

Will the new MOT system be ready?

Aftermarket asks the DVSA about its progress with MOT modernisation following issues with DVLA websites

THE WAY garages input the MOT data is changing, with the current system moving to an online cloud based platform. However, problems with recent online launches have understandably raised questions as to the readiness of the new system, due to launch in September.

The UK government is moving a number of its key systems online and giving the public access to dealing with things themselves. Firstly, the vehicle excise duty (VED) system was amended to abolish the paper disc, allowing drivers to apply online and gain instant cover as well as spreading the cost of the tax monthly. On June 8th, the paper counterpart to the UK driving licence was abolished, with drivers having to check their details online and get a code to give to car hire firms should they want to prove their number of endorsements.

Issues encountered

Both systems have proven unreliable in their opening days, leaving some to fear that the new MOT system will also experience problems. On October 1st 2014, some were left waiting up to 13 hours to be able to tax their vehicle, while the licence checking website crashed a number of times on June 8th with hire car firms unable to log in and drivers unable to generate needed codes. Both systems, run by the DVLA, suffered due to the demands placed upon them, the VED website saw an increase in traffic of over 30,000 users on day one. With 70,000 MOTs taking place a day in the UK, there is also the question of whether the system will be able to cope.

To find out the current state of the MOT service, Aftermarket contacted the DVSA to see what

was being worked on, whether there were any fears following recent website issues.

A spokesperson told us: "The MOT Testing Service is being tested in a number of phases. We have conducted a high volume of testing within DVSA and have just completed a series of 'customer acceptance' tests in MOT garages. For that, we have had 40 garages using the new MOT Testing Service alongside the existing MOT Computerisation system. This has helped us understand the use of the system in the real world and we have ironed out a number of defects and problems with data as a result of that. It did exactly what we hoped; by helping us find the things that needed some more work. Since then, we have carried on testing the service internally as well as testing particular aspects with garages."

"We have conducted a lot of testing, so have had a lot of feedback. We are keen to encourage feedback on an ongoing basis so that we can continue to learn and feed this into continuous improvement of the service. The part of the service relating to MOT testing results recording is the core part of the system and we have kept this broadly consistent with the existing service with some improvements from what people have told us – so feedback on that has been that this is straightforward to use."

The spokesperson also revealed that the way the system has been developed is like nothing the department has worked on before. The DVSA has steered away from a single supplier to use more, smaller suppliers, a system which has brought a number of challenges but which the department believes is the right way to go about building and maintaining the



TEST: 70,000 MOTs are conducted each day

service so user needs can be met. These suppliers have been working on the system since July 2013.

Back up

We asked the department about the issues that plagued the two DVLA websites. Their spokesperson adds: "There are around 30,000,000 MOT tests recorded per year – plus other transactions being conducted related to garage management. For us, we are doing a lot of work to make sure we understand peaks in demand and much of the 'early days' focus will be on ensuring that the service scales correctly to deal with these.

"The MOT service is already live for approximately 1,800 users who have 'claimed their account' and can check their garage details and conduct 'demo' tests within the system. Over the next few weeks we will move to enabling more users to claim their accounts and we will also start moving to live MOT tests being recorded in the new system. This will then be ramped up over the next few months. Through this period we will be monitoring things closely and will be cautious as we allow transaction volumes to increase."

No system is infallible, however the issue of issuing MOT certificates is always seen by the customer to be the garage's responsibility. Therefore any system failure would be borne by the establishment with frustrations taken out on it. In the event of an IT failure on site then the garage would be at fault and would have to deal with issues, but if the problem were to affect all MOT stations, for example a server crash under the weight of the number of users, what is the back up?

We were told: "There will be an option for contingency testing to

cover any instances of the service being unavailable, or in the case of widespread internet outages. Essentially, that will be similar to today's emergency testing – so will be a paper certificate or failure document, that then can be retro-keyed into the system when available again."

This could lead to issues getting vehicle tax, especially with an online system checking a vehicle MOT status; some drivers will need the online information, which could therefore lead to vehicles unable to be taxed at the correct time. This also creates extra work for garages which could see a knock-on effect.

Finally, we asked how often the service will be monitored and improved. We were told: "The service will be continually monitored. One of the key principles is that there will be continuous and ongoing improvement – that will prioritise to make sure the service best meets user needs. On the versions that have already been seen by the trade, we have been able to make improvements before making the service and we know there are lots of ideas out there for how the service can be improved further."

While some remain sceptical as to whether the system will be ready, the DVSA is pushing to ensure the system launches on time and is committed to September 2015 as its switchover date for all MOT stations to begin using the system. It remains to be seen how the first day will be but hopefully the department can learn from the issues encountered by the DVLA and provide a system that will, for the most part, be flawless.