



Driver Examination Stations

Project Description

July 2020

BACKGROUND

To obtain a Minnesota Class D driver's license (the most common license for Minnesota drivers), drivers must satisfy many requirements. These include passing a written or computerized "knowledge test" as well as a driving "road test" (also known as a "skills test") in which drivers demonstrate to a state examiner their ability to drive a car and observe traffic laws.

The Department of Public Safety's Driver and Vehicle Services Division (DVS) oversees these tests, both of which take place at DVS-operated driver examination stations. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, there were 93 driver examination stations located across the state.

Starting in mid-March 2020, DVS closed all examination stations in accordance with the state's COVID-19 "stay-at-home" order. As of June 2020, DVS had reopened 15 stations. (A temporary consolidation of stations, combined with enhanced staffing and hours, is part of DVS's plan to address the road-test backlog, which the COVID-19 closures had exacerbated).

Even prior to COVID-19, DVS had made news due to the growing backlog of Class D road tests and the now-defunct practice of granting standing appointments to certain driver education programs. Drivers reported having to schedule tests months in advance to find an open appointment or drive long distances to take a test.

POSSIBLE EVALUATION ISSUES

1. To what extent are driver examination stations adequately staffed and available to drivers across the state?
2. How effective, efficient, and accessible is Driver and Vehicle Services' current system for scheduling Class D road tests?
3. How has the Department of Public Safety spent the appropriations it has received to

improve the scheduling of Class D road tests, and what have been the effects of strategies it has implemented to address the testing backlog?

DISCUSSION

To address our research questions, we will interview DVS staff and other interested stakeholders, including driver education program owners or representatives. We will review the plans that DVS has developed to address its road-test backlog, and compare those with the strategies implemented in other states. We will review state and federal laws, as well as DVS policies related to the operation of examination stations.

We will visit driver examination stations to observe their operations, and we plan to survey examination station managers. We will conduct interviews to gather the opinions of drivers who recently took their Class D road tests or their parents.

Throughout this evaluation, we will analyze three types of data related to DVS examination stations: revenue and expenditure data, personnel data, and driver services data on driver's licenses and road tests.

While DVS had been criticized for granting standing appointments, the division has discontinued the practice, and we do not intend to focus on it as an evaluation issue. Further, we intend to restrict our evaluation to Class D licenses rather than commercial driver's licenses (CDLs). Road testing for CDLs is subject to federal regulation and differs considerably from testing for Class D licenses. With respect to both standing appointments and CDLs, we will research the topics only to the extent needed to provide context to our report.

This evaluation is scheduled to be completed in early 2021. For additional information, contact Sarah Delacueva, evaluation manager, at 651-296-1226 or sarah.delacueva@state.mn.us.