

Research Article

A Critical Analysis of the Driver's License Renewal Process

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Overview

The aim of this report is to critically analyse the driving license card renewal process in South Africa in line with the current mandate of the Organisation Undoing Tax Abuse (OUTA). The original purpose of the project was to determine best practises applicable to driver's license renewal process for a citizen in various countries. To achieve this a comparative landscape analysis took place to compare the South African process of driver's license (DL) renewals with the best practice internationally. If South Africa follows the example of other countries with successful driver's license protocols, it will save consumers as well as the government time and money together with improving the manageability and effectiveness of the renewal process. South Africa (SA) faces significant challenges with its driving license card renewal process. As a result, motorists are dissatisfied and often abandon their legal obligations. SA follows a five-year renewal period model, and the sub-par renewal process causes frustration with online booking systems. It is cumbersome to get a slot/booking, corruption is hard to avoid, and there are long queues for walk-ins. This report proposes how this flawed renewal process can be improved and addresses associated issues and difficulties that existed prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2020, SA had a backlog of approximately 320,000 driving license renewals due, with demand growing by 90,000 each month (Bhengu, 2020). This report assumes that the backlog has worsened over time. There is an obvious need for efficiency in the administration of the driving license card renewal process. We contend that the Department of Transport can announce a formal and permanent extension of the driving license renewal period to 10 years, as is the case in other countries. This will decrease the current pressure on government to keep up with increased administrative demand and allow the process of driving license card renewal's operational methods and systems to be evaluated, assessed, and improved over the next 5 years. Additionally, with the current ongoing pressures of Covid-19 which merely exacerbated known shortcomings within the system, such an increase to a 10-year period for the driving license card renewal will assist in mitigating the current backlog as well as reduce stresses among motorists who face a myriad of financial and legal uncertainties. We recommend continued monitoring of the updated booking system that should introduce a variety of online services across SA. This follows the National Assembly meeting and Transport Minister Fikile Mbalula's statement on Wednesday, 17 November 2021.

Organisation Undoing Tax Abuse (OUTA)

The Organisation Undoing Tax Abuse (OUTA) is a proudly South African non-profit civil action organisation situated in Gauteng and Western Cape with a view to challenge the abuse of authority. It challenges wasteful expenditure of public revenue generated through taxation.

Introduction

The South African government faces a significant crisis of legitimacy in its inability to address simple public service shortcomings. The renewal backlog of driving license cards is a case in point dealt with in this study. One key problem with this issue is the fiscal context in which it is transpiring. Motorists are already heavily taxed and paying renewal fees on such a regular basis is an additional 'user-pays' tax. This issue must be addressed. The solution proposed in this report would not cost anything other than a foregoing of revenue for specific public entities, which can be offset by reduced administration costs. Technical challenges include dysfunctional equipment and online booking system, reduced capacity in testing centres and corruption, which result in motorists being unable to secure bookings in time to meet deadlines for the renewal of their driving license cards.

In South Africa, dependence on privately owned cars and taxis to meet transport needs has been increased significantly over the last few years because investment in public transport has been minimal, and the retained capital expenditure has not yielded adequate results. According to Expatica (2021), automobiles are the preferred mode of transportation. Lifestyle changes such as increased affluence, extended family dispersion, and increased longevity have further increased automobile dependence (Expatica, 2021). Approximately 1.4 million applications have been affected by the backlog. There are cards renewal delays in the paper application processing due to social distancing and the lack of sufficient and efficient staff members at the centres. The outbreak of COVID 19 is an unprecedented challenge for transport authorities (Expatica, 2021). According to Ngqakamba (2020), nationally, 1.2 million driving licenses (42.4%) of the 2.8 million expired have not been renewed. Gauteng, with its high population has the most unrenewed card licenses (437,819) with a total of 45% backlog. The province experienced a capacity challenge that resulted in the unavailability of booking slots.

Provinces experiencing similarly acute challenges with unrenewed card licenses are KwaZulu-Natal (195,200) and the Western Cape (153,901). Obtaining and maintaining a valid driving license card is one of the most important needs today. Periodic renewal of a driving license is an important part of the driving licensing procedure. However, renewal requirements and fees vary significantly among different provinces (Ngqakamba, 2020). Gauteng is the only province which uses the Natis online system to book a slot for the renewal of the driving license card. If the system was working smoothly, as intended, this would eliminate the long queues at the centres. Whilst other provinces still use the old method of walk-in at the centres and queues, their backlog is not as severe as Gauteng's. This is in part due to the significantly larger population, but this should be offset by proportional service delivery.

Background

For years South Africans have been experiencing challenges with renewing their driving license discs and cards. This causes havoc as some people are forced to be absent from work to go to the centres, without any guarantee that this would yield a successful renewal. Some motorists pay others to queue for them, and in many cases, bribes are paid from the security gate onwards for them to secure a spot in line. Under the current government regulations, South African drivers must renew their driving licence once every five years. Motorists must apply four weeks before the expiry date. Those who miss the deadline will not be legally allowed to drive and run the

risk of having their vehicle insurance claims denied if they happen to be involved in an accident during the lapsed period. In this case, they must obtain a temporary driver's licence at an additional cost while waiting for their official licence to be issued.

To streamline the driver's licence renewal process and 'curb corruption', the Department of Transport and the Road Traffic Management Corporation (RMTC) rolled out the National Traffic Information System (NaTIS) in November 2018, which is a new online booking platform that was supposed to make it easier for drivers to keep their license cards up to date. The launch of the system was announced by Transport Minister Blade Nzimande. The online renewal system was introduced as an online pilot project in Gauteng, and it was meant to take place on a trial period. It was introduced as a booking system not a card renewal system with the primary objective to modernise services available at testing centres, to reduce corrupt practice opportunities and barriers to access. Making a booking online was made free of charge, however, drivers were expected to pay the applicable renewal fee of R72.00 effective as from 1 February 2018. Motorists had an option to have the new license delivered via courier to their residence or a place of their choice, which varies according to region. The online system could not re-evaluate the motorists' driving skills when renewing their license; however, they must get their eyes tested and their fingerprints taken at the appointment centre. The motorists also had another option to go for an eye test at an optometrist and bring the report with them on the day of their appointment (Hippo, 2018).

Concerns related to the online booking system of driving licenses are still being raised, such as corruption, inefficiencies, legality and constitutionality, and insufficient booking spots for licences. The online renewal system has caused unavailability of slots for booking which precipitates in a negative feedback loop of severe backlogs.

Literature Review

Prior to the 1990s, a driving license was a lifetime document that was contained in one's ID booklet and there was no need for renewal. The data of individuals with licenses were captured at Home Affairs offices. The driving license card system was introduced because of corruption at the Home Affairs Offices. The process was introduced to secure the system, to align with international standards, and to improve the technology. At the time the card system was introduced, the data was only kept in the system for a period of 5 years. However, with the advancement in technology, the validity of the card can be extended to 10 years and, in some counties, 15 years. The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR or Industry 4.0) is happening and if we as South Africans want to keep up with the 4IR, we need to move away from outdated paper-based administrative processes. The reason the old system was changed to the card was primarily for security reasons and when the card system was introduced, the security, information technology, and systems were improved and kept in line with international best practice.

According to the Department of Transport annual report for 2020/2021, when it comes to service delivery outcomes, the Driving License Testing Centers (DLTCs) have encountered challenges over the years. It has been beset by several impeding factors for some time. These include infrastructure challenges, the need to integrate operating systems, introduction of online service innovation, the need to decentralize the footprint of DLTCs, improvement of access to services, and the elimination of corruption and inefficiencies in operations. Some of these challenges are historical and may need dedicated focus to unbundle and address. In the report they further acknowledge that there were numerous interventions that have been commissioned, in partnership with the Road Traffic Management Corporation (RTMC) and DLTCs, to address these issues urgently. The issues include:

- Upgrade obsolete Live Enrolments Units (LEUs) and other tools of trade that DLTCs use to deliver services
- Online interface with optometrists and medical practitioners to upload eye test results on NaTIS
- Standardize operating hours of DLTCs (08h00-16h00 and opening of business on Saturdays)
- Optimize rollout of online booking platforms to improve customer experience
- Introduce self-service kiosks in public spaces, managed by the RTMC
- Operationalisation of licensing hubs and walk-in centers
- SMS solutions to alert motorists with expiring licenses
- Online payment systems to reduce visits to DLTCs

As much as the Department acknowledges the lack of service delivery, its officials must now realise that the current system as it stands is cumbersome and causes distrust, thereby disincentivising compliance and timely renewal. There are administrative and financial benefits for the Department and motorists if solutions are smart.

Motorists Complaints

Government has blamed the covid pandemic for this issue, but the problems existed long before the pandemic started. Prior to the pandemic there was a major backlog in processing applications as there is now (Writer, 2020).

Motorists complained about not being able to successfully book appointments online. Those that are successful in booking appointments still must stand in long queues when they get to the licensing stations because the booking system is flawed and slow. They are not attended to at their appointment time. Customers who have been trying to renew their driving licenses express frustration with the online booking system, where it is exceedingly difficult to get a simple slot for license renewals. The Gauteng provincial government has made changes to the booking process to address the backlog, with all drivers testing licensing centers (DLTCs) in the province now dedicating 70% of booking slots and capacity to driving license renewals to address the issue.

In the same publication, Minister Fikile Mbalula stated that the backlog was not only because of Covid-19 complications, but due to corrupt back-office staff at driving license testing centers and driver's license renewal centers. South Africa had a backlog of 320,000 driving licenses, with demand growing by 90,000 each month (Motor News Reporter, 2020).

Media Reports

Article 1: *Online driver license system to be rolled out across South Africa as reported on 18 November 2021. Transport Minister Fikile Mbalula says the online booking system for drivers licenses that was initially introduced in Gauteng has provided a basis for it to be rolled out nationally to deal with the license renewal backlog.[...]Other interventions that the province introduced include, amongst others, renewal facilities at selected Gautrain stations and more Driver License and Traffic Centres (DTLC) with extended operating days and hours from 07h00 to 21h00 at some, with the introduction of biometric systems to accelerate efficiency in service delivery. As stated by Mbalula (2021) "In the next few weeks, watch the space, we will be launching that renewed, revamped online approach".*

Article 2: *How government can fix the driving license mess right now, an opinion article by South African Institute of Driving Instructors (SAIDI) on 1 November 2021. According to the article, SAIDI recommends the following immediate solution to fix the South African driving license calamity:*

- 1. Under no circumstance promulgate an additional extension on renewals.*
- 2. The Minister of Transport must immediately publish a Government Gazette that declares:*
 - a. the validity of a driving license card shall be for a period of 10 years. The Minister of Transport has this authority.*
 - b. The validity of any driving license card with a five-year validity, with an expiry date on or after 26 March 2020, be automatically extended for a further period of five years.*
 - c. A driving license card, as mentioned in 'b' above, may be exchanged, if the holder so wishes, for a driving license card valid for a 10-year-period from the date of issue thereof once the relevant fee has been paid.*

Article 3: *The RTMC issued a statement on the 05 October 2021 (Mahope, 2021) on the aggressive drive to deal with the backlog. The Gauteng Department of Roads and Transport has managed to assist over 20 000 people with the renewal of their driver's licenses, after a backlog crisis.*

Article 4: *Minister of Transport extended the deadline: Motorists who had licence expired from 26 March to 31 December 2020 has until March 2022 to renew.*

- *The Organisation Undoing Tax Abuse (OUTA) called on Mbalula to extend the deadline for renewing driving licences that expired between 26 March and 31 December 2020.*
- *The Road Traffic Management Corporation (RTMC) recently acknowledged that there is a significant backlog when it comes to the renewal of driving licences.*
- *The Minister noted a lack of capacity at Driving Licence Testing Centres (DLTCs), corruption, the slow speed and unavailability of the National Traffic Information System (NaTIS), faulty live capture units (for fingerprints and ID verification), and faulty eye testing machines as the main challenges facing the centres in the provision of adequate services (Wheels24, 2021).*

Article 5: *Minister of Transport extended the grace period to renew expired driving licences until August 31, 2021. He further explained that (Wheels24, 2021):*

- *All learners' licences, driving licence cards, temporary driving licences and professional driving permits that expired from 26 March up to 31 Aug 2020 are extended to 31 January 2021.*
- *All motor vehicle licence discs, temporary permits, and roadworthy certificates that expired during the period that commenced from 26 March 2020 up to and including 31 May 2020 are deemed to be valid and their validity period is extended for a further grace period ending on 31 August 2020.*
- *Motor trade number licences that expired during the period that commenced from 26 March 2020 up to and including 31 May 2020 are deemed to be valid and are extended for a further grace period ending on 30 November 2020 (Writer, 2020).*

Article 6: *Validity periods: On December 3 the Minister of Transport gazetted an amendment to the lockdown regulations stating that all learner's licences, driving licence cards, temporary driving licences and professional driving permits that expire between March 26 and December 31, 2020, are deemed to be valid, and their validity periods have been extended until August 31, 2021 (Van der,2020). This grace period was implemented after a continued backlog of licence renewals and this was due to people struggling to renew their expired licences, either in walk-in bookings in other provinces or on Gauteng's online booking system. The extension will not apply to licences that expire from January 1, 2021, and vehicle licences.*

Article 7: *In October of 2020, the press release stated that "Government is planning 'provisional' driving licence for South Africa" (Writer, 2020), this is done in an already expensive process for most South Africans. The department indicated in a presentation on the National Road Traffic Amendment Bill to Parliament that current regulations will be amended to include three types of driving licences in the country: 1) learner's licence;2) provisional license, and 3) driving licence. Howard Dembovsky, chairperson of the Justice Project South Africa said that an explanation of provisional licences was proposed as far back as 2014 as part of proposed changes to the National Road Traffic Act. "Persons who pass their theory test will not be issued a full driving licence initially, they will be issued a provisional driving licence and subjected to restrictions in their driving practices, for a period of time, until they earn a full driving licence." In October of 2020 the bill was still in the draft proposal stage and subject to a full public participation process and governmental scrutiny.*

Covid-19

Covid-19 initiated the debate on the status of our driving licence cards renewal backlog. The root cause of the problems are the inefficiency and the failures within the system. We have the failures within the Department of Transport, failure in the Natis and RMTC, failure of the Driving Licence Testing Centres etc. The Covid-19 outbreak presented an unprecedented challenge for the transport authorities and resulted in restrictions that led to the Driving License Testing Centres (DLTC) closures and backlogs of expired licenses (Expatica, 2021). Throughout the pandemic, many people have faced different issues with renewing their expired license, either by walk-in bookings or an online booking system (Expatica, 2021). Clearly, there is a need for systemic changes to address this issue.

Road Traffic Management Corporation (RTMC)

RTMC was incorporated in terms of Section 3 of the Road Traffic Management Corporation Act and, in April 2005, started its operation. RTMC was assigned the responsibility of overall road safety and to introduce responsible behaviour of road usage. The RTMC derives revenues from various streams identified by the Corporation. One of the most important streams reported is through the transaction fees which are mainly based on the RTMC Act 1999. For every individual transaction, fees are charged in accordance with Section 24 of the Act (Ngqakamba, 2020).

Table 1: *Transaction fees as per the Government Gazettes*

| Government Gazette | Year | Transaction fees |
|------------------------------------|-----------|------------------|
| No.797 03 September 2021 No. 45085 | 2021 | R72.00 |
| No.376 08 March 2019 No. 42291 | 2019 | R82.00 |
| No.1090 06 October 2017 No.41170 | 2017/2018 | R72.00 |
| No.R.758 24 July 2009 No.32428 | 2009 | R36.00 |
| No.R.386 30 April 2007 No.29852 | 2007 | R30.00 |

The fees are changed and gazetted by the Department of Transport. The fees charge is included in the amount that is paid as one renews the driving license disc or card.

Backlog

South African motorists continue to experience the lack of progress made by the concerned authorities to address backlogs. The RTMC, Department of Transport, and other national and provincial authorities acknowledge that a significant backlog is present when it comes to driving license card renewal. They have also acknowledged that there are significant challenges debilitating testing centres from providing adequate services such as 1) lack of capacity at the Driving Licence Testing Centres, 2) National Traffic Information System downtime, 3) corruption, 4) inefficient digital platforms (band width to transfer data), and 5) live scanning units (Ngqakamba, 2020).

In 2020, South Africa had a backlog of approximately 320,000 driving licenses, with demand increasing by 90,000 every month (Ngqakamba, 2020) while the backlog increased in 2021 to approximately 500 000 licenses (Writer, 2021). On the 5th of October 2021, a statement was issued by RTMC to address the backlog. In the statement it

was said that the “the RTMC will launch two new Driving Licence Testing Centres (DLTCs) in Gauteng which will offer extended operating hours, open seven days a week and will also offer expanded operating hours between 07h00 and 21h00”. The RTMC highlights what they are doing to better the situation but cannot benchmark against past successes (i.e., what they have done in the past to better the situation). According to the State of Road Safety report, quarter 4 (Jan – Mar 2021), South Africa has the following numbers of Drivers Licenses sorted by Province:

- A. The number of learners driving licences **issued** decreased by 246 903 (21.07%) from 1 172 073 on 31 March 2019 to 925 170 on 31 March 2021.
- B. The number of driving licences **issued** increased by 861 323 (6.54%) from 13 174 103 on 31 March 2019 to 14 035 426 as of 31 March 2021.
- C. The number of driving licences cards **expired** recorded by the National Traffic Information System (NaTIS) is 2 892 813 (20.6% of all licences issued) as of 31 March 2021.

The RTMC delivered a presentation (31 August 2021) on the National Implementation Plan to address DLTCs, Vehicle Testing Stations (VTSs), and Registering Authorities (RAS) challenges. In the presentation they projected the backlog statistics as at the end of July 2021 (March to December 2020 Driving Licences).

Table 2: *Backlog statistics as of 30 July 2021*

| Provinces | Backlog of renewal of Drivers Licences per Province | Licences Renewed | Licences Expired |
|---------------|--|---------------------|------------------|
| Gauteng | 275,661 | 187,005 | 462,66 |
| Limpopo | 67,733 | 40,61 | 110,343 |
| Mpumalanga | 63,844 | 42,9 | 106,744 |
| Eastern Cape | 58,404 | 35,615 | 94,019 |
| Western Cape | 105,799 | 83,363 | 189,139 |
| KwaZulu Natal | 131,449 | 83,363 | 462,666 |
| Northern Cape | 13,509 | 10,686 | 24,195 |
| Northwest | 36,602 | 27,204 | 63,806 |
| Free State | 38,531 | 25,901 | 64,432 |

The presentation projected the backlogs per province. The situation in Gauteng is the most severe, with 275,661 driving license cards unrenewed. This number is not surprising as Gauteng continues to record the largest share of South Africa's population, with approximately 15,5 million people (26,0%) living in this province (StatsSA, 2020). However, this should prompt national government to allocate proportional resources to this province as needed.

A final extension is now in place until the end of March 2022. The extensions which the Minister introduced were ascribed to impacts of the pandemic. The pandemic exposed the challenges within the system and revealed that the system currently in place is not working. However, the extension is not a permanent solution to address the

emerging driving licence card renewal problem (Ngqakamba, 2020). This is similar to the e-toll saga, where the Department of Transport has repeatedly failed to address a systemic issue, by not overhauling it. Instead, we see ad-hoc symptomatic relief without serious and urgent measures taken to eliminate the root causes of the issue.

Online Challenges

In November 2018 a new online driving license renewal system was introduced as a pilot project in Gauteng. It was meant to be a trial. Introduced as a booking system, not a card renewal system, with the primary objective to modernise services available at testing centres, to reduce corrupt practice opportunities and lower barriers to access. However, concerns related to this system have been raised, such as corruption, inefficiencies, legality and constitutionality, unavailability of the system (system offline-unavailability, bandwidth, training, poor speed, connectivity) and insufficient booking spots for licences. The online renewal system has left motorists with a serious challenge of slot being unavailable when booking. This cyclically contributes to the current backlog.

Provincial Price Variance

Fees vary between provinces. MECs are responsible for setting the fees for the card renewals, within their respective provinces. We argue that the fees should be standardised across the country, rather than varying without clear reasons as it does. We contend that the Minister has the power to implement this recommendation.

Gauteng motorists pay more than twice as much as those in the Western Cape. The Minister of Transport justifies the various fee structures by saying “Each MEC is empowered by law to determine the fees for driving licence applications and card renewals, which explains the varying costs from province to province”. He elaborated on the online system which will standardise the fee to R250 for all motorists who wish to pay their driver’s license renewals online. This does not benefit all drivers, as some do not have access to information technology or data.

Table 3: *Current fees for renewing drivers’ licence at four (4) provinces.*

| | Gauteng | Western Cape | Eastern Cape | KwaZulu-Natal |
|--------------------------|---------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| Cost of Renewal | R228.00 | R140.00 | R216.00 | R250.00 |
| Temporary Licence | R70.00 | R40.00 | R96.00 | R90.00 |

Method

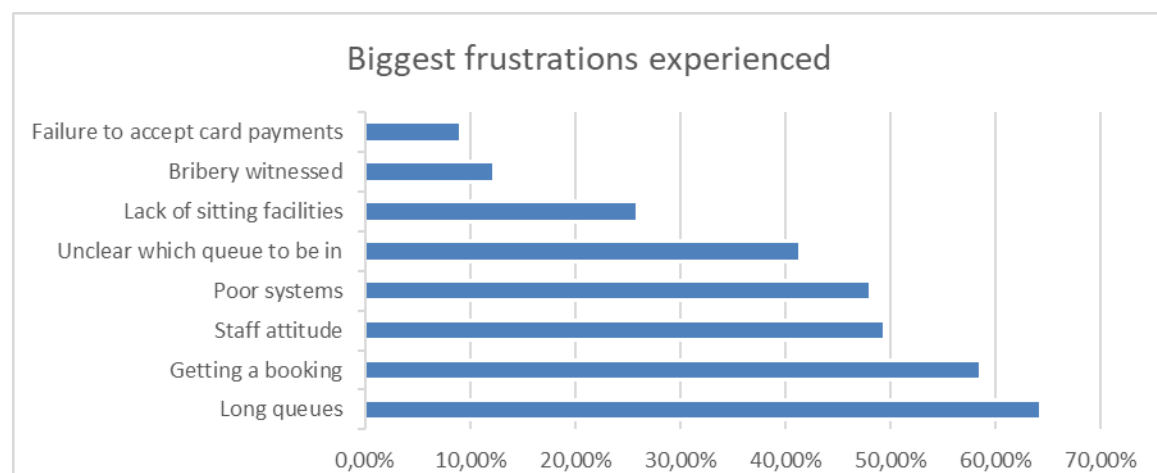
This study applies an online survey that was conducted by OUTA through its Facebook page in June of 2021, in combination with a literature review conducted from September to November 2021. It is thus desktop based but includes empirical data such as the complaints made by motorists regarding the driving licence cards renewal process in South Africa. This survey provided motorists (specifically, holders of valid driver’s licenses were targeted in the survey) with an opportunity to voice their experiences with regards to the licence renewal process. The rationale for this method is the principle that government systems like this must be customer-centric, which means measurements of their success or failure should be based on how users experience their performance.

The literature review component above provides secondary sources of data to a) establish the longstanding nature of this problem, and b) provide a credible frame of reference for recommendations that findings suggest. An important consideration is whether secondary sources that span across the past 5 years corroborate empirical accounts of the system's shortcoming in the near past. If they do, this will strongly suggest that – despite some attempted interventions from the Department of Transport, Natis, and others – problems are not yet solved.

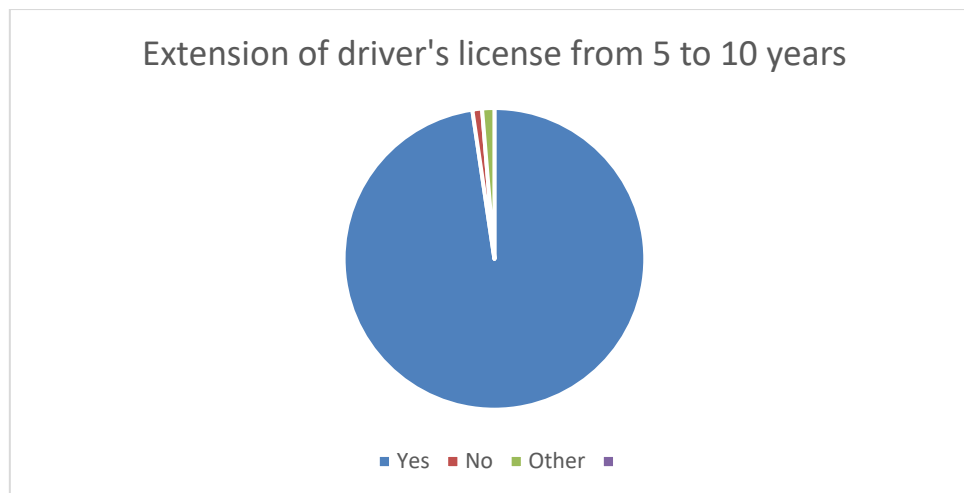
Below, results from the online survey wherein 3685 respondents participated are presented graphically with brief interpretations. Thereafter, some limitations applicable to this method are admitted for the sake of transparency and circumspection to the reader. Then, a discussion is put forward to consider overall trends derived from this mixed method – from which concrete recommendations are deduced in the final concluding section.

Results

The survey targeted average motorists from all provinces affected by the ineffective and inefficient card license renewal process. The results of some aspects covered with the survey are listed as the following:



This survey also revealed a plethora of other negative experiences as it gave motorists the opportunity to articulate their experiences. Motorists in Gauteng complained about not being able to successfully book appointments online. Those that are successful in booking appointments still must stand in long queues when they get to the licensing stations because the booking system is flawed, and the set appointment slots are not observed and used. The survey results shows that about 65% of motorists are frustrated by the long queues that they must stand when they arrive at the centres. The online system makes provisions for online payment as you book a slot, but the results shows that even that system is flawed.



The survey asked the motorists if they would support a call to extend driver's licenses from 5 to 10 years and only 3.4% of motorists stated they would not support an extension while 97% of motorists are in support of driver's license validity from 5 to 10 years. The results affirm that South Africans see the need for an extension period. In terms of institutional resilience to recommended change, we found a lack of information available in the public domain. Insufficient information is publicised by RTMC, Department of Transport, and licensing centres to be used by the public. This lack of transparency limited our ability to assess institutional resilience to change.

Discussion

A new online system comes with its own costs. A fee of R250 will be charged to those who wish to pay for their driving licence renewal online. This includes the cost of producing the card, and there is an additional fee of R99 to have the driving licence card delivered to your home. Per public announcements, the online service is to be provided by the RTMC and is a new service that gives motorists the option of lodging a driving licence renewal application online and effect payment accordingly, as an alternative to visiting a DLTC to lodge an application. The challenge with this online system is that it is not transparent with regards to all the fees that will be accumulated through its implementation. Questions remain around 1) fees for expired driving licences, and 2) how the R250 online fee apply to provinces that do not yet use the online booking Natis system. Detailed breakdown is needed.

A more cost-effective solution may be extending the validity of driving license cards from 5 years to 10 years. Currently, the Department of Transport acknowledges the failures that are observed and experienced by motorists. Those failures suggest that the current system is not working according to plan. There are simple alternatives. In Europe, 10 to 15-year driving license renewal frequencies provide more freedom to drivers whilst reinforcing security, backed up with the electronic data exchange systems (European Commission, 2013). The USA has a penalty system on the termination of driving licenses that can be applied to the current RSA system to avoid corruption and speed up the renewal process (South African Consulate General, 2018). The penalty system is the byproduct. Based on this, it is suggested that the South African government creates an online application

that can address the highlighted issues by extending their licensing to a ten-year period to alleviate the backlog (Ngqakamba, 2020) and provide space for the Department to implement more time-consuming improvements.

The research shows great concerns about the backlogs as it negatively impacts effective enforcement of laws as well as the levels of voluntary compliance with licensing requirements. Some of the concerns include significant pressure on driving license testing centres in processing DL card renewal (Ngqakamba, 2020). Another concern is that bribery is common amongst the officials who are involved in booking and 'selling' slots. Unavailability and insufficient broadband to move the data of the Natis system is also a cause of frustration for motorists (and officials) renewing their licenses (Mpyane, P., 2021). Another important finding of this research is that the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions have led to the Driving Licence Testing Centres closure, thus resulting in the significant increase in backlogs. Therefore, to provide motorists with an opportunity for driving license card renewal while rolling out the different actions to improve efficiencies and resolve challenges, it is sensible to extend the license renewal period from 5 to 10 years (Ngqakamba, 2020). To provide a fair opportunity to motorists for the driving license card renewal, SA should roll out several measures to resolve challenges and improve efficiencies, starting with extending the period from 5 to 10 years, which is a simple intervention that would not cost the taxpayer a cent, but would save motorists time and money without derogating from compliance with important 'rules of the road' (Ngqakamba, 2020). It will also help improve the manageability and administration of the process of renewal by under capacitated DLTCs, which is recommended in the context of the on-going uncertainties during the pandemic as well as allow South Africa to be aligned to international best practice standards (Ngqakamba, 2020).

Further to the above discussion it is important to note that a Government Gazette, with No.37048 was published (by the Honourable Minister at that time Dipuo Peters) on 19 November 2013, amending Regulation 108(5)(a) of the National Road Traffic Regulations, extending the period of driver's license cards validity from 5 to 10 years. Unfortunately, on 31 October 2014 a further amendment was published in the Government Gazette No.38142, which again amended the entire Regulation 108 and affectively changed the period back to 5 years. Generally, Section 75 of the National Road Traffic Act, no 93 of 1996, empowers the Minister of Transport to after consultation with the MECs make regulations not inconsistent with this Act, in respect of any matter contemplated, required or permitted to be prescribed in terms of this Act.

Conclusion

Although the South Africa government has blamed Covid-19 for the inefficiencies and the delays in driving license renewal, it only amplified an existing problem. The problem that has thus been overlooked is a procedural flaw exacerbated by layers of institutional ineptitude and inefficiency. This precipitates in measurable dissatisfaction among road users, and ultimately erodes public trust in the laws designed to protect them. South African officials state that the main reason for the high DL card renewal backlog is the 1) incapacity or lacking capacity of DL training centres; 2) corrupt official practices; 3) unavailability and slow processing speed of the Natis system, and 4) failed equipment processes. Extending the validity of driving licenses from five to ten years is a simple intervention that is affordable in terms of both money and time – two rare commodities in South African society.

This interim intervention, which should be permanent nevertheless, will provide for more fundamental changes to the process. OUTA therefore strongly recommends this extension, which can easily be affected by the Minister by publishing new Regulations in the Government Gazette and contends that it will eliminate, or at least alleviate, the current and otherwise inevitable future backlogs that incur wasted time, money, and stress.

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