

Automated Passenger Services

Permitting Scheme

The Automated Vehicles (AV) Act 2024 will introduce the automated passenger services (APS) permitting scheme, a targeted regulatory framework for automated passenger services.

Automated Passenger Services

- Automated passenger services in the UK are transport systems that move people with automation (partly or fully driverless), currently most visible in the DLR, airport shuttles, and autonomous bus trials. They are seen to improve efficiency, safety, and coverage.
- The UK government passed the Automated Vehicles Act 2024, which sets the framework for self-driving vehicles to be used commercially by late 2020s.
- This law will allow for licensed operators (companies, not individuals) to run automated taxis and private hire services. Passengers will still be protected by insurance and safety oversight, but the “driver” may legally be the automation system rather than a human driver.
- The Department for Transport (DfT) is carrying out a consultation which seeks views on the proposed automated passenger services SI to support the deployment of commercial self-driving pilots.
- Part 5 of the AV Act 2024 (the act) introduces APS permitting, designed to provide a new, flexible scheme to issue permits for automated passenger services and provide businesses with the regulatory confidence to invest in testing and deploying these innovative services.
- APS permits not only apply to self-driving vehicles (those without a human driver and listed or authorised as self-driving). They are also available, as set out in the act, for trials ‘with the aim of developing vehicles’ able to carry passengers without a driver.
- Given the importance of APS permits in providing clarity to enable commercial passenger carrying services, including for trials with or without a safety driver, the government intends to bring Part 5 of the act into effect in spring 2026.

In this consultation, views are not being sought on the provisions of the act itself: that has already been approved by Parliament. It is a consultation on the initial regulations to be made under the scheme alongside views on practicalities of running the scheme.

Summary

Purpose of the APS Permitting Scheme

- Provides a clear legal route for deploying automated passenger services without a human driver.
- Ensures commercial certainty for operators entering the GB market.
- Will apply from spring 2026 for pilots and from 2027 onwards for wider deployment.
- Taxi, PHV and PSV legislation is disapplied for APS permit holders (but these licensing routes remain for conventional vehicles).

Who Grants the Permits?

- Secretary of State for Transport for:
 - Bus-like services (anywhere in GB).
 - Taxi/PHV-like services in England.
- The scheme will initially be administered by DVSA.

Local Consent

- Taxi/PHV-like services → consent required from each local licensing authority (263 in England, including TfL for London).
- Consent procedure:
 - Authorities have 6 weeks to respond.
 - If no response → consent deemed granted.

Application Process

Applicants will need to provide:

- Service scope (area, vehicles, operating hours).
- Operational capability (depots, incident response, maintenance, insurance, financial stability).
- Engagement evidence (with consenting authorities, traffic authorities, emergency services).
- Safeguarding policy (DBS checks for staff, including remote operators).
- Accessibility plan.
- Fare information (transparent, published).

What role do we play?

Consent-giving (for taxi/PHV-like services)

- If an APS service resembles a taxi or PHV, the local licensing authority's consent is required before the Secretary of State (via DVSA) can grant a permit.
- In England, this means each district/borough council (or TfL in London) where the service operates must give consent.
- Authorities have 6 weeks to respond once formally asked for consent.
- If they do not respond in time, consent is automatically granted.

Policy and standards consideration

When deciding whether to give consent, local authorities are expected to consider local policy issues such as:

- Local taxi/PHV licensing standards and policies.
- Local transport integration (e.g. access to stations, ticketing schemes, congestion management).
- Passenger safety and safeguarding expectations.

Pre-application discussions

- Authorities are encouraged to engage in early informal discussions with APS applicants.

This gives them the chance to flag concerns about:

- Service areas (e.g. sensitive pick-up/drop-off points).
- Operating hours.
- Traffic management.
- Local accessibility expectations.

Safeguarding and equality oversight

- Authorities remain bound by the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED).

When granting or refusing consent, they must consider:

- Accessibility for older and disabled passengers.
- Safeguarding standards for vulnerable users.

Taxi's and PHV

In your view, what information are taxi and private hire vehicle (PHV) licensing authorities likely to consider most relevant when determining whether to grant approval or authorisation?

Safeguarding

What information would you expect to see published by permit holders on the safeguarding of passengers?