



Motor Vehicle Division Policy Memo 22-06

Requiring on-line orders for personalized license plates

DATE: June 20, 2022

FROM: Darcy Doty, Customer Services Bureau Director

TO: All Motor Vehicle Division staff, County Treasurers and County Treasurer staff

SUBJECT

This policy memo specifies the Iowa Department of Transportation (DOT) Motor Vehicle Division's (MVD) application process for personalized license plates under Iowa Administrative Rule 761--401.2(1)(b). Personalized license plates refer to when the customer picks a specific message (combination of letters or numbers). These are different from special plates, which are any plate design that is different from the standard design (e.g., Blackout or Flying Our Color plates). A personalized plate may be issued for either a standard or special plate design. A special plate without a personalized message is referred to hereafter as a "random special plate."

SUMMARY

Effective July 15, 2022, MVD policy requires customers to submit application and payment for personalized plates to MVD through the MyMVD on-line service.

MVD is implementing this change because the on-line ordering process provide the best method to order and pay for a popular, but non-essential service, and also provides benefits to the customer and the agency. On-line ordering is the fastest way to fulfill a transaction. It avoids problems for the customer such as ordering a message already in use or that is known to be prohibited. It ensures that the correct payment is submitted with the application and the on-line order is also more accurate by eliminating hand-written applications.

MVD will still accept application and payment through other means, such as by mail or in-person, but **only** for personalized plates that require specific qualifications or for other limited exceptions outlined below.

CURRENT

Currently, a customer may submit a personalized plate application and payment by using MyMVD, through mail to MVD, in person to MVD at the Ankeny MVD headquarters office, or to certain county treasurers that accept application and payment in person.

A customer may pay for a random special plate only at a county treasurer's office, and (with rare exceptions), the plate is provided and assigned immediately from the county treasurer's supply.

NEW

Effective July 15, 2022, customers must submit application and payment for personalized plates to MVD through the MyMVD on-line service, except for certain exceptions listed below. There is no change to the process to pay for and assign random special plates.

EXCEPTIONS

Certain special plates may only be issued to customers that meet specific qualifications, referred to hereafter as “qualification-based plates”. Additionally, moving a plate message from one plate design to another will require a paper application. Any personalized plates that use these special plate designs will apply and pay directly to with MVD via mail or in-person orders. These plates requiring a paper application include the following:

- Amateur radio operator
- Emergency medical services
- Firefighter (professional or volunteer)
- Military service
- Persons with disability
- Veterans and disabled veterans
- Transferring an existing personalized plate message from one plate design to another (such as moving the message “IOWA” from a University of Iowa Collegiate plate to a Blackout plate).

BUSINESS IMPACT

This change will improve MVD business practices by eliminating certain non-essential, paper-based transactions that can be performed faster and more efficiently on-line. The changes benefit customers, MVD, county treasurer offices, and our license plate manufacturer Iowa Prison Industries (IPI).

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

The following questions and answers provide additional information for staff, partners, and customers:

1. WHY IS MVD MAKING THIS CHANGE AT THIS TIME?

In state fiscal year 2020, MVD customers ordered more than 63,000 personalized plates that were eligible to be ordered on-line, meaning they did not require any qualifications. About three-quarters of these orders were made on-line using MyMVD, but the rest were ordered either directly through MVD or at a county treasurer’s office, where the application is then processed by MVD. This means there were approximately 15,500 plate orders for the year that were paper applications but could have been ordered on-line.

MVD recognizes that personalized plates are a popular product and generate revenue for the Road Use Tax Fund (RUTF). However, they remain a non-essential product. This is unlike other vehicle products such as bonded titles, official titles (for government agency vehicles), or persons with disabilities parking placards, which are essential products. The MVD team that processes personalized plates also processes these three, more essential products, and the requests we are receiving for all of these products continue to grow in volume. By shifting the non-essential personalized plate requests to on-line orders, MVD can prioritize the essential vehicle product transactions.

2. WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS TO CUSTOMERS?

Ordering a plate on-line through MyMVD is by far the best method to order plates for customers, and at least 75% of all personalized plate orders are already placed on-line.

- The on-line process is the fastest way to fulfill the order. Based on typical volume, the on-line orders are processed about 10-14 days before mail orders or orders transferred from county treasurer offices.
- On-line ordering automatically checks the customer’s message to make sure that it (a) is available for selection; and (b) does not conflict with any known prohibited messages.

- There is far better accuracy in the requested content of the message on the plate when ordering on-line, including for insertion of a space in the message. This contrasts to hand-written orders where it is hard to distinguish spaces, characters and letters; for example, the number '0' versus the letter 'O'. Because on-line ordering will improve accuracy of the plate messages, this means that MVD staff will no longer need to attempt to contact customers for clarification, reject the application because the message is unclear, or place an order that then needs to be corrected later.
- Customers can see how the message will display on the selected plate design on MyMVD.
- On-line orders will automatically require the correct payment. Orders submitted through US Mail may have the incorrect payment (higher or lower), requiring a return of the application to the customer for correct payment.

3. WHAT ARE POSSIBLE CUSTOMER CONCERNS?

There could be two primary issues for customers by making the switch to require on-line personalized plate ordering.

First, some customers may not have internet or computer access. For these situations, MVD advises that these customers may be able to access MyMVD through friends, family, or public locations such as libraries. Also, as noted below, MyMVD can be accessed from a cell phone with internet capabilities.

Second, some customers may not have a credit or debit card to pay on-line. For these situations, MVD advises that pre-loaded debit cards are readily available for purchase at many retail locations or that customers can use the credit or debit card of a friend or family member.

While the default policy will be to require personalized plate ordering on-line through MyMVD, if the county treasurer encounters a customer that truly does not have a viable option to address either of these above-listed issues, the treasurer can contact Brandy (Horsley) Bogle in MVD, who will work with the county staff and the customer to determine if a hardship waiver can be granted.

4. WHEN DOES THIS POLICY TAKE EFFECT AND WHAT HAPPENS TO PLATE ORDERS ALREADY MAILED?

This policy is effective July 15, 2022. MVD will continue to process all personalized plate applications that were received before that date and that appear to have entered the US Mail stream on or before that date. By mid-August, MVD may return eligible applications to customers with instructions to submit the order on-line.

5. HOW WILL CUSTOMERS ORDER QUALIFICATION-BASED PLATES?

Any customer who wants to order the qualification-based plates listed in the "Exceptions" section above should mail an application and payment to Iowa DOT Vehicle Customer Service, PO Box 9278, Des Moines, IA 50306. Customers may also apply in-person during regular business hours at Iowa DOT Vehicle Services, 6310 SE Convenience Boulevard, Ankeny, IA 50021. Customers are asked to call 515-237-3110 to make an appointment.

County treasurers may also choose to accept applications and payment for qualification-based plates. A customer should contact their county treasurer's office to ask if they will accept the application. If a county treasurer chooses to accept application and payment for qualification-based plates, the treasurer can take payment in ARTS as a miscellaneous transaction and then forward the application and payment receipt to dot.plates@iowadot.us. Please note, applications for a Veteran plate must be forwarded to the Iowa Department of Veteran's Affairs for approval before DOT can issue the plate.

Applications will be processed in the order they are received. Applications are available on-line, at county treasurer offices, or may be requested to be sent by mail by calling 515-237-3110.

6. HOW WILL CUSTOMERS PLACE AN ORDER TO MOVE A MESSAGE BETWEEN PLATE DESIGNS?

Any customer who wants to keep their same plate message but move it to a different plate design should mail an application and payment to Iowa DOT Vehicle Customer Service, PO Box 9278, Des Moines, IA 50306. Customers may also apply in-person during regular business hours at Iowa DOT Vehicle Services, 6310 SE Convenience Boulevard, Ankeny, IA 50021. Customers are asked to call 515-237-3110 to make an appointment.

County treasurers may also choose to accept applications and payment for the plate design change. A customer should contact his/her county treasurer's office to ask if they will accept the application. If a county treasurer chooses to accept application and payment to move a plate message between plate designs, the treasurer can take payment in ARTS as a miscellaneous transaction and then forward the application and payment receipt to dot.plates@iowadot.us

Applications will be processed in the order they are received. Applications are available on-line, at county treasurer offices, or may be requested to be sent by mail by calling 515-237-3110.

7. IS MYMVD AVAILABLE ON MOBILE DEVICES?

MyMVD is available by using an Internet browser (such as Safari or Google) on a mobile device. MyMVD is not available as a standalone app.

8. HOW WILL WE INFORM CUSTOMERS OF THESE CHANGES?

Leading up to and following July 15, 2022, MVD will use its various communication channels – including the DOT web site, social media, and traditional media – to announce the change. We are also informing county treasurers, the Iowa Automobile Dealers Association and the Iowa Independent Automobile Dealers Association and will ask them to inform customers and stakeholders.

9. WHAT ARE IMPACTS TO COUNTIES?

County treasurer offices will no longer accept paper application and payment for personalized plates. This may have some minor productivity benefits for counties who may devote more time to more essential transactions, including vehicle title issuance and registration renewal. Counties will also have less need to request plate corrections from MVD due to plate messages that were misinterpreted from a hand-written application.

County treasurer offices will continue to handle random special plate transactions as per current practice, primarily where a customer may pay for and receive a random special plate from existing county inventory.

County treasurers may choose to accept application and payment for qualification-based plates and when a customer wants to move a plate message between plate designs and here is the list of plates that counties may choose to accept paper applications for:

- Amateur radio operator
- Emergency medical services
- Firefighter (professional or volunteer)

- Military service
- Persons with disability
- Veterans and disabled veterans
- Transferring an existing personalized plate message from one plate design to another (such as moving the message “IOWA” from a University of Iowa Collegiate plate to a Blackout plate).

To process a paper application and payment for one of the above-listed plates, the treasurer should follow the process outlined in Q&A 5-6 above. Counties should include this option when they list their services to customers on their web pages, signs, or other information.

County treasurers may to assist customers and direct them to the DOT web site and the MyMVD system to order personalized plates. County treasurers should not place orders for customers on MyMVD, nor should the county allow customers to use county treasurer computer equipment to place orders for plates (unless such equipment is normally used for public access, such as at a county library or specially designated public access computers).

10. WHAT ARE IMPACTS TO IOWA PRISON INDUSTRIES?

While the impacts to IPI are minimal, there will be fewer plate orders that need to be destroyed and corrected after they are produced, since the on-line ordering will greatly reduce the misinterpretation of plate messages on hand-written applications.

11. WHAT ARE IMPACTS TO MVD?

Using data from state fiscal year 2020, MVD could eliminate about 15,500 non-essential personalized plates transactions annually. MVD will redirect these staff resources to ensure timely delivery of more essential vehicle products, including bonded title applications, persons with disabilities parking placards and official titles (for government agency vehicles).

MVD will still receive several thousand orders annually for qualification-based plates and personalized plate design changes. However, by eliminating the orders that can be processed on-line, these remaining orders can be fulfilled quicker.

12. CAN MVD LEGALLY MAKE THIS CHANGE?

Yes. Iowa Administrative Rule 761--401.2(1)(b) states “Application for blackout plates, collegiate plates, flying our colors plates, *personalized plates*, and special registration plates that have eligibility requirements must be submitted to the department *in a manner prescribed by the department. Unless otherwise specified*, completed applications for these plates shall be submitted to the department ...” (emphasis added). The phrases “in a manner prescribed by the department” and “unless otherwise specified” allow MVD to require personalized plate applications to be submitted online. As noted previously, personalized plates are a non-essential product that MVD is happy to continue offering in the most efficient manner possible, but no customer is ever required to obtain a personalized plate.

13. WILL THIS REDUCE PERSONALIZED PLATE ORDERS AND REVENUE?

Independent of any other factors impacting demand, MVD anticipates that few customers will be so impacted by the on-line order requirement as to decide to forego ordering a personalized plate. At least 75% of all personalized plate orders are already placed on-line, and the on-line process is more efficient for customers. The on-line ordering process will also reduce MVD costs by reducing errors and the need to issue corrected plates.