



Comhairle Ceantair
Lár Uladh
Mid Ulster
District Council

Our Ref: ENV/2122/AMC/4

4th March 2022

Minister Nichola Mallon
Department for Infrastructure
10-18 Adelaide Street
Belfast
BT2 8GB

By Email: private.office@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk

Dear Minister Mallon

Re: Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) Services

Further to a recent meeting of Council's Environment Committee meeting, I was asked to write to you about significant waiting times for vehicle testing services, and particularly the backlog for driving tests.

I understand the Driver and Vehicle Agency is currently experiencing significant demand for vehicle testing services. As a result, many drivers are unable to get vehicles tested before their current MOT certificate expires.

I am also aware there is a backlog securing driving test appointments, further impacted by rescheduling appointments due to the pandemic. This has been especially problematic for those with theory test pass certificates due to expire. As you will appreciate securing a driving licence is important for people's independence, employment, and particularly important across rural communities in Mid Ulster.

To this end, I would be grateful if you could advise on what is being done to address access issues experienced by customers availing for Driver and Vehicle Agency Services at this time in Mid Ulster.

I look forward to your response to the issues raised. Should you wish to discuss this matter, please contact me or Terry Scullion (Assistant Director of Property Services), on 03000 132 132 by email at terry.scullion@midulstercouncil.org

Yours sincerely

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**From the office of the Minister for Infrastructure
Nichola Mallon MLA**

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Your reference: ENV/2122/AMC/4
Our reference: CORR-0309-2022
23 March 2022

Dear Ms Campbell

WAITING TIMES FOR VEHICLE & DRIVING TEST SERVICES

Thank you for your email of 9 March 2022 to Nichola Mallon MLA, Minister for Infrastructure regarding delays in obtaining vehicle and driving test appointments.

The Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA) has steadily increased its vehicle testing capacity by adopting a range of measures including the recruitment of additional vehicle examiners, the use of overtime to provide cover for leave and sick absence and a reduction of the vehicle test appointment time. The DVA is also offering vehicle test appointments on a Sunday and bank holidays, at most test centres. Following conversion of an adjoining building at the Newbuildings test centre, additional testing capacity is now available to meet demand in the north-west. The DVA are monitoring the applications received and tests carried out and expect waiting times to reduce over time through the actions they have taken to increase vehicle testing capacity across the network.

From 1 September 2021 to 28 February 2022, the DVA conducted 414,700 full vehicle tests, which is 10% more than the five-year average for those months. Normal capacity has, therefore, been restored to MOT testing. As of 21 March 2022, the DVA has confirmed that over 48,000 vehicle test appointments were available across its network of centres up to 30 June 2022.

The DVA is currently experiencing significant demand for vehicle testing services and in some cases customers may not be able to have their vehicles tested before their current MOT certificate expires. In such cases, customers must book the earliest available test appointment for their vehicle, which may mean travelling to another test centre instead of their preferred location.

The DVA's advice to customers who require an MOT to tax a vehicle and cannot secure a date before the Tax expires is:

- book the earliest available appointment;

- keep checking the booking system for an appointment before their Tax expires

If a customer gets to within five days of their tax expiry date, they should contact dva.customerservices@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk and the DVA will do its best to secure an urgent appointment for their vehicle. To date, all customers who have contacted the DVA in these circumstances, have been offered an earlier appointment slot.

This information is available on NI Direct [Book, view, change or cancel an MOT/vehicle test | nidirect](#) and is also included as an advice note with every MOT Reminder Letter issued to our customers. The DVA has confirmed that any customer requiring an MOT to tax their vehicle will be given priority.

In relation to driver testing services the DVA has, and continues, to work hard to increase its capacity to help meet the high demand for driving tests for all customers, including those who are required to take a further driving test. In just over ten months since driving tests resumed on 23 April 2021 to 28 February 2022, the DVA has conducted 58,517 driving tests. This is already more than the total number of tests conducted in 2018/19, the last full year when driving tests were not affected by COVID-19 restrictions and is 40% more than the five year average for this period.

The DVA currently has 89 full time and dual role examiners who can conduct driving tests, and can be utilised across the network of test centres to meet driver testing demand. The DVA is in the process of completing an external recruitment competition for 16 new full-time driving examiners to be assigned across the network of test centres. A total of seven full time driving examiners have successfully completing their training and are now carrying out driver testing. A further training course commenced on 28 February 2022 and training will continue until all new driving examiner posts are filled. DVA plan to have these examiners in post within the next couple of months, subject to candidates accepting the posts and successfully passing their training

In addition to the recruitment of additional examiners, the DVA will continue to offer driving tests on a Saturday and at certain centres on Sundays where it is suitable to do so without compromising the integrity of the test. Overtime will also be used to rota off-shift dual role driving examiners to provide further capacity and to provide cover for scheduled driving tests, where due to a variety of unforeseen reasons such as sick absence or the requirement to self-isolate, driving examiners are unable to attend work.

The DVA is releasing Category B (private car) driving test appointments five months in advance with all test centres set to release driving test appointments on the first working day of each month and additional test slots will also be released as resources continue to become available.

Due to the constantly changing position, the DVA's advice to customers is to keep checking the booking system for availability as additional appointment slots are added when resources become available. If slots are not initially available at a customer's preferred test centre, they may wish to consider booking a test at another centre.

To help mitigate the impact on customers due to the cessation of practical driving tests as a result of Covid restrictions, the Minister brought forward legislation to extend the

validity period of theory test pass certificates. Theory test certificates that were due to expire between 1 March 2020 and 31 October 2020 have been extended by 12 months. In addition, theory test pass certificates which expire between 1 November 2020 and 30 June 2021, and which have not already benefited from an extension, have been extended by 8 months.

Rather than apply further extensions, the Minister decided that the DVA would operate a prioritised booking system for customers that focused on those that have been waiting longest. Phase 1 customers, whose theory test pass certificates will expired by 31 October 2021, opened on 26 April 2021. The booking system for Phase 2 customers, whose theory test pass certificates will expire between 1 November 2021 and 31 March 2022, opened on 4 May 2021. The DVA contacted Phase 1 and Phase 2 customers directly before the booking system reopened to advise them of their priority access.

The booking service opened for all customers on 10 May 2021, providing everyone with a valid theory test pass certificate with equal opportunity to book a driving test, regardless of their past test history or previous priorities.

You will appreciate it is important to ensure that new drivers have current relevant road safety knowledge and hazard perception skills at the critical point a person drives unsupervised for the first time. Hazard perception skills, a key factor in road safety, is a vital part of the preparation of new drivers, who are disproportionately represented in casualty statistics. For these reasons there are no plans to extend further the validity period of theory test pass certificates.

The Minister remains committed to minimising disruption and ensuring our plans for the restoration of services is in hand. However, all driving test services across these islands are experiencing high demand with longer than usual waiting times and we would ask customers for their continued patience.



KATHRYN MCFERRAN
Private Secretary to the Minister