

FAQs on Authorised Testing Facilities and VOSA's Testing Transformation Programme



What is the Testing Transformation Programme?

As part of VOSA's ongoing efforts to reduce its cost base and keep finances under control, the Agency is reducing its expensive testing estate. By July 2012, 220 Authorised Testing Facilities (ATFs) were delivering tests. VOSA also expects ATFs to reduce the overall cost of the test process (including travel to tests and vehicle downtime). FTA supports the principle of bringing the test closer to the point of maintenance which will reduce costs to both industry and VOSA.

What is an Authorised Testing Facility (ATF)?

An ATF is a privately owned and managed testing facility where a VOSA-employed examiner visits to carry out annual tests for the facility. The customer pays the private provider and the test certificate is issued by VOSA. The ATF contract allows the site operator better terms with VOSA than existing Designated Premises (DP), including certainty of availability of testers. VOSA is no longer accepting new applications to open Designated Premises and many have taken the opportunity to convert to ATFs; in many cases this is because of the stricter obligations in the ATF contract for VOSA to supply testers.

If the private provider is operating on a business case how will they make a profit? Surely test costs will increase?

The statutory fee for a test at an ATF is less than that at a VOSA site (all the statutory fee is passed to VOSA). However, the ATF is entitled to charge an additional 'facility fee' or 'pit fee'. This is capped in the contract (currently hgv £55, psv £70, trailer £40) and it is here providers are able to compete, either by reducing the pit fee or

incorporating it into repair and maintenance contracts. VOSA has indicated that it intends to continue to reduce the fee at private sites and increase it at VOSA sites until, with the facility fee cap included, the two prices find parity.

On the face of it, until this equalisation is complete, this makes ATFs more expensive than VOSA test stations. However, there should be overall cost reductions to industry from the arrangement (eg reduced vehicle downtime, fuel for journey from maintenance to test, cost of a skilled fitter's time driving to test).

Won't main dealers show favouritism of service at test to big customers?

The ATF contract carries conditions which require the ATF provider to treat all customers fairly. Operators whose experience does not meet expectations should in the first instance raise this directly with the ATF, regarding the contract provisions in clauses 7.15 to 7.17. Should this not result in a good service, the concern should be escalated to VOSA who will deal with any contract breaches accordingly.

Some ATFs I use are asking me to pay for testing in advance; wasn't the Pre-Funded Account supposed to be a thing of the past after testing transformation?

The ATF provider must pay VOSA for the tester's time and is subject to the same restrictive payment methods that vehicle operators had to deal with when booking tests with VOSA directly. Because of this, ATF operators are starting to find a significant cash shortfall where they are paying for a tester's time in advance but offering their customers credit for that

testing slot. This, coupled with the current straitened economic climate, means more ATF operators seem to be asking for payments for test in advance. VOSA imposes no requirements on ATF operators regarding payment processes, so payment terms are a matter of contract between the provider and the customer.

How do I book a test at an ATF?

Tests at ATFs must be booked directly through the provider; they do not appear on any of VOSA's central test booking facilities and VOSA has indicated it has no plans to do so.

What about specialist testing?

ATFs are not obliged to deliver anything beyond annual tests but the ATF contract may also cover specialist tests including voluntary tests, reduced pollution certificates and vehicles carrying dangerous goods. FTA has already raised concerns with VOSA's Chief Executive regarding the possibility of the closure of test stations on the grounds that annual test capacity is offered elsewhere yet none of the private establishments offer; for example, annual test for vehicles carrying dangerous goods which had previously been offered at that site. VOSA agrees that this will require an innovative solution.

Is this paving the way for privately employed testers like the light vehicles MOT system?

Alastair Peoples has indicated that this is not currently on the agenda and industry as a whole must work to make the tripartite (GVTS, DP, ATF) system work. FTA members have split opinions as to whether 'private testers' are a step too far.