



Department  
for Transport

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Earl Attlee  
Lord Naseby  
Baroness Randerson  
Lord Rosser

29 November 2021

My Lords,

### **Regulations on changes to the driving licence regime**

I am writing in follow up to questions raised at the debate on 9 November on two statutory instruments, the first on the removal of the car and trailer test (Category B+E) and the second on simplifying the process for drivers wishing to acquire a heavy goods vehicle and trailer licence (Category C+E). I would like to thank noble Lords for their contribution to the debate.

These regulations are part of a wider number of actions being taken to help alleviate the HGV driver shortage and among [32 interventions](#) the Government has already taken to tackle this issue. These include investing £32.5 million to improve road side facilities for hauliers across the country, launching a review to look at ways to streamline compulsory ongoing training requirements under the Driver CPC scheme and investing £17 million to create new HGV Skills Bootcamps to train up to 5,000 more people to become HGV drivers in England. These measures provide support to attract a diverse domestic workforce to the haulage industry.

On the issue of visas raised by Baroness Randerson, I have asked my officials to speak with those in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs who lead in this area and will provide a response. Lord Naseby asked about cabotage. The Government consulted between 14-21 October on a temporary unilateral relaxation of cabotage. Having considered responses to the consultation, the Transport Secretary and I decided to proceed with the temporary additional cabotage rights being permitted in Great Britain for six months, up to 30 April 2022. In implementing the cabotage extension, our intention is not to undercut the UK haulage industry, but to provide some short-term additional support and capacity to critical supply chains which are under intense pressure to meet increased demand. While our domestic haulage capacity has been and is increasing following the many measures taken by Government, the supply chain

pressure, which is the rationale for the cabotage extension, has not been disputed and it will take some months before the UK resident workforce can be grown sufficiently to rectify the driver shortage. It is unlikely that this intervention alone (involving temporary capacity in the order of 1% of total volumes or less than 10% of the size of the acute driver shortage) will depress driver earnings or haulage rates. This is also a temporary intervention at the end of which demand for UK drivers is still going to be ahead of supply.

I would like to take this opportunity to apologise for any delays in receiving a driving licence. The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) has introduced additional online services, recruited more staff and has secured extra office space in Swansea and Birmingham to house more staff to help reduce waiting times while providing future resilience and business continuity. These measures are having a positive impact. In particular, the focus on vocational driving licence applications to support the HGV driver shortage has been successful with routine vocational applications now back within normal turnaround times of five days, despite a significant increase in applications.

There will be occasions where an application may take longer if there is a medical condition involved that needs to be investigated, but this is right to ensure that a driver is fit to drive and safe on our roads. The remaining queues are reducing, and customers will see an improving picture in terms of turnaround times over the next few months.

In addition, significant improvement has already been made to increase testing availability, with the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) national vocational test waiting time currently under two weeks. Following on from the above, our HGV measures are working. In October 2021, DVLA issued 31% more provisional Vocational Driving Licences (10,531) and DVSA conducted 38% more large goods vehicle tests (9,391) than before the pandemic in October 2019.

A summary response to the consultation was published [online](#) on 10 September and the full response will be published as soon as possible. I understand the concern that a full impact analysis of these regulations, particularly on road safety for car trailer towing, has not been published yet. This is a situation that we would have preferred not to be in - balancing the need to take action quickly to address the driver shortage while assimilating data has been challenging. We have shared information on the road safety impact with the Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee, which they have published in full in their 15<sup>th</sup> Report for the session 2021 – 22. This can be found on the Parliament [website](#). I can reassure noble Lords that we have taken the comments of the Chair of the Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee seriously, and that we are working on a fuller assessment urgently; we expect to publish it by the end of the year.

It may also be helpful to note that around 16 million drivers who passed their driving test before 1 January 1997 can already drive a car with a trailer without having to take a separate test. This change affords that same entitlement to drivers who passed their test after 1997 when EU law forced a change in the rules.

Road safety however is of course of the utmost importance, which is why we have committed to review this legislation at regular intervals, initially after three years have passed and thereafter at five-year intervals. We are considering what further data could be collected which can help inform that review, and we are happy to continue to work alongside the APPG on Trailer and Towing Safety. Our current data collected by the police when they attend a collision – STATS 19 – is published regularly. The DVSA has recently concluded a programme of roadside checks of light trailers and caravans, and analysis of this data will help inform the next steps.

We will also continue to communicate to drivers including through campaigns the importance of towing safely. The issue has been highlighted by the Government's Trailer Safety Statutory Report and the Tow Safe for Freddy campaign, which has been publicised by DfT and DVSA. The accredited training scheme which has been announced is an important factor in developing and maintaining driver towing skills in the future. It will be based on existing training standards which reduces its development time, but it is important to get specific modules for different types of trailers right (for example, the difference between towing livestock with towing a caravan). We are working with industry to do this and with accreditation of those standards to ensure drivers get what they need. The DVSA is working with a range of organisations involved in the towing of heavy trailers to develop options for an introduction of the training early next year. For example, the Trailer Towing Advisory Group (TTAG) has met four times where the outline of the scheme has been developed along with core training modules applicable to all drivers who tow, with additional sector specific elements to cover areas such as safely managing livestock and breakdown recovery towing. Other options being considered include whether there will be ongoing assessment of competency carried out by the trainer or an end point independent assessment. We will provide further details in due course.

On the question of reducing skills of those that supervise learners, there is no reduction in skills. A supervising driver will continue to be required to hold the licence for the vehicle driven by the learner for a minimum of three years. However, we recognise that some trainers will have trained exclusively in rigid lorries and have not required an articulated C+E licence. It is likely that they will be seeking C+E entitlement now so they can, in future, train in that category. Providing the supervising driver has held the rigid lorry (or bus) entitlement for three years they will be able to supervise once they have held the C+E (or D+E) licence for one year.

Finally, on the question of how these will apply in Northern Ireland, driving licence entitlement is a devolved matter and it will be for Northern Ireland to decide whether to implement the same changes. Licences issued in GB will be recognised in Northern Ireland as they are currently. Drivers who travel abroad will be subject to international road traffic regulations. We are in current discussion with other countries to make them aware of the changes. Outside of the EU, countries have a variety of approaches to driver training and testing but their driver licences or permits can be recognised by the international community for temporary visits under the international road traffic conventions to which they are a party.

I thank noble Lords for their scrutiny of this legislation and trust the above addresses points raised that I was not able to answer during the debate. As I mentioned, I would be happy to meet again once the accreditation scheme has been developed further to discuss any questions you might have at that point in time. I will also be placing a copy of this letter in the Library.

Yours,  
Charlotte

**BARONESS VERE OF NORBITON**