

STATE REPORTS

**ATIA
International
Taxi
Conference**

**Gold Coast
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2016**

**"Think global,
act local"**

**2015
STATE REPORTS**

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NEW SOUTH WALES

Introduction

2015 was a year of contrasts for the NSW Taxi Industry with the year starting with ride-hailing being illegal, but this position being reversed in late December.

The year was dominated by the ongoing threat of illegal ride-hailing, the NSW Government's Point to Point Taskforce review process and finally, the announcement of the NSW Government's Point to Point Transport Reforms just prior to Christmas.

This report will focus on the Point to Point reforms as other events have been overshadowed by the profound changes of the Government's reforms and the impact they will have on the NSW Taxi Industry.

Point to Point Reforms

The NSW Government announced its reforms to the point to point transport sector on 17 December 2015. These reforms have resulted in the following:

- The legalisation of ride-hailing;
- The establishment of two point to point transport categories;
- Taxis;
- Pre-booked vehicles (private for hire)
- The removal of the private hire car annual licence fee;
- Only taxis can do rank and hail work;
- Fares for pre-booked taxis to be de-regulated
- Quality regulations removed;
- Training requirement removed under law, with the exception of training for WAT drivers;
- No more taxi licences to be issued for the next four years (WATs excepted); and
- Compensation to taxi licence owners of \$250 million.

The NSW Taxi Council is in negotiations with the NSW Government regarding the key challenges arising from the reform package, especially addressing the structural inequities that still exist between the NSW Taxi Industry and other point to point providers.

The issues include (but are not limited to) the following:

- Compulsory third party insurance;
- Industrial relations; and

- Competition law issues.

Although the NSW Government has determined that over \$254 million will be allocated to the industry for structural adjustment, more needs to be done to ensure that taxi licence owners are adequately compensated for the negative impacts of the point to point transport reforms. The NSW Government has however not removed the property rights of licence owners and a taxi licence therefore still confers a right on the owner to carry on a business. A new equilibrium for taxi licences will be reached although it is considered that the market will take some time to adjust to the new environment.

Limits on the supply of taxis into the future, along with rank and hail service rights, will yield a future capital value for taxi licences. This value will be contingent upon numerous factors including the overall demand for point to point transport services, the performance of the taxi industry generally, the removal of structural inequities in the reform package (as outlined above), compliance of the rank and hail laws and so on.

Given that the NSW Government has removed the annual licence fee for private hire vehicles (including ride-hailing) and is not constraining the supply of these vehicles, the NSW Taxi Industry will face significant competitive pressure which will not be offset by the rank and hail market alone. The NSW Taxi Council is therefore pressing for a more adequate compensation package to be implemented so that licence owners are properly looked after and the industry is able to adjust to the new competitive environment on a more even footing with its competitors.

The resolution of these issues will be the priority focus of the NSW Taxi Council for some time to come, particularly given that legislation to fully implement these reforms is yet to be finalised.

Industry Performance

The NSW Taxi Industry continued to perform strongly throughout 2015. The NSW Government's Annual Customer Satisfaction Index for 2015 (an independent survey of over 17,000 passengers) rated the NSW Taxi Industry's overall performance at 82%. Key performance indicators for safety, reliability, and cleanliness were rated at or around 90%.

This was a strong performance particularly given the advent of illegal ride-hailing and the disruption this was causing the industry.

Licences

The NSW Government suspended the Sydney metropolitan licence review process for 2015 pending the outcomes of the Point to Point Taskforce.

As advised above, there will be no new taxi licences released in NSW this year.

Taxi Fares

Taxi fares were again frozen in NSW for 2015/2016. This represents a decrease in real terms of approximately 2.5%

Industrial Relations

The NSW TIA continues its dispute with the NSW TWU regarding the Union's claim for a safety net payment for taxi drivers.

The TWU claim has significant ramifications for the future viability of the NSW Taxi Industry and it is therefore being vigorously contested.

It is disappointing that the TWU has pursued this matter with the NSW Taxi industry, particularly in light of the threat of Uber's illegal ride-hailing. The opportunity cost of this action has been significant in this context.

Training

Despite all driver training being removed from the regulations (with the exception of WATs training), the NSW Taxi Council has invested in a Gold Level Training package to increase driver competency, particularly for passengers with special needs.

This training package was developed in consultation with DVA, the NSW Department of Education, the NSW Community Transport Organisation and Alzheimer's Australia and is designed to improve the competitiveness of the taxi industry when providing higher needs point to point transport. It is also helping the industry to prepare for the rollout of the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

VICTORIA

The main focus of 2015 in Victoria was contributing to discussions regarding the future of the regulation that shapes our industry and a number of other operational matters. In particular, trying to respond to challenges that emerged as a result of the Knowledge Test for new drivers and drivers who had driven for less than five years.

2015 saw a lot of consultation with the new Andrew's Labor Government and in particular Minister Jacinta Allen. It was pleasing to note a significant shift in how Government worked with industry, with the Minister taking a far more collaborative approach to managing the problems many in the industry face.

2015 also saw the appointment of a new Chief Executive Officer (CEO) at the Taxi Services Commission (TSC) to replace Ms Marnie Williams. Mr Aaron de Rozario came to Victoria from Western Australia where he was the regulator in that State. To date the VTA have enjoyed a very productive relationship with Aaron.

By the end of 2015 the bulk of the reforms stemming from the Victorian Taxi Industry Inquiry (VTII) had been implemented and a number of the recommended reviews had commenced. These included:

- A Review of the Multi-Purpose Taxi Program (MPTP) and associated subsidy and incentive programs for WAT services.
- An interim review of the implied conditions mandatory to all agreements between operators and drivers.
- Continued work on a new taxi meter specification for taxis in Victoria.
- A monitoring report by the Essential Services Commission (ESC) on the impact of Price Notification in Country and Regional zones.
- A review of Victorian taxi fares by the ESC.
- A review of vehicle age limit regulations.
- Implementation of a \$4 million hardship fund for those licence holders who are able to demonstrate significant financial hardship stemming from the VTII.

During 2015 the Ministerial Forum, established by the Minister on coming to Government, met 4 times. The VTA were invited to participate in a smaller subcommittee looking specifically at how regulation should account for the emergence of ride-hailing services. The subcommittee's work was presented to the broader Forum towards the end of 2015.

A key issue for the VTA during 2015 was the impact of the Knowledge test on driver supply. The VTA were concerned to see a sharp contraction in the number of available taxi drivers, largely because they were unable to pass the

Knowledge test. This affected both existing drivers (drivers who had driven for five years or less) and new drivers.

The VTA strongly argued for urgent amendments to the test, and were successful in getting a number of these amendments implemented, but also argued for the complete removal of the test and a move to an industry based testing and monitoring regime.

In regional and urban areas, the mandated 45/55 revenue split continued to be a central concern. Country and regional operators were either forced to increase their prices or absorb the loss and urban operators were simply forced to absorb the loss.

More country and regional operators took the option of setting their own fares and by the end of 2015 approximately a quarter of the regional and country industry had notified their own fare structures and prices to the TSC.

During 2015 more licences entered the market with the vast majority entering into the metropolitan zone. Over 650 new licences were issued by the TSC during 2014-15. Of this, 71% issued since July 2014 have been renewed (29% handed back). There is an excessive entry test being run each time a new application for a licence is made. It is a slightly different test between the metropolitan zone and the rest of the State. The information about the test in terms of how it works is not publicly available. It is administered by the 'TSC economist'. During 2015, the WAT licence market contracted (measured by number of vehicles now and in July 2014).

A great deal of conjecture remains in Victoria as to the amount of work Uber is doing and the popularity of the Uber X service amongst consumers. Regardless of this, it remained the standout issue for the taxi industry in Victoria during 2015.

2015 saw legal action taken by the TSC in the Magistrates Court against an Uber driver. The case against UberX driver Nathan Brenner, was used as a test case for a small group of drivers prosecuted by the TSC. After a number of intervening hearings, the court found Brenner guilty and sentenced on two of the four offences he was charged with:

- Driving a commercial passenger vehicle without accreditation and fined \$500 (of a possible maximum of \$7,500)
- Operating a commercial passenger vehicle without a licence. For this, Brenner was offered a good behaviour bond of 12 months during which he had to agree to not drive for Uber. He refused to make this undertaking and was instead fined \$900 (of a possible maximum of \$9,000).

No conviction was recorded for either charge. It has since been confirmed that Uber is appealing, which will be heard in the County Court in May.

The outcome did confirm that in the Court's view UberX is a commercial service, and that as such, they must comply with licensing and accreditation requirements. The prosecutions against a further 10 individuals by the TSC will all be heard on 29 March 2016 by a single Magistrate.

The VTA expects 2016 to a busy year with more significant reform a real possibility.

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

Introduction

The government-approved introduction of Uber's uberX service into the ACT in October 2015 signalled the deregulation of fifty percent of the ACT taxi market, for all except taxi operators. Except for the requirement that taxi drivers must wear uniforms, taxi networks, operators and drivers are still required to abide by all the regulations as they did before October, whereas UberX, so far, appears to be working under no regulations except the need for drivers to pass the same police check as taxi drivers.

This has not stopped the local taxi group, Aerial Capital Group, from continuing to be innovative.

The volume of taxi work in Canberra has remained static over the past three years, but a reduction in the number of taxis has resulted in an increase in the number of jobs per car and slightly higher income for drivers and operators.

Arrivals at the Canberra Airport have continued a downward trend for five years dropping a further 4% in 2015. This trend may be slightly reversed in 2016.

UberX

Before the introduction of Uber, the workload per ACT taxi had increased during the years 2014 and 2015 by between two and three trips per car per day (around 12%) despite the predictions of doom for Canberra after the election of the Abbott government and the promised public service cuts. An admitted excessive number of taxi licences had been released during 2011 which led to the surrender of about 47 leased licences to the government.

The power of Uber as a political manipulator was displayed when in January 2015, the Government announced a "Taxi Innovation Review". The review was not a review into the innovative nature of the taxi industry, which was acknowledged in the review papers, but simply a directive of the Chief Minister to policy makers to "pave the way for UberX" (on a level playing field).

The thought of a level playing field was some comfort to the taxi industry as it was assured that uberX drivers would need to meet training, medical and police checking requirements appropriate to the task of carrying public passengers, and ride-hailing companies would be subject to reporting regimes and registration.

The idea of a level playing was an illusion. The policy makers determined that booked taxi work when taken by an uberX car should be deemed to be akin to hire car work and therefore, moved into a different risk category. This redefinition has also been applied to the assessment of insurance risks and a special category has been created in the compulsory third party insurance field.

The Government itself has acted to devalue the asset of perpetual licence holders (those who purchased taxi licences from either existing licences holders or the Government prior to the introduction of government leased plates).

The government-leased licences had been leased for \$20,000 per annum since 2007, but the Government announced during the course of the review that it would drop its lease fee to \$10,000 in October and to \$5,000 in twelve months time and issued a statement that it was dropping “licence” fees, an action that should lead to a drop in taxi fares. This greatly concerned perpetual licences holders and led to some operators demanding a drop in lease fees paid to them. The CTIA reminded owners that lease fees were determined by the market (the forces of supply and demand) and advised them not to be bluffed by opportunists. Lease fees have so far not been affected.

It is interesting to think that depending on the ability of the taxi market to hold its custom, lease fees could change little from where they are today, and the Government may find its \$5,000 leases are subject to “brown paper bag deals” by opportunists.

Opening up what has been previously considered to be taxi work to ride-hailing services may not necessarily be a disaster for the taxi industry although some taxi drivers are cutting their taxi shift short in order to take advantage of uberX’s surge pricing.

Taxis still hold the rank and hail field so what is to stop the industry attacking the ride-hailing field and developing the same or a more competitive pricing regime than UberX and co?

In Canberra, one of Aerial’s apps provides an opportunity for a passenger to pay in advance. What would prevent the use of another app offering incentives for priority services, like bottled water, for instance?

Work only belongs to the taxi industry if we work to hold it. In the past, lost custom evaporated. Now it goes to UberX. It is still there to be won back.

Taxi Innovation Review

The above heading has nothing to do with the ACT Government’s taxi innovation review. It refers to a review of what the local Aerial Capital Group has been doing to improve services for passengers, taxi operators and drivers.

For the past two years Aerial has been using its own app to facilitate more efficient three monthly car inspections. These inspections have been part of the Aerial fleet for about twenty years and are concerned with vehicle presentation and the proper upkeep of vital safety functions. The results of inspections are immediately relayed to operators with a date for re-inspection in the event of failure. Reminders for inspections are emailed out as well registration reminders and insurance reminders.

During 2015, Aerial introduced a driver rating option for users on its web based booking app. The rating is not to be used as a weapon to dismiss drivers without

notice, but as an advisory tool for operators so that low rating drivers may be counselled. The rating system has shown that over 80% of customers are happy with their driver.

Another new tool introduced by Aerial is the passenger call back option used by the driver. This has dramatically cut back use of the query channel and has proved to be very popular with drivers and passengers.

On arrival at the pick-up point, the driver simply rings a given number that recognises the car and passenger details and connects the driver to the waiting passenger to announce his/her arrival. Privacy for the passenger and the driver are not compromised.

Aerial recently adopted the Eway payment system through which a passenger using Aerial's web booking app may pay in advance or at the end of a journey. There is no paperwork involved in the transaction. An invoice is emailed to the passenger at the end of a journey.

Aerial is expecting to adopt more advanced apps during 2016 that will further enhance customer, driver and operator experiences.

Trip numbers and Airport work

Taxi trip numbers over the past two years have remained static, but because of the surrender of licences, trips per car per day have risen. The rise in trip numbers appears to have had a positive effect on the industry. The changeover to hybrid vehicles continued on from 2014 to the extent that 75% of Canberra taxi fleet is now hybrid.

A factor that worked against an increase in taxi work was the continued cuts to public service numbers begun under the previous Labor Government and the promise of more to come under the new Abbott led government in 2013. The industry did well to hold its total numbers.

Another negative effect relates to the decline of arrivals at the Canberra Airport. Passenger numbers were again down 4% after a 14% decline in the previous four years.

It is hard to predict when domestic airport traffic will increase and give a direct boost to taxi traffic, but the Airport has recently announced that international flights to and from Singapore and Wellington will commence in September 2016. Whether this traffic will result in large numbers of feet on the ground in Canberra remains to be seen, but hopefully there will be some benefit for the city.

Crimestoppers

Crime stoppers and the Aerial Capital Group are planning to work together during 2016 to provide almost three hundred pairs of eyes in the effort to build a better community.

QUEENSLAND

Introduction

Taxi Council Queensland ("TCQ") worked tirelessly throughout 2015 addressing issues relating to the continued growth of illegal taxis.

This was significantly impacted by a change in Government after the 31 January 2015 State Election. Within two weeks of coming to office the newly appointed Deputy Premier and Minister for Transport contacted TCQ to arrange a meeting. In keeping with pre-election commitments, enforcement efforts against illegal taxis were ramped up and led to the issuance of more than \$2 million dollars' worth of fines. Unfortunately, compliance and enforcement efforts ground to a halt in July 2015 as compliance officers found their accounts disabled. Since that time there has been little or no meaningful compliance activities undertaken.

In order to progress discussions in the Queensland Parliament regarding enforcement efforts, TCQ worked with the Katter's Australian Party ("KAP") to bring a Private Members Bill seeking to apply demerit points to drivers of illegal taxi services. The Government referred the Bill to the Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources Committee ("IPNRC") for consideration with a final report to be made to the Parliament on 16 March 2016. Two public hearings were held prior to the end of 2015 with overwhelming support for the Bill. TCQ's position throughout has been that the Government has a duty to uphold the laws as they currently stand.

In October 2015 the Deputy Premier announced the *Opportunities for Personalised Transport Review* ("OPT Review") to be headed up by an independent panel chaired by Mr Jim Varghese AM. The scope of the review was very broad and goes well beyond just the taxi industry. The OPT Review is to report to the Queensland Government in August 2016.

In order to ensure that TCQ's response is as comprehensive as possible, the Members unanimously agreed at a Special General Meeting in November 2016 to an additional levy of \$360 + GST per vehicle per annum for a period of three years. The budget for how these funds were to be applied by TCQ was supplied at that meeting with the lion's share being for media and PR (including social media).

In December 2016, TCQ commenced a comprehensive consultation programme state wide to discuss the review with Members about the types of changes that the industry sees as necessary to ensure ongoing viability of the industry. The forums will continue until mid-February 2016 and will be followed by an international research tour where meetings will be sought with regulators and operators in San Francisco, New York City, London and Singapore.

Strategic Plan

Throughout 2015 TCQ remained focussed on delivering outcomes guided by the four key strategic objectives. Progress on these objectives is as follows:

Strategy 1. Positioning and Image

Action Plan 1.1 Develop communication and media strategy – the strategies had to be modified in 2015 to deal with the media's fascination with the "battle" between the taxis and operators of illegal taxis.

Action Plan 1.2 Identify appropriate industry/stakeholder bodies to be represented on, and develop key outcomes required – TCQ continued to engage with appropriate industry/stakeholder bodies and going forward this will simply be an operational matter rather than one of strategy.

Action Plan 1.3 Develop suite of strategic events to support image and positioning – in 2015 the Annual Taxi Industry Awards were removed from the Conference programme and placed on their own night, held in Brisbane. The response was overwhelmingly positive and this will become a permanent feature.

Strategy 2. Further Develop Government Relationships

Action Plan 2.1 Make public the standards and good practice requirements / policies of TCQ – with the advent of the OPT Review, this will now become a result of the submission developed by TCQ.

Action Plan 2.2 Develop list of and invite key government officials to key events – This ties in with the work that has been done under the identification of key stakeholders and the stakeholder engagement.

Strategy 3. Driver Engagement

Action Plan 3.1 Develop advocacy and other relevant services to represent driver interests – Driver engagement and advocacy remains a difficult area given the diverse nature of the driver cohort and their respective needs. Positive moves were made throughout 2015 to improve relationships with other driver representative groups. This will remain an ongoing strategic imperative.

Strategy 4. Develop Alternative Income Streams

Action Plan 4.1 Identify government funds to develop new products for the taxi industry – TCQ is constantly engaging with Government to see where there may be opportunities to tap into Government funding for initiatives both within and around the industry.

Develop significant sponsorship income – This remains an ongoing strategic imperative for TCQ.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

2015 was dominated by TCSA responding strategically to the threat of the entry of ride-hailing.

Although TCSA naturally highlighted the safety, economic and employment risks of ride-hailing to SA MPs and the SA media, it avoided being reactive and instead focused on the competitive advantages of the taxi industry and on further improving customer service in the taxi industry as well as securing the ongoing viability of the industry.

TCSA's proactive advertising and media relations included the Taxi Driver of the Year campaign and the launch of a major, high-profile positive advertising campaign (radio, prominent billboards, taxi backs and street and social media promotions), *"thanks for catching a taxi"*. This campaign, which included rewarding customers with taxi vouchers, has been very well-received by customers, drivers, taxi operators, taxi industry employees, stakeholders such as Adelaide Airport, the media and political leaders. It featured taxi drivers and taxi concierges – real South Australians.

TCSA also strengthened its ties with the SA tourism industry. TCSA President Jim Triantafyllou has added to his many taxi industry responsibilities by also serving on the board of the SA Tourism Industry Council (SATIC). The winner of the Taxi Driver of the Year, Haider Ali-Shah, was announced at the high-profile SA Tourism Awards, attended by the Tourism Minister and tourism industry leaders. Haider Ali-Shah also attends meetings of the TCSA governing committee to share a driver's perspective and highlight issues affecting drivers. The Committee also welcomes candid feedback from its independent consumer representative, Lauren Kirk.

TCSA's positive and responsible approach to working with all levels of government and other industries was also reflected by participating in a media and promotional campaign with Adelaide City Council, highlighting bike safety. The same strategic approach applied to TCSA's participation in a review of the taxi and hire car industries conducted by a high-level panel appointed by the Transport Minister. TCSA welcomed the review and offered suggestions for improving training, driver incomes, enhanced customer service, better vehicle standards and additional driver and passenger safety measures.

The TCSA review submission also explained the need for a level playing field with its hire car competitors and the potential impact on customers, including people with a disability, if ride-hailing was to be introduced into SA. The likely impact of ride-hailing on SA taxi industry jobs and the investments of retirees and others in taxi licences was clearly and strongly communicated to all SA MPs and the media throughout 2015.

TCSA also strongly supported, in its government and media relations, the important innovation of the iHail app, allowing customers speedy access to the closest cab.

TASMANIA

The 2015 year was a very eventful one for the Tasmanian Taxi Council (TTC). Importantly, we consolidated our position as the industry's peak representative body and by year's end had approximately 85% of the taxis in the State affiliated with the association. The TTC was also admitted as a member of the ATIA mid way through the year.

For the Tasmanian taxi industry though, 2015 was a relatively tough year with demand for taxi services steady, except for the normal seasonal quiet times. Somewhat to be expected, demand for taxi licences was weak for most of the year. The Government released a new round of Owner/Operator licenses by tender in September and only 3 were taken up in Hobart.

Separately in September, the Government announced its intention to embrace the Sharing Economy, including legalising ride-hailing services. While this was not a particularly welcome development for the industry, at least the Government recognised that it needed to be consultative and that it should not be blindly following the reform agendas being contemplated across mainland Australia. Pleasingly, the TTC was recognised as a key stakeholder and invited by the Premier to participate in the working group tasked with reviewing the existing regulations and preparing legislative amendments.

In early March 2016, the government provided documentation to the parliament regarding legislative amendments to accommodate the sharing economy.

In regard to uberX and ride-hailing services it included -.

- All Drivers to have gained PPV (Hire Car Licence status);
- No vehicle to ply for rank or hail work;
- No vehicle to display advertising or promotion inside or out of the company they associate with; and
- Third party insurance (Registration) shall be of a higher standard than that of a normal family type vehicle.

NORTHERN TERRITORY

2015 was an exasperating year, with nobody knowing what the outcome would be of the NT Commercial Passenger Vehicle Industry Review.

The Review Report, released in February 2016, contains some good news, but there are some issues – such as the ability to buy taxi plates and to transfer them – which are still unresolved, and are frustrating the industry.

The CPV Review Report

Some of the decisions announced in the report are:

- The current cap on taxi numbers in Darwin and Alice Springs will remain. The department will be monitoring key performance indicators such as wait times, number of jobs received by networks, vehicles available, answering time of telephone calls etc. The number of licences to be issued from time to time will be based on these KPIs.
- There will be no cap in regional areas such as Katherine and Nhulunbuy.
- Ride-hailing services such as uberX will not be permitted to operate in the NT, at least for the time being.
- In 2016 there will be 13 taxi plates issued in Darwin. This will be staggered, so that 7 will be issued around June or July, with the others to be issued at the end of the year. The second issue will all be wheelchair accessible.
- The current nine categories of Commercial Passenger Vehicle licence will be replaced with five categories: Bus, Taxi, Minibus, Private Hire and Charter.
- Current industry requirements will be enhanced to require all new industry entrants to undertake the national training program for taxi, minibus and private hire drivers. Operators will need to complete a training course on establishing a business (such as the free Department of Business training course).
- Drivers and operators will be required to demonstrate a satisfactory history of compliance over the previous five years. Networks will be given increased regulatory powers and responsibilities.
- A Mystery Shopper program will be introduced to evaluate the quality of services provided by the industry.
- There will be infrastructure for ranks including the provision of CCTV, lighting, seating and directional tactile indicators over a period of time.
- Network livery (appearance and branding) standardisation will be required by the department over time.
- The minimum standard of security camera infrastructure in vehicles to include audio and continuous recording with improved picture quality.

- An annual education campaign to be called “Respect your cabbie” will be conducted by the department.
- Adoption of a new fare setting methodology based on CPI movements.
- Legislation for prepayment of fares between 10:00pm and 5:00am.

Keeping the cap

We are relieved that the cap is not being lifted in Darwin or Alice Springs, and are happy to provide KPIs to the department.

New licences will be issued by ballot, and to be eligible, a person must be an active driver with at least 2 years’ experience in the industry, and with a good compliance history. Operators who already have a licence will not be eligible.

We are disappointed that no cap is being placed on numbers in regional areas. Katherine in particular is hurting, with too many taxis for a population of only 10,000.

Ride-hailing

We are delighted of course that Cabinet voted to keep ride-hailing out of the NT. In making this decision, there is an expectation in Government that the taxi industry will keep up with the latest technology, so we will have to smarten up.

The bad news is that there will be an election this year, and so there is a chance of a change of government. The Opposition has made it clear that they would allow ride-hailing in, and would pass the necessary legislation. The Leader of the Opposition has stated that compensation will be considered for the taxi industry. We have yet to hold discussions with the Opposition regarding this. We will be doing our utmost to get the message across that allowing ride-hailing in would be a mistake that all Territorians would live to regret.

The Opposition has said previously that they will not lift the cap, so at least that is something in their favour.

Reduction in the number of categories of Commercial Passenger Vehicles

There had been a recommendation in the Review that minibuses become “taxi buses” and share ranks with taxis. The taxi industry argued that if this happens, they should be fitted with taximeters. They do not have taximeters, and the operators set their own fares. This will not change, minibuses will continue operating as they have done for 25 years. We are concerned that there is no cap on minibus numbers, and more are now appearing on the road. We have also expressed our concerns that minibus drivers do not have to do the English test, required for taxi drivers.

Entry requirements

Training has been tightened up in the last 12 months, with trainees now having to do a practical area knowledge assessment. This is done individually, and takes up to 2 hours. It is effectively sorting the wheat from the chaff.

The Taxi Council of the NT recently started placing ads for drivers in the NT News, specifically mentioning that seniors are always welcome in the industry. We were encouraged by the response from older Darwin residents in their 50s and 60s, but then disappointed when some of them objected to having to do an English test at Charles Darwin University, at a cost of \$160. One of them went to the NT News, which printed a front page article and editorial, very critical of the bureaucracy. This is an issue that we have discussed before with the department, and we will be writing to them, asking that applicants from English speaking countries be exempted. We would like to know what the situation is in other jurisdictions.

Operators will be required to complete a training course, and this is likely to be the free course provided by the NT Department of Business.

Increased powers and responsibilities for networks

Greater powers will be given to networks and, if history is any indication, the department will be giving them support. Transport inspectors have been out on the road telling drivers they will have to wear uniform shirts, provided by the networks. We welcome this, as some drivers can look quite scruffy.

As well as the wearing of uniforms, the department also wants to enforce standardisation of livery. Most people in the industry see this as reasonable.

Mystery shopper program and a driver award program

This will be implemented, and is something that we have no objection to. It may catch out a few unscrupulous drivers.

Rank infrastructure

This can't come too soon. After negotiations with the City of Darwin over the past 2 years, it was only in February 2016 that a motion was carried at one of their meetings to give us the ranks that we have been asking for in the CBD. The NT Government appears to be happy to contribute to the cost of lighting and CCTV.

Safety and security issues

We welcome this decision that camera specifications will be upgraded for audio and continuous recording with improved picture quality.

Prepayment of fares is also something that has been discussed many times with Government. It is likely that it will apply between 10:00pm and 5:00am, but will not include trips to and from the airport.

A new fare setting methodology

Fare increases will be linked to the CPI, and fare reviews will take place annually, instead of every 2 years, as is the case currently.

Purchase and transferability of taxi licences

The industry is disappointed that the status quo will remain. That is, licences will only be leased out by the department, not sold, and they cannot be transferred. On the one hand, the department wants to see investment in the industry, but it is doing nothing to encourage investment. If the bureaucrats continue to get their way, and do not listen to industry, we will continue to see mediocrity and frustration in the NT.
