

**Meeting of the Advisory Committee on SPSVs**

**Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> April 2024, 10.30am**

**Meeting Room 1**

**NTA, Dún Scéine, Harcourt Lane, Dublin, D02 WT20.**

**Present:**

<b>Chairperson</b>	Mr. Cornelius O' Donohue
Representing:	
<b>Small Public Service Vehicle and Driver Interests</b>	Mr. John Murphy, Mr. Shajedul Chowdhury, Mr. Francis Doheny
<b>Special Interest or Expertise in Matters Relating to the Functions of the Authority, the Advisory Committee, or Related Matters.</b>	Mr. James O'Brien, Mr. Harpreet Singh Ms. Aisling Dunne
<b>Local Authorities</b>	Mr. Brendan O'Brien
<b>The Interests of Older Persons</b>	Ms. Mai Quaid
<b>The Interests of Business</b>	Ms. Ann Campbell
<b>The Interests of Persons with Disabilities</b>	Mr. John Fulham

**Apologies:**

<b>An Garda Siochana</b>	Superintendent Tom Murphy
<b>The Interests of Tourism</b>	Mr. Paul Keeley

**NTA Representatives:**

Attendance: Mr. Jakub Szynal (Secretary).

Partial Attendance: Ms. Wendy Thompson, Director of Transport Regulation

Ms. Fiona Brady, Head of Regulatory Compliance

## **1. Committee membership**

The Chair introduced John Fulham, who is representing the interests of persons with disabilities. John is a manager within the Advocacy Team of the Irish Wheelchair Association.

The Chair informed the Advisory Committee that there has been no news so far regarding reappointments and new appointments.

## **2. Minutes of Meeting held on 28<sup>th</sup> March 2024 and Actions Arising**

The minutes of the meeting held on 28<sup>th</sup> March 2024 were agreed with no amendments.

## **3. Correspondence**

The Chair discussed correspondence received from Minister Ryan a few weeks prior to this meeting. Minister Ryan has asked the Advisory Committee to consider how taxi availability during night time pinch points (12am-2am) can be assessed, and how to best collect the data regarding this. As discussed at prior meetings, the late night pinch points stretch further into the night than just 2am. The Advisory Committee discussed the challenges with data collection with respect to tracking. Presently, there is no way to tell how many taxi drivers are available. Technology could be of great assistance, however the approach would need to be cost effective and mindful over the concerns of tracking.

The Chair had been introduced in passing to someone who was involved with smart meters and telematics in other jurisdictions. The Chair has reached out to this person for some assistance and advice. An anonymised smart roof sign may need to be proposed. This will be challenging given the sensitive nature of tracking and data collection. The Advisory Committee will discuss this in more detail during the next meeting.

*NTA Representatives joined the meeting*

## **4. NTA Update**

The Chair discussed the aforementioned correspondence from Minister Ryan regarding taxi availability for late night social hours. WT had met with the NTE (Night

Time Economy) team working on late night public transport service improvements on 22<sup>nd</sup> of April to discuss developments in that area. It was emphasized that taxis alone cannot service the entire night time economy. It was agreed that this is a whole of Government issue and will require planning and collaboration to ensure late night social hours are safe and well serviced by all public transport services including SPSVs.

A major SPSV operator concern, which is decreasing taxi availability at late night pinch points (12-4am), is driver and vehicle safety according to NTA's driver surveys. 51% of taxi drivers who stopped night work in the last three years advise they will not return.

NTA representatives gave the monthly statistics update, which was previously circulated to the members of the Advisory Committee. NTA noted that this has been a record month in the last few years for licensing. All funding has been allocated to the WAV24 grant, which was flooded with applications (2,889) when it opened.

The meeting noted that the EU is reducing the cost for EVs which it is hoped will incentivise private and SPSV drivers to acquire a more sustainable vehicle. The upcoming DoT Sustainability Mobility Group meeting was discussed, the Chairman and Aisling Dunne, representing Bolt, will attend.

Compliance statistics were discussed. NTA noted that in Q1, 44,235 recorded mobile licensing compliance checks were carried out. This covered 45% of the total fleet being checked at least once whilst operating already this year nationwide. At this rate, every vehicle in the fleet could be checked twice a year.

NTA noted that the number of prosecutions is likely to be lower than anticipated this year due to a legal technicality found in a non SPSV related High Court case involving Donegal County Council (considering appealing the decision). This technicality, if upheld, could mean adjourned cases may fall where the statute of limitations has run out. NTA exercised a precautionary reissuing of summonses to minimise any risk.

NTA confirmed, on enquiry, that Driver Check App reports are examined by a member of the NTA Compliance Team every working day and reviewed by Compliance Management weekly. It was noted that NTA can only deal with reports within its legal remit, such as licensing. Other reports are referred to other enforcement agencies. An online complaint form and the [taxis@nationaltransport.ie](mailto:taxis@nationaltransport.ie) email are available also. NTA representatives stressed the importance of drivers submitting complaints and reports to continue to enhance safety and transparency within the industry.

NTA confirmed, on enquiry, that not many complaints are received regarding drivers not taking the "shortest" route specifically. However, some complaints do detail a

customer's dissatisfaction with a driver taking one route over another. For instance, a customer might complain that they would have preferred going through the city centre as opposed to taking a motorway. It was noted that depending on time of day and traffic levels, drivers might opt for one route over another for the most efficient journey. However, that choice must be explained to the customer prior to taking it and the customer can refuse that option in favour of their preferred route.

Misinformation in the media was discussed. The meeting noted that there is an anti-taxi sentiment in the media at the moment that is diminishing all the good work done by the industry. NTA noted that on May 1<sup>st</sup>, there will be a drop-in day in Buswells for TDs and Senators, where it will present on real SPSV statistics, putting context behind the numbers. It was noted that Covid had decimated the growing vehicle and driver numbers of 2018 and 2019, with a low of -13% and -7% respectively, as the population rose swiftly. This context has been removed in the media. There needs to be a better understanding of the fact that SPSVs are not contracted public transport services but self-employed people. Ireland has the highest number of SPSVs per capita by far in Western Europe but service provision at key hours and locations is a real issue.

## **5. Nighttime Economy – NTA update**

During the March meeting, the Chair had asked the NTA if they could give an update on the work being done by NTA as a whole for the improvement of late-night services. A note on this was circulated to the Advisory Committee in advance of the meeting.

The meeting discussed the Maximum Fares survey. Compared to the last fare review, the percentage of drivers who would not return to night work under any circumstance rose from 31% to 53%. This is as a result of antisocial behaviour which requires a whole of government response particularly AGS. The Maximum Fares Review Report is intended to be presented to the NTA board for consideration in June/July.

Taxi ranks were discussed. The Advisory Committee noted that the number of taxi ranks are reducing around the city. NTA's only involvement with ranks, apart from some funding, is that local authorities (which decide on location and design) must consult with NTA regarding the drafting of rank byelaws.

The unsuccessful Local Hackney Pilot was discussed. This licence does not require a WAV, nor does it require an applicant to take the SPSV Driver Entry Skills Test. However, pick-up points can only be within a mapped area of 10km from a central point which is typically the driver's hometown, to protect existing SPSV operators. As well as fares, under the Pilot, drivers received a subsidy to make their services available to the Community for 20 hours a week. Despite this, only two of 21 areas

took up the local licence. The meeting notes that this job would be a great opportunity for retired persons, or persons who are only looking for part time hours. The subsidy alone would cover insurance costs, and the driver would get their fares. Applicants were surveyed as to why they did not follow through on their initial applications and they said insurance and “hassle” were the two top reasons. NTA met with all Motor Insurers in Ireland in March. Only one expressed any interest in supporting this scheme to alleviate rural isolation on the basis of its commitment to supporting and working with local communities. Any further decisions regarding the future of LAHs are sitting with the Minister.

The Advisory Committee discussed the prevalence of pubs using a vehicle to drop their customers home, free of charge. This is flouting SPSV law, as certain businesses are giving themselves an unfair advantage over other businesses. LAHs were discussed as a potential solution to this problem. The Advisory Committee raised a number of potential changes to the LAH scheme which it will work through at the next meeting. It was noted that the LAH licence was designed to benefit local communities, helping to reduce rural isolation, rather than benefitting established commercial businesses.

The Advisory Committee discussed limousines as an alternative for businesses. When thinking of limos, people might imagine the vintage or stretch limousines. However, there are a vast variety of vehicles which can be used as a limo, there is a list on the NTA website which the secretary will send it to the Advisory Committee. It was noted that any vehicle with seating capacity for more than 8 passengers did not come within SPSV law, e.g. a 10/12-seater minibus. Community cars were also discussed. NTA representatives informed the Advisory Committee that a community car is exempt from SPSV law, however, drivers must be volunteers. Money can only be taken for parking, tolls etc.

*NTA Representatives left the meeting*

## **6. SPSV availability**

The Advisory Committee agreed that during the next meeting, time should be set aside for a brainstorming session on SPSV availability. This will help identify what the exact issues are, and what potential solutions could solve them.

It was noted that new and existing transport methods should be better communicated to the public. The success of the local link was discussed, noting that word of mouth and positive stories helped emphasize how customer friendly this service is. The SPSV

industry needs to be promoted in a more positive light, highlighting the transport options it provides. Advertising local services on local area radios could aid in that. A balance needs to be reached between scheduled and non-scheduled methods of transport.

## **7. AOB**

Road safety and road safety supports were discussed. It was noted that there has been a recent spike in road deaths and injuries this year. Cycling infrastructure was discussed, noting that cyclists, taxis, and buses often share the same lane. The Advisory Committee considered the possibility of an awareness campaign for SPSV driver and cyclist safety.

**Date of next meeting – Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> May 2024.**

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