

Taxi Regulator
Rialálaí Tacsaithe



COMMISSION FOR TAXI REGULATION

END OF YEAR STATEMENT

2007

February 2008

Highlights of 2007	3
Overview of the Year	3
New Vehicle Standards	4
Industry Consultation on Transferability of SPSV licences for taxis	5
Joint Activity with the Road Safety Authority	5
Improved Information and Awareness	5
Deployment of Enforcement Team	6
Fixed Charged Offences	7
Complaints	9
National Vehicle Licensing System	10
National Register of Licences	10
Outlook for 2008	11
Editor's Notes	12

HIGHLIGHTS OF 2007

- Introduction and distribution of new Driver Identification to over 41,000 Small Public Service Vehicle (SPSV) driver licence holders around the country
- Introduction of new vehicle standards for SPSVs
- SPSV industry consultation on Transferability of Licences for taxis
- Deployment of Enforcement team
- Joint activity with the Road Safety Authority
- Improved information and awareness
- Completion of roll out of new national vehicle licensing system
- Completion of national register of licences

OVERVIEW OF THE YEAR

2007 was another busy year for the Commission for Taxi Regulation (“Commission”) as we continued to work towards developing a first-class, professional, safe, accessible, customer-friendly service for small public service vehicle passengers and service providers.

This year saw the appointment in May of Ms. Kathleen Doyle as the new Commissioner for Taxi Regulation. Ms Doyle replaced Mr Ger Deering.

During the year, some 41,000 Driver Identification cards were distributed to SPSV drivers around the country. The collection of the 41,000 licence data from the Gardai and subsequent creation of the new secure driver identification began in late 2006 and distribution commenced with Carlow and Kildare at the beginning of February 2007 and was completed by the end of the summer.

This was a major undertaking and could not have been achieved without the close co-operation of An Garda Síochána and the industry and the Commission wishes to place on record its gratitude for the assistance received during this process.

As of December 2007, Commission records indicated a total of 25,695 active SPSV licences. This includes;

Hackneys	4,868
Limousines	1,331
Taxis	17,992
Wheelchair Accessible Taxis	1,504
Total	25,695

This is an increase of 3,985 active vehicle licences since the previously published figure in the Commission’s End of Year Statement for 2006.

NEW VEHICLE STANDARDS

Following an extensive consultation process, new vehicle standards for the SPSV industry, including taxis, hackneys and limousines were published in November of 2007. The new standards will bring in reforms across a wide range of areas within the sector on a phased basis from 2008 to 2012.

The new standards cover a number of areas including vehicle condition, basic vehicle specification, comfort and safety as well as improved standards for wheelchair accessible taxis and hackneys. Accessibility is a key theme, not only in ensuring that all taxis and hackneys are more accessible to people with disabilities but also specifically with major improvements to the level of wheelchair accessible services.

Some of the main features of the new vehicle standards are;

Standard Taxis and Hackneys:

(For new applicants from 01/01/09, existing licence holders from 01/01/12)

- Vehicle age of not more than nine years
- Minimum luggage capacity of 420 litres
- Vehicles to be mid range cars – saloon, hatchback, estate or MPV
- Small cars, i.e. those not capable of seating four adult passengers in comfort, no longer permitted.

Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles:

(For new applicants from 2008, existing licence holders from 01/01/12)

- New category of wheelchair accessible hackney
- Vehicles capable of seating one person in their wheelchair and at least three other adult passengers
- Wheelchair accessible vehicles now required to meet new EU directive regarding safety standards for all vehicles
- Goods vehicles converted to wheelchair accessible vehicles will no longer be permitted; conversions should be made from passenger vehicles only.

Limousines

(For new applicants from 01/01/09, existing licence holders from 01/01/12)

- Modified vehicles or stretch vehicles will now require an engineer's report prior to licensing
- Further consultation with limousine representatives regarding categories of limousines and age limit.

All SPSVs will be required to have:

(For all licence holders from 01/01/09)

- Good standard of cleanliness
- Safety equipment including a fire extinguisher, first aid kit, advance warning triangle, high visibility reflective vest
- Torch
- Pen and paper.

INDUSTRY CONSULTATION ON TRANSFERABILITY OF SPSV LICENCES FOR TAXIS

Taxi licences are currently transferable. To assess the effect this practice is having on the quality of SPSV services, the Commission began a detailed examination of the manner in which taxi licences are being transferred, sold, rented or leased. In June 2007, the Commission began seeking views from the industry in relation to the appropriate operation and control of taxi and wheelchair accessible taxi licences. The purpose of this review is to enhance compliance with SPSV legislation and general accountability. The deadline for responses was 1st September 2007 and 130 submissions were received. The Commission is currently considering the submissions and will announce the outcome of the review during 2008.

JOINT ACTIVITY WITH THE ROAD SAFETY AUTHORITY

The Commission and the Road Safety Authority commenced a poster campaign targeting pubs nationwide to encourage the use of local taxi and hackney operator firms. This was a joint promotion of responsible behaviour over key holidays including the Christmas season.

The Commission will continue to promote responsible behaviour in the promotion of use of SPSVs whilst consumers are undertaking journeys socially.

IMPROVED INFORMATION AND AWARENESS

The Commission has run extensive television and radio advertising campaigns to promote the use of compliant taxis, hackneys and limousines.

In a new initiative, specific advertising campaigns were commenced in local media around large scale public events such as the Rose of Tralee festival and the Galway Races. These campaigns also featured specific reference to limousine services.

Limousines also received further promotion through advertising placed by the Commission in wedding supplements in newspapers and magazines.

The Commission will continue to focus on advertising to promote the use of the different categories of compliant SPSVs as well as highlighting to the consumer the changes that are taking place and the high quality of service they can expect from the industry.

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 10,000 calls to the consumer information line were received during 2007 at a rate of approximately 192 per week. These calls covered topics including how to make a complaint, lost property procedures and information on fares and vehicle standards.

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 to the industry.

Approximately 72,000 calls were received by this service during 2007. These calls related to a range of issues affecting SPSV drivers and the industry including driver and vehicle licensing, vehicle standards and in-vehicle information

Over 15,000 publications were distributed as a result of requests to the information lines.

DEPLOYMENT OF ENFORCEMENT TEAM

2007 saw the recruitment of the Commission's enforcement team with nine enforcement officers deployed. The enforcement team is now fully in place and has been active since February of this year. The team, assisted by An Garda Síochána, covers all aspects of the SPSV industry including; vehicle standards, vehicle licensing and driver licensing.

Since February, officers have visited every county in the country. This is part of our national enforcement operation and also in response to calls from within the industry, members of the public or following advice from the Gardaí. These visits will continue in 2008 with special attention assigned to major events that draw large attendances and are serviced by significant numbers of SPSVs.

The vast majority of the industry operates to very high standards and the Commission enforcement visits bear this out. However, enforcement officers have discovered a small number of incidences of non-compliance as a result of investigation of complaints and visits across the country. As a result some 16 prosecutions were taken between July and the end of 2007, resulting in 21 convictions in respect of individual charges. The fines imposed ranged from €400 to €2,000 with legal costs awarded to the Commission.

There are approximately 50 prosecutions currently pending which are listed for hearing in various locations across the country within the first four months of 2008. In addition the enforcement team have issued 130 formal warnings to SPSV drivers.

A total of 67 cases have also been transferred to the Gardaí or other agencies such as the Office of Tobacco Control as they either fall outside the remit of the Commission or a Garda investigation takes precedence.

Fixed Charge Offences

In addition to having the power to prosecute, the Commission also has the power to issue on-the-spot penalties for a number of 'fixed charges offences'. Contravention of a fixed charge offence provides 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.

The Commission commenced issuing fixed charge penalties on November 1st and issued 56 such penalties to the end of 2007.

There are 22 fixed charges offences, listed below as follows:

1. Operation of more than one small public service vehicle licence in respect of a single vehicle;
2. Removal or attempt to remove tamper-proof disc;
3. Failure to display tamper-proof disc;
4. Failure to display the relevant in-vehicle information in a small public service vehicle;
5. Removal or attempt to remove required in-vehicle information;
6. Unreasonable refusal to carry a passenger for a journey of not more than 30 kilometres;
7. Failure to have taximeter properly calibrated in line with the current maximum fare;
8. Operating taximeter while taxi or wheelchair accessible taxi standing for hire or plying for hire;
9. Failure to operate the taximeter while the taxi or wheelchair accessible taxi is on hire
10. Failure to comply with requirements in relation to the fitting and operation of the taximeter;
11. Charging a booking fee when plying for hire or standing for hire or, without having been pre-booked by a consumer, at an airport, transport station or other location;
12. Standing at an appointed stand while vehicle is not available for hire;

13. Standing for hire in a taxi or wheelchair accessible taxi otherwise than at an appointed stand;
14. Plying for hire or standing for hire in a hackney or limousine;
15. Refusal to carry a guide dog or other assistance dog;
16. Failure to provide a required receipt in respect of a taxi or wheelchair accessible taxi;
17. Failure to provide a required receipt in respect of a hackney or limousine;
18. Operating as a taxi or wheelchair accessible taxi without having demonstrated satisfactory knowledge of the local area;
19. Failure to comply with roof sign requirements for taxis and wheelchair accessible taxis, including failure to display current licence number within 28 days of the date of issue of a new licence number;
20. Failure to display required driver identification;
21. Displaying forged driver identification on a SPSV;
22. Displaying on a hackney or limousine a sign or advertisement other than one prescribed by the Commission.

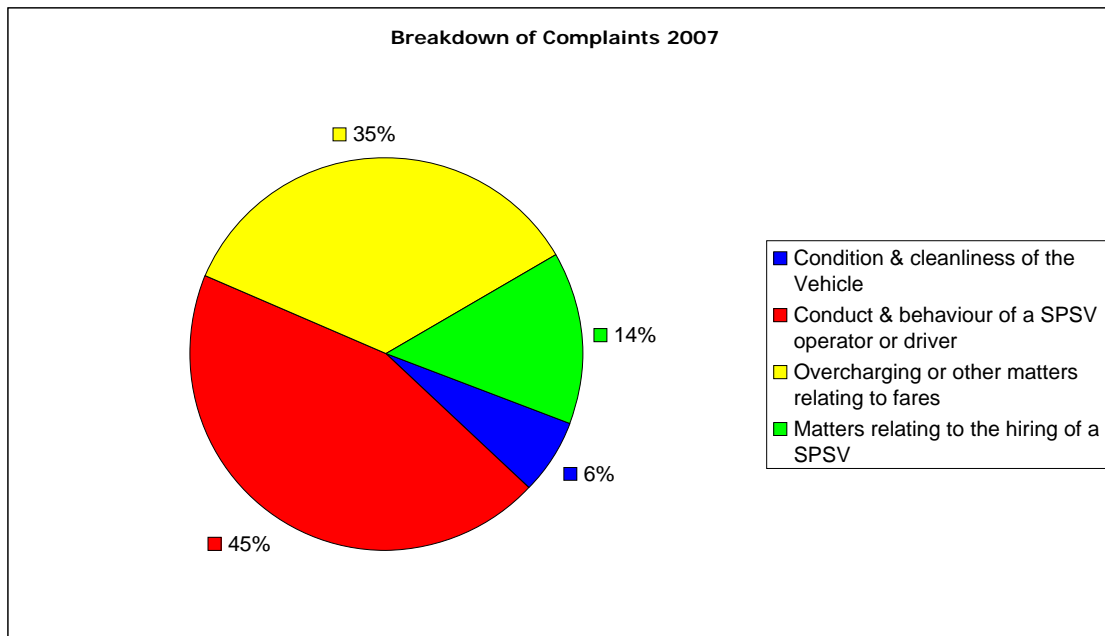
COMPLAINTS

Under Section 51 of the 2003 Taxi Regulation Act, the Commission is also responsible for investigating complaints in relation to the following:

- Condition and cleanliness of the vehicle
- Conduct and behaviour of a SPSV operator or driver
- Overcharging or other matters relating to fares
- Matters relating to the hiring of a SPSV.

In the course of 2007, the Commission received a total of 763 complaints and the following chart provides a breakdown of these.

[A total of 67 complaints received were referred to the Gardaí or the Office of Tobacco Control as the nature of the complaint was not within the remit of the Commission.]



NATIONAL VEHICLE LICENSING SYSTEM

October 2007 saw the completion of the roll-out of the new national vehicle licensing system. All vehicle licence holders have now been issued with the Commission vehicle licence and tamper-proof discs which are displayed on the front and rear windows of each licensed vehicle.

2008 will see the introduction of a different colour tamper proof disc for each category of SPSV. The new disc for a hackney will be blue in colour and the new disc for a limousine will be silver in colour. The taxi tamper-proof disc will remain yellow. Discs will continue to be affixed by NCT staff on successful completion of the licence application or renewal process.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF LICENCES

2007 saw the completion of the register of SPSV vehicle licences and current SPSV driver licences. As the Gardaí continue to administer applications and renewals for SPSV driver licences, the Gardai will continue to update the Commission with information to keep the SPSV driver register current.

OUTLOOK FOR 2008

Of key importance during 2008 will be the roll-out of the new drivers skills development programme. During the latter part of 2007 the Commission awarded a contract for the development of the programme following a competitive tendering process.

Work has now commenced on the development of the skills development programme and the various elements to be contained within it. A new assessment procedure will go hand in hand with the provision of learning material. The assessment will be mandatory for new entrants to the SPSV industry. This will be extended to all existing licence holders at a later stage.

2008 will also see the introduction of new operating standards for and licensing of dispatch operators. A series of presentations informing the operators of new standards for licensing will take place around the country in January and February.

In addition, a full review of the National Maximum Taxi Fare will take place during 2008. This will represent an important opportunity for the industry and other stakeholders to make representations in relation to fare structures for the taxi industry.

Other important initiatives and milestones during 2008 will include:

- A decision on the transferability of SPSV licences for taxis;
- The development of design guidelines for taxi ranks nationally following an audit of taxi ranks nationally during 2008;
- The implementation of the new vehicle standards requirements;
- The formulation of a new Action Plan to meet the Commission's objectives for the continuing development and provision of SPSV services;
- Continued promotion of the use of compliant SPSVs through media;
- Commencement of new driver skills development programme;
- New operating standards and licensing of dispatch operators;
- A review of SPSV licence fees;
- The Commission assuming responsibility from An Garda Síochána for the administration of SPSV driver licensing;
- The roll-out of pilot schemes on enhanced security and accessibility features for use in the industry;
- Development of a quality assurance scheme for all operators which will be piloted through licensed dispatch operators;
- Distribution of SPSV consumer and driver guides.

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.