

Dempsey publishes review of Disabled Parking Scheme

The Minister for Transport, Mr. Noel Dempsey T.D., today published the findings of his Department's review of the Disabled Parking Scheme. The Disabled Parking Scheme gives local authorities the power to designate special on-street parking bays for people with disabilities and to grant special parking permits to qualifying people with severely restricted mobility. The Scheme has been in operation since 1997 and the purpose of the review was to examine the existing operation of the Scheme, to make recommendations and suggest new measures to improve the Scheme. The overall outcome of the review is to ensure that more specific disabled parking bays are available to those most in need of them.

Key recommendations from the review include:

- Changing the medical eligibility criteria for the Disabled Person's Parking permit
- New measures to reduce the fraudulent use of permits
- An increase in the size of some types of parking bays
- The introduction of new types of disabled parking bays
- Giving powers to local authorities to introduce time restricted parking spaces and
- New set down and pick-up only disabled spaces.

Speaking today, Minister Dempsey said: "I have accepted the findings of the review and approved the proposed recommendations for amendment of the scheme. I wish to express my thanks to our colleagues in the Irish Wheelchair Association and the Disabled Drivers Association, for their assistance in conducting the review."

The review of the Disabled Parking Scheme was carried out by the Department of Transport, in co-operation with the Irish Wheelchair Association and the Disabled Drivers Association. Local Government and other disability interests were consulted, together with recommended consultants in the cardiac and respiratory fields. In addition, the Garda National Traffic Bureau was consulted on enforcement issues. The review also took into account the concerns that arose as a result of contacts with local authorities, Disability access groups and the general public.

The scheme was established to provide wider, longer parking bays close to services such as post offices, banks, pharmacies and shops for people for whom access to such services would be denied if they could not park and disembark either because of the size of a parking bay or because their limited mobility required that they park within a short distance of a service. The review examined the elements of the scheme and makes recommendations to secure the better functioning of the scheme with the positive objective being to ensure that more specific disabled parking bays are available to those most in need of them.

The Minister concluded: "These and the other recommendations of the review will be implemented by my Department and the issuing authorities between now and the end of 2010 through revised Regulations. The new Disabled Drivers Permits will also incorporate improved anti-fraud measures to ensure that disabled parking bays in our towns and cities are available to those most in need of them."

ENDS

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Editors:

A series of FAQ's on the review of the Disabled Parking Permit Scheme is set out below.

FAQ's on the review of the Disabled Parking Permit Scheme

Why was there a review of the Disabled Parking Permit Scheme?

The review examined several aspects of the disabled parking scheme, including eligibility for the permit, enforcement, the issuing of permits and the designation of parking bays. The review makes a number of key recommendations. These are:

Eligibility

- The medical eligibility criteria should be revised to focus more on the level of mobility impairment rather than the type of disability and to tighten the cardiac/respiratory criterion to include only those for whom walking, even short distances, is extremely difficult, detrimental or impossible
- Continuation of the exemption of Primary Medical Certificate holders and those registered as blind from further medical assessment in qualifying for the permit;
- A change in the focus of the role of GPs from certification of eligibility to provision of medical information to decision makers within the issuing authorities;
- The introduction of a right of review of decisions on eligibility for the parking permit.

Designated parking bays

- Local authorities should be allowed to impose time restrictions on parking in some designated disabled bays to maximize efficient use of available bays;
- A new type of set down and pickup only disabled bay to be allowed;
- Increase in prescribed dimensions of some types of disabled parking bay;

Enforcement

- The permit should have improved anti-fraud measures.

Issuing of permits

- The Irish Wheelchair Association and the Disabled Drivers Association of Ireland should remain the issuing authorities;
- The Issuing authorities should be permitted to charge a higher fee (currently €25), for the card to reflect higher card issuing costs incorporating improved anti-fraud measures.

How will these recommendations be implemented?

- a) The preparation of revised regulations implementing the recommended statutory amendments;
- b) The issuing to local authorities of an associated circular with the revised regulations setting out the relevant revised terms of the scheme (designated bay size, road markings and signage, potential for new time-based restrictions etc);
- c) The approval by the Department of revised terms and conditions of the scheme and revised level of fee with the issuing authorities; and
- d) Consulting with the Irish College of General Practitioners regarding information dissemination on the revised role of GPs and new medical eligibility criteria and on the establishment of an appeals panel.

When will the recommendations be implemented?

>Between now and the end of this year.

Will all existing parking permits need to be renewed immediately?

> It is intended that as and when permits come up for renewal, the holders will have to meet the new criteria in order to have their permits renewed.

So how do I apply for a parking permit now?

>The Irish Wheelchair Association (IWA) and the Disabled Drivers Association of Ireland (DDAI) will remain the issuing authorities for disabled drivers permits. Applicants should continue to apply to either of these bodies. An application currently involves:

- A declaration of personal details on request for an application form
- A GP assessment
- A form stamped by the Gardai to confirm the identity of the applicant.

Following the introduction of the proposed new criteria, the key difference will be that GPs will be requested to provide to the issuing authority (at the request of their patients) the required medical information by responding to a series of questions on the application form. The issuing authority (IWA or DDAI) will then take the decision regarding the appropriateness of granting a permit.

Why is the fee for a disabled parking permit being increased?

>The current charge for the issuing of a permit is €25, and the review recommends allowing the issuing authorities to charge a higher fee, up to a maximum of €35. This is being done to allow for the introduction of a new card format with improved anti-fraud measures built into the card, and in recognition that the number of cards issued by the issuing authorities will fall with, at least over the next two years, no corresponding reduction in administration and issuing costs.

Were disability organisations consulted in the conduct of this review?

>Yes. The review was carried out by the Department of Transport, in co-operation with the two permit issuing authorities, the Irish Wheelchair Association and the Disabled Drivers Association of Ireland. During the course of the review, local government and disability interests were consulted. Recommended medical/surgical consultants in the cardiac and respiratory fields assisted with the development of revised medical criteria. The Garda National Traffic Bureau was consulted on the enforcement issues. The review also took into account concerns arising regarding the scheme from contacts with local authorities, Disability Access Groups and correspondence from public representatives and the general public.

So how widespread is fraud?

>The disabled parking permit issuing authorities have observed, (particularly in more recent years), a significant increase in the incidence of fraudulent cards notified to them.

Types of offence can include forging or fraudulently altering or using a disabled parking permit, knowingly giving particulars that are false or misleading in connection with an application for a disabled parking permit, and fraudulently lending to, or allowing a disabled parking permit to be used by someone else.

The wider availability of colour photocopying and laminating machines has meant that production of fraudulent disabled parking cards has become easier and more common; despite the use of anti-fraud measures such as holographic images on the current card.

The review makes the point that current guidelines on eligibility focused on identifying particular *conditions*, rather than on the *level of mobility* impairment that those conditions involved.

The review recommends a refocusing of guidelines to emphasise that permits should be given only in the cases for which the scheme was originally designed. That is, people whose conditions lead to serious mobility impairment.

The recommendation of the review is that GPs should now certify that an applicant has a given level of mobility impairment. The final decision on granting a permit rests with the IWA or DDAI. This will create greater clarity and transparency in the system, as it will mean that GPs certify level of mobility impairment and IWA/DDAI check and approve it, rather than having one person do both. This is not a reflection on GPs, and should rather reduce some of the burden placed on them by the operation of the scheme.

Will local authorities have to devote more on-street parking spaces to disabled parking spaces?

>The level of provision of designated bays by local authorities is a matter for local authorities and beyond the scope of the statutory scheme.

Revisions to the Part M Technical Guidance Document of the Building Regulations (currently being considered for introduction) regarding access for people with disabilities to and use of facilities, which would be mandatory in new buildings and existing buildings when extended or materially altered from 1 July 2011 will potentially provide that where on-site car parking is provided, whether for residents, employees, visitors or others, a number of designated disabled car-parking spaces should be provided on a proportional basis. In general for new buildings (including apartment buildings), 5% of the total number of spaces would be designated disabled car-parking spaces, with a minimum provision of at least one such space.

This 5% provision is generally considered appropriate by planners for local authority and private construction, although it has no application in respect of on-street car parking except as a guideline minimum. However, it would provide a useful benchmark for local authorities to measure against.

How will the new 'set down and pick up' parking spaces work?

>The review recommends introducing a new type of parking space for setting down and picking up only. These spaces would be for the benefit of passengers with disabilities, and could be especially useful at accessible public transport stops or interchanges or at

commercial areas with high parking demand. Such set down and pick up bays would enable improved access for people with disabilities, and would complement but not be a substitute for designated disabled parking bays.

Who is going to operate the appeal process for those refused a permit. How do I apply?

>The precise mechanism for handling appeals remains to be finalised. The review recommends that appeals against refusals of applications for permits be dealt with by qualified medical professionals. Proposals in this regard will be explored in more detail with the Irish College of General Practitioners (ICGP).

Why is my gender and year of birth on my permit?

>It is an anti-fraud measure, designed to make it easier to verify, that the person using a disabled parking space is the person for whose benefit the permit was issued. It does not increase the possibility of personal identification by a casual passer-by.

What is changing about restricted or paid-on street parking and vehicles with a disabled parking permit?

>Currently parking regulations provide that in areas of restricted or paid on-street parking, a vehicle may only be parked for the indicated maximum length of time and may not be re-parked in that place within an hour after being removed. Holders of disabled parking permits had an exemption from that rule allowing them to re-park within an hour or remain parked in an on-street restricted parking space. Local authorities could not impose restrictions on the maximum duration of parking in those spaces.

This has had the unintended effect of exacerbating the difficulties experienced by some disabled person's parking permit holders in accessing bays close to high demand and necessary services, as some bays have in effect been occupied all day. It has also made it harder for local authorities to meet the parking needs of all. Removal of this exemption will allow local authorities more flexibility to impose maximum parking lengths of time or to allow all day parking depending on the demand and utilisation patterns for given bays and local circumstances.

Tá eolas sa teachtaireacht leictreonach seo a d'fhéadfadh bheith príobháideach nó faoi rún agus b'fhéidir go mbeadh ábhar rúnda nó príobhléideach ann. Is le h-aghaidh an duine/na ndaoine nó le h-aghaidh an aonáin atá ainmnithe thuas agus le haghaidh an duine/na ndaoine sin amháin atá an t-eolas. Tá cosc ar rochtain don teachtaireacht leictreonach seo do aon duine eile.

Murab ionann tusa agus an té a bhfuil an teachtaireacht ceaptha dó
bíodh a fhios agat nach gceadaítear nochtadh, cóipeáil, scaipeadh nó
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