

MOTORISTS' FORUM SUB-GROUP – IMPROVING GARAGE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Minutes of meeting 23 April 2012

Attendees:

Christopher Macgowan (chair)
David Bizley (RAC)
Bill Duffy (Halfords)
Paul Everitt (SMMT)
David Innes (SMTA)
Edmund King (AA)
John Lewis (BVRLA)
Sue Robinson (NFDA)
Steve Scofield (IMI)
Jaur Rahman (DfT - Secretariat)
Vicky Waite (DfT - Secretariat)
Tricia Hayes (DfT – Observer)

Apologies:

Cathy Jenkins (DfT – Observer)
Stuart James (IGA)

1. Welcome

Christopher Macgowan welcomed attendees to the meeting.

2. Introductions

Attendees introduced themselves.

3. Review Outline

Vicky Waite gave a brief outline of the review. Now that a decision has been made in relation to MOT testing frequency, the Secretary of State is very keen to ensure that the motorist is getting a good deal from the MOT test and also from garage services more widely. The Secretary of State has requested Motorists Forum advice on implementing the commitments set out in her statement.

Sub-group members discussed whether there was a clear vision of what a “good deal for motorists” looks like. It was agreed that Motorists Forum can play a role in refining the vision. In the first two weeks of Citizens Advice management of Consumer Direct, most complaints were received about used car sales, and complaints about car servicing were ranked third. The Secretary of State wishes to increase consumer trust and confidence in the industry. It was acknowledged that this was a huge challenge, but not a new one, and one that the Sub-Group is keen to engage with.

4. Secretary of State's commitments

1st commitment:

Publication of the VOSA MCS compliance survey

Review MOT data gathered by VOSA further improve transparency

Publication of the MCS compliance survey took place the same day as the Secretary of State's statement. VOSA is taking steps to make the statistical information more accessible.

2nd Commitment: Engage motoring organisations in surveying their members

Christopher Macgowan outlined organisations he was aware of who survey their members. The AA routinely surveys its members via its Populus poll. It gives access to 1 million members, although monthly responses tend to be from around 20,000 members. The demographic representation is fairly good. Populus is an independent polling company with expertise in crafting questions and demographic sampling.

The RAC carries out an annual survey. This is a more detailed survey of a representative cross-section of around one to two thousand motorists. The survey has been running for 24 years with a number of regular questions, for example on road safety. Each year there are also questions on topical issues. RAC also carries out ad hoc polling.

Both Auto Express and What Car magazines continuously survey their readers and would be happy to work with the Sub-Group. There may be issues around sampling size.

The Institute of Advanced Motorists would also be willing to work with the Sub-Group on surveying their members.

Which? magazine also carries out surveys on particular subjects, though there may be issues around low sample size.

BVRLA may be willing to undertake a survey of the fleet sector.

Motor Codes receives 20,000 results from consumer surveys based on actual experience and would be willing to share the information.

It was agreed that the priority was to determine the questions, which would in turn help determine which of the options above are most appropriate.

Action 1: DfT to suggest question areas.

3rd Commitment: Identify and work with organisations able to carry out mystery shopper exercises

Which? magazine carries out mystery shopping, although it can be difficult for government to engage with them as they are keen to protect their independence. They are also interested in protecting their revenue and branding.

It was suggested that we need to be clear what we want to achieve through mystery shopping as it can be expensive and to be statistically valid there must be appropriate sample sizes. It was thought that the Secretary of State is keen to expose bad practice.

Halfords undertakes audio mystery shopping at each of its premises every month to help individuals learn and improve. They also induced fault mystery shopping every month at a

number of centres. The results are used constructively to improve performance and shared within their own business.

Motor Manufacturers employ RAC to go to dealerships and audit work done. The results are discussed with the technicians.

VOSA undertakes mystery shopping for the MOT test, and some Trading Standards bodies also undertake mystery shopping.

It was agreed that the areas least likely to be covered were the independent garages and it was difficult to see how it is possible to target in excess of 25,000 garages.

It was agreed that the most practical approach was to make more of what is already being done rather than invest heavily in new work. Use of consumer surveys may enable mystery shopping to be more targeted.

It was suggested that the commitments should be seen as a package and successful delivery of this item might also depend on successful delivery of the 6th commitment (below).

4th commitment: Establish sub-group & report on work and role of MOT Trade Forum

Christopher Macgowan asked members whether they thought the right people were represented on the group, or whether there were any omissions.

Given their new role for Codes approval, it was agreed that a representative from the Trading Standards Institute be invited to the Sub-Group. Ron Gainsford was suggested.

Given their new role for consumer advocacy and Consumer Direct, it was agreed that a representative from Citizens Advice be invited to the Sub-Group. Paul Everitt thought he might know the name of a suitable contact.

Action 2: Paul Everitt to send name of Citizens Advice representative.

Action 3: Christopher Macgowan to invite Ron Gainsford and Citizens Advice representative to join the Sub-Group.

Vicky Waite informed the Sub-Group that Jim Punter and the MOT Trade Forum had been invited to contribute to commitment 8 below (consider adjusting standards for wear and tear items). They would put forward a proposal (probably on tyres and brakes) and DfT economists would investigate data and carry out a cost benefit analysis. The results would be reported back to ministers via the Sub-Group. Jim Punter has undertaken to ensure the proposals are the views of the MOT Trade Forum collectively.

5th commitment: Work with industry and stakeholders to encourage wider adoption of codes

Christopher Macgowan outlined the Codes currently available. There are currently 3 OFT approved Codes, Motor Codes, Bosch and Vehicle Builders and Repairers Association (VBRA). There is also the BSI PAS 125 Kitemark for vehicle damage repair. There are other non-accredited schemes such as the Good Garage Scheme, and Trust my Garage.

It was thought that Codes do encourage a better consumer experience. The main problem is encouraging garages to sign up. The BSI PAS 125 Kitemark has made a big difference to

vehicle damage repair, and the insurance industry has played a key role in ensuring that garages sign up to the standard. Motor Codes was developed in response to the threat of a “super-complaint”.

The point was made that Codes also offer a route to Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR).

There was discussion about whether Codes should be mandatory for garages, or mandatory for MOT garages, or whether regulatory scrutiny (via VOSA or Trading Standards) might be less stringent for garages who have signed up to a Code, and Codes sponsors to work with regulators where problems are detected. The options were summarised by Christopher Macgowan as follows:

- Option 1: All garages to be licensed
- Option 2: All garages required to sign up to a Code
- Option 3: All garages who do MOT testing required to sign up to a Code
- Option 4: Garages signed up to a Code subject to less regulatory scrutiny

There was further discussion about the use of competency training such as ATA to drive up standards. There are around 30,000 accredited technicians who have demonstrated a level of knowledge and signed up to a code of conduct. It was thought that increasing take-up of competency training such as ATA would help with the hard to reach garages.

Christopher Macgowan suggested a potential package of measures to drive up standards might consist of:

- Accredited training
- A Code with “teeth”
- Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)

John Lewis said that the EU was due to recommend access to ADR shortly and a directive was likely in 2014.

Tricia Hayes thought government preference was likely to be for light touch regulation if garages were willing to sign up to the package of 3 measures above.

Christopher Macgowan concluded the discussion by saying that the options would be revisited at future Sub-Group meetings.

Action 4: John Lewis to send details of the EU proposal on ADR.

Action 5: Christopher Macgowan to revisit the options at future Sub-Group meetings.

6th commitment: Measures to make it easier for consumers to give feedback in a transparent way that others can view.

Feedback from consumers is available eg on the Motor Codes website. Individual comments are available, linked to individual, verifiable pieces of work. Individual Codes websites have not yet reached a critical mass in the same way as “Trip Advisor” for example, but it was

thought that if take-up of Codes is increased (5th commitment), it would help with delivery of this commitment.

7th commitment: MOT certificates to show mileage for last three years; encourage motorists to view online database.

Vicky Waite said that work was well underway with delivery due for November 2012. The view was expressed that printing 3 years mileage on the MOT certificate might give vehicles a false provenance. However, others thought that it indicates the mileage shown at the time of the test, and just gives consumers another source of information when they make a choice about buying a vehicle.

The view was expressed that MOT tests should be extended to include safety recalls. In other words, if a vehicle has an outstanding safety recall, VOSA and MOT test stations should have access to the data and vehicle owners should be made aware at the MOT test. The Sub-Group was informed that plans were underway to align the recall database with the VOSA MOT dataset so this would become possible in future.

8th commitment: Consider adjusting standards for wear and tear

This was discussed as part of the 4th commitment above.

9th commitment: Develop a means of measuring consumer confidence over time across all garage services.

It was thought that this commitment is closely linked to the 5th commitment (encourage the wider adoption of Codes) and the 6th commitment (feedback from consumers). Consumers often provide feedback as part of the Codes process.

5. AOB

Christopher Macgowan outlined the process going forwards. There would be a process of capturing recommendations and refining them, before feeding back to the Secretary of State.

Bill Duffy said that there had been a number of good suggestions for improving the MOT test previously put forwards by the MOT Trade Forum. He would forward them to Christopher Macgowan for consideration.

Action 6: Bill Duffy to forward MOT suggestions.

6. Dates of next meetings

Proposed dates for the second and third meetings are:

- Wednesday 23 May
- Friday 22 June

Action 7: DfT to establish best meetings times for attendees (am or pm) and schedule meetings.