

NC Division of Motor Vehicles

Office of the Commissioner

Torre Jessup



SESSION LAW 2020-97

HOUSE BILL 1105

NCDMV IMPROVEMENTS REPORT

RESPONSE TO COVID-19

September 15, 2020

Purpose

Session Law 2020-97 (House Bill 1105), Section 3.17 requires the NC Division of Motor Vehicles to issue a report detailing any changes the division is implementing to improve operations and decrease wait times at NCDMV offices.

COVID-19 NCDMV related Executive Orders and Legislative Actions

On March 10, 2020 Governor Roy Cooper issued Executive Order 116 declaring a State of Emergency to prevent the spread of COVID-19. To comply with social distancing requirements, DMV took action to limit in-office customer traffic and increase staff distancing. These actions included closing some driver license offices and implementing telework at high capacity office buildings, to include the DMV Customer Call Center in Bladen County and the Raleigh headquarters.

On March 21, 2020 Governor Cooper issued Executive Order 119, in which Section 3 directed the Commissioner of Motor Vehicles to take the following actions to protect the public and limit the spread of COVID-19:

- a. Limit services at all driver license offices to appointment only.
- b. Encourage all customers to limit appointments to those services unavailable online.
- c. Close all public driver license offices that are of insufficient size to maintain social distancing, that are insufficiently staffed to operate on an appointment-only basis, or that are otherwise unable to maintain normal operations due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- d. To the extent practical, expand service hours at those driver license offices that remain in operation during this State of Emergency.
- e. Discontinue mobile services through the State of Emergency.
- f. Postpone all DMV-related hearings not required by statute to be held within a set number of days for a period of sixty days.
- g. Suspend all road tests for applicants seeking learner's permits, provisional drivers licenses, or unrestricted Class C licenses until such time as it is determined that such tests can be conducted with minimal risk of transmission of COVID-19. DMV, to the extent practicable, shall continue to conduct road tests for Class A and Class B licenses and for those applicants who must complete a road test due to a medical restriction.

On May 4, 2020 Session Law 2020-3 became law, granting a five-month extension to more than two dozen DMV credentials and allowing DMV to waive any penalties for late registration renewal through the extension period. The five-month extension applied to any credential that expired on or after March 1, 2020 and before August 1, 2020.

On June 19, 2020 Session Law 2020-30 became law, requiring DMV to temporarily waive the road test requirement for Level II Limited Provision Licenses.

On July 22, 2020 Commissioner Torre Jessup applied for and received an Emergency Administrative Rule amendment to 10A NCAC 03B .0201, granting DMV the ability to temporarily waive certain adult road tests where previous driver training or safe driving records could be established.

On September 4, 2020 Session Law 2020-97 became law, extending the expiration date of five credentials to 30 days after the governor lifts the COVID-19 State of Emergency Order. The five

extended credentials are: CDL licenses, CDL permits, disability placards, state identification cards, and inspection mechanic licenses.

NCDMV COVID-19 Challenges

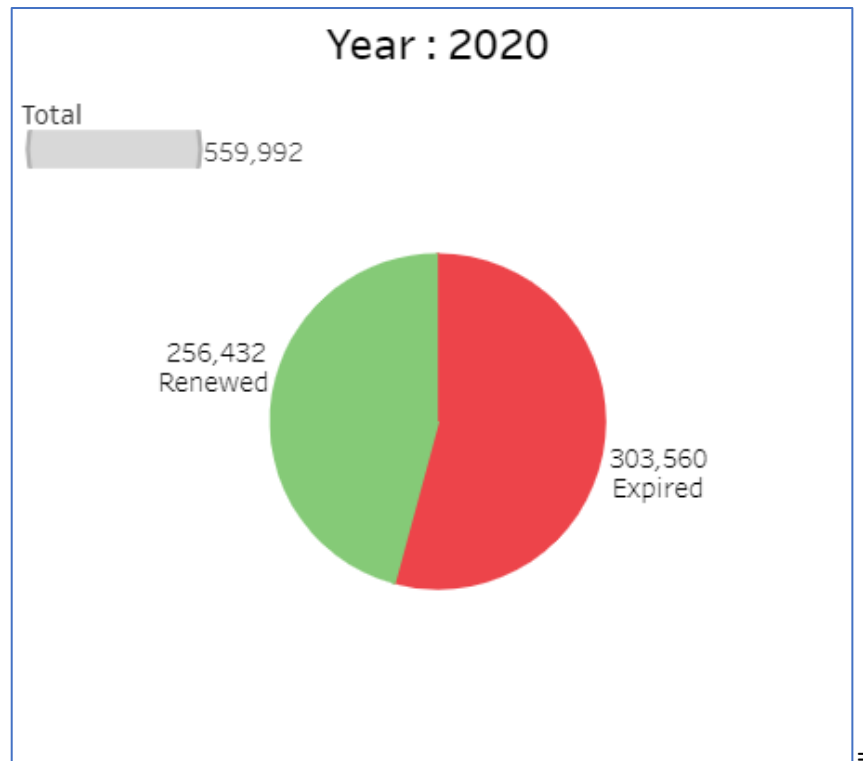
NCDMV's immediate response to the State of Emergency focused on ensuring the safety of employees and customers throughout the pandemic. DMV immediately implemented protocols for social distancing, 50% capacity in offices, and personal protective equipment (PPE) requirements. These protocols included:

- Closing 60 Driver License Offices – These offices could not support social distancing and/or capacity restrictions.
- Implementing Temporary Telework – Telework was necessary in high occupancy offices such as the Bladen County Call Center and DMV Headquarters. DMV had not previously offered telework for employees. This required defining who was eligible to telework, creating teleworking agreements, and procuring necessary equipment, including but not limited to laptops, SoftPhone software, remote desktop software, headsets and hotspots. Additionally, new IT processes and standard operating procedures had to be developed to safeguard customers' personally identifiable information.
- Obtaining PPE –DMV did not have any PPE on-hand at the onset of the pandemic. Equipment procured included plexiglass barriers, face coverings, digital thermometers, hand sanitizer, cleaning supplies, safety glass and disposable gloves. Delivery of these items took anywhere from 30 to 90 days to receive.

The greatest challenge DMV has experienced through the pandemic has been maintaining normal staffing capacity to maintain operations. The pandemic exacerbated an already precarious situation brought on by Department of Transportation fiscal challenges and attrition resulting from an impending headquarters relocation to Rocky Mount. As of the end of August 2020, the DMV headquarters vacancy rate was 27%, and was 17% agency-wide.

At the onset of the pandemic, the Office of State Personnel granted several new leave options for state employees that were experiencing child/eldercare issues or COVID-19 symptoms with special consideration for employees with underlying health conditions to participate in remote work. Initially some units experienced decreases in overall capacity upwards of 75%, requiring that some DMV services and offices be suspended or closed. Many units' operations were suspended on any given day due to a positive COVID-19 case or employee COVID-19 testing prescribed by a health professional. Mandatory DOT furloughs in the month of June further decreased DMV's capacity and services.

The division anticipates pent up demand in the driver license offices as a result of extensions granted for expiring credentials. Expired drivers licenses from January 1 - August 31, 2020 number 559,992, yet only 256,432 have been renewed. These customers will need to be served as soon as their extended dates expire.



NCDMV COVID-19 Response

Online Driver Services Appointments

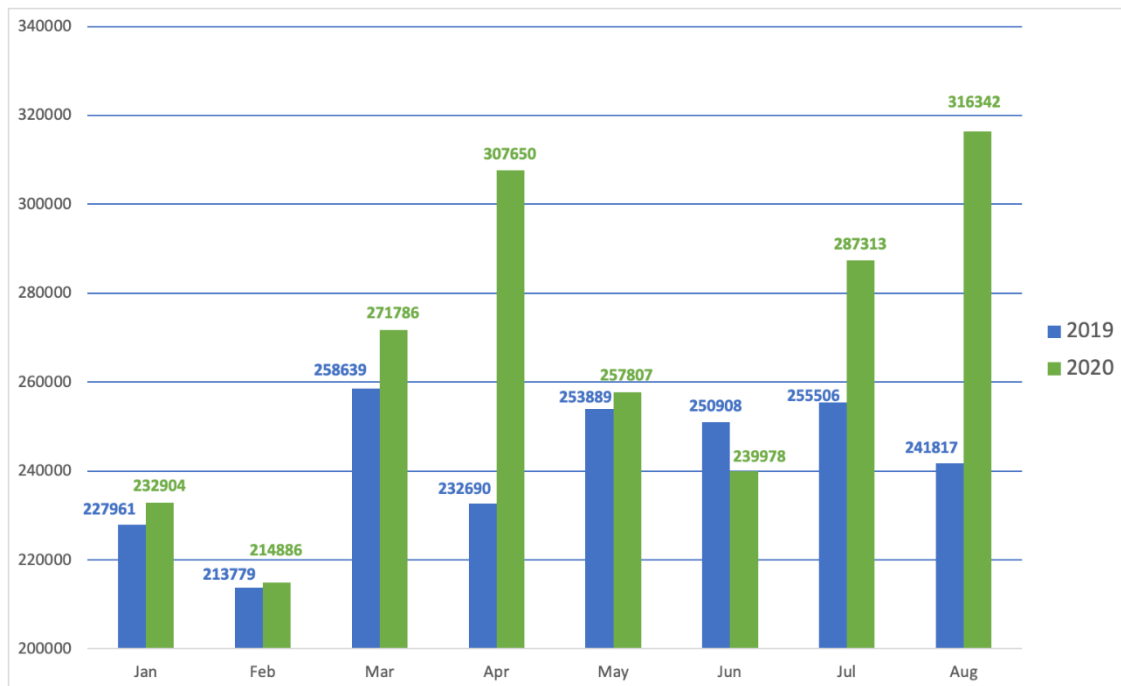
In response to Executive Orders 116 and 117, the division reduced the number of operational driver license offices to 55 out of 115 and implemented appointment-only visits. On February 24, 2020 NCDMV began piloting online appointments, originally offering appointments for 30 days. DMV saw that appointments were filling rapidly and extended available appointments to 45 days. Additional appointments are added daily; however, DMV is experiencing a 20% no show rate, which decreases daily transactions.

Online Transactions Promoted

DMV implemented a social media and news campaign to drive customers to online driver license and vehicle registration services to include renewals, duplicates, address changes, titles and property tax payments. From April 16, 2020 to July 1, 2020 online services fees were reduced from \$3.00 to \$2.00 to further encourage customers to conduct their DMV services online. Online transactions average 3300/day, which is a slight increase to pre-COVID-19 numbers.

Online vehicle transactions have increased significantly compared to pre-COVID-19 numbers.

Increase in On-Line Vehicle Registration Renewals

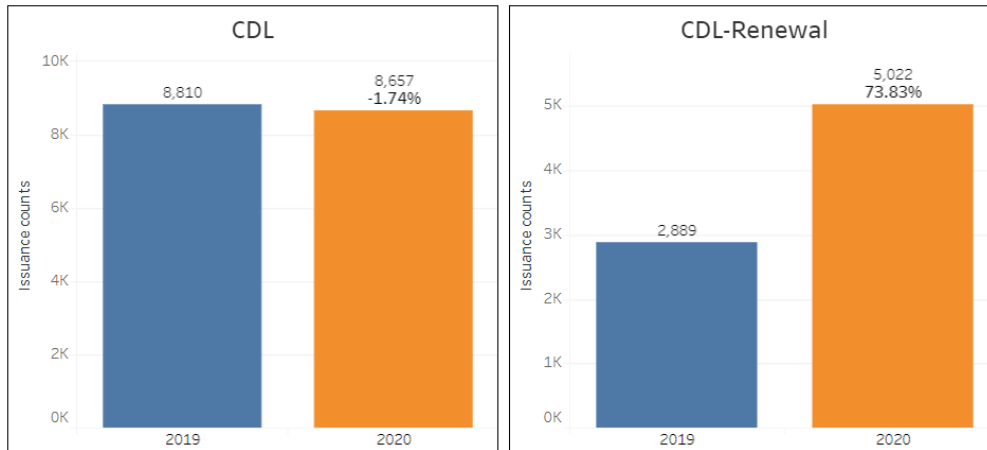


Acquisition of Personal Protective Equipment

As DMV obtained personal protective equipment, absenteeism decreased, and many temporary positions are improved for reinstatement, the division has been able build capacity by gradually opening additional driver license offices. As of September 14, 2020, 92 offices are in operation with an average wait time of 6.9 minutes.

Commercial Trucking Services

Commercial driver license (CDL) services were never suspended or interrupted by the pandemic. Recognizing that commercial truck drivers are transporting critical medical supplies and equipment and goods to stores, DMV never discontinued offering any commercial driver license and International Registration Plan services. The Division has worked closely with the North Carolina Trucking Association, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration and NC Highway Patrol to ensure coordination of services and information, including establishing a service account for emergency CDL issues. In fact, data shows that CDL renewal services have increased from 2019-2020.



Real ID Delayed

On March 31, 2020 Congress extended the federal Real ID Act implementation date from October 1, 2020 to October 1, 2021. This extension will allow the DMV to issue more Real IDs than originally estimated prior to the enforcement date. As of September 14, 2020, NCDMV had issued almost two million unique Real ID credentials.

DMV had 10 Real ID days planned for the spring of 2020. One event was held in Durham and the remaining events were cancelled due to the pandemic. Real ID days are aimed at education and offering of express services to customers wishing to upgrade to a Real ID.

Road Tests

Per Executive Order 119 DMV cancelled all road tests except for CDLs and medical evaluations. Road test waivers have been granted for Level II permit holders and some adult drivers where previous driver training or safe driving records can be established.

DMV continues to consult with the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators (AAMVA) on ways to safely reinstate road tests.

Vehicle Registration Extension

Senate Bill 704 granted a five-month extension to vehicle registration and property tax payments. This bill also allowed DMV to waive any penalties for late registration renewal through the extension period. The five-month extension applied to any credential that expired on or after March 1, 2020 and before August 1, 2020. Significant system programming had to be implemented to meet these requirements, to include not charging late fees and interest on vehicles tax and automatic refunds to applicable customers that remitted late fees and interest before the correction took effect.

Titles

DMV is experiencing a backlog in title processing due to vacancies and COVID related absenteeism. Enhancements and pilot projects have been put in place to alleviate the backlog to include:

- automatic release of titles within five days of processing;
- automatic release of trailer titles;

- eliminated notary requirement on salvage titles;
- outsourced mailed in title work to 10 license plate agencies for processing;
- increased LPAs that process instant titles from two to nine locations;
- granted authority for LPAs to back date a plate turn-in for plates seized by law enforcement.

International Registration Plan (IRP)

To ensure IRP fleet vehicles were being serviced promptly, DMV granted the authority to license plate agencies to print IRP cab cards when an online fleet renewal has been completed.

Call Center/Contact Us

Due to social distancing requirements, DMV's on-site call center building capacity was reduced by 50% with half of the staff being assigned to remote work. It took several weeks to procure all the equipment necessary for staff to telework. The call center also experienced absenteeism as high as 27% due to COVID-19 leave.

Throughout the State of Emergency, DMV has experienced a significant increase in customer contact via the call center and email requests (Contact Us), which has increased customer frustration due to long response times. The bulk of the inquiries relate to driver license appointments, extensions, online transactions, and title receipts.

DMV continues to put as much information as possible on the website, social media, and call center recorded messaging to aid customers without having to contact an agent.

School Bus Driver Training

DMV has continued to provide in-person school bus driver training throughout the State of Emergency. A Virtual School Bus training pilot with Wake County Schools began September 10, 2020.

Hearings

Executive Order 119 suspended hearings for 60 days. In-person hearings were reinstated on May 19, 2020. DMV is planning to expand the use of virtual hearings before the end of the year.

[Future Enhancements](#)

NCDMV continues to expand services through the pandemic. Enhancements already operationalized or nearing implementation include:

- touchless payments;
- contactless road tests at offices to accommodate people who do not qualify for waivers;
- in-vehicle road tests upon entering Phase III reopening (using PPE such as disposable seat covers);
- same-day driver license service with eTicketing and a virtual lobby;
 - eTicketing allows walk-in customers to get in-line virtually prior to arriving at the office;
 - virtual lobby gives customers an approximate wait time post check-in which allows them to wait in their vehicle or other location;

- customers receive a text when they need to report to the physical lobby;
- opening the remaining 23 Driver License Offices;
- operationalizing new Asheville Express office for walk-in express transactions;
- student online testing in collaboration with the Department of Public Instruction;
- virtual school bus driver training pilot with Wake County Schools began September 10th;
- expanded use of virtual hearings before the end of the year.