



ALBERTA
TRANSPORTATION

*Office of the Minister
Deputy Government House Leader
MLA, Calgary-Hays*

March 30, 2021

AR 84852

Ms. Paula Law
Reeve, Lacombe County
RR 3
Lacombe, AB T4L 2N3

Dear Reeve Law:

Thank you for your February 26, 2021 correspondence regarding Mandatory Entry Level Training (MELT) and the Agricultural Extension Program. As Minister of Alberta Transportation, I am able to provide the following information.

As you know, as of March 1, 2019, to get a Class 1 driver's licence in Alberta, drivers are required to take stringent new standardized driver training, and pass the MELT knowledge and road tests. The United States drove the development of MELT, forcing Alberta to adapt driver training to ensure our heavy truck drivers could cross the border. MELT is here to stay, and these new standards are the right way to go to ensure Alberta's roads are safe and heavy truck and bus drivers are properly trained. However, there were no plans in place to ensure a smooth transition and we have been working to catch-up since MELT was launched.

To support the agricultural industry's transition to MELT during the busy seeding and harvesting seasons, Alberta Transportation launched the Agricultural Extension Driver Program on February 28, 2019. This program initially gave drivers until March 1, 2020 pass the pre-existing Class 1 knowledge and road tests to get a temporary Class 1 licence, and then pass the MELT Class 1 knowledge and road tests within two attempts to keep a permanent Class 1 licence. In July 2019, our government extended the extension deadline to March 1, 2021, giving agricultural workers a full two years to pass the MELT Class 1 knowledge test. Although 2,100 applicants were approved for the agricultural extension program, fewer than 500 completed the first step to obtain a temporary Class 1 licence.

Alberta Transportation set the March 1, 2021 deadline for farmers to complete the MELT program after consultation with the agricultural industry. This date also matches the deadline in Saskatchewan and Manitoba to end their agricultural extension programs. We did not extend this extension again and the deadline has passed.

I understand that the COVID-19 pandemic presents an unprecedented challenge to commercial drivers everywhere. Although some registries and driver training facilities closed voluntarily or operated with reduced hours, exam and training services remained largely available to Albertans. We also worked quickly to adapt commercial driver tests to COVID-19 health and safety protocols, and they were the first tests to relaunch in spring 2020.

In January 2021, my department met with representatives of the agricultural industry to discuss their concerns about the pending deadline and to discuss opportunities to support extension drivers to take their MELT test before the deadline. Prior to the March 1, 2021 deadline we prioritized commercial tests over passenger tests to ensure there was no exam backlog, and reallocated driver examiners to rural locations to make as many commercial tests available as possible in rural Alberta. Alberta Transportation continues to work with industry representatives, the driver training and examination industries, and farm owners and drivers who contact us to help drivers find road tests so they can complete the program, and

explore options for driver training schools to increase instruction capacity for those drivers seeking remedial training.

If you know someone in this program who needs help booking their road tests, please have them contact my department by emailing driverexaminations@gov.ab.ca or by calling 780-427-8230 (toll-free by first dialing 310-0000).

I know that MELT is more expensive and more time consuming. To help smooth the transition to the stringent new standards, we have taken action by:

- Launching the Driving Back to Work grant program, which is now fully subscribed, covers about 90 per cent of the cost of MELT program for about 300 drivers seeking to earn their Class 1 commercial licence.
- Implementing the Experience and Equivalency Class 1 MELT Training Program, which recognizes driver experience by letting Class 3 drivers with a minimum of two years of experience the ability to take a 40-hour accelerated training program instead of the full 113-hour Class 1 MELT Program.
- Working with national partners to investigate virtual training and online training options to make MELT more accessible and less expensive.

I am also happy to report that the government has temporarily expanded eligibility to the Canada-Alberta Job Grant (CAJG) to help businesses, including farm families, access the training they need. The CAJG provides funding to eligible employers to train their current or future employees, including funding for MELT. The expanded eligibility now lets employers train employed family members, and lets eligible business owners with four employees or fewer get funding to get training themselves. The new, expanded eligibility is available until February 28, 2022. For more information on the CAJG, please visit alberta.ca/CAJG.

Despite the fact that we have taken action to make MELT more accessible, that work is not done. I know that the transition to MELT has not been easy, and I am grateful to farmers, school bus drivers, long-haul truckers, and everyone who drives a heavy truck for their patience as we implement the new training standard. MELT is the right way to go, but we are always looking for ways to improve access and lower the cost of training. Thank you for your suggestions, and I have asked the Department to carefully review each one to see if they can be built into MELT to make it more accessible to new and upgrading commercial drivers.

If you have any additional questions or concerns, please contact Mychele Joyes, Director of MELT and Licensing Standards with Alberta Transportation. Ms. Joyes can be reached toll-free at 310-0000 then 780-644-8797, or at mychele.joyes@gov.ab.ca.

Thank you for writing.

Sincerely,



Ric McIver
Minister of Transportation

cc: Honourable Jason Kenney, Premier of Alberta
Honourable Devin Dreeshen, Minister of Agriculture and Forestry
Honourable Jason Nixon, Minister of Environment and Parks
Ronald Orr, MLA for Lacombe-Ponoka
Mychele Joyes, Director of MELT and Licensing Standards, Alberta Transportation