to ensure that their taximeters were calibrated with the new fare.

The fare revision followed a public consultation process which began in April 2008. In making its decision the Commission took into account the views of those that made submissions during the public consultation period, industry representatives, the Advisory Council to the Commission and other key stakeholders. Economic consultants also undertook a review of the costs of operating in the business and these results were given due weight.

The changes reflect the increased costs of owning and operating a taxi since the National Maximum Taxi Fare was implemented in September 2006. The revisions to the fare were;

- An increase in the standard and premium initial charges and subsequent tariffs of 8.3%
- Christmas Eve 20:00h to St Stephen's day 8:00h and 20:00h New Year's Eve to 8:00h New Year's Day will now be charged at the highest tariff rate to address under supply on those days
- An increase in the soiling charge from €125 to €140

There were no increases to the additional charges for extra passengers or to the booking charge.

The changes mean that the initial charge displayed when a customer hires a taxi is now €4.10 (standard rate) or €4.45 (premium rate).

The new fare was set with due consideration for both taxi drivers and consumers. It is important that drivers have sufficient reward for their work, whilst a balance must be struck to ensure that the service remains affordable and demand is sustained. The fare continues to be a maximum fare and can be discounted at a driver's discretion.

This review has been completed two years after the introduction of the National Maximum Taxi Fare. The Commission has made a commitment to a further review before the end of 2010.

TRANSFERABILITY OF TAXI LICENCES

Following industry consultation last year, a large majority of the industry requested no change in the transferability or renting/leasing of taxi licences. The Commission therefore decided that taxi licenses could remain transferable, but put new responsibilities in place for licence holders who have a third party operating the licence.

Where a SPSV licence holder rents/leases/employs or allows a third party to operate their licensed vehicle, the licence holder is responsible for ensuring that the person driving the vehicle has a current SPSV driver licence and is insured to drive the vehicle as a SPSV. Details of the SPSV driver licence and insurance certificate must be available to the vehicle licence holder and a record held for inspection by the Commission on request. Actual numbers of taxi licences being transferred remain very low, less than 1%.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF LICENCES

Under Section 38 of the Taxi Regulation Act, the Commission is required to maintain a national register of licences. There are currently two separate registers – a register of licensed SPSVs (Vehicle Register) and a register of licensed SPSV drivers (Driver Register). The Commission provides information from these registers to appropriate enforcement agencies on request to ensure compliance with regulations. An Garda Síochána continue to update the Commission with information to keep the SPSV driver register current.

PREPARATION WITH DISPATCH OPERATORS FOR LICENSING

All dispatch operators are now required to register with the Commission. The first issue of the Dispatch Operator Newsletter, which outlined a step-by-step guide to obtaining a Dispatch Operator Licence, was sent to all registered Dispatch Operators in December 2008. The application process for licensing, including inspections, will commence in 2009. Operators have a number of months to prepare for the licensing process. Licences will be granted subject to the following;

- An efficient and accessible booking service
- Commission Skills Development Certificate
- Complaints process in place
- Appropriate record keeping systems in place to ensure the availability of up-to-date and relevant booking, complaints, staff training, driver and vehicle records
- Staff training plan
- A declaration that the required standards are in place
- An original and valid tax clearance certificate
- A licensing fee of €250

Dispatch Operators are required to train base operators in customer service, customer complaints, assisting persons with disabilities and the fare structure. All Dispatch Operators will also be required to keep copies of the following driver and vehicle records:

- SPSV Driver Licence in respect of each driver who operates a vehicle equipped with a radio supplied by that Dispatch Operator
- SPSV Licence in respect of each vehicle affiliated to the Dispatch Operator

- Insurance certificate(s) in respect of each affiliated vehicle and all drivers who operate that vehicle as an SPSV

Achievement of the Quality Assurance Mark will be piloted through Dispatch Operators and will depend on full compliance with the licensing requirements in addition to reports of very high standards of vehicles, drivers or booking services.

PREPARATION OF A WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE TAXI REGISTER

The Commission introduced a new requirement for wheelchair accessible licence holders to provide their contact details to the Commission for the purpose of booking their services. A register of all Wheelchair Accessible Taxi Operators, their contact details, area and hours of operation was commenced in 2008. Details from the register can be requested by contacting the Commission's Consumer Information Line at 1890 60 60 90.

BOOKINGS FOR WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE LICENSED VEHICLES

The Commission has also introduced new regulations whereby wheelchair accessible licence holders must give priority to bookings from people with disabilities and people who wish to travel in their wheelchairs. The Commission will monitor this service closely to ensure that people with disabilities are able to access a service.

INTRODUCTION OF COLOUR CODED TAMPER-PROOF VEHICLE LICENCE DISCS

Following on from the commencement of the roll-out of the new national vehicle licensing system, all vehicle licence holders will be issued with colour coded tamper-proof licence discs to be displayed on the front and rear windows of each licensed vehicle.

The disc for taxis remain yellow, hackneys are now blue and limousines silver. The colour coding has been introduced to simplify effective identification. Tamper-proof discs continue to be affixed by NCT staff on successful completion of the licence application or renewal process. All licence holders will be issued with a new disc by April 2009.

JOINT ACTIVITY WITH THE ROAD SAFETY AUTHORITY

A new national advertising campaign was jointly launched by the Commission for Taxi Regulation and the Road Safety Authority (RSA) in July. This initiative comprised a high visibility nationwide television, radio and print advertising campaign and highlighted the benefits of using Ireland's taxi, hackney and limousine services.

The campaign ran for eight weeks during the summer and at Christmas as a compliment to the Road Safety Authority's ongoing anti drink drive initiatives and the Commission for Taxi Regulation's regular promotion of the SPSV industry. As with previous joint initiatives, working with the RSA enables the Commission to promote the services of the industry in a more cost-effective manner while spreading important safety messages to the general public.

PROVISION OF INFORMATION

As part of its on-going commitment to keeping all stakeholders informed and up to date, the Commission published and distributed a number of documents during 2008:

- Action plan 2008-2009
- Consultation paper no. 5 on the national maximum taxi fare
- Three industry newsletters
- A consumer guide to the revised national maximum taxi fare introduced in November 2008
- Revised technical guidelines for meter and receipt information
- A newsletter to all registered dispatch operators

Regular stakeholder meetings were also held at national and regional level, including the following:

- Regular meetings with regional industry representatives throughout the year
- Meetings with disability representatives
- Meetings with other public bodies on policy-related matters
- Liaison with local authorities on taxi rank provision

The Commission also continues to operate two separate and distinct information telephone lines – for consumers and for industry.

The consumer information line - **1890 60 60 90**, which operates from Monday to Friday 8am-8pm, is open to all users of the SPSV industry and provides information on all aspects of the service, offering a one-stop-shop for consumers. It is also the first contact point for customers who wish to make a complaint. Customers may also contact this number to compliment service received.

Approximately 9,000 calls to the consumer information line were received during 2008, or an average of 187 per week. These calls covered a range of topics including how to make a complaint, lost property procedures and information on fares and consumer rights and responsibilities.

The industry information line - **1890 347 347** is an equally important service, providing members of the industry with information on the ongoing developments and improvements in the industry.

More than 40,000 calls were received by this service during 2008. These calls related to a range of issues affecting SPSV drivers and the industry including driver and vehicle licensing, enforcement, transfer of licences, vehicle standards and fares.

Over 16,000 publications were distributed as a result of requests to the information lines.

ENFORCEMENT

Proper enforcement is the cornerstone of any regulatory process. Enforcement is an essential element in achieving and sustaining consistently high standards and in preventing illegal or sub-standard service provision.

The Commission's enforcement team has been active since July 2007. The enforcement team, assisted by An Garda Síochána, cover all aspects of the Small Public Service Vehicle (SPSV) industry including;

- Vehicle standards
- Vehicle licensing
- Driver licensing
- Driver conduct
- Overcharging and other matters relating to hiring

Since July 2007, the Commission's enforcement officers have visited every county in the country as part of the national enforcement operation and also in response to calls from within the industry, members of the public or following advice from the Gardaí.

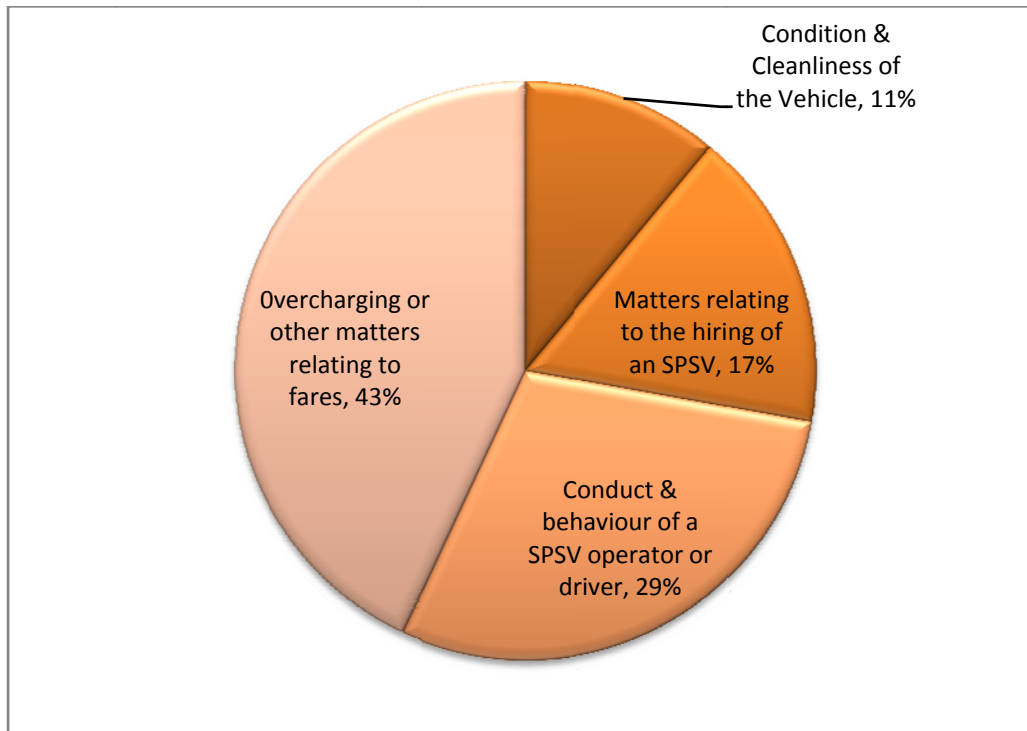
Under Section 51 of the Taxi Regulation Act 2003 the Commission is also responsible for the handling of the following complaints;

- Complaints in relation to the condition and cleanliness of a Small Public Service Vehicle (SPSV)
- Complaints in relation to the conduct and behaviour of a SPSV operator or driver
- Overcharging or other matters relating to fares
- Matters relating to the hiring of an SPSV

In the course of 2008, the Commission received a total of 601 complaints. Complaints are investigated by the Commission Enforcement Team and can result in:

- No further action;
- Advice given to the operator;
- A formal warning;
- A prosecution.

Breakdown of Complaints 2008



A total of 27 complaints received were referred to other agencies as the nature of the complaint was not within the remit of the Commission.

Under Section 46 of the Taxi Regulation Act 2003 an authorised officer of the Commission has the power to issue on-the-spot penalties for a number of fixed charge offences. Contravention of a fixed charge offence attracts an on-the-spot penalty of €250. In the event that payment is not made within 28 days from the date of issue, the Commission will institute court proceedings which could result in a fine of up to €2,000 together with a possible award of legal costs against the accused. There were 258 fixed charge penalties issued in 2008.

Joint Enforcement Operations

During 2008 the Commission has undertaken a number of joint enforcement operations with An Garda Síochána; this has enabled the Commission to increase the number of operations nationally by nearly threefold. This joint approach towards enforcement will continue in 2009.

The vast majority of the industry is fully compliant with SPSV regulations and Commission enforcement operations bear this out. However, incidents of non-compliance discovered as a result of investigation of complaints or visits across the country do result in prosecution in some cases. The Commission undertook a total of 106 prosecutions with regard to 117 offences in 2008.

OUTLOOK FOR 2009

The early part of 2009 will see the introduction, initially on a pilot basis, of the new Skills Development Programme. The Skills Development Programme and Skills Development Test will be introduced as part of the application process for new SPSV driver licences during 2009. This will be extended to all existing driver licence holders in 2012. Existing licensed drivers can sit the test, once available, in advance of this mandatory deadline. The Skills Development Programme includes modules on the rules of operation in the SPSV business, route knowledge, fare structure, customer service, safety and security and vehicle standards.

2009 will also see the introduction of new vehicle standards for all new SPSV licences. For standard taxis and hackneys these include a vehicle age of not more than nine years, a luggage capacity of 420 litres and minimum interior dimensions to ensure four adults may travel in comfort.

All SPSVs will also be required to have a good standard of cleanliness and carry safety equipment including a fire extinguisher, first aid kit, advance warning triangle, high visibility reflective vest, torch, pen and paper.

Other important initiatives and milestones during 2009 will include;

- The publication of an economic review of the industry, carried out by Goodbody Economic Consultants on behalf of the Commission;
- The development of design guidelines for taxi ranks following a national review of taxi ranks, consultation with relevant stakeholders and a review of Irish and international best practice during 2009;
- Full roll-out of the licensing process for dispatch operators;
- The development of a 'Quality Assurance Scheme';
- Launch of online public register of vehicle and driver licences
- A review of all fees relating to vehicle licensing and driver licensing;
- The Commission assuming responsibility from An Garda Síochána as the licensing authority for SPSV drivers¹;
- Continued promotion of the use of compliant SPSVs through media.

¹ This is subject to the adequate provision of resources

EDITOR'S NOTES

Principal Function and Objectives

Section 9(1) of the 2003 Act provides that '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 and their drivers'.

Section 9(2) of the 2003 Act requires that, in exercising its functions, the Commission shall seek to achieve the following objectives:

- (a) To promote the provision and maintenance of quality services by small public service vehicles and their drivers,
- (b) To pursue the continued development of a qualitative and customer orientated licensing system, regulatory code and standards for small public service vehicles, small public service vehicle licence holders and small public service vehicle drivers,
- (c) To oversee the development of a professional, safe, efficient and customer-friendly service by small public service vehicles and their drivers,
- (d) To encourage and promote competition in relation to services (including fares) offered by small public service vehicles,
- (e) In seeking to achieve the provision of quality services by small public service vehicles and their drivers, to have due regard to the protection of service users and providers alike,
- (f) To promote measures to facilitate increased integration of taxi services in the public transport system,
- (g) To promote the development of high quality cost effective services by small public service vehicles and their drivers which meet a wide range of customer needs including those of passengers with mobility or sensory impairments,
- (h) To promote access to small public service vehicles by persons with disabilities,
- (i) To encourage investments to support and enhance the services offered by small public service vehicles and to promote innovation in this regard.

ENDS