



Taxi Reform Newsletter



February 2008

Welcome to the first Taxi Reform Newsletter. It tells you about progress on the Taxis Bill. It also explains how we are going to start implementing it, if and when it becomes law later this year.

This issue of the newsletter:

- explains what is happening with the Taxis Bill now;
- outlines the stages the Bill still needs to go through in the Northern Ireland Assembly; and
- describes what will happen if the Bill is approved and becomes law later this year, and outlines when you will start to see changes.

The Taxis Bill: What's Happening Now?

At the moment the Taxis Bill is still going through the Northern Ireland Assembly's legislative process. The timetable opposite shows the steps that need to be taken before it becomes law. A lot of progress has already been made.

In May 2007, the Assembly agreed that there should be a Bill to improve how taxis are regulated. The Environment Committee then looked in detail at the Bill and took evidence from witnesses.

In December 2007 the Committee published a report suggesting a number of amendments to the Bill. It also made some recommendations to DOE, particularly about the need to increase the size of the taxi enforcement team.

You can see the Committee's report in full and read what was said in the evidence sessions at:
http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/environment/2007mandate/reports/report_taxis_bill_nia407.htm

Proposed Taxis Bill Timetable

February 2008

Consideration Stage

MLAs debate the Bill in detail and vote on proposed amendments.

March 2008

Further Consideration Stage

This is the last opportunity for MLAs to amend the Bill.

April 2008

Final Stage

The Assembly has its final debate and vote on the Bill. There can be no more amendments at this stage.

May/June 2008

Royal Assent

Once the Bill gets Royal Assent it will become law and its name will change to the Taxis (Northern Ireland) Act 2008.

What Happens After the Taxis Bill Becomes Law?

If and when the Taxis Bill becomes law, nothing will change overnight. The legislation will allow DOE to make certain changes to how taxis are regulated. For example, we will be able to make new rules or requirements for taxi drivers, vehicles and operators.

These new rules and requirements will be set out in more detailed taxi legislation which still has to be drafted. This means that you

probably won't start to see any major changes until 2009.

Most of this more detailed legislation will be in the form of regulations setting out the new rules on a particular topic. For example, what taxi businesses will have to do to get an operator's licence or what will be included in the taxi driving test when it is re-introduced.

We will consult with the taxi industry and taxi users on all of these regulations, including about any fees or other costs involved. Anyone who wants to will be able to send us their views on what we are proposing to do. Also, when businesses are affected by new regulations, we will issue guidance to them about what they will have to do at least 12 weeks before the new rules come into effect.

Changes on the Way

Operator licensing for taxi businesses
All taxis able to pick up without a booking
DOE setting maximum fare rates
Requiring all taxis to have taximeters
Bringing back the taxi driving test
Training for all taxi drivers
Creating new taxi sharing schemes
More wheelchair accessible taxis
Allowing only accessible taxis to use ranks

When Will Tax Changes Start to Happen?

If and when the Taxis Bill becomes law, regulation of the taxi industry will begin to change.

One of the first changes will be the introduction of taxi operator licensing. We will also be looking at what types of vehicles are suitable to be licensed as taxis, especially wheelchair accessible taxis.

We have already started work on these issues. As it progresses, we will tell you more about it in future newsletters.

We plan to start research on some of the other changes early in 2009. These will include the setting of maximum fare rates for all taxis (based on a detailed assessment of how much it costs to run a taxi) and the types of taximeters taxis will have to have.

We will keep the taxi industry informed about these and other developments well before any changes are introduced, to give operators, owners and drivers plenty of time to prepare.

Look out for updates in future editions of this newsletter.

Further copies of this newsletter can be downloaded from www.roadsafetyni.gov.uk. Follow the link for Taxis – Taxi Newsletter.

Useful Contacts

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Driver and Vehicle Agency

www.dvni.gov.uk

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DVA Taxi Enforcement

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148-158 Corporation Street
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DVA Taxi Testing

Check the DVA website for details of your local test centre.

NI Assembly

www.niassembly.gov.uk
To check progress on the Taxis Bill, you can visit the Environment Committee or the 'Legislation – Primary (Bills)' pages.