

**2007  
International  
Taxi Conference**

**Adelaide  
March 4 - 8, 2007**

**“What  
about  
me?”**



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>NEW SOUTH WALES .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>VICTORIA.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>QUEENSLAND.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>SOUTH AUSTRALIA.....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>WESTERN AUSTRALIA .....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>NORTHERN TERRITORY.....</b>	<b>34</b>

## NEW SOUTH WALES

### General

This past year has seen a welcome return to stability in the NSW taxi industry. This is in large part due to the stable policy environment we have experienced under the direction of the Hon. John Watkins Minister for Transport and the Director-General of Transport Mr Jim Glasson. Whilst there has been a very recent change with the appointment of the Hon. Eric Roozendaal as Minister Assisting the Minister for Transport the difficulties we faced in the annual Christmas media frenzy, Minister Roozendaal demonstrated a good understanding of our industry and gave the support required to get over this difficult period.

### New Networks

Two new authorised taxi networks entered the Sydney market during the year in review. There is concern that the use of illegal trunk radios and \$1000 twelve month short term licences is not in the long term benefit of any taxi industry stakeholder, especially drivers and passengers.

Trunk radios continue to survive because they (reportedly) offer a higher level of service because they charge (illegally) more than the authorised fare. The NSW Taxi Council has requested a premium surcharge be authorised so the legitimate authorised networks are able to offer specific services required by customers at a charge commensurate with those services.

Subsidised WAT licences are only issued on a short-term basis and the operator must be able to prove that the licence is being used for the intended purpose, which is to provide services to people in wheelchairs. During the last year there have been a number of cases where the Administrative Appeals Tribunal has upheld MoT decisions to refuse to issue licences to previous WAT operators who cannot demonstrate they have been abiding by the licence conditions regarding service to passengers. The Taxi Council remains very vigilant in ensuring this remains the case and the rules are enforced on a level playing field for all in the industry.

### Taxi Task Force

Whilst the process itself has largely been completed, we are awaiting the outcomes from the final report. The Ministry has continued its consultations with industry representatives to ensure the best outcome is reached for all stakeholders and we are not expecting any unpleasant surprises.

### Wheelchair Accessible Taxi Taskforce

This process is at a similar stage to the above task force and we are awaiting a government decision on the final recommendations. We remain hopeful that one of our

key objectives will be realised and that a drop-fee will be introduced in the near future. We see this as being critical to the ongoing improvement in service for wheelchair users.

### **Safety Task Force**

Following the unfortunate death of Mr Youbert Hormozi in January, the Minister moved quickly to establish a Taxi Driver Safety Task Force led by former Assistant Police Commissioner, Mr David Madden. At the time of writing the task force has reviewed all aspects of driver safety and vehicle safety precautions and procedures that are now in place and what is currently available. With representation from the Ministry of Transport, Taxi Council, CTOA, Transport Workers Union, Taxi Drivers Association, the Police and WorkCover it is expected that where improvements can be identified then changes will be made. The Taxi Council has a long and proud history of improvements in taxi driver safety resulting in our industry being a worldwide leader. So we are confident that no serious deficiencies or weaknesses that can be practically addressed will be found. Prior to the establishment of the Task Force the Taxi Council and CTOA had agreed to the introduction of compulsory security cameras in all taxis throughout New South Wales which illustrates our ongoing commitment to safety.

### **Taxi Licence Values**

The return to a more stable environment has been reflected in the value of licenses which have returned to previous levels with prices becoming less volatile.

### **Secure Taxi Ranks**

During the year, the Ministry of Transport announced the introduction of up to 22 new secure taxi ranks to be implemented throughout the State. The NSW Taxi Council has been processing applications from both urban and country areas where networks have requested secure ranks be introduced. Secure ranks are proving to be a positive step towards taxi driver and passenger safety. It seems absolutely unfair that the transport provider must bear the costs of safety on the streets, while local councils and liquor outlets contribute nothing.

### **OHS**

Occupational Health & Safety (OHS) remains an important part of everyday taxi operation. The Taxi Council has continued its representation on WorkCovers' Industry Reference Group for the Transport and Storage industries and has been part of a working party developing a Fatigue Management Guide for these industries. The guide will act as a reference that directs people to the more detailed taxi industry specific information that has already been developed and which appears in the Taxi Operator OHS Guide that is part of the TaxiCare Plus Operators training course and which is also available from the Taxi Council website.

### **Country Taxi Driver Training**

In a major new initiative, the Taxicare Basic Taxi Driver Training Course was released in a version specifically designed for use outside the Sydney transport district. This has

been a major project and the course is made available to members of the NSWTIA and CTOA at a heavily discounted price that covers the cost of printing and distribution. This is a very valuable resource that will serve to improve the standard and in particular the consistency of training provided to taxi drivers outside Sydney.

### **Workplace Agreements**

The Taxi Council was successful in applying to become registered as a separate organisation in the Industrial Relations Commission. The Council conducted a seminar on new workplace relations laws to explain how the new laws affect employers and employees in the taxi industry and also created model Australian Workplace Agreements for taxi networks to adapt and use. A number of networks have started using the AWAs to replace the Notional Agreement Preserving a State Award that effectively replaced the previous Administrative Employees (Hire Car & Taxi) State Award when it came into effect in March 2006.

### **Fare Adjustment**

The 2006 fare increase was approved and commenced on 14th August 2006. The 4.0% increase in urban fares was adjusted downwards by I.P.A.R.T to take into account productivity gains that the Tribunal estimated were being made by taxi operators and taxi drivers. The final figure was then adjusted upwards again to take into account the delay created by the Tribunal during the review process. The Taxi Council has made two submissions to IPART arguing that using the taxi cost index model to calculate fare adjustments has more advantages than any alternative method. Furthermore we have presented evidence why if any adjustment is to be included by IPART to pass on benefits of productivity gains to consumers then the adjustment must be very conservative due to the limited scope available to taxi operators and taxi drivers to improve their productivity. These submissions are quite detailed and substantial and are available from the IPART website.

### **WAT Christmas and Easter Bonus**

Following negotiations with the Taxi Council, and in recognition of the vital job WAT drivers do in these two peak demand periods, Minister Watkins offered a \$10 incentive payment per journey for WAT drivers who provided services booked through Zero200 or authorised networks in country areas for customers in wheelchairs on Christmas Day and Easter Sunday. The success of this initiative in encouraging drivers to work on these days when demand for services is extremely high supports our argument when drivers are paid what it is worth to do the job the service is readily provided.

### **Taxi Driver of the Year**

The reintroduction of Taxi Driver of the Year Awards was a major new initiative in 2006. The awards have been an outstanding success and have been enthusiastically embraced by the public who completed and submitted about 6000 nomination forms. It was a mammoth task to process all these forms and select the final winners. We are very grateful for the judges who gave up their time to assess nominations, select and interview finalists. We are also grateful to the companies that sponsored the Awards

including Cabcharge, Sydney Airports Corporation, Zurich Financial Services, Unigas, Toga Hospitality, Legion Taxi Base, 131008 Sydway, Freedom Motors and Pigott Stinson Ratner Thom.

The gala award presentation dinner was attended by over 300 guests and despite being given the extra Police portfolio, Deputy Premier, Minister for Transport and Minister for Police, the Hon John Watkins found time in his busy schedule to attend the evening and announce the winners and present the awards

### **Kerbside Access for Taxi Drivers**

Following intense lobbying, the NSW Taxi Council has secured extra kerbside space to allow taxi drivers to drop and pick up passengers. No Stopping – Taxis exempt 1 minute, signs are being erected in the Sydney CBD and hopefully will be rolled out across the state in the near future. We thank Minister Roozendaal and Cr McInerny of the Sydney City Council for their valuable support. Other initiatives including the use of Mail zones are under consideration

### **Council Cab**

The Taxi Council was able to negotiate a trial for taxis to provide demand-responsive flexible local transport for Willoughby City Council. The trial has been running for a few months and is proving to be a cost-effective way for local councils or other agencies that want to provide transport solutions to purchase services on behalf of customers and offer the service through a voucher scheme. The concept relies on Willoughby City Council hiring taxis during quiet times of the day to pick up and drop off passengers on runs that are pre-arranged the day before travel. The City Council recoups some of the cost by issuing fixed price vouchers that people redeem when they use the service. The taxi driver is guaranteed a fixed hourly rate or the metered fare for the journey depending on which is the most economical solution to match passenger demand.

### **Toyota Prius**

The trial of the Toyota Prius hybrid vehicle as a taxi has produced very good results during the first 12 months. Passengers love to ride in the vehicle which means it is very popular with drivers as well. The fuel economy of the vehicle is excellent at about 5.6 litres per 100 km. The Ministry of transport has approved a further twelve month trial.

### **Elections**

NSWTIA Directors John Bowe, Charlie Stanbridge, Richard Garvey, and John Mares were all re-elected unopposed.

---

## VICTORIA

### Country Taxi Review

Based on the results of operator surveys, case studies and financial modelling, the Country Taxi Review Working Group (WG) made ten recommendations to government.

These recommendations were reviewed by the Department of Infrastructure (DOI).

On 25 May 2006, the Minister for Transport announced measures to address issues of concern for country taxi operators.

#### ***Hours of Operation 24/7 – DOI supports this recommendation***

The WG recommended a default requirement that taxis provide a service 24/7, but the Victorian Taxi Directorate (VTD) welcome operators to apply for more limited operating hours. The WG envisaged that operating hours be set to meet local requirements. It was also recommended that the VTD develop a simple procedure to encourage and assist operators to apply for limited operating hours.

#### ***Fare Flexibility - DOI supports this recommendation***

The WG recommended that all country taxi licence conditions be amended to allow operators or depots to negotiate fares for either contracted services or permanent bookings. In the absence of any agreement the existing fare structure shall apply, including all hails, off-rank hires, and telephone bookings.

The introduction of flexible fare provisions will require cooperation between the depot, operator and driver in considering how agreements including bailment agreements are managed.

#### ***WAT Provision***

*DOI supports the recommendation to conduct an industry review on booking and pick-up fees*

*DOI supports the recommendation to establish a \$3M WAT purchase subsidy fund*

The WG believed that booking and pick-up fees in the country would have limited impact in improving the financial viability of small operators. However, the WG noted that there is a case to address the disparity in treatment of metropolitan and country and recommended that a whole-of-industry review be undertaken.

The WG believed that practical support can be given to small operators by implementing a WAT purchase subsidy. An up-front tied grant of up to \$40,000 (the difference between a conventional taxi and a WAT) would equalise the purchase cost of a WAT with that of a conventional taxi. Operators are expected to bear the on-going costs of operations for the WAT.

The WG recommended that the Government establish a vehicle purchase subsidy fund (i.e. a Tied Grant) for application by country operators. The subsidy provided to operators will be an amount to fund the difference in capital purchase cost between



conventional taxis and WAT's. Applications will be assessed on the basis of community need and the operator's financial capacity.

**Licence Fees and Charges**

*DOI partially supports this recommendation – DOI supports reducing licence fees for towns with up to 9 taxis. Because a survey is currently underway to assess the viability of operators in towns with 10 or more taxis, the DOI will reserve its position for more than 9 taxis.*

The WG recommended a reduction in current licence and administration fees for licensed areas with 0 to 19 taxis as shown in the following table.

**Current vs WG Recommended Fee Structure**

Taxis in Area	Conventional Taxi		WAT		Admin Fee	
	Current	Proposed	Current	Proposed	Current	Proposed
10 – 19	\$3,200	\$3,200	\$1,600	\$800	\$444	\$222
5 – 9	\$2,500	\$500	\$1,250	\$100	\$444	\$44
1 – 4	\$2,000	\$500	\$1,000	\$100	\$444	\$44
0	\$1,000	\$500	\$500	\$100	\$444	\$44

Under the above cost structure, the Government is able to effectively tailor its solution to smaller country operators. The reduction in licence and administration fee revenue to the Government is estimated at \$150,000. Whilst this may appear small, it represents a significant saving for individual small operators given the size of their returns.

**Multi Purpose Taxi Program (MPTP)**

*DOI does not support the recommendation on introducing an assistance scheme similar to the MPTP*

*DOI does not support the recommendation to use of MPTP in other Government funded programs*

*DOI supports the recommendation on maintaining the current MPTP application form*

*DOI does not support the recommendation on increasing the trip cap*

The WG recommended that DOI in conjunction with other government departments, develop an assistance scheme for taxi users (similar to the MPTP) in locations without local public transport services. It was envisaged that this scheme be available to users who would otherwise have access to transport concessions if public transport was available.

The WG supported the current MPTP application process and believes that the information requested is consistent with the need to assess the applicant's eligibility for assistance through the MPTP.

The WG believed that whilst the current cap is appropriate for most MPTP users, some flexibility could be provided to cater for those who make trips that are not fully covered by the subsidy. A solution could be to allow those under special

circumstances to apply for an increase to their trip cap. However, the administration effort to manage a variety of caps makes this option impractical.

The WG recommended that the MPTP trip cap be increased from \$60 to \$100 (full fare) per trip; that is a maximum subsidy of \$50/trip

The WG noted that the Government recognises the need to provide financial support for community transport services. Most recently this was included as part of the Government's *Fairer Victoria* statement. Under *Strategy 12: Building Stronger Communities*, the Government has committed to providing more community buses.

Rather than provide this support on an ad hoc basis through provision of vehicles, the WG believed a more effective mechanism would be to widen the application of the MPTP to allow its use in conjunction with other Government programs. Whilst these arrangements are not expected to take effect on current community transport services until the vehicles are replaced, the Working Group believed that the additional funding for vehicle procurement should be directed to procuring taxi services.

The WG believed that it is generally more cost effective to procure taxi services when providing community transport and recommended allowing the MPTP to be used in conjunction with other Government funded programs.

***Operator and Driver Up-skilling – DOI supports this recommendation***

Given the importance of taxi services to country Victoria, the WG supports any actions that will improve the industry. The WG therefore recommended that DOI in conjunction with the VTA, work with the taxi industry to identify and establish an appropriate training and education program for country taxi operators (e.g. business management, legal requirements, finance). The WG estimated the cost of the program to be approximately \$200,000.

***Community / Agency Transport Opportunities***

*DOI supports the recommendation on developing consistent approaches for procurement of Government funded community transport*

*DOI supports the recommendation on developing training material that encourages the use of taxi services among community groups*

The WG recommended that DOI in conjunction with other Government departments such as DHS, DOE and DVC, lead the development of consistent approaches in the procurement and brokering of Government funded community transport, focusing on provision of service rather than purchase of vehicles. DOI should also establish principles for and encourage the use of taxis to provide community and public transport in situations where taxis provide a "value for money" option.

Consultation with taxi industry stakeholders also revealed the need for local knowledge since user needs can vary across communities. Whilst it is advantageous to centralise the procurement and contracting of taxi services, any decision made by DOI will require prior involvement from local communities/agencies that are transport providers. To this end, some form of training will be required, in particular to clarify the misconceptions on the taxi industry. Further information on the DOI's procurement

processes will also be required given the need for input from these parties during procurement/contracting.

The WG recommended that the VTD in conjunction with the VTA, develop a range of training material and programs that encourage and promote the use of taxis amongst community groups and agencies. The WG estimated the cost of the training program to be approximately \$100,000.

***Roadworthy Tests - DOI supports this recommendation***

The WG considered mobile testing services for those operators located a significant distance (say 60km) from a licensed taxi tester. There are currently two mobile testing services but these focus on testing buses, however they could also be used for testing taxis.

It is acknowledged that this regime is not currently practicable, given the requirement for re-inspections within 7 days of a failed test and the long distances involved for either the operator or tester. The 'problem' of re-testing has been resolved for buses by allowing operators to complete a self-declaration that all identified defects have been rectified.

The WG recommended that the VTD investigate the feasibility for mobile testing of taxis for operations beyond 60km of licensed testers. Subject to provision of this service at competitive rates, removal of existing exemptions for comprehensive testing can be considered.

***Vehicle Standards - DOI supports this recommendation***

The WG considered changes to the existing vehicle standards, however it did not seem a compelling reason for change. In most cases the potential financial benefit to operators is modest. On the other hand the WG supports the principle of presenting a uniform taxi identity across the State and ensuring that all vehicles comply with minimum standards of comfort and safety.

The WG recommended maintaining current vehicle standards for livery and vehicle age. It is also recommended that the VTD increase awareness amongst operators of the option to extend vehicle age limits on application (subject to vehicle condition meeting VicRoads and DOI service delivery standards).

***Advertising - DOI does not support the recommendation that the advertising policy be reviewed***

The growth in the number and usage of taxis and the introduction of premium service taxis suggests there is demand for higher quality services. Maintaining minimum standards for the industry is therefore important.

The WG believed there is a case to allow advertising on taxis while complying with minimum standards to maintain the image of the industry. It therefore recommended that the current advertising policy be reviewed and that the VTD increase awareness as to what is allowed to be displayed – internally and externally of taxis.

The Country Taxi Review report and DOI response to the Working Group recommendations is available on DOI website [www.taxi.vic.gov.au](http://www.taxi.vic.gov.au).

### **Fare Review**

In accordance with a decision taken by the Minister for Transport in 2005, taxi fares would be adjusted in 2006 and 2007 in accordance with the CPI-1 model.

This resulted in a fare increase of 3 percent, effective 23 September 2006.

### **Flexible Transport Solutions**

In May 2006 the Victorian Government released its \$10.5 billion Transport and Liveability Statement - Meeting our Transport Challenges.

As part of this statement, the government allocated \$18.3 million over four years towards the Flexible Transport Solutions initiative, which was formally called the Transport Connections program and includes two core components:

- A significant expansion of the Transport Connections Program; and
- Funding for new, low-cost services and projects identified by local communities.

Transport Connections (\$14.15 million over 4 years)

The Transport Connections Program assists communities across the state to develop and oversee local transport solutions to meet local needs. The program was developed in close consultation with community organisations, transport providers and peak bodies.

Nine projects were supported as part of a successful three-year pilot program. From 2006/2007 the Government will expand the program to support up to 30 projects across Victoria. These will be predominantly in regional, rural and outer urban municipalities to deliver access and mobility options for transport disadvantaged individuals and isolated communities. Projects will focus on better using and coordinating existing transport resources, such as public transport, school buses, community vehicles, taxis and volunteer drivers.

Funding will be awarded to community-initiated partnerships through a competitive grant application process. Evaluation of the pilot programs has shown that most successful projects are approximately one to three local government areas in size and have the involvement of local government.

Existing Transport Connections projects are eligible to re-apply for funding, either in their current or modified form. Existing projects were provided with transition funding up until the finalisation of the first funding round.

From 1 July 2006, the Transport Connections Program is managed by the Department for Victorian Communities (DVC), in close collaboration with other State Government departments, including DHS, DOI and DOE.

New services and projects (\$4.19 million over 4 years)

A Flexible Transport Solutions fund will be established to assist in the delivery of local transport initiatives across the State.

All communities (regardless of whether a Transport Connections project is involved) will be eligible to apply for small funding allocations to trial or implement new, low-cost transport services or projects. This could include support for project development activities, or minor capital works to improve local access and mobility. This initiative will be managed by the DOI, in close collaboration with other State Government departments.

Further Information Transport Connections please go to the website [www.dhs.vic.gov.au/pdpd/transportconnections](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/pdpd/transportconnections)

### **Taxi Industry Training Victoria (TITV)**

Following on from the success of the launch in Geelong in May, Taxi Industry Training Victoria (TITV), the wholly owned training subsidiary of the VTA, launched the Course in Wheelchair Accessible Taxi Services (WATS) in Melbourne on 13 July 2006.

The objectives of the Course in Wheelchair Accessible Taxi Services (21402VIC) are to prepare Victorian taxi drivers to meet the knowledge and skill requirements for:

- operating wheelchair accessible taxis, and
- providing for the transport of people with disabilities

All drivers of metropolitan wheelchair accessible taxis had to complete at least the major element of this course (assist passengers into and out of a vehicle) by 15 December 2006. This includes loading and unloading a person in a wheelchair into and out of a WAT and ensuring they are secured safely.

Drivers must successfully complete the entire course (five elements in total) by 30 November 2007. After these respective dates, it will be a breach of licence conditions for a driver who has not completed the required elements of the training course to drive a WAT, regardless of whether or not the WAT is carrying a passenger who is in a wheelchair.

During the year TITV continued to operate its driver and operator training programs.

### **New Training Resource for VIC Drivers**

The VTA received funding approval from the Department of Education Science & Training to develop new training resources for Victorian taxi drivers.

The project involved the development of a CD Rom with accompanying workbook that assists taxi drivers (new and current) developing their listening, speaking and writing skills.

This resource aims to assist new taxi industry entrants, most of whom are from non-English speaking backgrounds, with the knowledge to carry out the important transport and service task of taxi driving.

The CD-Rom and Workbook is due for release early 2007.

### **BSX**

The BSX taxi-cab licence transfer and assignment system commenced operation on 28 March 2006. The functions of BSX include the provision and management of the BSX Taxi Market and the licensing, training and monitoring of taxi licence brokers.

Effective from 28 March 2006:

- Metropolitan Taxi-Cab Licences must be traded in accordance with a specified system under the Trading Regulations; and
- The BSX Taxi Market System will be the only specified system under the Trading Regulations.

### **Strategic Transport Planning**

The VTA continued to be involved in a number of strategic transport planning forums at State and Local Government levels, the objective being to provide a “taxi” perspective to future transport mobility options.

An example of VTA involvement is the Victorian Road Based Public Transport Advisory Council. This Ministerial Council provides a broadly based forum for obtaining views and advice from the transport sector on issues affecting the effective integration of the needs of road based public transport and the management of the road and traffic system in Victoria.

Its role is to provide advice to the Minister for Transport on the needs of public transport in the development, planning, programming, regulation, management, operation and design of the road and traffic network in Victoria and with particular reference to:

- State Government strategies for planning and transport
- Road transport efficiency and road safety
- Community and environmental issues
- Service performance standards for road based public transport
- International best practice for road management and the public transport that uses them.

The Council may draw on various sources so that advice reflects consideration of a broad range of interests to stakeholders with an interest in road based public transport.

It takes both a state-wide and metropolitan view on strategic issues of relevance to the effective integration of the needs of public transport including taxi services and the design and management of the road and traffic network.

Guidelines for taxi ranks, relationships with other public transport providers, traffic priorities for taxis, access for people with disabilities are some examples of issues raised at this forum.

### ***Event Planning and Operation***

The VTA continued its representation on key event transport planning and operational committees, including MCG special events, Australian F1 Grand Prix, Melbourne Safe City, Flemington Spring Racing Carnival, Caulfield Spring Racing Carnival, and Commonwealth Games.

The VTA provided advice to venue operators on the operation of taxis and the placement of taxi ranks. This is in line with the VTA's greatly expanded role and participation in matters of land use and special event and venue planning, and assists in bringing taxi services to the public.

In addition, the VTA arranged for taxi rank supervision at the Caulfield and Flemington Spring Racing carnivals, and the Australian Tennis Open.

The VTA was also contracted by Tennis Australia to appraise the driving skills and knowledge of the courtesy car drivers for the 2006 Australian Open championships.

### **Infrastructure and Transport Planning**

The VTA continues to be consulted by Councils, throughout Victoria and the Melbourne CBD, on taxi rank siting and design.

### **Commonwealth Games**

The net effect of Melbourne's 2006 Commonwealth Games upon taxi business was to maintain the status quo. The loss of business caused by the imposition of school recess for the entire games period was balanced by the additional Games taxi demand.

Whilst not always translating into increased taxi business, this, like many other traffic management planning activities undertaken by the VTA in respect of major events and iconic venues, is regarded by Government and event/venue organizers as critical to every successful outcome.

### **Committees**

The VTA was involved in a wide range of operational and planning committees and consultative groups, including:

- The NCPR Implementation Group
- Melbourne Transport Committee
- Road Users Collaborative
- The Road Based Public Transport Advisory Council
- Melbourne Airport Taxi Consultative Committee

- Melbourne Docklands Chamber of Commerce
- Guide Dogs Association
- VicRoads Regional Reference Groups
- VicRoads Driving with Trams Group
- Local Governments (various), Transport Focus & Integrated Transport Strategy Groups
- Westgate Bridge Suicide Prevention Committee
- Victoria Police, Traffic Management Units Briefings
- Local Police Consultative Group, Building and Estate Security
- Multiple Specific Issue Reference Groups.

### ***The Year Ahead***

Looking ahead to 2007, there are important issues to be addressed, including:

- Taxi driver safety
  - Implementation of the outcomes of the country taxi review
  - Tolling systems
  - Accreditation of drivers, operators, licence holders and networks
  - Expansion of the Transport Connections program
  - Fares setting model
  - DDA standards
  - WAT driver training
  - MPTP depot support
-



## AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

### Canberra Taxi Industry Association

The Canberra Taxi Proprietors' Association has changed its name. It is now known as the Canberra Taxi Industry Association to better reflect the new structure of the industry. Now that around 70% of operators are non-owners of taxis it is appropriate that their opinions are heard and promoted by the industry body. Each fleet that operates in the Aerial Consolidated Transport network is represented by an operators committee. It is intended that some directors of the CTIA will be drawn from these committees.

### Licence releases

Network accreditation standards state, among other things, that failure by a network to meet minimum service standards may indicate insufficient licences are available for the task.

In late 2005, after failing to meet off-peak service delivery standards for a period, the board of Aerial decided, although not unanimously, that the release of a small number of extra taxi licences might help improve service delivery.

Subsequently, the CTPA approached the Minister and asked for the release by tender or by auction of an extra thirteen licences. Eight were to replace the twelve wheelchair accessible licences that had been surrendered at that time (three WATs do the work equivalent of two standard taxis) and, it was suggested, the extra five could make an incremental difference.

In the first quarter of 2006, the Minister announced that his department would release forty leased taxi licences (4 X 10) over the next four years, depending on demand for inclusion in a ballot.

Entries into the first ballot, held in May, numbered around one hundred and twenty, many of which were a part of family groupings (one person is known to have had nine names entered on his own behalf). This was taken to indicate that the demand for extra licences was high enough to necessitate another ballot which again was entered in the same spirit.

This ballot was held in August.

The release of the first ten saw a temporary improvement in service delivery levels and the release of half of the second ten saw a return to the previous levels.

A concern of the CTIA prior to the release was that the effectiveness of extra cabs could be adversely influenced by a shortage of drivers. Although it might be considered too early to make a judgement the concern appears to have been justified as there is already some evidence that there is less double shifting and drivers are working only when it is busy. Peak time service levels are very good, but it is in the off-peak times that

levels are lower. This tends to indicate that extra taxi licences are not always the way to improve services.

### **ASR**

The introduction of new call taking technology by Aerial Consolidated Transport during the year did cause some controversy and media outlets which could have been quite helpful chose (quite understandably) to “stir the pot”.

In 2005, the average waiting time for callers grew to around eighteen minutes, unacceptable by any standards, especially to Aerial, and so public perception and criticism of the taxi service reached unprecedented levels.

The two main reasons for the growth in waiting times would be familiar to all operators of call centres. One is the cost of engaging and difficulties in managing the shifts of call takers in an environment of highly fluctuating demand; and the other is the difficulty of obtaining call centre staff.

To address this problem, Aerial placed an order for a speech recognition system which it hoped might handle up to 50% of all calls. Public pressure and threats of fines from the Minister for failure to answer all calls within two minutes resulted in Aerial being forced to switch on the new system before it would have otherwise done. This has resulted in 99.2% of calls being answered within one minute, and 75% of all calls going through with no assistance from a call taker. Unfortunately, technical problems around the interfacing of the new system with the dispatch system caused some trip details to disappear; and adjustments to the recognition system had to be made on the run rather than before switch-on.

Unhappiness with the previously unacceptable waiting times, the above mentioned technical problems (now fixed) and a mainly antagonistic media, resulted to some extent in reluctance by clients to be patient enough to listen to instructions or hear of any of the benefits the system would provide.

The less than perfect introduction of the new system led to further belligerence from the Minister and some members of the bureaucracy.

Drivers were also affected by the change and found it difficult to sell the idea to any clients who had experienced difficulties.

Upgrades and education have helped improve public perception, but unfortunately, the relationship with the Minister for Territories and Municipal Services has been strained to the point where he has threatened to release the balance of the proposed forty taxis “in the new year”, a clearly unhelpful “solution”.

In spite of this, Aerial is very confident its automated speech recognition system will be solidly embraced by its clientele in the near future. Internet and SMS bookings are increasing, and upgrades in the new year will allow for a much more personalised service to regular clients (including mobile phone users), and an easier to understand set of instructions for non-regulars.

### **WAT Services and a New Taxi Company**

According to waiting time statistics service to wheelchair bound passengers during 2006 did not appear to improve. However there were very few complaints about the service. It has been estimated that up to 60% of WAT work does not go through the network although drivers are ostensibly required to channel all their private bookings through the network so that service delivery might be measured. The upshot of this is that private bookings seem to be attended to in a satisfactory manner whilst those who call the network directly are left dependent upon co-operation of drivers who may be on private hirings or chose to ignore the trip because it's too far away, it would interfere with a "run", or is known to be a short trip.

To make the issue more complicated, thirteen of the eighteen remaining WATs are controlled by two operators who have indicated they will establish a rival network to Aerial and use the promise of better service to wheelchair bound passengers. It has been difficult to gauge the contribution to the service made by the vehicles under the control of these operators, but it has been easy for antagonists to lay any blame for shortcomings at the feet of Aerial.

From what is known of the plans of the proposed new company, the WAT service will be the core of the business and any operators who might be convinced to switch allegiance from Aerial will make up the remainder of the fleet.

It will be interesting to see if many are attracted to the proposed venture, particularly when the fleet would likely be seen by many as simply a WAT service running the type of vehicle that many callers reject in advance or simply by-pass on taxi ranks.

Over the past few years, Aerial has been most unhappy with the statistics which reflect poor WAT service but has been unable to convince the bureaucracy to allow it to implement changes which it feels will improve the situation and make performance easier to measure.

Of grave concern is the prospect that should the new company actually launch, and then fail, those facing the greatest hardship would be the people with disabilities.

Additionally, there is concern that as some of the WATs are nearing their age limit, a number of operators will feel disinclined to spend upwards of \$85,000 each to replace and refit them; and given the survival record of WAT operators, it may be difficult to find replacement operators.

### **Discrimination Case**

In October, Aerial Consolidated Transport faced the Australian Capital Territory Discrimination Tribunal to answer a complaint that in July 2004 it had discriminated against a wheelchair-bound passenger "... in not providing him with the same service provided to citizens with no disabilities".

It was claimed that the company had discriminated against the passenger because of his disability. The Deputy President of the tribunal ruled, "The tribunal is not satisfied ... that the complainant's complaints have been substantiated".

The complaint arose from the length of time it took the network to obtain a WAT to attend to the client who rang for a taxi at 12:25AM on a Sunday and who did not get picked up until 1:55AM (the trip was a 1km trip on the outskirts of Canberra).

The Deputy President made his ruling on 2nd November 2006. He was critical of the drivers who had failed to respond, especially the driver who had refused the trip and then switched off his radio so he could not be contacted again.

He commented on the culture that apparently exists among WAT drivers that they are immune from action by the Department to which trip refusals are referred by the Company. One condition of the WAT licence is that priority must be given to wheelchair-bound clients.

[The approach of 31/12/07 and the application of the federal Disability Discrimination Act could see the emergence of many more difficult matters. Unless the authorities properly face up to their responsibilities towards people with disabilities and implement a fare structure that makes WAT work as attractive on the whole as standard taxi work, it might be impossible to obtain any drivers or any operators for WATs.]

Details of the matter may be viewed on the Aerial Consolidated Transport website.

### **Shuttle Buses**

Last year it was reported that Aerial had introduced a shuttle service into areas of high peak period demand, that the shuttles were to be used for charter work during the off-peak periods, and that hopefully shuttle work from the Canberra airport would eventuate. It was also hoped that the buses would be able to be used in a demand responsive transport scheme.

The peak hour service was unable to be sustained for a number of reasons, one being the need to keep receptionists at hotels enthused.

The local bus network, ACTION, did commence a demand responsive transport program and it was felt at one time that conditions for a DRT licence were designed to keep Aerial out so that ACTION could have a clear run. That may or may not have been the case, but ACTION ceased the service not long after it started.

Aerial has found it hard to entertain the idea of a future foray into DRT as one of the requirements now is that all buses should be wheelchair accessible. This injects a serious cost element which would strongly deter any prospective participants in such a business.

Meanwhile, Aerial still uses the buses for shuttle work and departmental staff transfers.



### **Passenger Transport Industry Alliance**

At the instigation of Mr Mark Bramston, CEO of Aerial, the taxi industry has taken the lead in establishing a body called the Passenger Transport Industry Alliance.

The PTIA is still in the formative stage, and preliminary meetings have been chaired by Prof Des Nicholls of the Australian National University.

It is envisaged that the PTIA will present a common voice for all types of ground transport that are involved in moving people. Attendees have represented taxis, hire cars, bus operators, tourist operators, and charter operators from all over the capital region (including Yass and Bungendore).

The idea behind the scheme is that the various modes of transport do not compete against each other, so much as compliment each other and can provide each other with opportunities to develop new markets; and that a united approach to government, and others for the provision of facilities and general assistance is better than a fragmented approach.

### **Elite and Silver Service**

During the past year, Aerial's Elite and Silver Service fleets have done very well.

The Elite fleet has grown by 50% and now numbers one quarter of the fleet whilst the Silver Service fleet has shown the biggest workload gain.

Elite cars are standard sized taxis with a more refined livery than a standard taxi. The drivers wear a different uniform than Canberra Cabs drivers and are obliged to accept work when asked by the dispatcher. The Elite operators' committee have established a system of driver rewards and have been building customer loyalty.

The Silver service fleet is due to grow from six to ten in the New Year.

### **MTData**

During 2006, Aerial has been preparing for the introduction of a completely new dispatch system called MTData.

One hundred and forty standard taxis have been wired for the new system and operators of seventy more have made applications to have the new system fitted.

The system is expected to be switched on the weekend 17th-18th February and promises to take its users into a new era.

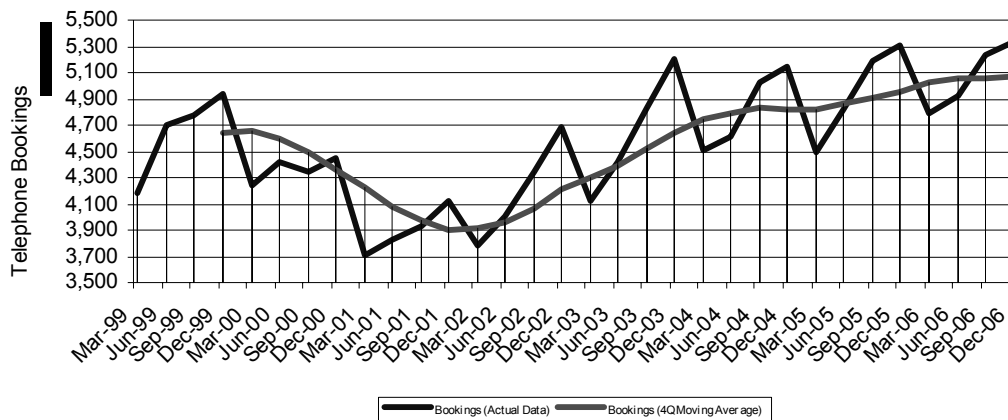
---

## QUEENSLAND

### Introduction

The 2006 year was another good one for the Queensland taxi industry with demand for services remaining buoyant and a number of new initiatives successfully introduced. However, it was not all plain sailing with record low levels for unemployment in the wider economy continuing to make it difficult to source and retain quality long term taxi drivers. Similarly, there were a few decisions, or indecisions, of the Government that gave reason for some concern.

Actual Data & Moving Average  
QLD Taxi Telephone Bookings per Quarter



Disappointingly for the Taxi Council, there was little “progress” made in regard to finalising the National Competition Reform (NCP) process or an acceptable Taxi Industry Code of Practice (CoP) and associated Model Standard Bailment Agreement (MSBA). However, notwithstanding these disappointments, pleasing outcomes were achieved in regard to a range of security issues including cameras in taxis and supervision at taxi ranks.

Overall then, 2006 was another year in which the Queensland Taxi Industry continued to deliver a world class product in terms of technological innovation, quality of service, value for money, and safety.

This report discusses the following strategic issues in turn –

- National Competition Policy;
- Industry Code of Practice;
- Taxi Industry Health & Safety Committee ;
- Wheelchair Accessible Services;
- Secure Ranks;

- Security Cameras;
- Accident Watch Task Force;
- Taxi Fares Review;

### **National Competition Policy**

The National Competition Policy (NCP) Review of the Transport Operations (Passenger Transport) Act commenced in December 1998 and culminated in a report that was released in September 2000. As noted in last year's report, pleasingly, the review committee and the State Government agreed with the Taxi Council's position that there was a substantial public benefit delivered to Queenslanders from regulating taxi services. While this was a good result for the industry, it then took the Government 3 years (i.e. until 31 August 2003), to commit to actioning the recommendations contained in the report. Unfortunately, similar to 2005 there was little perceptible progress made in 2006.

The NCP reform process remains something of a mixed bag. The Taxi Council generally supports (subject to certain caveats) the following initiatives –

- establishing a Queensland Passenger Transport Council (QPTC);
- developing a Taxi Customer Charter and a Guide for Limousine Users;
- creating a head of power in legislation for QT to conduct taxi industry related trials;
- improvements in Taxi Driver Training;
- continuing the moratorium on the sale of limousine licences;
- introducing OA for Taxi Booking Companies;
- introducing stricter "pre-booking" requirements for limousines; and
- introducing a requirement for Booking Companies to develop and implement Peak Demand Management Plans;

However there were, and remain, some objectionable proposals from QT, that the Taxi Council continues to vigorously oppose, namely -

- introducing certain very modest new vehicles and age limits for limousines;
- introducing a new class of limousine called a Special Purpose Limousines (SPL);
- increasing the severity of penalties to apply to breaches of Service Contracts;
- introducing Chain of Responsibility type legislation to Booking Companies and taxi operators;
- introducing (or retaining) a discretion for QT to establish Limousine Ranks at peak times;
- introducing a new category of part-time taxi to operate during peak times.

The Taxi Council will need to continue actively lobbying the Government on each of these issues in 2007 in order to secure the best possible outcome for the industry across the whole NCP agenda.

### **Taxi Industry Code of Practice**

In the early part of 2004, the Taxi Council worked with the State Government to produce the first drafts of a Model Standard Bailment Agreement (MSBA) and a Taxi Industry Code of Practice (CoP). These documents were further refined over the next 12-18 months and by June 2005 had received effective sign-off from the Committee tasked with their development.

Unfortunately though, somewhere in the remainder of 2005 or early 2006 QT curiously took the decision to unilaterally redraft the dispute resolution clauses of both the CoP and MSBA documents. Of great concern to the Taxi Council, QT weakened the obligation on parties to a bailment agreement to resolve disputes through conciliation and / or mediation. Also, it expanded the role for Queensland Industrial Relations Commission (QIRC) commissioners to act as arbiters in disputes. This was an extraordinary action for QT to take, given that it was completely at odds with previous understandings negotiated with both the Minister for Industrial Relations and the Deputy Premier (of the time). It also appeared as though unusual effort was made to seemingly hide the redrafting from the Taxi Council, as well as other government and non-government members of the Code of Practice Committee.

It will be a priority in 2007 for the Taxi Council to oppose QT's redrafted elements of the CoP and MSBA. We will also need to work hard to ensure that the enacting legislation and / or regulation are drafted in a balanced way so that the commerciality of taxi bailment relations is not placed in jeopardy by the philosophical prejudices of certain parties.

### **Taxi Industry Health & Safety Committee**

The Taxi Council continued to participate in the Government's Taxi Industry Health & Safety Committee during 2006. While the Committee met somewhat more regularly last year than previous years, it was no more effective in progressing any of the matters referred to it by a Review of Taxi Driver Working Conditions that dates back to 2001.

The Taxi Council believes that there is an ongoing need to review, and where possible, improve the health and safety of taxi operations and services in Queensland. The Taxi Council will be continuing its call for QT to greatly lift its performance and properly resource the work of the Taxi Health & Safety Committee in 2007.

### **Wheelchair Accessible Services**

Under mounting pressure from the Taxi Council to address the targets contained in the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport (DSAPT), QT established a DDA Reference Group in 2005 comprising a range of stakeholder representatives (from both government and non-government sources). However, similar to QT's Taxi Health & Safety Committee, 2006 was a year of underachievement for the DDA Reference Group. Despite much discussion of the problem(s), there was little progress of tangible deliverables other than an unfunded draft skeleton action plan developed at the end of the year.

During 2006, both through the DDA Reference Group and its other representations, the Council continued its lobbying for the following initiatives to be trialled –

- a Passenger Assistance Fee (\$5 + GST payable to the driver for each pick-up);
- a Run to Customer Fee (payable for each job where the WAT runs “x” km to the customer for a short fare);
- new / different accessible vehicles (e.g. accessible People Mover vehicles); and
- strengthened measures for ensuring WATs preference wheelchair work (e.g. monthly job targets, a requirement for WATs to be “logged on” at all times when plying for hire).

In June 2006, the Taxi Council brought together a broad range of stakeholders for a day to workshop issues associated with meeting the DSAPT targets. It proved to be a very worthwhile exercise and in large measure reaffirmed the Council’s position that no “silver bullet” would solve the problem. To the contrary, a range of measures would need to be implemented that fairly rewarded good WAT drivers, exposed and deterred errant WAT driver behaviour, and explored / harnessed new despatching and vehicle technology.

Notwithstanding the lack of genuine progress by the DDA Reference Group, the Council will continue to work with QT on improving accessible services throughout 2007. We were encouraged by Minister Lucas’ attendance at the June 2006 DDA Reference Group meeting and are hopeful that this may ultimately prove to be the catalyst for transforming the group’s mindset towards a more action / results orientation.

### **Secure Ranks**

In November 2004 the Taxi Council, with funding support from the Brisbane City Council (BCC), commenced a large scale trial directed to improving safety for taxi drivers and customers on Friday and Saturday nights. The initiative involved deploying a security officer and a rank marshal on each of 6 taxi ranks in the Brisbane CBD and Fortitude Valley precincts. The trial proved to be immediately successful and subsequently was one of the key components of Premier Beattie’s 17 point City Safe Plan announced 1 March 2005.

In late 2005, QT took over responsibility for funding from BCC and continued in that role throughout 2006. The secure rank program was also expanded to include a 7th conventional rank in the Caxton St precinct plus 4 dedicated Nightlink ranks. The Nightlink services off these ranks are an innovative hybrid arrangement that combines the fixed fare, share riding attributes of a bus service with the on-demand (non-scheduled, non-fixed route), rank to door attributes of a taxi service. Notwithstanding some initial teething problems associated with the pricing of the product and low taxi occupancy rates, with improved marketing and customer understanding the Nightlink services successfully found a niche in the Friday / Saturday night passenger transport market during 2006.

The Taxi Council was a key member of the Government's City Safe Taskforce in 2005/06 and we expect to continue working with the Government in 2007 on further initiatives that improve the safety of late night taxi services for drivers and passengers.

### **Security Cameras**

The Taxi Council's position on taxi security camera systems has been consistent and simple. Namely, the Government should –

1. mandate security camera systems in taxis wherever it can be demonstrated that they will viably make a material improvement to the safe operation of a taxi workplace, and
2. fund their subsequent introduction from monies the Government receives from selling taxi licences.

Pleasingly, the Government accepted the Taxi Council's position, and following an exhaustive tendering process in the first half of 2005, QT entered into a contract with VerifEye Australia for a bulk purchase of security cameras (including installation). Subsequently, the rollout of cameras commenced in October 2005 and was virtually complete by 31 December 2006.

The VerifEye product is state of the art for taxi security camera systems and represents both a welcome and commendable investment by the Government in the safety of our industry.

In 2007, the key remaining issues for the Council will be monitoring –

1. the reliability of the hardware;
2. response times and charges for repair / servicing; and
3. the extension of the Government's funding offer to small regional taxi licence owners as per its September 2006 election commitment.

### **Accident Watch Taskforce (AWTF)**

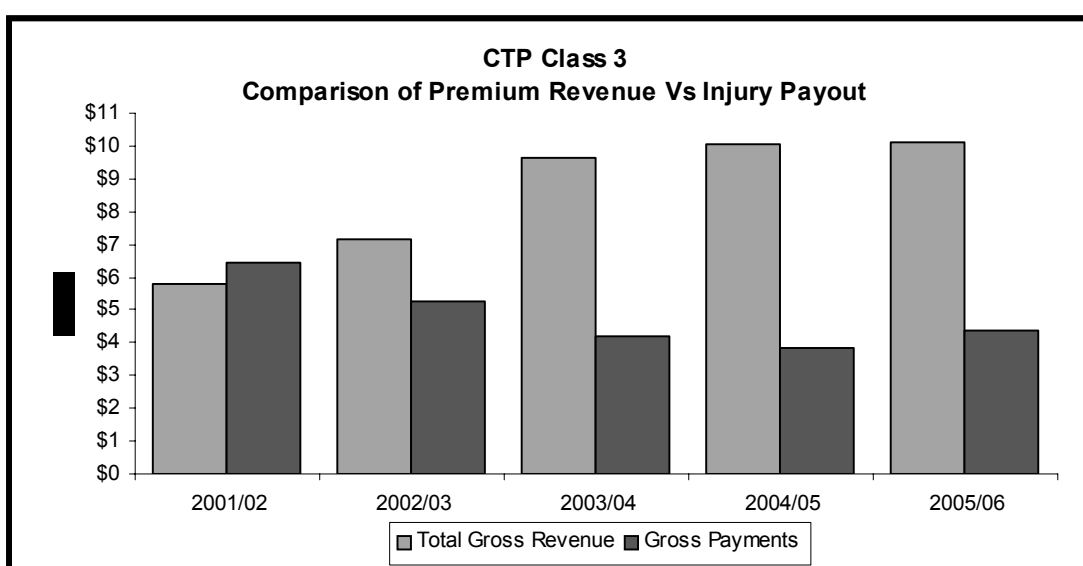
In 2002, the Taxi Council established the Accident Watch Taskforce (AWTF) to address the looming prospect of escalating compulsory third party (CTP) insurance premiums for taxis. We did this with the help and support of members paying a \$100 levy per taxi licence.

The aims of the AWTF were always simple. It was charged with developing and implementing initiatives that would lead to reductions in –

1. the number of at-fault crashes involving taxis;
2. the seriousness and magnitude of injuries, and injury claims, arising from crashes involving taxis; and
3. Class 3 CTP premiums (i.e. for taxi sedans and wagons).

Since then, the good work of the AWTF has been widely acknowledged. In 2003, AWTF initiatives won a Queensland Road Safety Award. During 2004, we began to see real and significant reductions in crash rates, and injury claims, involving taxis. These good results, supported by the State Government’s tort law reforms, continued throughout 2005. In February 2006, our submission to the Motor Accident Insurance Commission (MAIC) argued strongly that a real reduction in Class 3 CTP premiums was both warranted and overdue.

Unfortunately, true to its form of recent years, MAIC responded by siding with the interests of CTP insurers. It showed little interest in providing premium relief to the taxi industry, pushing up the Class 3 CTP premium to a level equivalent to 16 times the Class 1 premium.



Recognising that MAIC would likely be a very tough nut to crack, the Council set about looking for a CTP insurer that might be prepared to break ranks from its peers and take a realistic and informed approach to setting premiums for Queensland taxis. We wanted to find an insurance company that would be prepared to recognise the new downward trends in crash and injury claim data and price its products accordingly. We began looking for an insurer prepared to explore the obvious benefits of doing business with our industry using a cooperative and positive approach. Pleasingly, with the help of Taxi Industry (Australia) Insurance Brokers (TI(A)IB) we found such a CTP insurer in the QBE Insurance Group.

It was indeed a major breakthrough when QBE agreed to join the AWTF as a fully participating member and to work in cooperation with the Taxi Council and TI(A)IB on reducing Class 3 CTP premiums in Queensland.

To that end, QBE also agreed to “put its money where its mouth was” by filing its Class 3 (taxi) CTP premiums at rates lower than the maximum allowable by MAIC. QBE was, and remains, the only CTP insurer that has been prepared to do this – i.e. to treat our industry with the respect and courtesy that it deserves. QBE’s lower Class 3 CTP premiums commenced operation in the market on 1 January 2006.

Importantly, QBE also committed to using the information it receives from processing taxi related claims to help the industry make further reductions in crash and injury claim rates. This feedback had been sadly lacking from other Class 3 CTP insurers, and yet is crucial for the ongoing effectiveness of some key AWTF initiatives.

With its cheaper CTP premiums and industry friendly approach, QBE quickly grew its market share.

The Taxi Council will continue to drive the work of the AWTF and lobby MAIC for lower CTP premiums as a major priority in 2007.

### **Fare Reviews**

Rising fuel prices, especially in the first half of 2006 were a constant problem for the industry. In anticipation that this would be the case, in July 2005, the Council wrote to QT recommending that –

1. taxi fares be reviewed on a six (6) monthly basis rather than annually, and
2. a differential fare structure be reintroduced between SE Qld and the Rest of Qld.

Pleasingly for the Council it appears that QT accepted the rationale of both requests. An 8 c/km differential (between SE Qld and Rest of Qld) was subsequently included in the December 2005 fare increase and QT conducted a mid-year fare review in May/June 2006.

Notwithstanding a range of ongoing concerns that the Council has about the validity of the model used by QT to analyse movements in costs affecting taxi operations, the most recent fare increases gazetted in December 2005, June 2006, and December 2006 were reasonably consistent with the recommendations contained in each of the Council's respective fare submissions. For SE Qld the increases were 6%, 4.7% and 3.9% respectively. (NB These percentages do not include the \$2 late night flagfall increase introduced in Brisbane during November 2005 and major regional centres in December 2006. Similarly, they do not include the 8 c/km increase achieved for the Rest of Queensland area in December 2005.)

Notwithstanding these successes, QT's promised comprehensive review of the fare determination process again did not happen in 2006. It will accordingly remain a matter for the Council to pursue in 2007.

---

## SOUTH AUSTRALIA

### Introduction

The last year has seen the Taxi Council South Australia (TCSA) achieve sustainable resources to provide sound business policies and procedures. Recurring funding for the Council has always been a major issue in ensuring that the Council conducts its day to day business in a professional manner.

With the funding issues being achieved TCSA has formulated a range of strategies addressing passenger and driver safety.

The Taxi industry in Adelaide suffered massive media exposure regarding alleged sexual assaults on female passengers. The Police launched a campaign to encourage people to come forward for retrospective incidents that provided the media with, in many cases, an unrealistic perception that the taxi industry was not a safe mode of public transport.

Public perception has been amended with a structured strategic plan that incorporates safety initiatives being progressively introduced.

Principal amongst these initiatives was the introduction of compulsory and legislated use of Personal Identification Numbers (PINS) for all drivers. The Premier's Taxi Council requested that the three radio companies implement the system within three months. This was achieved with all costs absorbed by the companies and now underpins the perception by the public that the industry can readily identify drivers and vehicles upon request.

### Opportunities for the Taxi Industry

Lengthy negotiations with the State Government and Adelaide Airport Limited resulted in an agreement to disperse the \$2 levy collected by the taxi industry for entry to the new airport terminal.

Funds collected through the \$2 levy are being used:

- to provide taxi concierge services at the Terminal
- to develop new facilities at the terminal for the benefit of taxi drivers
- to establish the Taxi Industry Fund
- to support Adelaide Airport past and future investment in and maintenance of taxi related activities.

Of significance is that 20% of the monies collected will be administered by TCSA for improvements throughout the industry by way of a Taxi Industry Fund. The Fund will be administered by TCSA and is open to individuals, groups or organisations directly aligned with the taxi industry.

Funding will be used to:

- promote and stimulate utilisation of taxi services
- improve community perceptions of the overall benefits of the taxi industry
- value add to passenger and drivers benefits.
- add to the knowledge and expertise of all stakeholders within the taxi industry
- affect improvements in technology and communication equipment and methodology
- add to the safety and general lifestyle and well being of drivers
- ensure that training for all sectors of the taxi industry is effective, sustainable and reflects real world situations
- improve knowledge and communications initiatives, which incorporate multi cultural and tourism awareness issues.

Stronger marketing ties are being forged with relevant industry stakeholders. This is being well received and will result in value added advantages being passed on to owners, operators and drivers.

### **Taxi Marshals**

The concept of marshalled taxi ranks is not new for many States but it has been pioneered in South Australia by the Council with the establishment of a major rank in the main entertainment precinct adjacent to the Adelaide Casino. Adelaide City Council has identified the advantages of the initiative and has financially supported opening another 2 ranks in the CBD during this calendar year.

### **Taxi Fares**

TCSA negotiated with the regulators to achieve a modest increase in fares during 2006. The increase of 4.69% was implemented in July 2006.

The Council is currently working with the regulators on the introduction of a third tariff for vehicles seating 5 or more passengers.

### **Taxi Licences**

The State Budget in South Australia was not delivered until September 2006 and included a projected income of \$5.8 million through the sale of general taxi plates. New plates have not been issued in this State for many years due mainly to a stagnant market place and population growth.

Discussions with the Government revealed that they intended to release 10 general taxi licences and 15 WAT licences prior to June 2007.

Lobbying will continue with the Government, questioning the need to issue more licences following this latest release.

Taxi Council has managed an independent report being prepared by the University of South Australia and funded by the Government. The Adelaide Taxi Industry Service Performance Study will be available in May and will provide meaningful information for both the industry and the Government in the further consideration of the issue of additional taxi plates.

### **Training Task Force**

The regulators and the Taxi Council reviewed entry level training for taxi drivers in August 2006. The current 3 day program enhanced with 120 hours on-the-job mentoring prior to final accreditation was due for review. The Taxi Council established an industry based task force that will report to the Government in late March.

The English Assessment has been improved and brought into line with International Standards and practical driving assessments have been modified to address issues resulting in insurance claims. Professional development programs will possibly be recommended using experienced drivers in workshop scenarios involving actual case studies.

Whilst the Task Force will work on content and process it will seek advice from relevant industry stakeholders such as Tourism, Equal Opportunity, Multi-cultural Affairs, Police and other groups to ensure all avenues are covered.

The modules will remain aligned to National Transport competencies.

Taxi Council is also keen to introduce Operator Training and work on this project will commence later this year.

### **Country Taxi Accreditation**

This long and protracted issue continues to frustrate the industry at large. Some regional Councils have rescinded their by-laws regarding taxi licences, whilst others have retained them. Country Taxis are not licensed through the Passenger Transport Act and it is incumbent on the government to achieve an amicable and final resolution. Taxi Council is working with representatives of the country operators and government to ensure that a solution satisfactory to all parties can be attained.

### **The Year Ahead**

- Introduction of Taxi Council SA Website
  - Whole of industry awards program
  - Extension of working partners program
  - Industry endorsed drivers and operator accreditation
  - Continuation of the sound working relationship with Government.
-

## **WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

### **Introduction**

2006 has been a record year in terms of demand for taxi services. Strong economic growth was also experienced in the movement of taxi fares, shift lease rates and taxi licence values. However, with this strong economic growth came public criticism of poor service during the busy entertainment hours of Friday and Saturday nights plus increased levels of State Ownership through Government leasing a significant number of new licences.

Notwithstanding the adverse publicity, the increased level of State Ownership, and other threatening and destabilizing policies of the Government, the Taxi Council of WA (TCWA) managed to maintain consumer and industry confidence and also, stave off threats of competition encroaching on traditional taxi markets.

In terms of the destabilizing policies, these included:

- a partial buyback of the Multi-purpose taxi (MPT) fleet;
- a trial of Small Charter Vehicles (SCV) and Tour Coach (TC) operators plying for hire on ranks during ultra peak demand periods (this trial was unsuccessful);
- increased levels of State Ownership (from 20% to 35%);
- 130 additional Government taxi licences.

During the year, the TCWA focused resources and energies into lobbying the Government and other organizations in an effort to contain the level of State Ownership and counteract the negative publicity. The TCWA also called on the Government to provide mass public transport (i.e. bus and train services) to support taxi services in catering for the unprecedented levels of demand occurring during busy entertainment periods.

Despite these significant challenges, the Taxi Council managed to maintain levels of industry confidence, viability and generally, a good level of service performance to the community. More specifically:-

- The regulatory environment was maintained.
- The demand for taxi services increased.
- Returns to taxi drivers increased (including a general fare increase of 4.45%, a 50% increase in the telephone call-out fee and the introduction of a new \$2 late night surcharge for Friday and Saturday nights).
- Shift lease rates increased 4.45%.
- Taxi licence values increased by 13.8%.
- Competition in the form of SCV and TC operators was removed from the traditional taxi rank market.

- Multi-Purpose Taxi (MPT) operators and customers were offered a choice of taxi dispatch service /company.

Government relations were strained throughout the year as a result of the Minister's damaging policies and her reluctance to consult and communicate with the industry. There is opportunity for the Taxi Council to improve communications and relations with the Government and this continues to remain a focus for the Council.

### **Maintaining a Regulatory Environment to Protect Member Interests, Service Performance and Industry Viability**

#### ***Regulation and Service Performance***

The taxi industry in Perth remains regulated and this in turn, ensures that the high levels of driver and vehicle standards, operator viability, safety and service to the community are maintained. During 2006, the demand for taxi services increased and generally, a good level of service to the community was delivered. However, service performance levels declined during periods of ultra peak demand – i.e. midnight to 5 am on Friday and Saturday nights.

#### ***Industry viability***

Despite the Government leasing an additional 130 Government taxi licences, plate prices and industry viability remained firm. The average taxi plate price traded for \$237,000, reflecting an increase of \$28,719 (13.8%) on 2005 levels of \$208,281.

This level of economic stability and continued strong market growth is pleasing.

In December, a general fare increase of 4.45% was granted. The radio call-out fee was increased to \$1.50 (from \$1.00) and a new ultra-peak surcharge of \$2.00 was introduced to apply between midnight and 5am on weekends.

In addition, all shift lease rates were increased by 4.45% and the plate lease rate of \$355.00 per week (excluding GST) remained unchanged.

#### ***Taxi policies***

Throughout the year, the Taxi Council advocated for clear and sensible policies to be adopted in respect to the following:-

- future plate issues to be based on service performance standards (i.e. only issue plates where and when they are needed);
- all regulated charges (fares, plate and shift leasing rates) to be pegged and adjusted annually in keeping with the movements in the CPI (or component thereof);
- a plate ownership incentive scheme for drivers;
- no State Ownership of Taxi Plates (i.e. that the Government's role is to regulate the taxi industry and not to compete with it);

- Wheelchair passengers and operators of wheelchair taxis to have a choice of taxi company .

Whilst successful on many of these fronts, the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure could not be stopped increasing the level of State Ownership during the year. This is posing a potential threat to the long-term viability of the private sector and as such, Taxi Council resources were channelled into lobbying the Government in an effort to halt this progression. This will be a key focus of the Council's activities for the year 2007.

It is imperative to the economic stability of the taxi industry, that the level of State Ownership is curtailed and that the Government sets clear and economically sustainable policies that will protect industry viability, service performance and maintain fair returns to all industry participants.

### **Competition**

As a result of an unprecedented increase in demand for taxi services during the ultra-peak demand periods (Friday and Saturday nights between midnight and 6am), the Government offered competitor services (Small Charter Vehicle and Tour Coach operators) the opportunity to rank and ply for hire during these hours.

The Taxi Council was opposed to direct competitors being offered ranks and the ability to ply for hire and negotiate fares and lobbied against this.

The Government conducted a trial with a Tour Coach operator. That operation failed within three weeks of operation.

### **Multi Purpose Taxi (MPT) Dispatch**

Historically, one taxi dispatch company was appointed to coordinate and manage the dispatch of the MPT work.

This year, the contract was awarded to two companies and as a result, MPT operators and customers now have a choice of taxi dispatch service / company.

### **Increasing Taxi Driver and Industry Recognition**

The Council's 2006 "WA Cabbie Day", held at the Burswood Entertainment Complex in November, was a huge success and attracted a large number of taxi drivers and supporters to join the industry's festivities and to recognize and congratulate the Taxi Driver of the Year winner, Shahram Haidari, and other finalists and Award recipients.

With special thanks to the major sponsors, Kleenheat AutoGas, Radio 6PR, Department of Planning and Infrastructure and the Burswood Resort Complex (and all other sponsors and supporters) this Awards event and Cabbie Day festivities were able to be hosted free of charge for all drivers and their families.

## 2006 WA STATE REPORT

---



This event and the Awards program went a long way in raising the recognition for taxi drivers. Radio 6PR broadcasted live from the venue and other media publicized the event throughout the State.

### **Conclusion**

Throughout a difficult and uncertain year, the Taxi Council staved off threats of unfair competition from SCV and TC operators and managed to absorb an increased number of taxi licences without adversely affecting operator and industry viability. Demand for taxis increased throughout this period and the Council managed to maintain levels of stability, plate prices and confidence in the industry. For the first time, the Taxi Council obtained a taxi fare and shift lease rate increase for operators and Multi Purpose Taxi Operators and Customers received a choice of taxi dispatch service / company.

The challenge, as in the previous year, has been to work with the Government and progress initiatives that will improve the service to the community and returns to drivers and taxi operators. Pivotal to this, is the need for levels of State Ownership to be curtailed as with the need for Government to provide the taxi industry with clear and sustainable policies and economic certainty.

On behalf of the Executive Council, sincere thanks are extended to all members for their support, contributions and high level of involvement and participation during the year. Our gratitude also extends to industry partners and alliances and to State Associations and the ATIA for all the support and valued sharing of knowledge and experiences.

It has been a pleasure to work together during 2006 and progressing issues of National importance.

---

## NORTHERN TERRITORY

The year 2006 was a busy year for Northern Territory taxi operators, and as usual there were times when the demand for taxis was excessive, and there were also the very quiet periods. Just how the demand and supply requirements will ever be just right is an ongoing problem and our new minister for Transport Delia Lawrie is looking at steps to try and help ease the problem.

The Board of the Taxi Council has established regular quarterly face to face meetings with the Minister, and these have proven to be beneficial in solving some of the many policy issues which arise on a regular basis.

One of the most recent issues to be reviewed is the transfer of plates, and although all previous representations have been rejected by former Ministers, at the recent Ministerial meeting Minister Lawrie made a promise to at least look at the proposition.

The past year, 2006, saw the long awaited upgrade of the Darwin International Airport and the introduction of the \$2 pick up fee. This was a problem from day one and the boom gate continues to malfunction from time to time on a regular basis, particularly during the wet season. Drivers have been particularly tolerant and although they are not happy with the fee, and the associated passenger hassles, the industry appreciates the facilities in the new driver amenities block.

After almost twelve months of hard work and hundreds of pages of paperwork later, the Taxi Council of N.T. was approved as a trainer for drivers of Commercial Passenger Vehicles. This has had an immediate effect on the driver shortage with applicants coming forward at an unprecedented rate. The Northern Territory has always had a real shortage of drivers and operators have long suffered with their vehicles parked in the yard with no person to put behind the wheel.

The Taxi Council N.T. will continue its campaign to encourage the members of the public who have taken early retirement, and those long term residents who want to be part of our industry.

Last year saw the termination of the Commercial Passenger Vehicle Board, as we knew it, and 2007 will see the formation of a new CPV Board but in a different form. However it appears this new Board will be a purely advisory authority without the powers bestowed on the old group.

A proposal for the introduction of Executive Taxis in Darwin went before the old CPV Board and although they agreed in principal to the idea, it looks as if the Minister is not convinced and we probably won't see them in Darwin the near future.

Multi Purpose Taxis and the provision of a reliable service has been a priority for both the Government regulators, and the Taxi Council throughout the year. A shortage of drivers prepared to operate this type of vehicle continues to be a problem. The last Taxi Ballot in August 2006 saw only MPT vehicle plates released, and although these vehicles will help in a small way, they will not do any good if they are sitting idle.



The ongoing claim for a lift fee is still before the N.T. Government, and if and when a fee is approved, this may help drivers to be encouraged to drive these vehicles.

The Taxi Industry continues to be the subject of media criticism, and unfortunately this is not always justified. The public are constantly reminded we are the only people moving service which is on duty 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year, year in, year out.

Our industry is expected to handle all medical emergencies, move huge crowds at sporting events within minutes, and be available on public holidays such as Christmas Day – notwithstanding the Government Transport system being either limited or inoperative on such occasions.

Where there is a complaint from the public the Taxi Council NT Complaints tribunal follows these up, and when necessary takes appropriate action. We are fortunate to have a good working relationship established with the Territory media, and therefore the executive officer and Board members can use radio, television, and the print media to present the taxi industry position on many issues. It's unfortunate there are a few people in our industry who don't always do the right thing, and it's those few who give our industry a bad name.

Driver safety continues to be of concern, and just one instance such as children throwing rocks at taxis during the school holidays is a dangerous situation. And it seems to crop up every year. The Taxi Council works closely with the N.T. Police Force and supplies a taxi which is driven by two police officers until the culprits are caught. This has proven to be successful in the past, and is an example of close cooperation between the industry and our law enforcement officers.

There is still the ongoing problem of fare evasion, and always the problem of dealing with intoxicated passengers, and I'm sure the Territory has more than its fair share of these. Still with all these day to day problems the Taxi Industry has a bright future. The Northern Territory is experiencing a booming economy and the Taxi Industry is well positioned to provide the best possible service to the community.

---