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Sent: Monday 6 July 2020 12:02
To: Aileen Fallon
Cc: Covid19
Subject: Taxi Dispatch Operator's Representative Association Submission to Special Committee on COVID-19 Response
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Submission to Special Committee on COVID-19 Response

Aileen Fallon,
Committee Clerk,
Special Committee on Covid-19 Response,
3rd July 2020.

Dear Aileen,

I would like to make this submission on behalf of TDORA to the Special Committee on COVID-19 Response. As General Secretary of TDORA representing the largest national association of licensed taxi dispatch operators I would ask that we work together in an effort to ensure a viable return to business offering the travelling public a safe, reliable and professional taxi service to enhance all other modes of Public Transport.

We represent operators in Dublin, Cork, Galway, Limerick, Kildare, Wicklow, Meath, Waterford, Clare, Sligo and Carlow providing essential services to the HSE, hospitals, government departments and households during COVID-19 and wish to continue doing so. As established and trusted transport providers we are committed to being part of the solution on how best to progress through this pandemic.

Thanking you,

Vinny Kearns,
General Secretary,
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Taxi Dispatch Operator's Representative Association

Special Committee on COVID-19 Response

1. I would like to thank you for this opportunity to make a submission to your committee. Having over the past 35 years worked with local government, central government and E.U. Transport Committees dealing with all modes of public transport I had never expected the challenges we are now facing from COVID-19. We also have the additional responsibilities that we are faced with in protecting office staff, drivers and customers thus reducing the risk of further spread of this virus. We like other public transport providers experienced a 90+% decrease in business but still continued to operate. Social distancing and reduced occupancy will be a new norm for a long time to come. We have had to temporarily lay off some staff and restructuring will follow if we are to survive. We are unique in our role as licensed dispatch operators in that we are better equipped to provide traceability of passengers which is an essential measure in moving forward.
2. Government initiatives to date will be subject to review at some future time but by and large the majority of decisions have proven to be in the best interest of our country and have also assisted us in the taxi industry in staying operational, keeping jobs and maintaining a customer base that we can return to and grow from.
3. We are now at a stage that we need to work on a plan for sustainability until we get back to the business levels that we experienced pre COVID-19. We have reviewed our staffing levels to comply with recommended return to work guidelines. Our offices have been changed about to create more space between desks and we have installed screens between telephone operators. All efforts have been undertaken to ensure safety. This additional cost along with the cost of remote working is adding to our stress but if it helps us return to the level of demand we experienced last February it will be worth the cost.
4. It is accepted that once social distancing and a restriction on public gatherings began that the first to feel the economic impacts were, pubs, nightclubs, concerts, sporting events, air travel, public transport and taxis. It is also a fact that we were among the first impacted and we will also be the last to recover as restrictions are being lifted and public confidence in our ability to cope with this new demanding environment grows. We did keep essential services going since early March to date despite it not being economically viable. We will now need a viable plan to help us return to a somewhat normal business environment as the country recovers. TDORA will play our part in order to avoid the fears of a second wave of the virus.

Keeping your taxi safe

1. Hand hygiene, we hear again and again that 'the spread of Coronavirus is in our hands', and that the virus is often contracted by hand to face contact. Wash your hands regularly, for a minimum of 20 seconds with soap that lathers. During your shift use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser.
2. Make hand sanitiser available to your passengers and ask them to use it on entry to your car.
3. Avoid touching your face with your hands. Keep conscious of this by keeping them on the wheel.
4. Wear a mask. Face masks are more effective when worn by a person with Coronavirus to stop them spreading it, rather than preventing somebody from contracting it. But that is not to say it does not mitigate risks, and many people also use face masks to stop the impulse to touch their face.
5. Use your driver app to phone/text passengers to let them know you arrived rather than calling to their door
6. Do not allow passengers to sit in the front seat.
7. Consider installing a screen between the front and back of your car if you do not already have one.
8. Regularly disinfect your car by wiping down door handles, car seat belts and other areas with antiseptic wipes.
9. Avoid handling passengers' bags and other goods if you can. Of course, this may not be possible in the case of elderly or incapacitated passengers, so think about wearing gloves and sanitising your hands after helping them.
10. Have a supply of tissues in the car to catch coughs and sneezes for both you and your passengers, and a bin with a closed lid to immediately allow for quick disposal.
11. Let people know about the measures you are taking to protect both you and them from the spread of the virus. Put a sign up in your car outlining the steps you are taking and ask them to please oblige by following COVID-19 safety practices and etiquette.
12. Encourage passengers to make contactless card payments where possible, and if you do have to accept cash be sure to wear gloves and sanitise immediately after handling.
13. If you offer deliveries be sure to do drop-offs at the doorstep rather than handing orders and packages over to people. This protects you both.
14. Self-isolate. If you have come into contact with a confirmed case of Coronavirus then you should isolate at home until the period of incubation is over.
15. Follow your government guidelines. The COVID-19 crisis will be handled differently by different governing bodies across the world, with varying levels of security depending on the crisis timeline. Your cooperation is appreciated.

I would ask that consideration be given to grant aided initiatives to help get drivers, taxi license owners and licensed taxi dispatch operators back to work. We are in the same category as pubs and restaurants so please consider this when assessing the speed of recovery within the taxi business. This assistance by way of grant aid could in the long run be a low price to pay if it results in,

- Drivers signing off COVID-19 payments to return to work.
- Taxi License Owners putting cars back on the road creating employment and increasing the service.
- Taxi Companies keeping their doors open which will result in many jobs being saved and the essential services they provide being maintained.

I would be happy to participate and assist the committee in deciding what levels of grant support and assistance would be required.

The other areas of concern will be,

- How will driver, taxi license owners and licensed dispatch operators access finance for change of vehicles. Covid-19 has ruined the credit ratings of anyone associated with the industry.
- Can state low interest rate funding be made available?
- Can the age of the vehicle be extended for licensing purposes?
- Can Electric Vehicle grants be reviewed? In order to meet climate change targets special taxi grants and financing similar to the UK and Scotland would be appreciated.

I appreciate the time given to read and evaluate my submission and on behalf of TDORA I would like to thank you.



Taxi Dispatch Operator's Representative Association