

## **Consultation on Motoring Services Strategy – The views of the AA**

The AA is the UK's largest motoring organisation. It operates two driving schools (the AA Driving School and BSM) and also owns AA DriveTech, the UK's largest provider of fleet risk management & driver education services in the UK. The AA is also a very significant insurance broker and media publisher producing atlases and guides, it is also a provider of road traffic information. Our on-line route planner has 20 million hits per month and the AA website hosts a vast range of motoring related information.

The AA has carried out motoring opinion research for many decades and in 2008 established the AA / Populus motoring opinion panel – the largest of its kind in Europe which attracts around 20,000 responses to its monthly poll on a range of motoring topics.

At a policy level the AA works closely with government on the key issues affecting motoring. The AA has been involved in the 'modernisation of vehicle registration and driver licensing' including reform of the Government's motoring related agencies to date.

### **1) Which Agencies do you deal with and how often?**

All four of those listed – very regularly (weekly & daily for some parts of our business). AA Driving School attends the DSA's Modernising Driver Training Steering Group meetings on a quarterly basis and regularly works in partnership with the DSA to check ADIs' status on the DSA Register. Our ADI's have daily contact with DSA regarding driving tests and other queries. AA Public Affairs attends DVLA's 6 monthly Industry Liaison Group meetings

and ad hoc meetings with senior DVLA officials. AA Roadside Operations (fleet) works closely with VCA on type approvals for specially designed AA roadside assistance vehicles. The AA's vehicle technical experts also work closely with VOSA experts on interpreting complicated EU legislation.

**2) Which services have you used in the last 12 months?**

Due to the nature of its business the AA is a frequent user of a range of services and information from the four agencies listed. For example, the AA's driving schools are in frequent contact with DSA as mentioned above and Intelligent Data Systems, which is part of AA DriveTech, driver licence checking services and are a customer of DVLA services. The AA also depends on data provided by its partners who use the four agencies services, for example Experian who obtain vehicle data for AA insurance.

**3) Referring to page 15 of the strategy, "Our Guiding Principles" please tell us which of the principles, if any, would help you in your dealings with us?**

All of the guiding principles are very important and relevant to the AA and its members. Putting customers at the heart of what the agencies do is the right approach but it is important these principles are translated into actions.

Rationalisation (simplifying and streamlining) is understandably an important goal but this is not without some risk in the provision of motoring services where attention to detail (including legislative), expertise and data protection is critical.

The AA believes that the agencies services can be delivered by a broader range of partners. Perhaps the word 'trusted' should be added. The AA as the leading motoring organisation in the UK is interested in how it can help in this should any suitable mutually beneficial opportunities arise.

In polling (20,659 respondents to an AA Populus poll 19-25 January 2012) our members proved to be slightly cautious about DVLA working with a greater range of service provider partners with 53% opposed to this. However, we do not believe this would be an obstacle to further development of this strategy.

The AA Driving School has provided the following points as observations on its experience with the DSA and putting customers first:

- Learner Driving Test consistencies are generally good
- However, there can be inconsistencies with ADI Check Tests using Junior Examiners. DSA need to ensure all examiners are fully qualified to provide a consistent experience for all customers. More quality assurance and standard checks are required to achieve this.
- Improvements are required to reduce waiting times for CRB's and PDI Tests.
- Standard Checks – there is inconsistent practice between the Grade awarded to an ADI and the time interval between tests.

- DSA need to ensure that the Check Test meets the customer needs – currently it adopts a “one size fits all” approach. We would like to see ADI’s development needs identified from the Check Test and the DSA to support ADI development going forward by supporting the development of an action plan for the ADI. There is currently no supporting development from the check tests and the DSA are reluctant to provide any information to enable us as an organisation to support our ADI’s development.
- Grading system – assessing quality of ADI’s to inform consumers of standards, provide qualitative information as opposed to simply a grade. We understand consideration is being given to this by the DSA and we would support this move if it helps clarify an ADI’s grade to the consumer.
- We are generally supportive of devolving Driving Testing to other organisations if it improves convenience for the customer and our ADIs. However, we need to ensure there is no reduction in standards

**4) Will the vision for digital services outlined on page 17 of the strategy help you in your contacts with any of the four Agencies?**

The digital vision is one that road users and the AA would support and already a majority are very satisfied with those services which are already available.

87% of 20,659 respondents to an AA Populus poll supported more DVLA services being made available on-line and 87% also rated DVLA on-line services as good or very good.

The vision for services should also be underscored by a commitment by government to protect life and limb on the road and consumers through having state of the art vehicle and driver data systems with capability well into the future. The AA believes that ailing mainframe systems like the vehicle and driver registers at DVLA have worked admirably well given what is now expected of them. However, they are no longer fit for purpose to deliver the vision now proposed. We believe that road safety may already be compromised through, for example, the inability of the vocational driver record to link to other databases which provide certificate of professional competency information. We also believe that approved driving instructor licence record information could equally be improved by greater cross referencing of driving offence information held on the driver record.

As mentioned in 3 above whilst the AA supports rationalisation and efficiency gains care will be needed to avoid there being a lack of specialists as multi-skilling can result in a dilution of specialist knowledge and skills. It is essential that there is service continuity at the levels individual and business customers are familiar with and any depletion of this would result in inconvenience and additional business cost.

Our AA Populus motoring panel polls have picked up some slight member concerns about recent DVLA efficiency proposals. 51% of respondents to a recent AA Populus poll did not agree (25% strongly) that insurance checks at

vehicle relicensing should be abolished. In another recent poll only 46% of respondents supported (22% strongly) the abolition of the vehicle excise duty (tax) disc, 28% were opposed (14% strongly) and 24% were neutral. These responses show there is some reluctance for change albeit that they are efficiency measures which ultimately should make life easier for drivers. The DVLA needs to make sure it clearly communicates reasons for change and puts in place appropriate safeguards to ease any concerns.

**5) We plan to move to greater delivery of services online or by other digital means. Will these changes help you in your dealings with us?**

The AA believes that there will be efficiency gains through greater use of on-line and digital services. This will help reduce administration time for the AA Driving School and potentially other AA operations. We are also hopeful that more on-line services will enable us to look up certain useful information.

**6) Do you think the proposals to reform VCA as outlined on page 17 of the strategy will help you and/or the UK economy?**

AA Roadside Operations (fleet) works closely with VCA experts on the design of its purpose built AA fleet. The people at VCA are expert and very helpful. At this stage the AA has no detailed comments to make but understands the need to review options for VCA but we must not lose the key skills and customer service.

**7) Do you have any suggestions for the future structure of VCA or the range of services it offers?**

See 6 above.

**8) Do you support our plans to bring the driving test closer to the customer as outlined on page 17 of the strategy?**

The AA is supportive of tests being administered in accredited centres by third parties.

**9) How would our plans to bring the driving test closer to the customer affect you as a customer or a business?**

The AA Driving School would for obvious brand reasons find it difficult if tests were conducted at our direct competitor's Test Centres. This would depend on the organisation and level of confidence we had in them.

**10) Do you support our plans to reform HGV, bus and coach testing as outlined on page 18 of the strategy?**

The AA is generally supportive of this strategy and will respond to any further proposals. It remains to be seen whether operators will feel comfortable with commercially operated facilities in place of government agency ones.

**11) How do you think our plans to reform HGV, bus and coach testing will affect road safety?**

There should be no impact on road safety providing standards are maintained and closely monitored.

**12) How do you think our plans to reform HGV, bus and coach testing will affect convenience for customers and businesses?**

It should be more convenient for customers.

**13) How do you think our plans to reform HGV, bus and coach testing will affect red tape for customers and businesses?**

Hopefully red tape will be reduced through private sector innovation and flexibility.

**14) Do you have any comments on our plans to reform HGV, bus and coach testing?**

No comments.

**15) Do you agree with our outline proposals for defining our organisations to deliver better services as outlined on page 18 of the strategy?**

It makes every sense to exploit synergies and savings by merging functions within the defined agencies. However, the process of change will be potentially disruptive and risks some deskilling and confusion. The overarching goal must be protection of standards to ensure road safety is maintained and customer service should be set on a path of continual improvement.

**16) Do you have any comments on our plans to re-define organisational boundaries?**

The agencies many customers should be closely involved in defining the future shape. Further engagement will be necessary particularly with businesses that have key skills in re-engineering service driven public facing organisations with significant back offices.

**17) Do you have any other comments on how we can improve our service to you?**

Because much of what the agencies do is governed by legislation it is sometimes difficult to entirely satisfy customer's needs. We hope that the radical overhaul of the agencies may include putting in place measures to overcome legislative obstacles where there are clear advantages to all in doing so.

**18) Do you have any other comments on our approach as outlined in the strategy?**

No.

The AA would be happy to be involved in this process as it evolves.