

# Meeting of the Advisory Committee on SPSVs

Thursday 31<sup>st</sup> October 2024, 10.30am

Meeting Room 1

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

## Minutes

### Present:

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

### Apologies:

|   |                    |
|---|--------------------|
| <b>The interests of Tourism</b>   | Mr. Paul Keeley    |
| <b>The Interests of Consumers</b>   | Mr. Adrian Cummins |
| <b>Special Interest or Expertise in Matters Relating to the Functions of the Authority, the Advisory Committee, or Related Matters.</b> | Ms. Aisling Dunne  |
| <b>The interests of Business</b>  | Ms. Ann Campbell   |

**NTA Representatives in Attendance**

Mr. Jakub Szynal, *Secretary to the Advisory Committee on SPSVs*

Ms. Roisin Cullinan, *Head of Licensing*

Ms. Fiona Brady, *Head of Regulatory Compliance*

**Department of Transport Representatives in Attendance**

Minister Eamon Ryan

Ms. Clare Finnegan

Mr. Garrett Doocey

Ms. Úna McDermott

## 1. Minutes

The Chair welcomed the members of the Advisory Committee on SPSVs, noting that the NTA presentation will go ahead as usual at 10.45 am and that Minister Ryan will be in attendance at 11.30 am.

The minutes of the previous meeting held on October 3<sup>rd</sup> were agreed with no amendments.

*NTA Representatives joined the meeting.*

## 2. NTA Update

Driver statistics were discussed, noting growth in the previous month.

NTA discussed the Local Area Hackney provisions, and noted a new scheme will be launched next year. Lessons have been learned from the 2019 and 2023 pilots and changes will be made accordingly. One of the changes is that all areas will be open to application. This plan will have a nationwide rollout and will be assessed over a two year period. A public awareness campaign is expected to launch end of Q1 next year.

The possibility of LAH drivers being required to affiliate with dispatch operators was queried. It was noted that there may not be an appetite from dispatch operators for this. It was also noted that many drivers would not want their phone numbers signposted to advertise their services. It was agreed however, that advertising is required and part of the T&Cs.

The question of multiple LAH drivers per LAH vehicle licence was raised. Presently, LAHs operate on a singular person licence while the option for additional drivers will be explored through legislative changes. It is also important to appreciate that any changes to legislation, in particular the Act, will take time.

The maximum permissible age for vehicles was discussed, noting that there has been concern amongst drivers that many vehicles will come to a 'hard stop' at the beginning of January 2025. NTA highlighted that this process will be spread out over the year as usual (original date of vehicle + 10 years for standard vehicle licences). Extensions were provided as emergency measures, as drivers did not have time to prepare for the vehicle supply crisis. As the supply crisis has ended, no further changes to the Regulations are planned.

Vehicle costs were discussed. Industry representatives on the Advisory Committee advised that vehicles which costed 24,000 euro 5 years ago now cost up to 42,000 for

the same model. It was queried whether this is caused by the grants or inflation. The rising price of vehicles would need to be reviewed, and the suitability of the grants should be examined in light of this. It was noted that standard vehicles have likely also seen the same level of inflation.

Grants were discussed, with NTA noting that another million euro has been allocated to the eSPSV grant for 2024. The WAV 25 grant will be updated taking into account the feedback from this year.

The increase in Article 60 licenses and related concerns was discussed by An Garda Siochana.

*Minister Ryan and DoT representatives joined the meeting.*

### **3. Minister's Visit**

Minister Ryan and Department of Transport officials joined the meeting. The Members of the Advisory Committee introduced themselves.

The Chair thanked the Minister for taking time out of his schedule to meet with the Advisory Committee. The Chair opened his presentation detailing the changes happening next year in terms of upcoming vacancies. He highlighted the Committee's view of the need for an open and transparent process, including advertisement of the vacancies, especially with the number of appointments due next year.

Earlier this year, the Advisory Committee had received requests from both the Minister and NTA for advice regarding WAV supply and demand. The Chair detailed the work undertaken, which included several workshops and presentations from various organisations. TDORA's presentation had been rescheduled to November in light of the Minister's visit.

One of the key difficulties mentioned in this process was data collection. There was little interest from I.T companies regarding anonymous tracking. The Chair mentioned that smart taxi meters showed promise, but are however, a huge investment. There is potential however for anonymised tracking to be linked to smart roof signs.

The role and function of the Advisory Committee was discussed. The Chair queried the possibility of receiving funding from NTA or DoT for research purposes, highlighting that he is not asking for the Committee Members to be paid, but to have an allocated budget for research.

The UN Convention was mentioned as an example – this legal text would suggest that every taxi should be wheelchair accessible. It would be beneficial to have funding for legal advice and research support in the background.

Strategic issues were discussed, querying whether grants were matching the price of conversions and highlighting the importance of striking the right balance. The Nighttime economy and driver safety were also discussed.

The Minister began his discussion by thanking the Advisory Committee on SPSVs for their work. He highlighted the importance of availability, affordability and attractiveness for SPSVs.

Availability has improved significantly for the accessible public service vehicle fleet. The Minister noted that there should be no compromise on accessibility and that the ambition is to have a universally accessible fleet.

There is a variety of availability issues faced by both rural and urban areas. The Minister noted that that the Advisory Committee may require provision of research and support. CF commended the Committee for the work done. She noted that DoT is looking into resourcing, funding, procurement and general functions of the group and legislation. The fundamentals of what this group is expected to look at need to be established. The difficulty of sourcing data was acknowledged.

The Minister continued, that in terms of affordability, the entire country is faced with cost-of-living pressures. This is especially true for drivers, for whom the increase of vehicle costs is palpable.

It is expected that in the next 10 years, all vehicles will be switched to electric vehicles. With the increase of these vehicles on the road, they should become more affordable over time. BusConnects will be rolling out on a wider scale next year, with focus on prioritisation and enforcement. The large increase in dedicated bus lanes will provide a big improvement for taxi drivers.

In terms of attractiveness, the taxi industry needs to become more attractive for young people as a stable career. Work also needs to be done to improve the feeling of safety for both drivers and passengers, which will require collaboration with the Department of Justice. It was noted that there is a public order issue in Ireland, which has affected the working patterns for taxi drivers. Drivers often avoid certain hours for their own safety. This needs to be improved as there is growing demand for taxis during late night social hours.

Transferability was discussed, with some members of the Committee calling for vehicle licenses to be put back into the system after a driver retires. It was emphasized

by some of the members of the Advisory Committee that many taxi drivers are not part of a union or representation, and steps need to be taken to ensure that taxi driving is considered a stable career and not a 'fall back.'

The Advisory Committee noted that some measures, such as fare increases, can have a negative effect on wheelchair users, especially with the removal of the mobility grant. Additionally, SPSV demand for wheelchair users is difficult to determine as many have given up on taxis due to previous negative experiences. The census also does not enquire as to how many wheelchair users are in a household.

HSE use of SPSV was discussed.

EV WAVS were discussed, with the Advisory Committee noting that driving ranges are not suitable for these journeys. The cost of EVs was also discussed, highlighting that the price range is unattainable for many drivers. Furthermore, trade in prices have been low. The Minister advised that the second hand market will stabilise over time and that the prices should be less of an issue in two years. Transport infrastructure will also need to improve to facilitate EVs.

DoT noted that the key actions for the department are:

1. Succession Planning
2. Resourcing of Committee

#### **4. AOB**

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

The next meeting of the Advisory Committee on SPSVs will take place on the **28<sup>th</sup> November 2024**. This meeting will take place in NTA's new office in **Haymarket House, Smithfield, Dublin 7, D07 CF98**.