

Commission for Taxi Regulation Announces Further Reforms

(October 15th 2009) The Commission for Taxi Regulation has today announced the next stage of reforms for the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry following its most recent public consultation process. The Commission sought and received advice on the reforms from the Advisory Council to the Commission and completed Regulatory Impact Assessment and legal considerations on the reforms which will be implemented on a phased basis, between now and 2012.

“These measures are a natural progression in our ongoing reform of the industry. They are also a proactive response to the recommendations contained within the Goodbody Economic Review and our consultations with industry and consumers,” commented Commissioner for Taxi Regulation Kathleen Doyle.

“In the last five years, the Commission has undertaken a vast amount of work in bringing reform and improvement to the Small Public Service Vehicle industry. There is now a national maximum taxi fare and national taximeter area, ensuring ease for the consumer nationwide, a secure and transparent national vehicle and driver licensing system, focussed industry enforcement and new vehicle and driver standards for all new entrants to the industry. Statistics show that consumers are getting a higher quality service than at any previous time, that taxi usage is increasing and that formal complaints made to the Commission are falling.

These reforms look to build on that success. A key concern of the Commission is that the SPSV fleet meets its accessibility objective. As it is individuals with disabilities who are often most reliant on the door-to-door service offered by taxis, the Commission believes that there is a need to increase the number of wheelchair accessible vehicles and improve the availability of those already licensed to provide a service.

Many of the other reforms listed below were contained within our previous schedule for future activity, but we have been given a clear indication, notably by industry, that there is an appetite for change sooner rather than later. As such, these measures are aimed specifically at dramatically and quickly continuing to improve the standard of the fleet and the knowledge of those operating it.

We firmly believe that at the conclusion of this reform period, that Ireland will have an SPSV fleet it can be proud of and the consumers and the industry will greatly benefit. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those that participated in the public consultation process and the members of the Advisory Council for their input and advice” she concluded.

Reforms Outlined

All new licences to be Wheelchair Accessible only

- It is a Commission priority to ensure that people with disabilities have access to high quality vehicles. To meet the Commission’s objective for the provision of accessible services, the Commission will issue new taxi and hackney licences for wheelchair accessible vehicles only from 2010. All such vehicles will have to meet new vehicle standards for Wheelchair Accessible taxis/hackneys which were published by the Commission in 2007.
- The Commission will continue to monitor entry to the industry at regular intervals. Should service levels to consumers be impacted the Commission will reconsider issuing standard taxi licences to ensure effective competition and supply.

- This will be run in conjunction with a number of other measures to better match the supply and demand for wheelchair accessible services in the sector.

Ending Transferability of Taxi Licences

- To ensure the second hand market value of licences does not artificially increase following the new entry requirements, any new taxi licences issued will not be transferable.
- Existing taxi licences will be transferable only once more and will only be processed if the licence is being transferred to a standard saloon vehicle under three years old thereby ensuring that people entering the industry will do so at a high standard.

Introduction of a Fleet Licence

- The Commission will investigate the feasibility of a fleet licence for multiple vehicle licence holders, considering the most appropriate licensing criteria and operational model. This will enable multiple licence holders with a fleet of vehicles employing drivers and those renting/leasing licences and licensed vehicles to continue to create driver employment in the industry and maximise vehicle utilisation, but allow for greater transparency for enforcement purposes.

Fast Tracking of Nine Year Rule

- At present, all new entrants to the standard taxi / hackney business must have a vehicle less than nine years old. This will now become the law for all operators from January 2011. The original date announced was 2012, however, 25% of the standard taxi and hackney fleet are now over the age of nine years, some by a number of years. The Commission appreciates that there are cost implications for drivers; nevertheless, this must be balanced against the requirement for those operating to be fully committed to the business and providing a high quality service.
- To ensure the existing fleet maintains a high standard the Commission will also introduce the nine-year rule for current licence holders who change their vehicle from 2010. The remaining vehicle standards for incumbents will continue to be phased in on renewal of licence in 2012.

Enhanced Driver Licensing Requirements

- The Commission will collect further relevant information during the driver licensing process next year. This will likely include details of other employment, PPS number and more frequent production of tax clearance certificates. This would also enable the Commission to provide information to other Enforcement Agencies and would assist the Commission in building a profile of the industry.

Fast Tracking of Driver Skills Development Programme

- To deliver a consistent high standard of drivers in the industry, the Commission intends to fast track the Driver Skills Development Programme for existing drivers. The original timescale was for all drivers to undertake the test on renewal of their licence from 2012. As the licence granted by the Gardaí is for five years it could be some considerable time before drivers would need to undertake the programme and pass the test. The Commission now aims to ensure that SPSV driver licence holders will have undertaken the programme prior to 1st January 2012.

Compliance & Enforcement

- The Commission will complete and announce the results of a review of potential approaches, including the use of roof signs, to making it easier to identify where a driver is licensed to stand or ply for hire. Options will be provided to both the Advisory Council and industry representative bodies to seek their views.

- The Commission will continue with multiple agency operations, building on information sharing programme formally established between An Garda Síochána, Revenue Commissioners and Dept of Family & Social Affairs.
- Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle licence holders receive a discounted licence which is subject to conditions; one of which is they provide a service to people with disabilities. The Commission will introduce stronger penalties for drivers of Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles that fail to provide a service to people with disabilities, when requested to do so.

In addition to these reforms, the Commission is also moving forward with its Action Plan for 2010-2011 which will have a strong focus on the move of the administration of driver licensing from An Garda Síochána to the Commission among other regulatory developments and actions.

The Commission will organise a series of meetings with industry representatives around the country to explain the reforms in detail and any answer any questions they may have on their rollout.

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. 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.

As of October 1st 2009 there are a total of 27,169 active SPSV Licences nationally. This includes 19,601 Taxis, 1,577 Wheelchair Accessible Taxis, 4,661 Hackneys and 1,330 Limousines.

The Commission will finalise the regulatory, policy, operational and resourcing requirements to implement these reforms before the end of 2009. Some elements will be subject to a final regulatory impact assessment.

The Commission is working with SGS Ireland Limited to implement an enhanced vehicle licensing system which will provide an immediate platform for rollout of reforms relating to vehicle licensing. It has also established a working group with An Garda Síochána to progress reforms relating to driver licensing.

The Commission's forthcoming action plan for 2010-2011 to be published early next year will provide further and final details of the timing and specifics of the reforms outlined.

Licence holders will be contacted on an individual basis to provide a reasonable notice period to prepare for any licensing changes that effect their particular licence.