

Demerit system for drivers edges closer

The long-awaited rollout of the points demerit system to manage traffic infringements is edging closer with only a few hurdles still to be overcome...



(Image: Wikimedia Commons)

In terms of the demerit system points will be notched up for traffic contraventions until a high of 12 has been reached after which suspensions of driving licences for various periods will be imposed.

Once these periods have been complied with the motorist will receive points back and be able to resume driving again.

Road Traffic Infringement Agency (RTIA) chief operations officer Thabo Tsholetsane said, on the sidelines of a briefing to Parliament's transport portfolio committee yesterday, before the system could be implemented an amendment to the act would have to be introduced. This would remove the obligation for the traffic authorities to notify motorists through registered mail. This, he said, would be very expensive.

"We want to reduce the costs of postage," he said. "Once this has happened we will be able to roll out. We are afraid that if we roll out with this registered mail requirement authorities will not be able to fulfil the mandate of the act because it will be very expensive to do this through the Post Office."

Alternative forms of communication under consideration are electronic communications such as e-mails and SMSs as well as ordinary postage.

The agency also had to ensure that a national contraventions register was in place and that there were sufficient financial resources for the project. Tsholetsane did not believe that budgetary issues would be a constraint.

Another issue to be finalised is to determine how to allocate points for specific critical traffic offences.

No national launch date set yet

A pilot project - launched in Tshwane and Johannesburg in 2008 - had revealed a number of problems. "We are at a stage where we are finalising all the issues which came out of the pilot," Tsholetsane said.

No national launch date has as yet been set. This will be for Transport Minister Dipuo Peters to decide once she has assessed the readiness of the system.

Tsholetsane said one of the advantages of the demerit system was that the processing of offences would be an administrative matter that would not have to pass through the clogged-up courts. The court system requires a lot of time spent in queues and waiting at court.

"It will take the burden off the courts and ensure that the matters are dealt with expeditiously."

While Tsholetsane did not mention the issue, the recent prolonged strike at the Post Office and the accumulation of piles and piles of undelivered mail must strengthen the argument for the demerit system not to rely solely on the Post Office as a means to communicate with non-compliant motorists.

The RTIA also plans to complete its investigation into establishing traffic rehabilitation schools this year.

Source: *Business Day*, via I-Net Bridge

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