



Commission For Taxi Regulation
An Coimisiún Um Rialáil Tacsaithe

COMMISSION FOR TAXI REGULATION

END OF YEAR STATEMENT

2006

March 2007

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Publication of 'Driving Forward' – Action Plan for 2006-2007
- Introduction of a more transparent and efficient national vehicle licensing system
- New national register of licences
- Introduction of tamper-proof vehicle licensing disc
- Introduction of a national maximum taxi fare
- Declaration of the entire country as one taximeter area
- Introduction of a dedicated consumer information line
- Introduction of a dedicated information line for SPSV drivers and operators
- Commencement of a new national complaints system
- Hiring of enforcement officers
- Improved information and awareness to consumers
- Introduction of industry newsletter
- Publication of vehicle standards public consultation paper

OVERVIEW OF THE YEAR

In its end of year statement published today, March 12 2007, the Commission for Taxi Regulation reported on a successful year working towards its mission to achieve a first class, professional, efficient, safe and accessible, customer-friendly service, for small public service vehicle passengers and service providers.

Deputy Commissioner for Taxi Regulation, Kathleen Doyle commented, "Following the publication of the Commission's Action Plan 'Driving Forward' in March 2006, much has been achieved. The vast majority of the initiatives we implemented were done so for the very first time in this country and the overall impact and reaction has been very positive."

NEW LICENSING SYSTEM

The Commission for Taxi Regulation is now the sole SPSV licensing authority for the country, replacing the various local authorities who were previously responsible for this role. The new system, administered by the NCTS at centres throughout the country makes greater use of technology to enable maintenance of a single database of all SPSV licences. This National Register of vehicle licences assists both enforcement and greater transparency in terms of compliance.

Tamper-proof licence discs are also affixed by the NCTS at the time of renewal. Drivers can now renew their vehicle licences up to 12 weeks in advance of the expiry date meaning there is less downtime.

As of December 2006 there were a total of 21,710 active Small Public Service Vehicle Licences. This includes;

16,429 Taxis (15,100 Taxis and 1,329 Wheelchair Accessible Taxis)	(75.67%)
4,135 Hackneys	(19.05%)
1,146 Limousines	(5.28%)

This is an increase of over 900 vehicles since the previously published figures in June 2005 in the National Review of Taxi, Hackney and Limousine Services.

TAMPER-PROOF DISC

As noted previously, a tamper proof disc is now affixed by NCT staff on successful completion of the licence application or renewal process. This process is expected to be complete by October 2007. This offers increased levels of comfort and security for the passenger and makes it easier for enforcement agencies to know at a glance if a vehicle is properly licensed.

The disc displays the details of the vehicle registration, the SPSV licence number, the expiry date of the SPSV licence and the number of passengers the vehicle is licensed to carry. The disc is affixed on the windscreen and rear window of the vehicle so it is clearly visible from inside and outside and from the front and back of the vehicle. A hologram and advanced security features make replication or forgery extremely difficult.

The introduction of the disc also ensures that all vehicles are up to date in their licensing making it increasingly difficult for people to operate illegally in the industry.

NATIONAL MAXIMUM TAXI FARE AND NATIONAL TAXIMETER AREA

September 25th 2006 saw the introduction of a new National Maximum Taxi Fare. The new system saw the entire country become one taximeter area and a new National Maximum Fare apply throughout. Passengers now have the right to have all their taxi journeys charged on the meter.

The new structure removed the complex fare structures and diverse elements previously in place around the country and customers will now know how their fare is being calculated, no matter where they are. Figures from Legal Metrology, the organisation responsible for setting and checking taximeters show that there is 100% compliance in the programming of the new fare system.

The National Taximeter Area has removed the problems associated with 'off meter' fares, it will also enable a supply of taxis available for hire in areas that were previously outside taximeter areas. Indeed, since the implementation a number of areas which previously had no taxi licences (as they were not in a taximeter area) now have a service operating including Roscommon, Cavan and Tuam, Athenry, Kinnegad, Gorey, Spiddal, Athboy, Kill (Co Kildare), Stradbally, Claregalway, Ashbourne, Clifden, Newbridge and Carrigaline.

CONSUMER AND INDUSTRY INFORMATION LINES

September 2006 also saw the introduction of a new consumer information line - **1890 60 60 90** which operates from Monday to Friday 8am-8pm. The line is open to all users of the SPSV industry and provides information on all aspects of the service, providing a one-stop-shop for consumers. It is also the first contact point for customers who wish to make a complaint and customers also contact this number to compliment service received.

The Commission for Taxi Regulation received approximately 4,000 calls to the consumer information line up to December 31st 2006 at a rate of approximately 500 per week.

Of these 4,000 calls, the majority were general information queries. These related to subjects including the details of the new fare structure, the new national taximeter area, customer rights and responsibilities, queries on lost property and services for people with disabilities, amongst others.

The remainder of the calls were seeking information about making a complaint in relation to a SPSV provider or service.

The Commission is pleased at the level of interest being shown by consumers following the introduction of the consumer information line and it has been a useful guide to areas on which customers require more information.

The industry information line - **1890 347 347** is an equally important service, providing members of the industry with a channel for information on the ongoing reforms of the industry. To end 2006, the industry information line has received 8,600 calls since its implementation in September 2006. These calls related in the large part to queries on the new national maximum taxi fare and national taximeter area, as well as requests for publications and further information on licensing.

529 publications including the Action Plan 'Driving Forward', and the Fares Booklet have been distributed on request from both information lines.

COMPLAINTS

In September 2006 the Commission took over the complaints process from the Garda Carriage Office. Since then, the Commission has been responsible for the following complaints:

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

Since September 25th 2006 there have been 145 complaints made to the Commission.

- 61% of these are related to fares (i.e. overcharging or incorrect charging)
- A further 27% relate to the conduct of the driver (i.e. anything that could be considered inappropriate in terms of language or action)
- The remainder are related to hiring matters (mainly where companies have let people down on a booking) or vehicle standard/cleanliness
- Approximately 15% of the complaints have been referred to the Gardaí for their attention
- A small number have been referred to the Office of Tobacco Control

RECRUITMENT OF ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS

As part of the Commission's commitment to maintaining compliance within the industry, recruitment began in 2006 for a team of nine enforcement officers who will work both on the investigation of complaints made by customers and also in the field, proactively ensuring compliance within the industry.

AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

A public information campaign to provide consumers with greater information on their rights and responsibilities, accessibility to more information on fares and other recent changes and to generally build awareness of the industry has been underway in 2006.

The availability of consumer information displays in all taxis and hackneys was a key part of this with stickers and latterly information cards displaying customer rights and responsibilities as well as the new national maximum taxi fare chart, showing all tariffs and charges.

The consumer information line, as noted earlier, has been a focus of the awareness campaign, and the volume of calls received is testament to the success of this element.

The Commission has also been running a number of advertising campaigns on national radio, television and in newspapers, featuring 'TC' an animated Taxi Cab. A campaign around the introduction of the new fare structure and also at Christmas time to encourage greater use of SPSVs was well received and attracted a number of calls to our consumer information line.

The Commission also distributed around 10,000 wallet-sized cards detailing the new fare system through hotels, libraries and other public places, as well as through taxis themselves.

The Commission also commenced the production of 'Industry News' a quarterly newsletter sent directly to all SPSV licence holders to keep them updated on the activities of the Commission for Taxi Regulation and answering the most common questions received through the industry line.

PUBLICATION OF VEHICLE STANDARDS PUBLIC CONSULTATION PAPER

In December 2006, the Commission for Taxi Regulation published 'Consultation Paper No. 4, Vehicle Standards'. The Paper proposes reforms across a wide range of areas within the SPSV sector. The proposed reforms relate to vehicle condition, size, capacity, safety, security, accessibility and comfort for taxis, hackneys and limousines.

The Commission is seeking 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.

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. Reforms will be implemented on a phased basis from 2008.

POLICY ON DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION IN RELATION TO LICENCE-HOLDERS

The policy of the Commission relating to the disclosure of information is shaped by a number of legislative provisions. This policy has been developed in the interests of striking a fair balance between access to information on the one hand and the privacy and security of licence-holders on the other.

Section 38 of the Taxi Regulation Act 2003 requires the Commission to keep a register of licences to include the following details:

- (a) the name and address of the holder,*
- (b) any change of address of the holder,*
- (c) the licence number,*
- (d) where the licence is granted in respect of a vehicle, the unique identification mark (registration number) of the said vehicle,*
- (e) the driver number of the holder of a licence, that is to say the number of the driving licence granted to the holder,*
- (f) the category of small public service vehicle in respect of which a licence has been granted,*
- (g) the date of the grant of a licence,*
- (h) the area of application in respect of which the licence has been granted, where appropriate,*
- (i) details of any transfer of ownership of a licence or of the continuance in force of a licence in respect of a different vehicle,*
- (j) details of any suspension applying to a licence, including the period of the suspension, a reference to the reason for the suspension and particulars of all removals of such suspensions,*
- (k) details of the revocation of a licence and the reasons for the revocation.*

By virtue of section 38(5), having consulted the Garda Commissioner, it has been agreed that certain personal information should remain confidential. For example, the address of a licence-holder or the reasons for any suspension or revocation of a licence will not be disclosed.

Section 28 of the Freedom of Information Act 1997 expressly provides that a public body shall not disclose personal information. Section 28(1) provides:
Subject to the provisions of this section, a head shall refuse to grant a request under section 7 if, in the opinion of the head, access to the record concerned would involve the disclosure of personal information (including personal information relating to a deceased individual).

The Commission also has obligations under the Data Protection Acts 1988 & 2003 which provide that information may be obtained only for *one or more specified explicit and legitimate purposes*.

SUMMARY OF COMMISSION POLICY

In light of these various statutory provisions and to protect against misuse of information and avoid any security risk to drivers and operators, the Commission has adopted the policy of not disclosing private information concerning a licence-holder such as his or her address. Similarly, information relating to the reasons for the suspension or revocation of any licence will not be disclosed. This information will be available to members of the public from the register held in the Commission's offices **only** on foot of a request in writing for a certificate relating to the SPSV register under section 38(6) of our Act.

(An exchange of information may occur in the ordinary course between the Commission and other State agencies for the purpose of, among other matters, preventing, detecting or investigating offences).

OUTLOOK FOR 2007

The focus of the Commission in 2007 will be the continuing implementation of the Action Plan for 2006 – 2007 'Driving Forward'. This will include the following initiatives;

1. The deadline for receipt of submissions on Consultation Paper No. 4 'Vehicle Standards' is 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.
2. As part of the Vehicle Standards public consultation, the Commission will also carry out a number of Pilot studies commencing in 2007 to investigate;
 - The possible inclusion of a 'swivel' passenger seat 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.
3. 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 the end of 2007 and all existing drivers on renewal of their SPSV licence from 2008. The tender for the running and accreditation of this programme will be available in the early part of 2007.
4. New driver identification is currently being issued to all current SPSV driver licence holders. Each will receive a set of photo ID cards from the Commission. A personal 'smartcard' will enable the driver to have a portable photo ID containing a microchip that will enable members of the Commission enforcement team to verify the identity of the driver and their licence status. A larger ID for display on the vehicle dashboard will also be supplied. This will identify the driver and confirm to the passenger that they are licensed.
5. The Commission will publish user-friendly guides for passengers drivers and operators of SPSVs in a range of languages and accessible formats.

6. Enforcement officers will be visible on the streets from the early part of 2007, both checking vehicles at taxi ranks and undertaking journeys to determine the standard of service and level of compliance.
7. Taxi licences are currently transferable. To assess the effect this practice is having on the quality of SPSV services the Commission intends to carry out a detailed examination of the manner in which licences are being transferred, sold, rented or leased. A consultation paper will be issued on this matter during 2007.
8. The Commission proposes to revise existing guidelines for taxi ranks with a view to incorporating best practice in terms of accessibility for the provision and maintenance of taxi ranks. The Commission will undertake an audit of taxi ranks throughout the country in 2007 for publication on the Commission's website.
9. Key operational standards for dispatch centres will be put in place by the Commission along with a voluntary Quality Assurance Scheme and Quality Mark scheme on a pilot basis.

EDITORS 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.