



# DfI

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Your Ref:

Our Ref:

Date: 8 August 2016

## **FOLLOW UP CONSULTATION ON PROPOSALS TO MAKE CHANGES TO THE UNLADEN WEIGHTS FOR POWERED WHEELCHAIRS AND MOBILITY SCOOTERS**

Dear consultee,

You will be aware that the Department consulted last year on proposals to increase the weight limits for powered wheelchairs and mobility scooters to facilitate the continued mobility of disabled people.

### *Original Consultation Proposal*

The Department proposed to retain the current unladen weight limits for each Class of mobility vehicle but provide flexibility in relation to necessary user equipment which helps to address a specific clinical, postural, hygienic, caring or nursing need. An upper limit of 200kg was proposed which would provide for any necessary user equipment that would take the mobility vehicle above the approved Class weight limit. A mobility vehicle without any necessary user equipment would remain within the current approved Class weight limit.

### *Responses to consultation*

Four responses were received to the consultation, which were largely positive. Most respondents considered that the proposed changes balance the necessity of ensuring that disabled people can be mobile and play a full part in society with the need to minimise risks to other road users.

However, the Northern Ireland Regional Wheelchair Service (NIRWS) based at Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, raised some issues with the proposal. NIRWS explained that the system for issuing equipment in the North is regulated. The NIRWS provides wheelchairs to clients throughout the North on behalf of the 5 Health and Social Care Trusts. Following prescription of a wheelchair, the NIRWS is responsible for procuring and issuing the equipment to individual clients. The NIRWS will not issue vehicles to

clients without assessing their ability to operate them and training them and it retains ownership and maintains the vehicles on a regular basis.

NIRWS indicated that many people in the North, for example bariatric patients, would currently use wheelchairs that are in excess of the existing weight limits for medical reasons. These chairs would also in many instances exceed the proposed upper or “backstop” limit of 200kg including any necessary user equipment that takes the mobility vehicle above the Class weight limit. NIRWS advised that there are approximately 2,000 users of powered wheelchairs in the North. NIWRS also advised that a number of wheelchairs required by children were Class 3 due to their weight, although the legislation did not permit them to be used by anyone under the age of 14. Departmental officials met with representatives from NIRWS to discuss weight limits for powered wheelchairs users and to try to find a solution which would facilitate users of mobility vehicles whilst at the same time limiting any potential risk to road safety.

#### *Revised proposals*

Having considered the issues raised by NIRWS and others during the consultation, the Department has developed revised proposals for consideration and would be glad to have your comments on each, as well as your preferred option.

#### **Options for Powered Wheelchairs and Mobility Scooters**

1. Retain the current unladen weights for Class 1, 2 and Class 3 invalid carriages but introduce an upper backstop limit of 200kg for the weight of necessary user equipment (GB position); or
2. Raise the unladen weight of Class 2 invalid carriages from 113.4kg to 150kg, retain the weight limit of 150kg for Class 3 invalid carriages and introduce an upper backstop limit of 200kg for the weight of necessary user equipment. (the only difference between Class 2 and Class 3 vehicles would be speed); or
3. As Option 1 above but introduce a new Class 4 with an upper backstop limit of 230kg for specific cases. This new class of vehicle would only be issued by a NI Health and Social Care Trust to a very limited number of patients with very specific medical needs and would be tightly controlled by the Trust. It should be noted that this class of vehicle does not exist in Britain and therefore these vehicles can only be used legally in the North.

If you wish to respond to this consultation, please complete the reply form Annex A and forward your comments in any of the following ways:

**E-mail:** vehicle.standards@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk

**Write to:** Vehicle Standards Team  
Road Safety and Vehicle Regulation Division  
Clarence Court  
10 –18 Adelaide Street  
Town Parks  
BELFAST  
BT2 8GB

This letter can be made available in alternative formats and, if appropriate, consultees are asked to contact the Department to discuss their needs.

The closing date for all responses is **19 September 2016**. Any responses which do not arrive on or before this date will not be included in the summary of responses, and thus will not be included when considering recommendations.

A summary of responses to this consultation letter and the previous consultation will be published following the close of consultation on the DfI's website at <http://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/> . The Department will also publish its preferred way forward.

Yours faithfully

Vehicle Standards Team