



Department for Transport

Iain Stewart MP
Chair of the Transport Select Committee
House of Commons
London
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From the Parliamentary Under Secretary of
State

Guy Opperman MP

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Dear Iain,

I am writing to you to notify you that the Department for Transport (DfT) will be launching a public consultation on 11 April concerning two proposals to remove licensing restrictions to make it easier to recruit more coach, bus and heavy goods vehicle (HGV) drivers. I have set out the details and purpose of the consultation below.

In September 2021, the bus and coach sectors told the DfT they were experiencing a driver shortage that was impacting their ability to run services. This shortage peaked at a vacancy rate of 9.3% of bus driver and 15.9% of coach driver positions, in September 2022, according to the Confederation of Passenger Transport's (CPT – the main coach and sector industry body) survey data.

DfT and CPT co-chaired a summit in November 2022 to identify actions that could be taken to help alleviate the bus and coach driver shortage. Whilst many of these actions are owned and driven by industry, who are responsible for recruiting and retaining drivers, the main asks of the department were to take forward a consultation to:

1. Remove the 50km restriction on 18 to 20 year old bus and coach drivers when driving a regular service; and
2. Allow a person to undertake the theory tests and off-road manoeuvres tests required to gain their driver certificate of professional competence (DCPC) before being granted a provisional bus, coach, or heavy goods vehicle (HGV) driver entitlement.

On the first proposal, the bus and coach sector has submitted that the current restriction on 18 to 20 year olds from driving buses or coaches more than 50km could mean people in this age group are lost to the sector.

The bus and coach sectors have indicated that removing this restriction could help to alleviate the shortages the industry is experiencing. It could also:

- increase the frequency of bus and coach services and/or increase frequency of bus routes that were de-registered or amended due to insufficient numbers of drivers;
- see the provision of new coach and bus services where there is demand;
- increase workforce diversity, widening the candidate pool;
- provide more opportunities for younger drivers to be recruited and lower the average age of bus drivers – which is currently 52 years old and has increased over the last 10 years;
- move to a similar position for 18 to 20 year old drivers of bus and coaches as exists already for HGV drivers; and
- support DfT's net zero aim by having more environmentally friendly public transport services available.

On the second proposal (allowing theory and/or off-road DCPC training before being granted a provisional entitlement), the bus and coach sectors believe around 1,600 people leave the industry every year before a decision has been made on their provisional entitlement, which is within five days in most cases. Whilst a proportion of these people will not be granted a provisional entitlement due to health and conduct reasons, industry have suggested to DfT that there are likely to be a material number of applicants who would have been granted a provisional entitlement and therefore **remained** in training, had it not taken the additional time to process these checks. These measures could therefore help ensure this cohort remains in training and not seek alternative employment opportunities.

This consultation proposes two options as part of the second proposal:

- Option 1 – removing the requirement to hold a provisional bus, coach, or HGV licence before undertaking the theory, case study and practical demonstration modules of the DCPC test. People do not drive any vehicles during these tests.
- Option 2 – removing the same requirement given in Option 1, but also includes the off-road manoeuvres test of the DCPC.

In both options, a provisional entitlement would be required before completing any on-road driving (instruction or testing). This proposal would also apply to

HGVs and could improve HGV driver recruitment. The consultation seeks to better understand from industry, drivers, insurers and others, what impact these proposals could have. The consultation will run from 11 April to 5 June.

A copy of this letter, including the consultation document '*Amendments To Licensing Restrictions: Bus, Coach and Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs)*', has been placed in the libraries of the House of Commons and House of Lords for reference, should Honourable Members wish to read the case for change and respond to the consultation.

Best Wishes,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Guy Opperman', is written in a cursive style.

GUY OPPERMAN MP

MINISTER FOR ROADS AND LOCAL TRANSPORT