Siam Legal International Reviews Proposed Driving License Changes for Foreign Applicants

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Siam Legal International, a full-service law firm with more than 22 years of experience in Thailand, has reviewed a draft from the Department of Land Transport (DLT) that would change how foreign nationals obtain a Thai driving license. Published on November 4, 2026, the draft sets out three changes aimed at foreign applicants, and a public consultation on the proposals will run until December 4, 2026.

The draft would amend the driving license testing and training rules introduced in 2022. Under the current rules, foreign nationals can obtain a Thai driving license without completing a training course, a written exam, or a driving test, provided they hold a valid license or an International Driving Permit (IDP) from their home country.

The first proposed change would remove that route. Foreign applicants would be required to complete the standard training and pass the required tests for both the two-year and five-year licenses, even if they already hold a valid driving license issued overseas. In practice, this would place foreign applicants under the same training and testing process that applies to first-time drivers.

The second change concerns visa validity. Applicants for the temporary two-year license would need a visa with at least two years of validity remaining. The only exemption in the draft applies to those who meet alternative conditions established by the DLT.

This requirement could make obtaining a license harder for certain groups of foreign residents. Retirees and other long-term residents who rely on one-year visa extensions would not hold a visa with two years of validity remaining, and on the current wording would only qualify if they fall within the DLT's alternative conditions.

"For many retirees and long-term residents, a Thai driving license is part of everyday life, and the two-year visa validity requirement is the change most likely to affect them," said Rex Baay, Senior Immigration Consultant and Operations Manager at Siam Legal International. "Anyone renewing their stay through a one-year extension should follow this draft closely, because the alternative conditions that could apply to them have not yet been defined."

The third change relates to where foreign applicants would take their tests. Driving schools would still be able to provide training, but they would no longer host written or practical exams for foreign applicants. Instead, applicants would sit their tests at provincial land transport offices, at branch offices, or at one of the five DLT offices in Bangkok.

Several questions remain open in the draft. While it addresses new applications, it does not state whether license renewals would be affected. It also does not cover foreign visitors who drive on an IDP without holding a Thai driving license.

The draft refers to alternative DLT conditions for the two-year visa requirement, but it does not specify what those conditions are. It is also not yet clear whether the DLT intends to provide exceptions for retirees, spouses of Thai nationals, or long-term residents, three groups for whom the visa validity rule could be most significant.

Siam Legal's Thai driving license update covers the three proposed changes, the groups most likely to be affected, and the questions the draft leaves unanswered. As the proposals remain in draft form, the final rules may differ once the public consultation closes and the DLT considers the feedback received.

Foreign nationals who already drive in Thailand, or who plan to apply for a Thai driving license in the coming months, are encouraged to monitor the draft as it progresses. Those relying on yearly visa extensions have particular reason to follow developments, as the outcome of the consultation will determine whether a two-year license remains within reach for them.

Siam Legal International is a full-service law firm with more than 20 years of experience serving foreign and Thai clients in Thailand, with offices in Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Phuket, and Pattaya. The firm provides comprehensive legal support across immigration, property transactions, business law, family law, and litigation.

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