
Driver Licensing Review

BACKGROUND

Where can I get a copy of the discussion document?

The discussion document is available on the Ministry of Transport website www.transport.govt.nz/dlr

How can I make a submission?

You can either:

1. Do an online submission [www.transport.govt.nz/dlr] and choose which sections you'd like to respond to.
2. Send us a written submission focusing on the questions in this document that are relevant to you. Please use the submission template available on [www.transport.govt.nz/dlr].
3. Please email your written submission to dlr@transport.govt.nz with 'Driver Licensing Review Submission' in the subject line.

Or post it to: Driver Licensing Review Submissions, PO Box 3175, Wellington 6140.

When do submissions close?

The deadline for submissions is 5pm, Thursday 2 June 2016.

Who else has contributed to the review so far?

The Ministry and the Transport Agency met with three reference groups of stakeholders where we discussed a number of issues covered in the discussion document.

What's the next step after the discussion document?

The review team will consider all the responses and develop recommendations on driver licensing reform that will go forward to government.

A summary of submissions will be published on the Driver Licensing Review page at <http://www.transport.govt.nz/land/driverlicensingreview/>

What happens after public consultation finishes?

Decisions will be made on possible changes to the Driver Licensing Rule. Following that, there will be an opportunity for public consultation on amendments to the Rule.

When does the review finish and when will the changes be implemented?

Detailed planning, including timings of when the proposed changes could be implemented, is currently being assessed following Cabinet approval of the discussion document.

DETAILS ABOUT THE REVIEW

Why is the driver licensing system being reviewed?

While the current driving licensing system is sound, there are opportunities to improve some components specifically relating to heavy vehicle licensing, endorsements, and online transacting, which will help make the system more efficient and customer-focused.

What is covered by the review?

The review focuses on the process for acquiring a heavy vehicle licence, and whether it's possible to improve or remove some special endorsement requirements.

The discussion paper also proposes enabling the online renewal of driver licences. For this to happen, the frequency of vision testing will be reduced, meaning that customers will no longer need to present or undertake a vision test at a licensing agent at each stage of the licensing process, or every 10 years. First time applicants would continue to have a vision test at a driver licensing agent, as would drivers aged 75 and over, and people that seek commercial licences and endorsements that require medical checks.

Does the Driver Licensing Review have any impact on the driver licensing investigations regarding fraud that are currently happening?

No. The Driver Licensing Review is completely separate to the investigation and has no connection or impact on it. This review focuses on reducing compliance costs and improving processes for all New Zealanders to obtain or renew their licence, including vision testing proposals to help enable online licence renewals. The integrity of an online system is crucial and will be a consideration in any new systems or processes established. Additionally, under the vision testing proposal a driver applicant must visit a licensing agent to submit the initial vision test at the learner licence stage.

This review also proposes to improve the process for obtaining truck licences, however drivers will still have to prove their competency and pass tests before obtaining their licences. This will help the road transport industry address its driver shortage issue by removing barriers to supplying properly licensed drivers.

Has anything been decided?

The discussion document contains our proposals for improving the system, but these ideas are not fixed. We'd like to know what you support and whether we've missed anything relating to the issues we are considering.

What are the major benefits from making the proposed changes?

The changes proposed in the discussion document will maintain or improve road safety, and result in a system that could improve compliance, while saving people, businesses and the government time and money.

Will the proposed changes affect road safety?

Any changes made to the driver licence system must maintain or improve road safety.

Why is the driver licence system important?

Driver licensing has an important role in supporting road safety – it shows a driver has met the required standard of medical fitness, road rule knowledge and driving skill.

It also assists Police to identify drivers who are not entitled to be driving, and those with specific conditions.

For people and businesses, holding a valid driver licence is very important because it enables the easy movement of goods and people, aids social connectivity, assists road safety, and provides a handy form of identification.

Who is conducting the review?

The Ministry of Transport and the NZ Transport Agency are jointly conducting this review.

When was the last time the system was reviewed?

The current system came into effect on 3 May 1999 after a substantial overhaul of the previous system.

Has the current system been successful?

The current driver licensing system has been successful, in conjunction with roadside vehicle impoundment, in reducing the incidence of disqualified driving and the involvement of such drivers in fatal crashes.

Will there be any changes to the general licensing system?

The Government has decided that the existing legislative framework remains fit for purpose and the review will not make changes relating to general driver licensing at this stage. As a result, the fundamentals of driver licensing such as the photo licence or the minimum driving age will not change.

The review originally included a range of proposals relating to general driver licensing – are these still being considered?

We are still assessing the impacts of recent changes to the general licensing system such as the introduction of five-year time limits on learner and restricted licences in December 2014. Due to this, the decision was made not to introduce further changes at this time.

Are there any changes being made to improve the learner licence process?

The Graduated Driver Licensing System (GDLS), of which learner licences are part, is accepted as world's best-practice for managing the extra risks associated with young or novice drivers. These drivers have a higher crash rate than the general driving population and this is managed through the GDLS. Therefore there was no need for the review to consider the GDLS.

Changing heavy vehicle licensing

Will the proposed changes provide a better process for achieving a heavy vehicle licence?

The current process requires drivers to go through a number of learner and full licensing stages in order to achieve their Class 5 heavy vehicle licence.

The proposed changes will improve this while still having checks in place to ensure that drivers of heavy vehicles are safe and responsible on the road.

Do the changes affect drivers aged under 25?

Yes. Under option 3, the six month wait time for practical tests for applicants under 25 years of age would be removed. However, producing safe drivers remains a priority, and these applicants would still have to pass a strengthened practical test to ensure competency and wait six months before progressing to the next class up.

Changes to endorsements

How will people know if drivers are qualified to drive forklifts, rollers, tracked vehicles (e.g. bull dozers) and special type wheeled vehicles (e.g. combine harvesters) on a road if the endorsement for these vehicles is removed?

Under the new Health and Safety at Work Act, it is the responsibility of the business or organisation to ensure their drivers are able to safely operate these types of vehicles on a road. They will still need to check that the drivers are qualified and have successfully completed the required training. The drivers of these vehicles types will still need to hold the Licence Class for the weight of the vehicle that will be driven on the road.

Removing requirement for regular vision testing

How often is vision tested at the moment?

All driver licence applicants (except drivers aged 75 and over and commercial drivers – who have additional requirements¹) must pass a vision check as part of an application or renewal.

For example, currently young and novice drivers may be tested three times in three years – when they apply for a learner licence, apply to sit their restricted test, and apply to sit their full test. They must then be tested every 10 years at renewal.

What percentage of people pass their vision check

Most drivers (around 97%) pass the vision check at driver licensing agents; only 3% fail. Of those that fail the driver licensing vision check, 36% are subsequently required to wear corrective lenses when driving.

How will this affect road safety?

There's no question that good vision is important for safe driving. However research suggests that vision testing at every stage of the licensing process, and then every 10 years doesn't improve road safety.

What are the benefits of making this change?

These are the benefits of removing the requirement for regular vision testing:

1. Road safety would be maintained
2. There would still be a vision test when drivers first apply for a licence –
3. Reduced costs for driver licence applicants that need to present an eyesight certificate
4. Most of the driver licensing processes could be done online, such as uploading a new photo or signature, if there is no need to visit a driver licensing agent for a vision test.
5. The time taken for the in-person process will be reduced for the majority of applicants.

² Commercial drivers are defined as drivers who need a specific form of licence class or endorsement (e.g., a commercial truck driver may need a Class 5 driver licence).