

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT

Tenth Delegated Legislation Committee

DRAFT MOTOR VEHICLES (INTERNATIONAL
CIRCULATION) (AMENDMENT) (EU EXIT)
ORDER 2019

Wednesday 30 January 2019

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:

Chair: MR NIGEL EVANS

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| † Afolami, Bim (<i>Hitchin and Harpenden</i>) (Con) | † Knight, Sir Greg (<i>East Yorkshire</i>) (Con) |
| † Blunt, Crispin (<i>Reigate</i>) (Con) | † Lamont, John (<i>Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk</i>) (Con) |
| † Day, Martyn (<i>Linlithgow and East Falkirk</i>) (SNP) | † Murray, Ian (<i>Edinburgh South</i>) (Lab) |
| † Donelan, Michelle (<i>Chippenham</i>) (Con) | † Nandy, Lisa (<i>Wigan</i>) (Lab) |
| † Doughty, Stephen (<i>Cardiff South and Penarth</i>) (Lab/Co-op) | † Norman, Jesse (<i>Minister of State, Department for Transport</i>) |
| † Foxcroft, Vicky (<i>Lewisham, Deptford</i>) (Lab) | † Sheerman, Mr Barry (<i>Huddersfield</i>) (Lab/Co-op) |
| † George, Ruth (<i>High Peak</i>) (Lab) | † Turner, Karl (<i>Kingston upon Hull East</i>) (Lab) |
| † Green, Chris (<i>Bolton West</i>) (Con) | |
| † Harrison, Trudy (<i>Copeland</i>) (Con) | Matthew Congreve, Miriam Keating, <i>Committee Clerks</i> |
| † Jayawardena, Mr Ranil (<i>North East Hampshire</i>) (Con) | † attended the Committee |

Tenth Delegated Legislation Committee

Wednesday 30 January 2019

[MR NIGEL EVANS *in the Chair*]

Draft Motor Vehicles (International Circulation) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Order 2019

2.30 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Jesse Norman): I beg to move,

That the Committee has considered the draft Motor Vehicles (International Circulation) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Order 2019.

It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans. Following the UK's decision to leave the EU in the 2016 referendum, the Government have been working tirelessly to develop a positive future relationship with the EU. The Department for Transport is currently working on the mutual recognition of driving licences and the possibility of achieving an agreement with EU member states. We must prepare for all scenarios, however, and that is what this draft legislation does.

If approved, the order will enable a charge of £5.50 for an international driving permit, to be levied for an IDP issued in the format specified in the 1968 Vienna convention on road traffic. The document will guarantee the recognition of UK driving licences after exit day, and recognise 1968 format IDPs when presented by overseas visitors to Great Britain, in the same way that this country already does for IDPs issued under the earlier 1949 Geneva convention on road traffic and the 1926 Paris convention on motor traffic.

Mr Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire) (Con): Can the Minister confirm that the permits will be available in the post office for people up and down the land?

Jesse Norman: I am fully able to confirm that. If I am allowed to finish my speech, I will say that 2,500 post offices are already primed and ready to issue the permits.

Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con): Paragraph 7.2 of the explanatory memorandum refers to two conventions: the 1968 convention and the 1949 convention. If someone applies for an international driving permit, will it cover only one of those conventions, or will it be a dual-purpose permit that covers both?

Jesse Norman: We are presently discussing the 1968 convention. Applying for such a permit now enables travel to countries that it would not have been possible to travel to post EU exit. For countries governed by the 1949 convention, a further IDP will be required.

Sir Greg Knight: My concern is that most British holidaymakers go to Spain—it is the No. 1 destination—but, as I understand it, Spain is covered by the 1949 convention

and not the 1968 convention. Someone who wishes to go to Spain and who applies for the 1968 convention permit will therefore not be allowed to drive in Spain. I am anxious that the public are not misled, with ensuing chaos.

Jesse Norman: My right hon. Friend's point is well taken; he is absolutely right to point out that Spain is governed by the other convention. People travelling to Spain will need that IDP. If they are travelling to Spain through France, they will need an IDP for both countries. That is well set out on the Post Office website and other websites, including gov.uk. We hope that will do a lot to alleviate any possible concerns.

The document would guarantee the recognition of UK driving licences after exit day and will also recognise 1968 format IDPs when presented by overseas visitors to Great Britain, in the same way we already do in this country for IDPs issued under the earlier 1949 Geneva convention and the 1926 Paris convention. All formats of IDP will cost £5.50, which, it is important to emphasise, is a charge that has not increased since 2004.

Although UK nationals will not be required to purchase an IDP if, as we expect, this country achieves agreements across the EU, the amendment is still required as the 1968 format IDP will be required to guarantee licences when driving in over 75 countries outside the EU. It is therefore important that the amendment is approved, since the 1968 Vienna convention will still come into force on 28 March 2019, irrespective of whether the UK ceases to be subject to EU law on 29 March or at the end of the implementation period.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I apologise to the Minister for arriving late; my Whip sent me to Committee Room 12, where I sat rather bemused because the wrong statutory instrument was being discussed.

This issue is becoming increasingly complicated, is it not? Yesterday I had a delegation from the insurance industry in my office. They pointed out that the green card that goes with the driving licence will not be valid after we leave the European Union, which means that no British driver in Europe will be protected against being hit by an uninsured driver. Does that not make life very dangerous for anyone from this country intending to drive in Europe?

Jesse Norman: The fact of the matter is that, at the moment, many countries may be required to recognise it by law, but on the ground they may not do so. One of the effects of an IDP is precisely to give a recognisable, international-standard document that allows any police or enforcement agency to see under what licensing arrangement the person is travelling. There is no doubt a slight increase in the complexity, which is a result of the requirement needed to exit the EU. However, this provision is activated only in the unlikely contingency that we do not have an EU-wide relationship that allows for mutual recognition, but we fully expect to.

Mr Sheerman: Will the Minister meet the insurance industry? They are exercised about this. If someone gets hit by an insured driver in Britain, there is a security that automatically delivers protection. The one called

the green card for people driving in Europe will end, so every driver from Britain who goes through continental Europe will be at risk of being hit by an uninsured driver with no insurance cover. Will he assure me that he will meet the insurance industry to talk about that?

Jesse Norman: I have learned over many years that interventions from the hon. Gentleman are rarely short, and this has been no exception. I meet the insurance industry very regularly, and I promise him that its representations have not been unheard or unmade in this context. He is right to highlight them, but they are only one part of the wider picture. This order has no direct effect on insurance as such; it is about the driving permits themselves.

UK motorists drive to Europe every year, using ferries or the Eurotunnel, and they drive in Europe, whether for business or leisure. UK holidaymakers rightly want the option of hiring a car while abroad. Although the Government are still in the process of achieving agreements with the EU, as I have described, we are committed to minimising disruption to UK motorists following our exit. The Department is taking the appropriate measures to facilitate that.

The 1968 convention facilitates international road traffic and increases road safety through consistent traffic rules. In preparation for exit day, this country ratified the 1968 Vienna convention on 28 March 2018. That international agreement will come into force one year later, on 28 March—the day before the UK leaves the EU. Following exit day, the convention will guarantee the recognition of UK vehicles and driving licences when used in 23 EU member states, plus Norway and Switzerland and more than 70 other countries globally. The earlier 1926 and 1949 conventions also remain in place, guaranteeing UK licences in four EU member states, plus Iceland and more than 40 countries globally, including Japan and the USA, if the motorist presents the supporting IDP with their driving licence.

Sir Greg Knight: The Minister is being very generous in giving way. Is there any legal reason why the Government cannot issue a comprehensive permit that covers all the conventions? Otherwise, a motorist will have to have two or three permits in his pocket.

Jesse Norman: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to ask that question—as he can imagine, it was the first question that I and officials asked. It is not possible in law because of the nature of the conventions and the relationships they bear to one another. We are fettered by the way in which the international structure of those conventions works. I would like nothing better than to have a consolidated format that could be applied for, but unfortunately it is simply not possible because of the way the treaties work.

The changes made by this statutory instrument will provide certainty for UK motorists driving in the EU following exit day in a no-deal scenario. The SI specifically will amend provisions of the Motor Vehicles (International Circulation) Order 1975 to implement provisions of the 1968 convention concerning IDPs. These amendments will extend the 1975 order to the 1968 format IDP and extend the power to charge a fee for the issue of IDPs to IDPs issued under the 1968 convention in addition to

those issued under the earlier conventions. The 1968 format IDP will cost £5.50 and will be valid for three years. This amendment therefore ensures that UK motorists can exercise their international legal rights to drive in the countries that are party to the 1968 convention once it comes into force for the UK on 28 March of this year.

The amendments also provide for the recognition of a 1968 IDP issued to non-UK residents by another country that is party to the convention, for those who may be temporarily visiting the UK. Although the UK will continue to recognise both EU and non-EU driving licences for up to 12 months, IDPs may provide immediate recognition and legitimacy at the roadside if the licence is not printed in the Roman alphabet. While we are still seeking agreements with member states on licence recognition and exchange, the SI will ensure that IDPs provide certainty for UK motorists who seek to travel in the EU following exit day.

IDPs under previous international conventions have been issued for many years, so the concept is not new, but the SI will expand the number of countries in which IDPs can be used and will enable the Government to issue a document covering them for the 1968 convention. The 1968 format IDP has a longer validity period and therefore reduces the frequency of reissue. To ensure that UK drivers will be able to get hold of these documents, we have significantly increased the numbers of issuing post offices: from this Friday—assuming that the Committee is content with the SI—2,500 post office branches will be issuing the document to licence holders, a huge increase compared with the 89 post offices that issue them today. I hope that colleagues will join me in supporting the order, which I commend to the Committee.

2.42 pm

Karl Turner (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab): It is always a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Evans, and a privilege to serve under your chairmanship. This instrument is necessary. As we have heard, it applies specifically to international driver permits for those UK residents driving within EU member states, but, as we have also heard, there is a cost to it, because those applying for a permit will have to pay a fee. It is only necessary if we leave the European Union without a deal, which is why the Prime Minister should categorically make it clear that we will not be leaving without a deal.

We support the instrument, but I have one or two questions for the Minister. First, is the Department ready with any additional resources that might be required to administer permit applications? Secondly, what will that additional administrative cost be? Thirdly, we are very close to leaving the European Union—I happen to believe that it is a terrible mistake, frankly, but the reality is that the date looms very large indeed—so is the Department ready to provide guidance to members of the public who will, in my view unnecessarily, have to apply for these permits?

2.44 pm

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans. I am grateful for the summaries from the Front-Bench spokespersons. I have one question, which the Minister partially answered by indicating that there would be 2,500 post offices geared up by Friday. In July last year

[*Martyn Day*]

the Department suggested that up to 4,500 post offices could be issuing the permits, so could the Minister update me on whether that will be rolled out to the others, and on the timescale for doing so?

The Chair: Does anyone else wish to speak?

2.45 pm

Jesse Norman: I think, Mr Evans, that the decisive and energetic interventions have exhausted the volcanoes on my side of the Committee. I am grateful to the Opposition and Scottish National party spokesmen for their contributions and for their support for this small but important piece of legislation. I am sure that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull East will understand that this is not the place to rehearse the already considerable arguments over the benefits or no of no deal, but I will pick up on the three specific points he raised about the order.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether the Department is ready with additional resourcing. As he will be aware, the vast preponderance of the resourcing for this falls on the Post Office. To pick up on the point made by the hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk, we have talked historically about up to 4,500 post offices. The first 2,500 of them are primed and ready to go; were it required, in the case of extreme levels of demand, we would be able to go to 4,500, but it is a staged process. That seems sensible, because at the moment we issue about 110,000 IDPs a year. Obviously that will go up, for reasons that hon. Members have described, but we want to be able to address whatever the demand may be, and we have made that contingency arrangement.

The price of £5.50 has been set on a cost recovery basis and therefore covers the cost involved. With regard to DFT guidance, the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull East will be aware that it is already on the gov.uk website, on post office websites and on the AA and RAC websites, at least—I am sure that other motoring organisations will feature it in due course. There will be no absence of available guidance for people who are making journeys. Of course, it is widely understood that one of the effects of Brexit may be to create some complications for international travel, so we expect that guidance to be widely sought and reviewed.

Sir Greg Knight: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way again; the volcano is not entirely exhausted. Does he have any plans to introduce an international driving permit app or to make the permit available so that motorists can have it on their phone, rather than needing to carry a paper copy around with them?

Jesse Norman: That is a very interesting and helpful suggestion. As my right hon. Friend will be aware, at the moment it is not possible to apply online for the 1968 convention permit. We are therefore unable to offer that service, because the format is determined by the conventions, but I am very grateful to him for that constructive suggestion, and I will ask officials to look again at whether the applicable law may permit something. I recognise, and I am sure the Committee recognises, that that would have considerable value. I will leave it there. I am grateful for all the interventions that have been made and for the support of the Opposition parties and my own colleagues.

Question put and agreed to.

2.49 pm

Committee rose.

