

**An Roinn Iompair**  
Department of Transport



25 June 2021

Mr. Sam Keenan  
Committee Secretariat  
Committee of Public Accounts  
Leinster House  
Dublin 2

**Ref: S000403 PAC33**

Dear Mr. Keenan,

I refer to my appearance before the Committee of Public Accounts on 27<sup>th</sup> May 2021 during which I undertook to supply further information on a number of items to the Committee.

I now attach the information, as promised.

Should you have any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

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Ken Spratt  
Secretary General

RESPONSE TO DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT PAC 27<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2021**1. A detailed breakdown of the expenditure under subheading A3 of Programme A: Civil Aviation in the 2019 Appropriation Account for the Department. (pg. 6)**

	Current Outturn 2019 (€m)	Capital Outturn 2019 (€m)	Total 2019 Outturn (€m)
Donegal Airport	€0.69	€0.82	€1.51
Knock Airport	€1.74	€7.75	€9.48
Kerry Airport	€1.28	€1.919	€3.20
Waterford Airport	€0.38		€0.38
PSO Air Services	€7.22		€7.22
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>€11.30</b>	<b>€10.49</b>	<b>€21.79</b>

**2. A detailed note providing an update on the following:**

- **the additional testing centres being set up by the RSA,**

Work has been progressing on ensuring the RSA have sufficient facilities for temporary testers and current plan is to have these available from early July 2021 when first tranche of testers have their training completed. Current facilities are being expanded where possible to accommodate new testers and the intention is to add 6 new test centres to the Driving Test Centre estate.

A number of driver testing centres have either been expanded or new locations added to the estate accommodate additional driver testers while adhering to public health guidance. The table below sets out the capacity added to driver testing estate. These locations are continually reviewed by the RSA in response to demand for driver tests coming through.

Location	Additional Capacity
Birr	New location added (County Arms Hotel)
Carlow	Moved from current centre to new location
Cork	New location added (St. Finbars GAA Club)
Finglas	New location is being sourced currently in this area
Kilkenny	Existing location expanded to accommodate additional testers
Letterkenny	Additional capacity is being sourced currently in this area
Loughrea	New location added (Lough Rea Hotel & Spa)
Mallow	Moved from current centre to new location
Mulhuddart	New location added (Carlton Hotel, Blanchardstown)
Mullingar	Existing location expanded to accommodate additional testers
Naas	Existing location expanded to accommodate additional testers
Navan	Existing location expanded to accommodate additional testers
NewcastleWest	New location added (Long Court Hotel)

Raheny	New location added (St. Brigid's Parish Resource Centre)
Skibbereen	Existing location expanded to accommodate additional testers
Tralee	Existing location expanded to accommodate additional testers
Waterford	Existing location expanded to accommodate additional testers
Wicklow	Existing location expanded to accommodate additional testers

- when the Department expects the full cohort of those on the waiting list for:

**(a) driver theory tests**

In line with the further easing of restrictions, the gradual re-opening of in-person driver theory test centres commenced on the 8th of June. The RSA will reopen its network of test centres and will be permitted to conduct 25,000 driver theory tests per month.

Prior to COVID-19, the RSA provided 15,000 tests per month. In light of the significant backlog of customers, capacity will gradually increase in centres to 25,000 tests monthly.

The test centres have extensive COVID-19 measures in place to protect both customers and staff and to ensure the safe delivery of the service. It is hoped that capacity will gradually increase to 50,000 tests monthly, if public health guidance permits.

The current number of confirmed bookings on the system is 129,000 scheduled tests. The service will test approx. 25,000 per month in centre with up to 7,000 online tests targeted. If they continue to test at that rate, it will take a minimum of 4 months to clear the backlog. This figure does not include an estimated 50,000 candidates that have not yet booked a theory test appointment due to the long waiting times. The service has received 14,274 new bookings since the announcement on the 28 May until 16th June 2021 and we expect this number of new bookings to maintain in the weeks and months ahead.

The RSA has been working to deliver an online theory test service, with a pilot online test already underway for trucks and buses. This pilot service has now been extended to include a limited number of car and motorbike tests. To date 5,842 online tests have been conducted.

It is important to emphasise the limits of online testing. These may be convenient for test candidates, but they have to be monitored closely by a supervisor, which makes them more staff-intensive than tests in test centres. In consequence, if the RSA and Prometric, the test operator, get approval in future to extend capacity in test centres to 50,000 tests, they have indicated that they will prioritize staff for the test centres and may have to reduce the figure online from 10,000. This will in fact have a positive impact on numbers tested, as the test centres are far more efficient.

The gradual reopening of services will not immediately solve the backlogs. Every possible measure is being put in place to ensure that the maximum number of customers can be served while public health guidance is strictly adhered to.

**(b) driving tests**

Due to the suspension of driver testing services in the initial pandemic response, along with the health protocols required since the resumption of services, a significant backlog has developed. During the lockdown, driving tests were continued, but for essential workers only. In 2021, the RSA has delivered over 52,569 driving tests, with no case of Covid transmission attributed to a driving test.

In line with the gradual reopening of services, driving tests for non-essential workers for those eligible to take the test and have been waiting longest have recommenced to the limit of 2,000 per month. This relatively small number is a prudent step as we see what the health impact may be. I understand that to date the RSA has offered test bookings to over 2,500 candidates (this allows for refusals).

Essential workers continue to be the priority. The reopening of essential driver training for this category means that more essential workers coming through the system will be looking for tests.

An additional 40 temporary driver testers have been authorised along with 36 approved for retention or rehire in 2020. The additional testers are expected to start testing by the end of June. In addition, sanction has now been given to add a further 40 testers to that cohort.

The RSA is also looking to increase the number of tests from 6 to 7 per tester per day as well as extending operating hours when restrictions are fully lifted.

The first 40 new testers are in training and the capacity of the service is just over 3,000 tests per week. While training is underway capacity per week is slightly reduced as, testers who would otherwise be testing are involved in training new recruits. Assuming a successful return to 7 tests per tester per day, when the 40 testers already approved and in training start to give tests, the capacity of the system will be 4,881 tests per week. If we are still at 6 tests per tester when the 40 testers begin that figure will be 4,183.

At this point, there are approximately 72,000 people eligible to take a test. This means that, with a possibility of 4,881 tests weekly, it should be possible to clear that backlog in 15 weeks, allowing for those 40 testers and 7 tests per tester per day.

It is worth noting though that many people will have held off from applying during the lockdown, either because they were non-essential workers or because they were essential workers who had not completed the mandatory lessons. As we move to the full resumption of services, we can anticipate an increase in demand for a while.

The health of both the public and the testers must take priority, and as a result, it is important to recognise that it will take time to get driver testing waiting times back to normal pre-Covid levels.

- **what is the Department doing to ensure that**

- (a) the RSA is fully resourced to clear these backlogs, and**

- The Department is liaising with the RSA on an ongoing basis to meet the growing demand for tests. An additional 40 temporary driver testers have been authorised along with 36 approved for retention or rehire in 2020. The additional testers are expected to start testing by the end of June. In addition, sanction is now being sought to add a further 40 testers to that cohort. The Department will continue to monitor and review the situation.

- The DTT service provider has sourced an additional 40 temporary team members to support the expected increase in capacity to 50,000 in centre appointments. The DTT service has sourced approximately 30 additional employees to manage the online testing facility. The DTT tests are conducted under strict requirements in order to adequately verify the identity of candidates, and to ensure exams are completed in a secure manner, maintaining the integrity of the exam content and to prevent cheating or fraud. To replicate the highly secure nature of in-person testing, the

on-line testing service requires live proctors to perform the required security and ID checks and monitor the theory tests in a live online environment.

**(b) resolve the technological issues encountered with the online testing facility**

Under Section 4 of the Road Safety Authority Act 2006, the Road Safety Authority (RSA) has been given all functions relating to driver testing, including all matters relating to the operation of the driving theory test. This note has been based on material supplied by the RSA to the Department, including additional material supplied in response to a tweet by a journalist regarding the technical aspects.

The RSA has been working to deliver an online service, with a pilot online test already underway for trucks and buses. This pilot service has now been extended to include a limited number of car and motorbike tests.

The new offering will see 4,000 online theory tests available for all categories of vehicles per month. The RSA has plans to increase this by a further 6,000 during July. Tests are available on a 'first come, first served' basis with the new online service becoming more widely available later in the year. Once the new service is established, all customers will be able to opt to do the test online.

Driver Theory Test customers are asked to note that online theory tests can only be booked via [www.theorytest.ie](http://www.theorytest.ie) using a Windows (8 or above) laptop or desktop computer and the latest Google Chrome web browser. The call centre team members cannot create an online testing appointment. The online testing service is available to all candidates on a 'first come first served' basis. Customers will also need to follow the technological, environmental and security requirements to be able to test via online testing (more details available on [www.theorytest.ie](http://www.theorytest.ie)), to ensure that the environment is secure and customers' data is protected.

Technical requirements for access to online driver theory testing are intended to support the integrity of the testing process.

A key software component which is required to use the ProProctor software is not currently supported by Apple MAC devices. The exam will be available for Apple MAC devices in the next phase of the project later this year.

Windows 7 is no longer supported by Microsoft and as such cannot be supported by the theory test online software, as well as presenting a significant cybersecurity risk.

The technical requirements are set out on the [theorytest.ie](http://theorytest.ie) website and advised to candidates in their confirmation email as well as guidance as to how they can meet the necessary standards.

The RSA is currently delivering online theory tests to truck and bus drivers and the technical issues are not a significant barrier to undertaking the test.

The reason the RSA have specific requirements for delivery of the theory test online are not just based on operating systems. Delivering the theory test Exam (and its worth remembering that this is an exam) online is designed to replicate as much as possible the assessment experience in

a test centre. The exams also have features such as voiceovers, pdf support for case study exams and enhanced item types (image based items). The RSA exams are designed to be delivered on larger screen devices, not tablets or Smart phones.

**3. A note detailing research expenditure on the taxi industry, the impact COVID-19 has had on it, and how the thousands of operators within the sector can be assisted to ensure they are a key part of the public transport network. (pg. 12)**

The response to this matter is in a separate document.

**4. A note on the progress of the DART Interconnector project, and how much of the previous work in bringing the project to railway order stage can be reused if an evaluation is undertaken on the project. (pg. 12)**

As part of the preparation of the Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) (2016 – 2035), the National Transport Authority (NTA) undertook a review of the business case for the DART Underground project. Following this review, the NTA recommended that the project, which remains a key element of integrated transport for the GDA, be revisited to consider alternatives to delivering the required rail connectivity taking account of the opening of the on-going investments in the public transport network. As a result of this, the compulsory acquisition powers of the approved Railway Order (RO) for the DART Underground project (granted in 2014) were not activated.

In January 2021 NTA commenced the preparation of a Route Alignment Options and Feasibility Study to establish the route of a DART Tunnel that forms part of the integrated public transport network and meets the long-term passenger demand in the Dublin city centre, taking due cognisance of the known changes to the existing and proposed public transport network (e.g. the extension of the Luas Green Line to Broombridge, the DART+ Programme, MetroLink). The corridor associated with this route will then be protected for later delivery.

As part of this study, all available information gathered on the previous DART Underground project is being used. Some of the detailed survey information would remain valid, such as geotechnical and ground investigations, however a range of other information would no longer be suitable given the time that has passed since its collection. Additionally, the technical design information for the project may change, given changes in standards and best practice and progress in technology such as tunnelling methods, construction techniques, etc.

As the study is ongoing, the amount of useable information in progressing a preferred route, leading to a corridor for protection, can only be determined following the study's outcome. It should be noted that in obtaining a RO for the preferred route, even if this was the previous route, the requirements of the Environmental and Planning legislation today would necessitate a full reassessment of the route option and new data would need to be obtained.

**5. A note outlining whether the Department or the State funded any of the capital costs for the purchase or financing of helicopters, whether the state owns any of the assets, and whether a training component has been built into the contract. (pg. 12-13) –**

The current contract for a SAR helicopter service for the Irish Coast Guard did not involve the purchase or leasing by the State of the helicopters. The state does not own the helicopters. The Night Vision Goggles are the only assets owned by the State in the context of this contract. There is a training component built into the standing monthly charges whereby pilots and rear crew maintain their currency levels to perform the SAR function.

As set out in the detailed letter to the PAC of 24 May ahead of the Secretary General's appearance (attached herewith for ease of reference), the contract terms agreed with CHC included a number of milestone payment which were once-off in nature, intended to mark the achievement of agreed stages in the contract delivery. These payments were capitalised in the Department's Vote.

This type of provision would not be uncommon for such a contract given the requirement for the introduction of a significantly enhanced helicopter type as specified in the tender. It was a matter for bidders to determine how best to optimise their bid, whether through the purchase, leasing or a combination, in relation to the helicopters. The key considerations for the evaluation team were the relative merits of the bids in the context of the agreed evaluation criteria.

**6. A note containing the number of utility companies upon which a surcharge was imposed for re-opening a road during an embargo period applied by the relevant local authority, and whether particular companies incur a higher number of such surcharges. (pg. 17-18)**

The Road Management Office (RMO) was set up as a shared service in 2014 by local authorities, with assistance from the Department, to manage a centralised MapRoad GIS system whereby all surface dressing and road strengthening works are recorded each year and to manage road opening licences across the country. The MapRoad system also facilitates the submission of road pavement works programmes to the Department and assists local authorities in their management of the road network and their interaction with utilities.

The RMO advises that where a utility seeks to open a trench in a road during the "protected period" it is not general practice to apply surcharges but instead to require utility companies to reinstate a larger area of the road than would be normally required. This is to reflect the fact that any opening will cause some long-term damage, even if reinstatement is to a high standard, and it is undesirable that recently resurfaced roads should be subjected to new trench openings. Specifying a larger resurfacing area allows for a full lane width reinstatement which minimises the number of joints and minimises the long-term damage.

As regards coordination and protection of investment, in 2017 the Department issued the Guidelines for Managing Openings in Public Roads <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/eda1ae-guidelines-for-managing-openings-in-public-roads-2017/> "the Purple Book". This is a comprehensive document that describes in detail the process and procedures associated with an application for a road opening. Among the processes in place are:

1. Advance notification and consultation of major utility openings (a "T1 Notification")
2. Having a protected period for roadway and footway of 5 and 10 years respectively

### 3. Providing details of previous and next planned resurfacing to applicants

The Department's guidelines strongly recommend that applicants engage with authorities prior to submitting an application by use of the T1 Notification. The notification is to allow adequate time for consultation, determination, coordination and joint planning between applicant and authority in relation to subsequent licence(s). It is designed for larger scale works which include capital works carried out by utilities, 'Find and Fix' type contracts for water leak detection and repair and rollout of new telecommunications infrastructure at village/ town level.

In order to protect the road authority's investment, authorities provide recent projects with a 'protected period'. Protection is achieved by making available to licence applicants' details of planned future work through MapRoad to:

- encourage applicants to complete works prior to surfaces being renewed
- encourage applicants to co-ordinate their works with other applicants or with future planned roadworks.

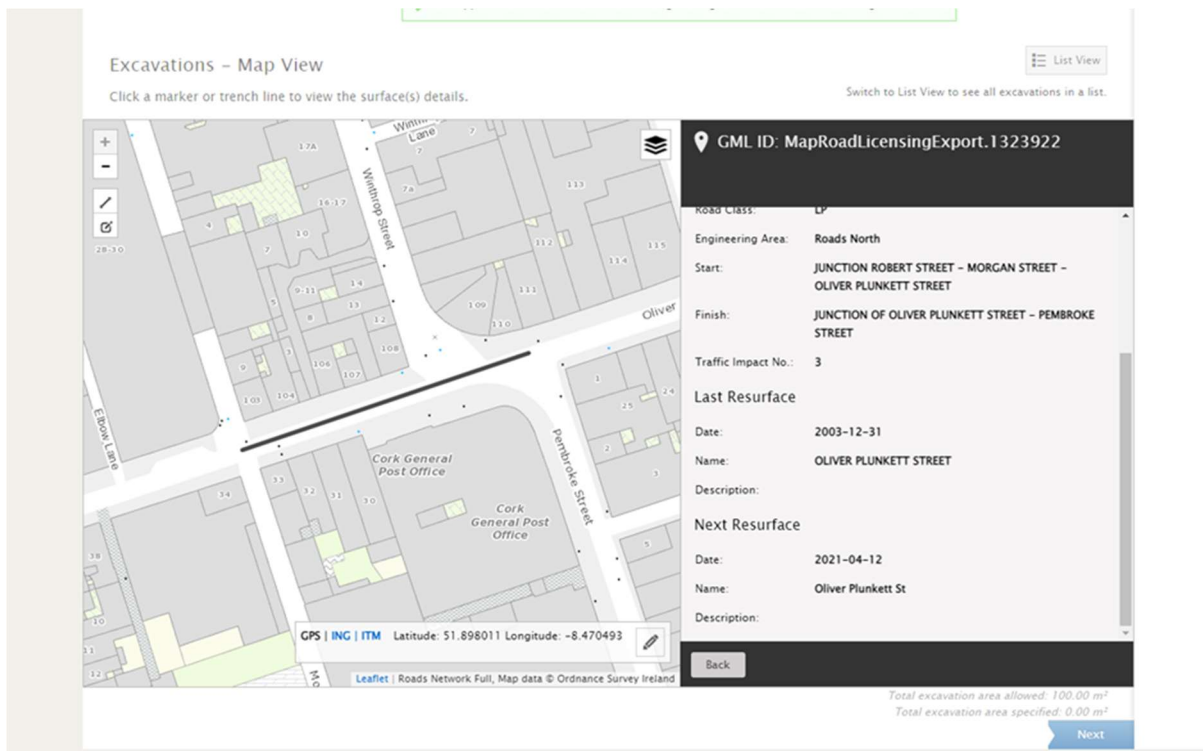
In some cases, roads have to be opened irrespective of whether they were recently resurfaced. This may arise from activities such as:

- emergency or other works not planned at the time of maintenance. This typically involves leak repair. In these cases, the guidelines require the Licence Holder to carry out permanent reinstatement over the full width/lane/bay reinstatement when these works occur within the protected period.
- Provision of new customer utility connections including Gas/Water/ Underground telecommunications. Such connections are only provided on a case-by-case basis.

#### Providing details of previous and next planned resurfacing to applicants

The MapRoad roadworks licensing, MRL, system allows an applicant to interrogate the Map Road system to see where works have been completed or are planned. See attached sample for Oliver Plunkett Street in Cork. In addition, many authorities including Cork City Council share their roadworks programme with utilities once agreed with members of the authority.





### Joint Utility and Local Authority Forum

The Department has set up a Joint Utility and Local Authority Forum, JULA. This forum allows feedback and dialogue between utility applicants/licence holders and road authorities. It seeks to address matters of a significant nature relating to road openings and licensing. The Department will highlight to the joint chairs of the forum the ongoing need to coordinate roadworks.

### Further supports

The Road Management Office holds regular meetings with utilities and authorities and has committed to highlight again to stakeholders the importance of the type of coordination which the Deputy has noted.

The Department will soon be seeking a new three-year road pavement works programme from local authorities and it will remind local authorities of the importance of engaging with utility companies and making their programmes available at the earliest stage.

### **7. A note outlining the recruitment of new Irish Coast Guard volunteers nationwide, whether there is a cap on the number of volunteers attached to each Coast Guard station, and the replacement of and investment in equipment for Coast Guard stations. (pg. 19)**

There are currently approximately 900 volunteers within the 44 Coast Guard units around the coast of Ireland. Volunteers are typically recruited at a local level within the Coast Guard Unit's community and make themselves available to carry pagers to respond to incidents as tasked by the Coast Guard Operations section. Volunteers serve a probation period of one year during which time they receive their Occupational First Aid, Field Search Skills techniques and Manual Handling training.

The number of volunteers within a unit is capped as follows:

- Single unit (Search) – 15 volunteers
- Double Unit (Search & Cliff Rescue or Search & Boat Rescue) – 20 volunteers
- Triple Unit (Search, Cliff Rescue and Boat Rescue) – 25 volunteers
- Amalgamated units i.e., Greystones/Wicklow or Toe Head/Glandore are permitted to have an additional 8 volunteers above the amounts outlined above.

On a case-by-case basis, and based on operational requirements in a specific area, this cap has been increased. An example of this is Dun Laoghaire Coast Guard Unit who are permitted to increase their numbers of volunteers from 15 to 20 given the number of callouts they attend over a year.

All Coast Guard units are equipped with state-of-the-art equipment for all functions. The provision of fit for purpose equipment to the volunteer units is an on-going process where the Coast Guard works alongside the volunteer Coastal Unit Advisory Group (CUAG) to ensure the end-users are appropriately equipped.

**8. A note clarifying the use of the Irish Coast Guard vehicles detailing who can use the vehicles and when, and whether there are provisions for volunteers for whom it is not practical to make their own way from their home to the base. (pgs. 19, 20 and 27)**

The Irish Coast Guard Response vehicles are located strategically at the 44 Coast Guard units and are for the use of the volunteers and full-time staff of the Irish Coast Guard while on official Coast Guard duties. Probationary members are not permitted to drive the Coast Guard vehicles. The vehicles used by the Irish Coast Guard at the 44 Coast Guard units are typically vans, crew-cabs, jeeps and Polaris All-Terrain Vehicles. Such duties which would typically require the use by volunteers of the vehicles include training, responding to incidents, attending courses, school visits and other pre-authorised official activities.

The management of the use of the vehicles at the Coast Guard units is undertaken by the Officers in Charge. Typically, vehicles are parked at the Coast Guard stations to ensure their optimum use to discharge Coast Guard activities. In stations where it is not feasible to store vehicles alternative local arrangements are put in place. The Irish Coast Guard does not make any provisions for volunteers who cannot make their own way from their home to the base – rather it relies on volunteers to attend as volunteers to the base and the Coast Guard then equips the volunteers with fit-for-purpose vehicles to enable them to undertake their Coast Guard duties.

**9. The figure spent on the online theory test facility for all vehicle categories since it was introduced. (pg. 20)**

Since inception of the online service in November 2020, the total estimated cost is € 82,130 to date.

**10. A detailed note on the *Smith v Meade* case including information in respect of internal accountability, and lessons learned. (pg. 20-21)**

The Smith v Meade case dates back to an incident in 1999 and involved a person who was seriously injured while a passenger in the rear of a van which had no fixed seating. At the time, Irish law did not require insurance for a person being carried in these circumstances. This was found to be an incorrect transposition of the Third Motor Insurance Directive in the High Court. However, the High Court adopted a harmonious interpretation of Irish law in light of EU law and determined that the exclusion clause could not be relied upon by the insurer.

The insurer paid the plaintiff, but took a case arguing that the State should reimburse it due to the incorrect transposition. The case took many years in the courts, both Irish and EU, and reached a point where the State ultimately agreed a settlement with the insurer, which was reached in October 2018.

As the Deputy rightly points out, the State's difficulty arose due to a faulty transposition of the Third Motor Insurance Directive. This transposition was affected by the European Communities (Road Traffic) (Compulsory Insurance) (Amendment) Regulations, 1992 (S.I. No. 347 of 1992). At that time, motor insurance was the responsibility of the then Department of the Environment, and it was the then Minister for the Environment who signed the regulations. Responsibility for motor insurance transferred to the Department of Transport in 2002. Given the change of Departmental responsibilities and the passage of 26 years between the transposition and the point where court proceedings made it clear that the State was liable, it would not be possible to identify individuals or apportion blame, nor can I speak to transposition procedures in 1992.

In terms of current practice with regard to transpositions, the Department will prepare a draft transposition and submit it to the Office of the Attorney General, along with a copy of the EU legislation concerned and a table indicating which provisions of the draft transpose which EU provisions. A parliamentary counsel will then be assigned by the AG's Office to produce a formal draft, in consultation with the Department. That formal draft is then subject to review for quality assurance with the office of the AG. This is a rigorous procedure and I believe provides ground for confidence that errors of the kind found in S.I. 347 are very unlikely to occur in future. I would like to say it is impossible for a problem like this to arise again, but no one can absolutely guarantee how the courts may interpret legislation.

**11. A note on the procurement of night vision goggles and associated expenditure, an update on how training on the equipment has progressed, whether the equipment is in use, and any other Night Vision Imaging System issues that have arisen in relation to the equipment and its procurement. (pg. 21)**

Night Vision goggles were purchased and the 5 CHCI helicopters equipped to enable NVIS operations to take place. The costs related to this are in the region of €4m. Training of aircrew is additional. This training is underway and €1.7m has been paid to date towards this.

The ability to conduct operations with the aid of Night Vision Goggles (NVG's) brings an enhanced operational safety and situational awareness capability to Search and Rescue Helicopter Crews. This enhanced capability offers significant operational improvements for both SAR and HEMS operations. No other civil operator has introduced this capability in Ireland.

A Future Helicopter Study Group, led by the IRCG with all key state stakeholders agreed the parameters and scope for the IRCG aviation service in 2010. It recommended that Night Vision Imaging Systems (NVIS) were necessary to improve coastal and overland search and rescue capability. It was

therefore recommended that helicopters be fitted for such a system but that the night vision goggles (NVG), support equipment and training at a later time in the contract if and when funding became available given significant outlay involved. The staged implementation and costs associated with that were a function of affordability. The separation of conversion from training also meant that pilots and crew would not be undergoing NVIS training at the same time as converting from old technology helicopters. The training element on NVIS has taken longer than originally anticipated.

A proposal for the final phase of implementation involving the training of CHCI crew on the proper use of NVIS was submitted in 2017 by CHCI. Formal training is a regulatory requirement by the Irish Aviation Authority (IAA) in accordance with regulations established by the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA). For various reasons, it was important to re-validate the basic rationale for proceeding with this expenditure at the time taking all relevant factors into account. A business case was prepared which recommended the IRCG proceed.

An initial payment of €1.7m was made as part of the Contract Change Notice. For a variety of reasons, this training programme has been interrupted and delayed, most recently owing to Covid restrictions. Once operational over the coming months, it will be a significant enhancement to the SAR service at night. The IAA is expected to provide approval for their use in SAR operations imminently and this will then facilitate roll-out across all 4 bases over the proceeding months once conditions allow.

**12. A note on the process for appointing new members to agency boards, and the reasons why it can take some time for vacancies to be filled, despite it having been agreed that a departing board member will leave at the end of their term of office. (pg. 21-22)**

**State Board appointments – Department of Transport**

- State Boards appointments are operated through the Public Appointments Service (PAS) under the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and follow the State Board appointments Guidelines 2014. This applies to all State Boards both commercial and non-commercial. There are 11 commercial bodies and 5 non-commercial bodies with boards that fall within these guidelines under the aegis of the Department of Transport. Information relating to board appointments for agencies under this Department's remit and the basis of that appointment is available here on [stateboards.ie](http://stateboards.ie) and here on the Department's website.
- Each Department has a State Boards Liaison Officer (SBLO) who is the official contact for the Department with the Public Appointments Service.
- In January 2017, the Minister approved and published new principles and procedures by which the appointment processes within the Department of Transport would follow. This process includes an additional internal selection process which is undertaken following the receipt of a list of shortlisted candidates from PAS. This process would enable the Minister to make appointments with confidence in the ability of the selected person to contribute effectively to a State Board.
- The National Treasury Management Agency (Amendment) Act) 2014 provides for NewERA to provide financial and commercial advisory services to a Minister. The Department's Commercial state bodies have been designated to NewERA, in accordance with the Act and their role includes advice in relation to appointments to the boards.

- Compliance with the Government Decision of 30/09/2014 on gender balance on State boards is an essential requirement of the appointment guidelines. Following the March 2019 report of the Inter-Departmental Group on Gender Balance on State Boards Options and Recommendations for Government, it has become necessary for Gender Balance to be addressed when appointing board members. The Department aims to attain a target of at least 40% representation of each gender on State boards. The Department is committed to ensuring our agencies are in compliance with all aspects of the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies, including Gender Balance, Diversity and Inclusion.
- While every effort is made to avoid a vacancy on a board occurring, there can be situations where a board member becomes sick or retires unexpectedly or the process cannot be concluded within the expected timelines.

### **The Selection and Appointment Process**

- At least six months in advance of a vacancy arising, the Department engage with the Agency and NewERA in relation to the role and job specification and all efforts are made to embrace diversity and gender balance through the appointments system.
- The Department in consultation with PAS prepare an information Booklet which is published on PAS website stateboards.ie.
- PAS arrange an assessment of all applications and forward a shortlist of candidates to the SBLO.
- The Department undertake the internal assessment process and submit a shortlist of selected candidates for the Minister's decision.
- The Minister makes a decision on a successful candidate.
- PAS are informed and relevant websites are updated.

### **13. A note detailing the methodology by which money is distributed for roads improvement and maintenance including detail as to whether (a) it is solely on a per kilometre basis, (b) the condition of roads factors into funding allocation. (pg. 22)**

The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of each local authority, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from local authorities' own resources supplemented by State road grants, where applicable.

There were major cutbacks in funding for the road network in general during the post 2008 recession. The National Development Plan (NDP), as it stands, provides for a gradual increase in funding for regional and local roads and there has been a significant increase in Exchequer funding particularly in

the last four years. In this context, Wexford County Council received a total allocation of €18,569,130 for 2021 which is an increase of 59% when compared to 2017.

Funding is not yet at the level needed for the adequate maintenance and renewal of regional and local roads and so for this reason, the primary focus for capital investment continues to be the maintenance and renewal of the network with some limited investment in road improvement projects. The major cuts to funding for regional and local roads during the post 2008 recession resulted in the build-up of a substantial backlog of maintenance and rehabilitation works across the country. Work is in hand at the moment to firm up on the cost of the backlog, but an indicative cost is in excess of €5 billion. This backlog of works is spread across all counties.

As regards the basis for allocating grants, within the budget available to the Department, funding is allocated on as fair and equitable a basis as possible to eligible local authorities. In this context, grants in the main grant categories are allocated based on the length of the road network within a local authority's area of responsibility with some account taken of traffic. It is envisaged that grants will continue to be made available on that basis.

Basing regional and local roads grant allocations on road conditions could result in an uneven distribution of State funding. For example, local authorities that allocate higher levels of own resources funding to regional and local roads should have a larger proportion of roads with a satisfactory condition rating than those with lower levels of own resources funding. Basing allocations on road condition could therefore disincentivise local authorities from allocating own resources funding to roads maintenance.

The Department appreciates that, within the overall parameters set for the grant programme, local authorities might need to target funding at particular problem areas and there is sufficient flexibility in the structure of the grant programme to allow for this. It is also open to each local authority to allocate its own resources to priority areas.

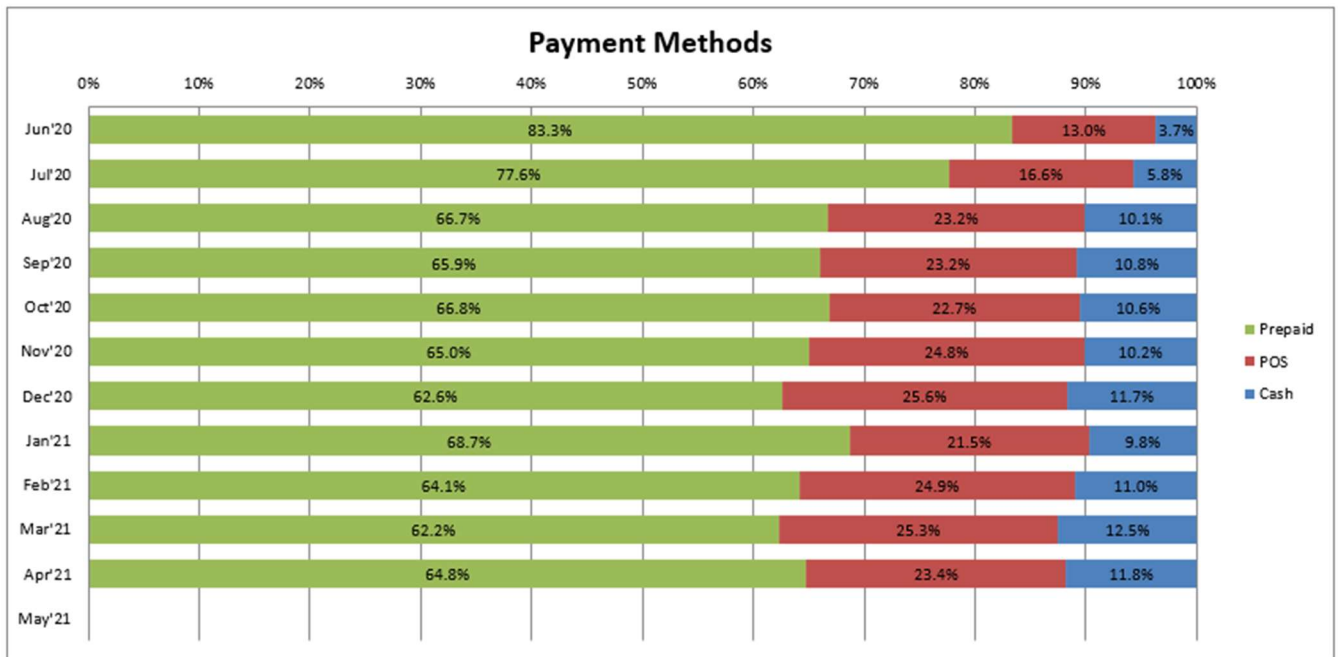
**14. Whether NCT applicants can pay by cash in NCT centres, and if not, how the Department intends to accommodate those that do not have the means to pay by another method. (pg. 24)**

NCTS customers are encouraged to pay by card but where cash is presented, it is accepted.

All customers who book through the web are required to provide card details at the point of booking. Payment is taken automatically at the centre when the vehicle is checked in. If there are no funds available on the card at the time the vehicle is checked in, an alternative payment type is required (Cash or alternative Card). More than 70% of customers book through the web.

Customers who book through the call centre do not provide card details on the call, but all are encouraged to pay by card when they arrive at the test centre.

The stats on Cash (Cash) V Card Terminal in Centre (POS) V Web card payment (Prepaid) since NCTS re-opened in June last year are below (note: the call centre was not accepting bookings in June 2020).



**15. An update on Coillte’s progress in transferring land for a new Irish Coast Guard base to be established in Castlefreke, Co. Cork, and the reasons for the delay that appears to have occurred in the process. (pg. 26-27)**

The IRCG was offered a site by Coillte for a new station at Castlefreke. The OPW was instructed to investigate feasibility of this site. To progress this project, a site visit was required by the OPW to agree and mark out a clear site before legal issues and the planning application could be finalised. This site visit was unfortunately delayed due to covid travel restrictions. However, following easing restrictions, the OPW recently visited Castlefreke and carried out this site visit. The site was agreed with the surveyor. The OPW has since met to discuss final work on the planning application and intend to issue a final draft set of docs including application form, notices, to all parties for comment shortly.

**16. Whether there is a strategic plan for the Irish Coast Guard, and if so, can the Committee be furnished with a copy. (pg. 27)**

The National Search and Rescue Plan (NSP) is the key means by which SAR policy is implemented in Ireland (attached herewith). It is the baseline reference document for use by all Search and Rescue organisations in Ireland and promulgates the agreed methods of coordination through which search, and rescue operations are conducted within Irelands SAR Region. The Plan was subject to a major review process in 2019 on foot of various reports and reviews in relation to search and rescue in Ireland. The Department of Transport (DoT) is responsible for ensuring that the NSP is established and is fit for purpose. The National SAR Committee has been established by DoT as part of the NSP to monitor the performance of the Plan and report to the Minister on an annual basis. The Committee provides strategic coordination, guidance and leadership for Irelands National SAR system and advice where required to the Minister for Transport.

As set out in the NSP, the Irish Coast Guard is required to discharge Ireland’s SAR obligations by implementing the National SAR Plan for all incidents occurring in the maritime domain. An Garda Síochána is responsible for land-based search and rescue. The Irish Aviation Authority through the Air Rescue Coordination Centre is responsible for air search and rescue incidents in the Irish SAR region.

Also attached is the Irish Maritime Directorate Strategy for period 2021 to 2025. This Maritime Strategy sets out clear goals under our six priority objectives, in line with the Department of Transport's Statement of Strategy as well as the Government's priorities under the Programme for Government. One of those six priority objectives is to "Deliver an effective Maritime Emergency Response (Search and Rescue (SAR) Maritime Casualty and Pollution Response" and the goals and actions to be achieved for the period of the strategy 2021 to 2025. Both documents provide the strategic framework in which the Irish Coast Guard operates.

**17. Details of the last time the national oil spill contingency planning was undertaken or practised by the Department. (pg. 27)**

The National Maritime Oil & HNS Spill Contingency Plan (NCP) was published in June 2020 by the Department of Transport after extensive consultation with stakeholders. The principal objective of the NCP is to develop an effective national preparedness and response regime in line with the International Convention on Oil Pollution Preparedness, Response and Cooperation, 1990 (OPRC Convention) and its Protocol on Preparedness, Response and Cooperation to Pollution Incidents by Hazardous and Noxious Substances, 2000 (OPRC-HNS Protocol). The NCP provides a stepwise approach for the planning, preparedness, and implementation process at national and regional levels in response to spills in the maritime domain.

The delivery of a proactive annual national exercise regime is a core support to achieving this objective. Following the publication of the NCP in 2020, the Irish Coast Guard as a Division with the Department has conducted a number of exercises which have sought to exercise the NCP, most recently in March 2021 during the multi-agency Coast Guard exercise "Blue Mist". Amongst other objectives, "Blue Mist" sought to exercise key components of the NCP such as the establishments of the Maritime Response Team (MRT), Interagency response cooperation within the Major Emergency Management (MEM) framework and Place of Refuge (POR) standard operations procedure

**18. The subhead in the Department's Appropriation Accounts that the marine casualty investigation board comes under. (pg. 27)**

Funding for the Marine Casualty Investigation Board, the independent accident investigation body for the maritime sector, comes under Subhead C3 'Maritime administration and Irish Coast Guard'.

**19. Details of the funding given to local authorities arising from the transfer of responsibility for harbours from the Department, and the reasons why funding was given or not given to each local authority concerned. (pg. 27)**

No State funding has been transferred to the local authorities in relation to the port transfers.

Following the transfers of the five Ports of Regional Significance to local authority control, where a port company transferred under the transfer of shareholding model, the company continues, as before, to fund all activities from its own resources. In the case of a port company that was dissolved and transferred directly under a local authority, it continues to generate income from port activities under the local authority.



The date and amount of each transfer is set out below.

Port Company Name	Local Authority	Date of Transfer	Funding transferred to Local Authority
Wicklow Port Company	Wicklow County Council	30 <sup>th</sup> August 2016	Nil
Drogheda Port Company	Louth County Council	2 <sup>nd</sup> October 2017	Nil
Dún Laoghaire Harbour Company	Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council	3 <sup>rd</sup> October 2018	Nil
New Ross Port Company	Wexford County Council	1 <sup>st</sup> August 2019	Nil
Galway Harbour Company	Galway City Council	1 <sup>st</sup> January 2021	Nil

On an exceptional basis and due to potential environmental contamination, Exchequer funding of €93,328.54 was paid to Wexford County Council in 2020 in respect of the environmental clean-up of previously identified sites at New Ross.

Each Local Authority conducted due diligence in advance of taking over the relevant port and the Department provided funding of up to a maximum of €30,000 to each Local Authority toward the due diligence.

Wicklow County Council received €30,000 in October 2015.

Louth County Council received €30,000 in December 2015.

Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council received €18,450 in January 2016 and €11,550 in April 2016 (Total €30,000).

Wexford County Council received €30,000 in December 2016.

Galway City Council were received €30,000 on 7/12/2015

**20. A note detailing how the effectiveness of the agencies under the aegis of the Minister for Transport is measured, and what programme of assessment is carried out to ensure these targets are being met. (pg. 27)**

- The Department has 19 State bodies under its aegis, a mixture of commercial and non-commercial.

- In March 2018, the Department adopted a framework document for the Department's oversight of both commercial and non-commercial State bodies in respect of governance.
- The core objective of this document is to establish the means by which the Department as a whole oversees the governance of its State bodies and how the Secretary General, as Accounting Officer, and the wider Management Board can be assured on the compliance by our State bodies with the revised Code of Practice 2016.
- The framework provides guidance to all the stakeholders with respect to Government's current objectives for State bodies and their subsidiaries and enables us to maintain a consistent and structured approach to governance.
- The Department structure places the line Divisions with a frontline position in the management of the State bodies and the Department. They are key to the successful relationship with the State bodies and the consistent implementation and compliance of the Code.
- In particular the Line Divisions oversee the Shareholder Expectation letter (for commercial bodies) and the Performance Delivery and Oversight Agreement (for non-commercials). These documents define our relationship with the State bodies and the mechanisms to monitor output, outcomes and performance. Included are financial performance measures in respect of profitability and investment return which are used to assess company performance in keeping with key Government objective.
- Formal meetings take place between Line Divisions and each State body regularly. These formal meetings encompass the monitoring of deliverables/targets, financial information, governance and policy matters, key risks and other key performance indicators as part of their agenda.
- The Department has further enhanced its oversight role this year with the designation of the 11 commercial agencies under the National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA) (Amendment) Act 2014. NewERA's advice will now be provided on a statutory rather than advisory basis. This development will enhance our engagement with our agencies and utilise NewERA's expertise and depth of knowledge.
- The Management Board review the compliance and financial performance of its agencies in July of each year for Commercial agencies and September for Non-Commercials.

**21. A detailed note regarding the matters raised in relation to the R400 regional road. (pg. 28)**

There has been and continues to be ongoing discussion between the Department and Offaly County Council in relation to this and other roads which are built over peat.

Separate to the normal grants for road maintenance / rehabilitation works, Offaly County Council requested funding for an investigation scheme in 2019 to determine the extent and depth of peat underlying certain key regional routes in the county. This information is essential in order to determine the most cost effective way of overcoming the ongoing problems with these roads. The Department agreed to an investigation scheme and as it progressed the Department made payments to the Council of €165,000 in 2019, €26,967 in 2020 and has provided an allocation of €40,000 in 2021.

These grants have allowed a significant number of site investigation works to be carried out (more than 300 boreholes, nearly 100 dynamic probes and more than 50 window samples). The Council is currently preparing drawings detailing the extent of the peat underlying the key regional roads and will report to the Department on the findings in 2021.

The report will outline the results of the investigation scheme along with feasible solutions and cost estimates based on the Council's experience of such works on national roads. Upon receipt of the report the Department will discuss with the Council the choices and costs in terms of rehabilitation works on roads over peat and how targeted interventions can best be accommodated in terms of the funding available to the Council under the Department's investment programmes.

## **22. A detailed note in relation to responsibility for bus shelters, and whether it would be feasible to delegate this responsibility to local authorities (pg. 28-29)**

In accordance with section 44A (1)(a) of the Dublin Transport Authority Act 2008, the NTA has "the function to secure or provide public transport..... infrastructure in the State in relation to ..... bus stops, bus shelters, bus stations, stands and bus fleets".

The NTA works closely with local authorities to coordinate the development and implementation of bus shelter programmes at county level rather than through piecemeal arrangements. This is necessary as the installation of a bus shelter will frequently require the upgrading of footpaths and / or roads as well as the relocation of underground services. Accordingly, the planning and execution of those preparatory works is undertaken by local authorities and the bus shelter structures are then installed by the NTA's bus shelter contractor (JCDecaux). This is the most effective and efficient process for the provision of bus shelters. All of the capital costs involved are funded by the NTA.

The centralised procurement and delivery of shelters managed by the NTA also offers other benefits including:

As it currently stands there is a limited number of service providers in the market who provide the service of designing, supplying, installing and maintaining shelters on a nationwide basis. Decentralising and localising the procurement of the shelter programme may result in no service providers being interested in providing the service in small counties and/or sparsely populated counties in particular.

- Procuring a single nationwide programme ensures consistency and uniformity across the country in the context of the TFI brand in addition to updating timetables and signage.
- Procuring a single nationwide programme allows for the possible integration of real time passenger information units into the shelter structure.



## Note from NTA on Taxi industry

### 3. A note detailing research expenditure on the taxi industry, the impact COVID-19 has had on it, and how the thousands of operators within the sector can be assisted to ensure they are a key part of the public transport network. (pg. 12)

#### Introduction

On 1 January 2011, the NTA subsumed the Commission for Taxi Regulation, and became responsible for the regulation of the self-employed small public service vehicle sector, i.e. Taxis, Hackneys and Limousines, together with their drivers, owners and associated services, including booking services.

Unlike many comparable jurisdictions, SPSV services are regulated at a national level in Ireland and there is no cap on either driver or vehicle licence numbers. The [regulatory framework](#) comprises the:

- ☐ Taxi Regulation Acts 2013 and 2016;
- ☐ Taxi Regulation (Small Public Service Vehicle) Regulations 2015 and 2016;
- ☐ Taxi Regulation Act 2013 (Maximum Fares) Order 2017;
- ☐ Small Public Service Vehicle (Emergency Measure COVID-19) Regulations 2020;
- ☐ Small Public Service Vehicle (Emergency Measure COVID-19)(No.2) Regulations 2020;
- ☐ Small Public Service Vehicle (Emergency Measure COVID-19) (Fees) Regulations 2020;
- ☐ Health Act 1947 (Section 31A - Temporary Restrictions) (COVID-19) (Face Coverings in Small Public Service Vehicles and Certain Premises) Regulations 2020;
- ☐ Health Act 1947 (Section 31A – Temporary Restrictions) (Covid-19) (Amendment of Definition of Face Covering) Regulations 2020 (S.I. No. 651 of 2020); and
- ☐ Small Public Service Vehicle (Emergency Measure COVID-19) Regulations 2021.

The rationale for SPSV regulation, focussing on safety and protection, is to ensure that passengers have a safe vehicle for their journey, with appropriate insurance in place, driven by a driver who has been vetted by An Garda Síochána and, in the case of taxis, with a pre-established and verified charging system. Taxis can use ranks and pick up on the street; hackneys and limousines must be pre-booked.

Much of the rationale for the changes made in the industry by NTA flowed from the [Taxi Regulation Review](#) published in January 2012 which was a wide ranging review carried out in line with a Government decision of June 2011, comprising 46 actions. The review was chaired by Mr. Alan Kelly TD, former Minister of State for Public and Commuter Transport. The Review Group included dispatch operators, drivers, consumers as well as Government Departments and regulatory and enforcement agencies. The aim of the review was to allow consumers to have confidence in the taxi system while also ensuring that legitimate and competent operators and drivers can be rewarded fairly by operating under a regulatory framework that is adequately enforced.

The Taxi Regulation Act 2013 and the Taxi Regulation (Small Public Service Vehicle) Regulations 2014 were enacted in April 2014 consolidating all other SPSV primary and secondary legislation and the legislation set out above now provides the regulatory framework for the industry with NTA as Regulator.

## Background

The point-to-point, 24-hour, on call service provided by taxi, hackney and limousine operators, deemed essential public transport, comprised the following:

-as at 31 December 2019 (preCOVID)

31 December 2019	Valid Driver Licences	Valid Vehicle Licences
Total	27,328	21,411

-as at 31 March 2020

31 March 2020	Valid Driver Licences	Valid Vehicle Licences
Total	27,228	21,235

-as at 31 March 2021

31 March 2021	Valid Driver Licences	Valid Vehicle Licences
Total	25,758	18,470

-as at 30 April 2021

31 March 2021	Valid Driver Licences	Valid Vehicle Licences
Total	25,696	18,568

-as at 31 May 2021

31 March 2021	Valid Driver Licences	Valid Vehicle Licences
Total	25,586	18,757

## COVID-19

The SPSV market has been decimated by the COVID-19 crisis with the combined effects of social distancing requirements and falling demand for transport services.

89% of the SPSV fleet cannot achieve the 2m social distancing recommendation between the driver and a single passenger; approximately 1m in separation is all that is practicable and not always so.

Most SPSV journeys preCOVID-19 were close to or over 15 minutes in duration in an inevitably confined space.

Large booking service and rental fleet providers shared their statistical data early in the pandemic and this clearly showed the decimation of the SPSV industry in Ireland. A reduction in 87-98% of trips taken throughout a number of regions and journey sectors was shown. Available driver figures had reduced by up to 88% for these active large firms by the end of May 2020. The lowest figure relating to rental fleet operator activity was a reduction of 71% for one provider in Dublin with evidence of 100% reduction in areas nationwide.

It is crucial to note that some of these particularly urban providers were:

- (a) in a position to provide much greater support and PPE to their affiliated drivers than individual drivers have been able to access to try to keep working;
- (b) in a position to commence temporary non-passenger services to keep their affiliated drivers in business; and
- (c) had previously secured large passenger transport contracts in the essential services arena which continued throughout the pandemic,

thus the levels of industry collapse are greater outside of these providers.

By the end of March 2020, the limousine industry had come to an almost complete halt as its business is primarily associated with the tourism, events, and hospitality sectors which were amongst the earliest social gathering restrictions. No uplift in this situation has been realised.

The cycle of restrictions which have occurred since the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business was first published is evidence of the complexity involved in the safe resumption of business for many sectors – none more so than the hospitality and events sectors, which SPSVs service in the main – the “experience industry”. It appears clear that these will be amongst the last to see the current restrictions lifted and only on a limited basis, where social distancing restrictions can be complied with at these venues, together with appropriate cleaning regimes. Inbound tourism and commercial travel resumption patterns remain tentative. This continued uncertainty makes the return to sustainability even more difficult for SPSV operators as they service the experience industry in the main.

A survey of travel behaviour carried out by Behaviour and Attitudes over the first half of 2019 confirmed the primary SPSV market sectors shown below.

Reasons for Taking a Taxi on the Last Occasion		
Socialising/Recreational	43%	68%
Alcohol consumption	25%	
Work related		14%
Shopping Trip		9%
Visiting Friends and Family		9%
Other		8%

A further survey, also undertaken by Behaviour & Attitudes, in September 2020 illustrates the shift in demand patterns caused by hospitality/experience sector closures and the challenge this shift poses for the SPSV industry. This latest survey also reiterates information previously obtained regarding the average taxi journey duration.

#### Reason for Travel

Reason for Travel	Pre Covid restrictions (%)	During Covid restrictions (%)
Leisure	56	38
Visiting friends/family	8	18
Shopping/Shops	5	10
Essential hospital visit/medical appointment	7	10
Work	6	9
Appointment (hairdresser, barber, beautician etc.)	2	3
Business meeting/interview	3	2
School/college	1	1
Other	12	9

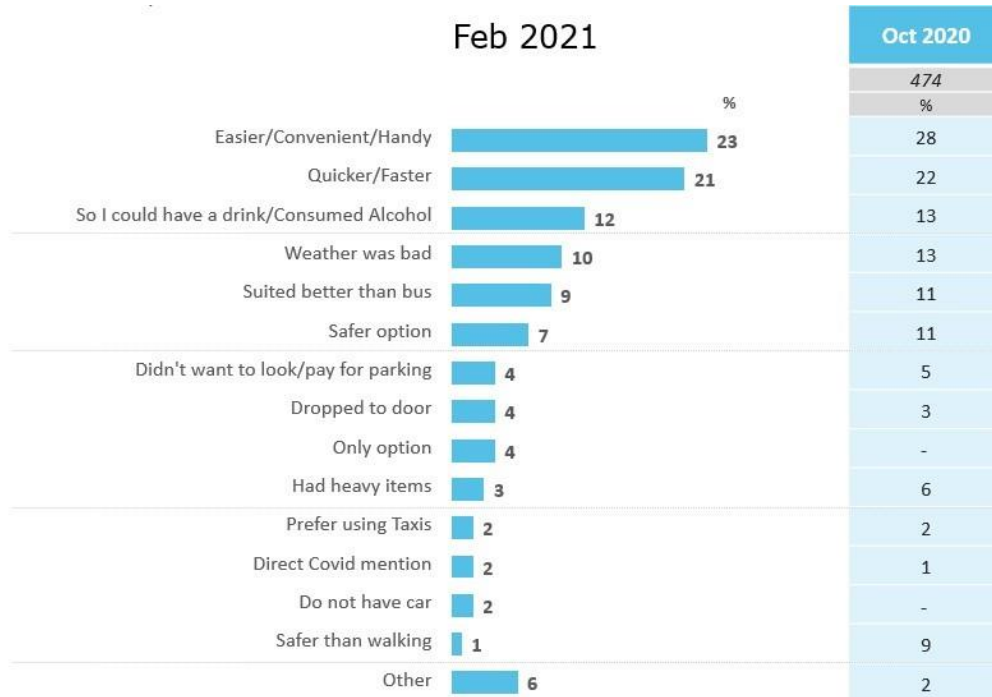
Duration of Journey (minutes)	%
Less than 5 minutes	3
5 to 10	28
11 to 15	32
16 to 20	23
Over 21 minutes	14

The September 2020 survey also showed that walking is now the principal form of commuter transport. This apparent behavioural change and modal shift to walking, and other forms of active individual travel including bikes and scooters, will compound the damaging economic impact of COVID on SPSV operators.



A further survey, also undertaken by Behaviour & Attitudes, in February 2021 illustrates a more pessimistic outlook in the SPSV industry and with consumers. This latest survey also reiterates information previously obtained regarding the average taxi journey duration.

Reasons for using a taxi



Duration of Journey

Duration of journey		
	Past Fortnight	
	Oct 2020	Feb 2021
<i>Base (unweighted):</i>	159	79
	%	%
Less than 5 minutes	6	<b>14</b>
5-10 minutes	35	<b>28</b>
11-15 minutes	32	29
16-20 minutes	17	17
Over 21 minutes	10	12

Behaviour & Attitudes, an independent research company, commenced a third wave of these rolling surveys at the end of May 2021. The preliminary findings from this current wave of surveys are anticipated in mid-July 2021.

The expenditure incurred by NTA in researching the impact of COVID-19 on the SPSV industry is summarised below.

	Supplier	Product	Cost
Oct-20	Behaviour & Attitudes	Survey costs - industry and consumer research (COVID-19 support) Wave 1	€37,714
Feb-21	Behaviour & Attitudes	Survey costs - industry and consumer research (COVID-19 support) Wave 2	€37,100
May-21	Behaviour & Attitudes	Survey costs - industry and consumer research (COVID-19 support) Wave 3	€34,750

Given the current and projected landscape for SPSV drivers, vehicle licence holders, dispatch operator companies and, of course, ancillary providers to the SPSV industry, the gains made over recent years in reversing the exodus from the market and improving the service supply for persons with disability including wheelchair users will be lost. In reality, we are likely facing much worse, with a large percentage of the regulated industry expected not to return to work and an unregulated and uninsured market emerging. Already, the number of current vehicle licences has reduced significantly.

It is important to note that both vehicle and driver licences have three status points:

☐ Current/Active Licence

A vehicle licence is active and eligible to be used to provide SPSV passenger services. However, the licence holder may not be working (potentially not on shift, on leave or the current situation of insufficient demand to provide work).

☐ Inactive Licence

A vehicle licence moves to Inactive status if it is not renewed by its expiry date. A licence holder then has 12 months to re-activate that licence and is unable to operate until that vehicle licence is reactivated. In the current situation this provides “breathing space” for licence holders and ensures that although fixed costs are reduced (particularly insurance costs), the licence holder may return to the industry with relative ease after a substantial break.

## ☒ Dead Licence

A vehicle licence moves to dead status if it is not renewed within the 12 months specified above. Whilst this is not overly challenging for WAV licence holders as new WAV licences are available from NTA; for nonWAV licence holders this can be problematic, if that licence holder wishes to continue to drive a nonWAV (saloon cars in the main) as such licences have not been issued for taxis or hackneys since June 2010.

There are a number of risks to be considered post COVID-19:

- ☒ Driver licence renewal rates may suffer as the cost of operating outweighs the benefit and/or health and mental health costs are too high
- ☒ SPSV supply will not be available to the travelling public, particularly in non-urban areas
- ☒ Passengers with disabilities, particularly those using wheelchairs, will not be appropriately catered for due to social distancing requirements
- ☒ Fraud and forgery of authentic SPSV vehicle and driver identification will emerge
- ☒ A new unregulated market will operate affecting the safety of the travelling public

Mitigation Measures (in order) taken by NTA to assist in the restoration of services

- ☒ Extensive engagement (see appendix for detail) with the industry individually and through our website, providing advice and assistance on all aspects of operation including temporary deferral of activities and available HSE and DEASP assistance, together with the dynamic [SPSV Industry Information Note \(COVID-19\)](#) providing up to date advices on all SPSV COVID related matters;
- ☒ Deferral of renewal dates of vehicle licences due to renew from 13 March to 12 June 2020 by three months at the commencement of the COVID-19 emergency (when we thought the pandemic would be short lived);
- ☒ Ensured SPSV licence holders were prioritised in NCTS;
- ☒ Increased the means by which SPSV operators can break a “Driver to Vehicle Link” following initial restrictions to include email, online, SMS and App;
- ☒ Provision of Advisory Guidelines on Temporary COVID-19 Dividing Screens;
- ☒ Engaged with insurance providers and facilitated cover reductions to private or Fire and Theft cover only for “parking up” - 60% to 90% discount on SPSV premium;
- ☒ Suspended SPSV licences for underinsured operators, which would ordinarily have left operators open to prosecution and placed that licence in inactive status immediately, requiring a full NCT and an SPSV suitability inspection prior to returning to operation;
- ☒ Engaged with SPSV inspection testing providers to reopen standalone SPSV centres as required and use some forecourts manned by NTA personnel to assist operators directly;
- ☒ Frequent engagement with the Advisory Committee on SPSVs and the Department of Transport, specifically including responses and actions on foot of the “Small Public Service Vehicle Industry Proposals for Industry Recovery - Advisory Committee on Small Public Service Vehicles response to Covid-19”;
- ☒ Engagement with regulators in other jurisdictions to learn and advise on best practice;

- ☐ Engagement with other transport operators and with PPE suppliers and designers on face visors/masks/coverings, gloves, screens, sanitisers and other COVID-19 related safety equipment.
- ☐ Introduction of hand sanitiser points at major transport interchanges where SPSV passengers transit to or from other modes of transport;
- ☐ Facilitating the Fáilte Ireland SPSV driver Infection Prevention Control training programme;
- ☐ Undertook radio, press and social media campaigns regarding mandatory face coverings following the enactment of the Health Regulation for mandatory face coverings in SPSVs on 03 December 2020;
- ☐ Enactment of regulations in May and December 2020 to enable the operation for another 12 months for those vehicles which would reach their maximum permissible age (MPA – 10/15 years old) between 13 March 2020 and 31 December 2021;
- ☐ Enactment of a regulation to waive standard vehicle licence renewal fees during the period 1 January and 31 December 2021 and also to waive late renewal fees until 12 June and impose a reduced late renewal fee from 13 June to 31 December 2021;
- ☐ Commencement of the ESPSV Grant Scheme 2021 with enhanced grant funding for vehicle scrappage;
- ☐ Commencement of the WAV Grant Scheme 2021 for existing SPSV industry members, and for new entrants purchasing a electric WAV;
- ☐ Resumed SPSV Driver Entry Testing Programme following public health advice;
- ☐ Enactment of regulations in May 2021 to ensure no vehicle associated with a vehicle licence would reach its maximum permissible age of operation in 2021:
- ☐ Commencement, on 18 June 2021, of public consultation to waive 'standard' vehicle licence renewal fees in 2022;
- ☐ Commencement, on 18 June 2021, of public consultation to double the period of time an SPSV licences rests in 'inactive' status before it permanently lapses (or enters 'dead' status).

#### Engagement with SPSV Industry COVID-19 Pandemic

There are three primary methods of communication used to address SPSV industry members: the SPSV Latest News section of the NTA website, email campaigns and SMS campaigns. These are often conducted in unison to maximise the reach of the information being provided. Email communication is the preferred method of contact for NTA owed to the fact more detail can be provided. However, a larger volume of SMS notifications have been issued to industry members in the context of the current pandemic to provide an instant notification to visit the website via direct link to receive new information.

From the commencement of the COVID-19 period to the end of May 2020, the following communications had been completed:

- o 50,000 emails issued to operators
- o 114,000 SMS issued to operators
- o 12,000 calls to Information line from operators
- o 7,500 individual emails from operators

By the end March 2021, this had increased to:

- o 117,932 emails issued to operators

- o 260,198 SMS issued to operators
- o 116,880 calls to Information line from operators
- o 15,978 individual emails from operators

By the end April 2021, this had increased to:

- o 117,932 emails issued to operators
- o 277,368 SMS issued to operators
- o 101,310 calls to Information line from operators
- o 15,435 individual emails from operators

#### SPSV Industry Information Note (COVID-19)

The content of the document can be broken down into the below categories:

- ☐ SPSV licensing implications
- ☐ SPSV insurance cover and premium reductions
- ☐ Health and safety measures while operating
- ☐ General updates related to COVID-19

This document is a 'live document' as the COVID-19 situation and Government guidelines are continuously evolving. For this reason the document is regularly updated.

<https://www.nationaltransport.ie/taxi/publications-and-regulations/forms-and-guides/>

#### SPSV Industry engagement

The below tables provide a chronological timeline of the updates provided to SPSV industry members in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

No.	Communication with Licence Holders	Date	Format
First contact tracing by NTA for COVID-19 Positive Taxi User		28/02/202	
1	Link to HSE website	28/02/2020	Website
2	COVID-19 industry member notification - link to HSE Guidelines	06/03/2020	SMS
3	HSE Guidelines: Fact Sheet	06/03/2020	Website
4	COVID-19 industry member notification - link to HSE Guidelines	06/03/2020	Email
Statement by An Taoiseach Leo Varadkar on Measures to Tackle Covid-19		12/03/202	
5	Link to HSE/NCTS websites	12/03/2020	Website
6	Update HSE fact sheets	13/03/2020	Website
National Action Plan on COVID-19 (Public Transport as Essential Service)		16/03/202	
7	COVID-19 Social Distancing Request on behalf of An Garda Síochána	17/03/2020	SMS
8	COVID-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment	18/03/2020	Website
9	Legal Metrology Services - Taximeter - Closure Notification	19/03/2020	Website

10	COVID-19 Operation Advices to Industry Members	19/03/2020	Website
11	HSE Guidance: multiple languages	21/03/2020	Website
Post Cabinet Statement of An Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar - Update on COVID-19		24/03/2020	
12	COVID-19 update meeting with Advisory Committee on SPSVs	26/03/2020	Virtual
13	Vehicle licence renewal deferral/late fees waiver	27/03/2020	Website
"Stay At Home" Speech of Taoiseach Leo Varadkar		27/03/2020	
14	Website updates - Driver Check App/Contact Tracing	28/03/2020	Website
15	SPSV Industry Information Note COVID-19 provided to Advisory Committee on SPSVs and SPSV Representative Groups	28/03/2020	Email
16	Notification to all licence holders directing to website for assistance	28/03/2020	SMS
NCT and inspection centres closed		30/03/2020	
17	Inspection Centre Closure - SMS to affected licence holders	30/03/2020	SMS
18	COVID-19 Industry Information note updated	30/03/2020	Website
19	COVID-19 Industry Information note updated (DOH)	31/03/2020	Website
20	Public Consultation: Maximum permissible age	03/04/2020	Website
21	Public Consultation SMS - all vehicle licence holders	03/04/2020	SMS
Speech of An Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar T.D., Update on COVID-19		10/04/2020	
22	COVID-19 Industry Information note updated	17/04/2020	Website
23	COVID-19 Industry Information note updated	17/04/2020	Email
24	COVID-19 Industry Information note updated	17/04/2020	SMS
25	Vehicle Licence Suspensions Expiry Procedure Detailed*	23/04/2020	Website
26	COVID-19 update meeting with Advisory Committee on SPSVs	30/04/2020	Virtual
Statement of An Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business		01/05/2020	
27	Roadmap meeting with Chairman Advisory Committee on SPSVs	05/05/2020	Virtual
28	Tamper Proof Licence Disc Reapplication Information	08/05/2020	Website
29	Maximum Permissible Age Extensions	18/05/2020	Email

30	Guidance on safe use of face coverings (Dept. of Health)	18/05/2020	Website
31	Advisory Guidelines: Temporary COVID-19 Dividing Screens	18/05/2020	Website
32	SPSV Conditional Licence Offer Extension notifications	21/05/2020	Email
33	COVID-19 update meeting with Advisory Committee on SPSVs	28/05/2020	Virtual
34	SMS: Licence Holders with Valid NCT	03/06/2020	SMS
35	SMS: Licence Holders - Booking Cancelled due to Closure	04/06/2020	SMS
36	Some SPSV Inspection Centres and the NTA Booking Line will Reopen on 8 June	03/06/2020	Website
37	NCT service to reopen on a phased basis from the 8 June	03/06/2020	Website
Commencement of Phase 2 of Government Roadmap to Reopening		08/06/2020	
38	Latest News Update for expiring licence holders	18/06/2020	Website/SMS
39	Link to Latest News for additional licence holders	19/06/2020	Website /SMS
40	Insurance company confirmation that screens do not impact cover	17/06/2020	Website
41	National Car Testing Service: Statement	18/06/2020	Website
42	SPSV Information & Booking Line – Abnormally High Volumes	20/06/2020	Website
43	SPSV Vehicle Licence Suspensions – Insurance premium reductions	22/06/2020	Website
44	NCTS Statement 27 June - NCT extensions	23/06/2020	Website
45	COVID-19 update meeting with Advisory Committee on SPSVs	25/06/2020	Virtual
46	Face coverings in public transport - refusals	29/06/2020	Website
47	Covid-19 Fáilte Ireland Advisory Group – SPSV Representation	29/06/2020	Website
48	COVID-19 update meeting with Advisory Committee on SPSVs	30/07/2020	Virtual
48	COVID-19 SPSV Industry Update (Issue 49)	01/08/2020	Website/SMS
49	COVID-19 Supports - Financial	14/08/2020	Website
50	Enterprise Support Grant for businesses impacted by COVID-19	14/08/2020	Website
51	SPSV Telephone Survey Announcement	07/09/2020	Website
52	Public Consultation on SPSV (Emergency Measure COVID-19) Draft Regulations 2020 – Fees waiver & Maximum age for SPSVs	20/10/2020	Website/SMS

53	COVID-19 update meeting with Advisory Committee on SPSVs	24/10/2020	Virtual
54	Respect Campaign	15/11/2020	Social Media Campaign & website
55	COVID-19 update meeting with Advisory Committee on SPSVs	29/10/2020	Virtual
56	COVID-19 update meeting with Advisory Committee on SPSVs	26/11/2020	Virtual
57	SPSV Industry Update Issue 50	30/11/2020	Website/SMS
Plan for Living with COVID-19 - Level 3 Restrictions		01/12/202	
58	Face Covering Regulations for SPSV Services signed	03/12/2020	Website/SMS Media
Phase 2 Plan for Living with COVID-19 - Level 3 Restrictions - Restaurants		04/12/2020	
59	Compulsory Face Coverings – 92% Passengers Feel Safe campaign	10/12/2020	Printed/Social Media Campaign & website
60	Fáilte Ireland COVID-19 Training for SPSV Drivers	10/12/2020	Website
61	Additional flexibility for self-employed workers on the Pandemic Unemployment Payment	10/12/2020	Website
62	Compulsory Face Coverings in SPSVs – Feel safe radio campaign		Radio
Phase 3 Plan for Living with COVID-19 - Level 3 Restrictions		18/12/202	
63	Minister for Health makes Amendment to the Definition of Face Covering	18/12/2020	Website
64	Approved – SPSV (Emergency Measure COVID-19) (No.2) Regulations 2020	18/12/2020	Website/SMS
65	Approved – SPSV (Emergency Measure COVID-19) (Fees) Regulations 2020	18/12/2020	Website/SMS
Level 5 with Adjustments Commenced		24/12/202	
66	Four Taxi Representative Groups - meeting	24/12/2021	Virtual
Full Level 5 Restrictions Commenced		31/12/202	
67	COVID-19: Useful finance links for the SPSV Industry	28/01/2021	Website
68	Advisory Committee on SPSVs Meeting	28/01/2021	Virtual
69	Launch of Electric SPSV Grant Scheme 2021	04/02/2021	Website/SMS
70	SPSV Industry & Consumer Surveys COVID-19 Impact Research	10/02/2021	Website
71	SPSV Industry Update Issue 51	25/02/2021	Website/SMS
72	Advisory Committee on SPSVs Meeting	25/02/2021	Virtual
73	Useful Information for the SPSV Industry - Fees	01/03/2021	Website
74	SPSV Driver Entry Test update	01/03/2021	Email



75	WAV Grant Scheme 2021 – Launch	01/03/2021	Website
76	COVID-19 Industry Information Note – Updated	15/03/2021	Website
77	Advisory Committee on SPSVs Meeting	25/03/2021	Virtual
78	Fáilte Ireland Strategic Tourism Transport Business Continuity Scheme	08/04/2021	Website/SMS
79	Public Consultation on Draft Small Public Service Vehicle (Emergency Measure COVID-19) Regulations	20/04/2021	Website/SMS
80	Minister’s attendance at the Advisory Committee on SPSVs Meeting	25/03/2021	Virtual
81	NTA Press Release: Taxis and hackneys continue to be widely available	07/05/2021	Website
8 Level 5 lockdown restrictions eased – gatherings, services, retail		10/05/2021	
82	Resumption of SPSV Driver Entry Testing	12/05/2021	Website
More restrictions lifted including all non-essential retail		17/05/2021	
83	SPSV (Emergency Measure COVID-19) Regulations 2021 enacted for Maximum Permissible Ages 2021	21/05/2021	Website/SMS /
84	SPSV Industry Update (Issue 52)	21/05/2021	Website/SMS/ Email
85	COVID-19 Industry Information Note – Updated	26/05/2021	Website
86	Minister for Health extends the period of effect of the COVID-19 Face Coverings Regulations	08/06/2021	Website
87	Minister for Transport, Eamon Ryan, advises of changes to the horizontal supports available to the SPSV industry	10/06/2021	Website
88	Regulatory Consultations on Proposed Emergency Measures for the SPSV Industry	18/06/2021	Website/SMS