

Meeting of the Advisory Committee on SPSVs

Thursday 27th June 2024, 10.30am

Clayton Hotel (Mallview Suite)

[Charlemont St, Saint Kevin's, Dublin, D02 H9C1](#)

Minutes

Present:

| | |
|---|---|
| Chairperson | Mr. Cornelius O' Donohue |
| Representing: | |
| Small Public Service Vehicle and Driver Interests | Mr. John Murphy Mr. Francis Doheny |
| Special Interest or Expertise in Matters Relating to the Functions of the Authority, the Advisory Committee, or Related Matters. | Mr. James O'Brien Mr. Harpreet Singh |
| Local Authorities | Mr. Brendan O'Brien |
| The Interests of Tourism | Mr. Paul Keeley |
| The Interests of Consumers | Mr. Adrian Cummins |
| The Interests of Persons with Disabilities | Mr. John Fulham |
| An Garda Siochana | Superintendent Tom Murphy |

Apologies:

| | |
|---|-------------------|
| The Interests of Older Persons | Ms. Mai Quaid |
| The Interests of Business | Ms. Ann Campbell |
| Special Interest or Expertise in Matters Relating to the Functions of the Authority, the Advisory Committee, or Related Matters. | Ms. Aisling Dunne |

NTA Representatives:

In attendance: Mr. Jakub Szydal, Secretary to the Advisory Committee on SPSVs.

Partial Attendance: Ms. Wendy Thompson, Director of Transport Regulation
Ms. Roisin Cullinan, Head of Licensing
Ms. Fiona Brady, Head of Regulatory Compliance

10.30am Advisory Committee

1. Minutes of meeting held on 30th May 2024 and Actions Arising

The Chair welcomed the Advisory Committee to the Clayton Hotel.

The minutes of the meeting held on 30th May were agreed with no amendment.

2. Induction Session

The upcoming induction session was discussed, with a provisional date set for the 11th of September 2024.

The Chair informed the meeting that Taxi Coalition have expressed interest in meeting the Advisory Committee.

The overall workplan was discussed, acknowledging the requests from the Minister and NTA regarding supply and demand, WAVs, pinch points, and the Nighttime Economy. For the next meeting, the Chair has invited the NTA to present on what the current data sources are, and what kind of data it doesn't have access to but would like to. Independent Living Moving Ireland and Irish Wheelchair Association have also been asked to present at the July/September meetings.

Night Meters were discussed with emphasis on concerns over tracking. The Advisory Committee queried the possibility of a dispatch operator presenting at one of the meetings.

3. Hotel Courtesy Cars

In the light of recent convictions for unlicensed SPSV operations, the use of Hotel Courtesy Cars was discussed. The Advisory Committee noted that it would be useful to have someone from NTA licensing to give their insight to the hotel sector.

NTA Representatives joined the meeting.

10.45am Advisory Committee and NTA.

4. NTA update

New license statistics were discussed, noting an upswing in the May numbers.

NTA encouraged the members of the Advisory Committee to spread the word about the eSPSV grant, which is tracking well in comparison to last year.

WAVs were discussed. A question was posed regarding the average cost of WAV conversion. NTA informed the committee that the cost of conversion for vehicles is accounted for by the grant. NTA committed to providing an update on these costs at the next meeting.

Second hand WAVs were discussed, noting that their prices are determined by the seller's market. The numbers of second-hand WAVs currently may not be as healthy as they appear in sales adverts and NTA is looking into this. NTA committed to providing an update on this at the next meeting. It was noted that second hand WAVs would be ideal for those starting out in the SPSV industry.

The industry and area tests were discussed. The Advisory Committee queried how many applicants undergo the entire process, and how many repeat exams occur. NTA acknowledged that the number of successful applicants has increased for the 1st attempts with the second attempt pass rate remaining consistent over the years. NTA noted that the figure provided on this is an average of the entire test offering, but that pass rates have increased steadily in recent years. NTA committed to illustrating this increase in the slide deck at the next meeting. The turnaround time between passing the test and being licenced was also queried and an existing slide in the slide deck referenced. NTA committed to undertaking a more recent assessment of this timeline in addition to the slide, noting that recent results indicated an average 4 month timeline. It was noted that while a review of the Area Knowledge Test is being undertaken by NTA, recent driver licence numbers do not show the Area Knowledge Test to be a barrier to entry.

Satellite Navigation was discussed, noting that most vehicles nowadays have it. It was queried whether that would ever have an impact on the area knowledge test. NTA acknowledged the benefits of Sat Nav, however they noted that it can often take drivers on indirect routes. In light of consumer protection, the "shortest route" has to be taken.

The Maximum Taxi Fare Review 2024 was discussed. 78% of the drivers surveyed have worked nights. 52% of those used to but have stopped out of concern for personal safety. Over half said that they would never go back to nights again. A proposed weighting towards the nighttime rate was noted.

A change to remove the early hours was suggested as it impacts early workers. The taxi meter calibration process was discussed. On average, the calibration costs 140 euro. The fare bands are 8am-8pm. The taxi cost index was discussed, noting that consultants were involved in its development.

A full public consultation will be starting from next week.

Compliance

There was a record number of FPNs issued in May. NTA confirmed to the meeting that specific WAV covert and overt operations were carried out, and fines were issued where sufficient evidence was provided. The Advisory Committee were shown images of recent operations and the common offences committed. With regard to WAVs, there have been frequent instances of drivers putting tyres/personal belongings where a wheelchair should be.

The Compliance teams were given clear instructions to issue A17 fines if the user manual is not present (drivers should be familiar with its contents) in the vehicle and D27 for refusals where appropriate.

Hotel courtesy cars were discussed. Middleton District Court ruled in May that a hotel courtesy car service operating without a licence was doing so unlawfully. In taking the prosecution, NTA argued that carriage in a hotel "courtesy car" constitutes carriage "for hire or reward" within the meaning of section 22 of the Taxi Regulation Acts 2013 and 2016 ("the Acts"). The case is being appealed.

NTA Compliance team continue to investigate similar services.

The Advisory Committee agreed that a pragmatic system needs to be found to deal with the widespread use of hotel courtesy cars. The law must be adhered to and any drivers operating such a service would need an SPSV licence. It was agreed that it would be prudent for hotels to look at the range of vehicles which may be licensed as limousines.

The meeting queried if there was an international benchmark against which Irish SPSV statistics can be compared. NTA confirmed to the meeting that Ireland is leading in terms of WAV taxis with a 23% penetration of the fleet.

The Advisory Committee noted their request to NTA for information on existing data sources on taxi availability to inform their research on the matter. NTA committed to providing this to the Committee.

NTA Representatives left the meeting.

11.30am Advisory Committee.

The Chair had reminded the Advisory Committee of the recent correspondence from Minister Ryan and NTA. The Advisory Committee will have to consider;

- how unmet demand for SPSVs nationally can be identified and addressed where possible.
- how WAV need can be identified and to make recommendations on how relevant data can be collected.
- how taxi availability can be assessed, in particular in urban areas from 12am to 2am and to make recommendations how relevant data can be collected.
- What challenges are faced in regulating for an appropriate level of SPSV service provision in rural Ireland.

5. Local Area Hackneys

The brainstorming session on LAHs from the previous meeting was discussed, focusing on ways that could make the pilot more appealing. It was noted that allowing more than one driver per LAH could increase the scope of improvement. Whenever a driver is not operating their LAH, another driver could fill in and increase the regularity of the service. Urban areas without extensive public transport coverage could benefit from LAHs running day and night. The Advisory Committee queried whether there should be a maximum number of drivers allowed to operate an LAH.

6. Nighttime economy

The Chair proposed to the Advisory Committee to carry out a whiteboard brainstorm session on the nighttime economy during the next meeting. Recommendations on smart signs will also be discussed then. It was emphasized that drivers will need to be incentivised to return to night work.

The Chair informed the committee that in light of the presentations planned next week, the meeting might run until 1pm.

7. Road safety

The Advisory Committee agreed to defer Road Safety discussions until the next meeting.

8. WAV supply and demand

The Advisory Committee queried potential ways of collecting data on WAV supply and demand. The census was discussed, noting that 1/5 of people in Ireland have a disability, but it is unclear how many of those use wheelchairs.

The Chair had reminded the Advisory Committee that the next meeting will take place on the 25th of July, and there will be no meeting in August.

12.45pm Advisory Committee

9. AOB

The Chair had asked the Advisory Committee if there was any other business to discuss, there was none.

Date of next meeting – Thursday 25th July 2024, 10.30.

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