

TRANSCRIPT

STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Subcommittee

Inquiry into ride sourcing services

Melbourne — 8 September 2016

Members

Mr Joshua Morris — Chair

Mr Khalil Eideh — Deputy Chair

Mr Jeff Bourman

Mr Nazih Elasmr

Mr Bernie Finn

Ms Colleen Hartland

Mr Shaun Leane

Mr Craig Ondarchie

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Witnesses

Ms Alex Holland, Youth Disability Advocacy Service, and
Mr Emilio Savle, president, Disabled Motorists Australia.

The CHAIR — I declare open the Standing Committee on the Economy and Infrastructure public hearing, and thank you to our witnesses for agreeing to appear today. We are a bit of an undermanned subcommittee at the moment; we have colleagues who have been called away.

Mr BOURMAN — We will manage.

The CHAIR — We will indeed.

Mr SAVLE — I am sure we will.

The CHAIR — The committee is of course hearing evidence today in relation to our ride-sourcing inquiry, and today's evidence is being recorded. All evidence that is taken today is protected by parliamentary privilege, and therefore you are protected for what you say in here today, but if you go outside and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. Once again, thank you and welcome. I might get both of you to just state your names and the organisations which you are attached to and then move into any introductory comments you might like to make. Then Mr Bourman and I will follow up with some questions after that. I will hand over to whomever would like to go first. Ms Holland? Very good.

Ms HOLLAND — My name is Alex Holland, and I represent the Youth Disability Advocacy Service.

Mr SAVLE — My name is Emilio Savle from Disabled Motorists Australia, and of course we are also here representing a number of disability organisations that came together to put the submission through as well.

Ms HOLLAND — Just as an opening comment — I am not sure how formal you want this to be — as per our submission, which you have, Emilio, I and the rest of the disabled community are concerned about the entry of Uber into the public transport marketplace, along with other ridesharing services. Specifically we are concerned that access to point-to-point transportation will become even more difficult than it already is for people with disabilities. I am not sure how much you know about it, but trying to get a wheelchair-accessible cab on weekends, on Friday nights or during the AFL Grand Final is impossible.

A reduction in wheelchair-accessible taxis has been shown to occur in other jurisdictions when services like Uber have come into the market. In jurisdictions such as New York and San Francisco drivers have stopped operating wheelchair-accessible taxis and have opted to drive for the ridesharing services, as there was not enough incentive for them to continue operating a wheelchair-accessible cab. There has already been a reduction in the number of wheelchair-accessible taxis from 565 at the peak in 2013 to below 500 now. Also the response times for wheelchair-accessible taxis are increasing rather than decreasing.

What we also mentioned in our submission was the multipurpose taxi program, and we believe that this program should be extended to other services. The MPTP allows people with disabilities to access point-to-point transportation and makes it affordable for them. However, if there is a decrease in the number of wheelchair-accessible taxis on the road and an increase in wait times, people with disabilities are going to be significantly disadvantaged. If the Victorian government is to continue its commitment to ensure that people with disabilities are given affordable and accessible access to point-to-point transportation, the MPTP needs to be extended to more services than just wheelchair taxis.

Mr SAVLE — If I could just beg your indulgence for a couple of minutes to take up further a couple of points that Alex has made mention of, for the committee's benefit here I have got a document called *Time to respond: three years on*, which is a document that was produced by the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission. It is subtitled 'Realising equality for people with a disability utilising taxi services'. This document was written in 2010, and it highlights the extraordinary amount of time it takes to obtain a wheelchair-accessible taxi for a person with a disability, and that has really continued. Although it has improved slightly, we are still facing the same situation today, being 2016.

With the introduction of rideshare services, as Alex definitely pointed out, we see that that service may also diminish even further and therefore put people with disabilities — specifically wheelchair and scooter users, manual wheelchair users — at a disadvantage for those that require a wheelchair-accessible taxi or vehicle. What we are asking also is that, if a rideshare service is going to be allowed to operate, then we need to be able to make sure that those rideshare services do provide for people with disabilities.

We also believe, as Alex pointed out too, that they should be able to obtain the same access to state government assistance for the provision of wheelchair-accessible vehicles. By that I mean the assistance of being able to purchase it. Whether it is a tax exemption or whatever the government thinks fit, great. That would really go a long way, we believe, in providing accessible vehicles.

At the moment for a rideshare service — for example, we will mention Uber at this point in time — anybody that wants to provide or be a contractor for Uber can virtually walk out and buy a \$12 000 or \$15 000 vehicle and they are on the way to earning some money that way. For a wheelchair-accessible vehicle to get on the road, we are talking at least \$80 000 to fit that out, purchase the vehicle and fit out the appropriate restraints in the vehicle to tie down wheelchairs or scooters and so on. So there is a cost disadvantage, really, and it is prohibitive to folk out there that would like to perhaps provide a wheelchair-accessible service, but there is quite a huge cost outlay in terms of getting that, so we tend to think that government could perhaps assist in that vein.

I am holding up my pocket version of *Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002*. When this came out it basically drew the line in the sand, I guess, in terms of saying that for all public transport vehicles, services and infrastructure, you have a time line in which to make all those provisions accessible under the Disability Discrimination Act. The problem is that it is going to take a fair amount of time, as we would no doubt know. For trains and trams, for example, we have a 30-year time frame for all of those rolling stock, as we call it, to become accessible. Having said that, anything after 2002 — in my mind and in others' as well — services or facilities must be accessible. There is no excuse in our mind. The Disability Discrimination Act basically talks about not discriminating, as we know, against people with disabilities and/or their associates, so that is already set and has been there for quite some time.

At the time when the transport standards were written there was no notion about rideshare services or, for that matter, any type of service. It was public transport services — under that kind of umbrella, if you will. When this was written it was written with the view that anything that came in after 2002, as I mentioned, must be accessible. We would like to take that further in any rideshare services that come on board. In the public arena certainly it has been expressed that not only is Uber keen to operate, but there is a company set up called Shebah, which is a women-only service, and I think Mum's Taxi service.

Let us deal with Shebah for a start. If it is going to be a women-only rideshare service, then that service must be accessible. I know there are women with disabilities that would like to have a service that they could access. The justification in my mind there is, if anybody else wants to operate a service, it needs to understand that we have legislation in place in terms of providing services that are non-discriminatory.

The service itself in terms of, say, Uber or the mechanism in which or how you provide access to that organisation to book a service certainly needs to also be explored. For example, yes, you can use a smart phone, but is it available to a person with hearing impairment? Is it available to a person with vision impairment? Those sorts of issues as well. The vehicle itself might be, but the actual way in which you access that service may not be. I guess we are also saying in that respect just to be mindful of that and how we deliver that or assist those that are wishing to deliver that service.

If I could also go to the rideshare service specifically that Uber provide, which is called uberASSIST, the way in which they provide that service is that, if you are able to transfer out of your wheelchair or mobility aid into a conventional vehicle and your mobility aid can be folded up and stowed in the boot, then you can ride with Uber using uberASSIST. Again, we welcome that to a certain extent, but that will only fit a certain number of folk that are actually able to do that. If you have a person with quadriplegia and so on, for that person there is no way they can easily transfer into a standard vehicle; you must have a wheelchair-accessible vehicle. There are no ifs or buts in that respect. We would be, again, keen to make sure that wheelchair-accessible vehicles are out there in order for the rideshare organisations to obtain or encourage their contracted folk to assist in providing that service.

In terms of Uber mooting a wheelchair-accessible vehicle, we need to understand what that means, because under the Taxi Services Commission criteria in terms of a wheelchair-accessible vehicle, and certainly under the transport standards in the notion of a wheelchair-accessible vehicle, a wheelchair-accessible vehicle must be able to take a mobility aid that measures within the prescribed dimensions that the transport standards state, which is 1300 by 800. In other words, if you fit that dimension of 1300 by 800, you should be able to ride in a wheelchair-accessible vehicle. The other two additions to that are that there needs to be headroom clearance of 1500 and that the vehicle must be fitted with appropriate restraints that are to standard.

We have seen vehicles that have been imported from other countries where, shall I say, the restraints do not comply with Australian standards, and that is what we hold ourselves up to in that respect, because they have been tested, they have been tried and they work here in Australia. Pretty much I would say that all throughout Australia those types of restraints are used because they are accepted under Australian standards. So any vehicle that any rideshare service is considering must comply with those basic requirements as under the Australian standards — the Australian transport standards, that is.

In closing, I guess we also need to look at the delivery of service as well. In the Taxi Services Commission and, prior to that, what was the Victorian Taxi Directorate, I spent four years within that area. In my past I was actually employed within the department of transport for 13-odd years, so I have spent quite a vast amount of time there. I was in what was called the accessibility unit of the department of transport when it was the department of transport and infrastructure in those days, and I was very particular in looking at accessible public transport across the whole breadth and width of what we mean by accessible transport — buses, trains, trams and of course taxis. I guess I have the passion to make sure that we do encourage any new operators that come in to consider the issues of accessibility.

With respect to vehicles that are going to provide point-to-point transport, there will be a variety of vehicles, and in my time at what was then the Victorian Taxi Directorate we certainly looked at a number of different options that were presented to us at the time, and it was very interesting to see the sorts of scenarios — as in the type of newer vehicles that were coming on stream rather than your average, shall I say, parcel-type vehicle that was used to transport people with disabilities. These days you can get much more modern vehicles to accept and give you a better ride than those vehicles.

All I am saying is we need to consider the type of vehicle that is going to be used as well. To incentivise or provide that incentive for operators, new operators, that are going to provide a rideshare service, as I said before, the state government should consider how we could assist those operators as well. The more vehicles that are out there, the more opportunities people have to be able to participate within the community, whether it is employment — and that is a major issue as well — or whether it is, as we call it, work, rest and play, depending upon wherever you want to go. I will open it up to questions people have so we can answer more directly, otherwise I will tend to ramble on.

The CHAIR — Not at all. Thank you, Mr Savle, and thank you, Ms Holland, for your presentations. I suppose it is concerning to see that the number of wheelchair-accessible taxis is declining, because I am quite sure the demand for them in the community is not declining, so to see that overall decline is quite concerning, along with the extended response times in waiting for those vehicles. We have certainly heard from a variety of groups who have been advocating for vehicles that are going to be accessible, whether they be taxis or ridesharing or ride-sourcing vehicles. But we find ourselves at a point now where we are seeing deregulation of the industry, and there is a huge opportunity here that could facilitate great transport options for those who are mobility impaired and the like. But if a couple of decisions are made that go the wrong way, it could make things a whole lot worse as well.

Obviously we all want that right outcome to ensure people have the accessibility to the vehicles that suit their needs, but what does the government need to do? Because, as you have said, there is a cost disincentive in effect to not necessarily deliver wheelchair-accessible taxis and other types of vehicles, what does the government need to do to ensure that those vehicles are accessible? I note that \$44 000 currently can go towards the wheelchair-accessible taxis; that is obviously going into a regulated industry at the moment for taxis. But when the whole industry is deregulated, what can the government do to ensure that there is not just equal access but more access to vehicles that are going to meet the needs of everyone in our community? I am happy for either or both of you to take that.

Ms HOLLAND — Are you asking what incentives you need?

The CHAIR — What should the government do to ensure operators provide options for those who are — —

Ms HOLLAND — They have to provide resources by law.

The CHAIR — Yes, but what does that look like in terms of how is it? Is it funding, what is it that is going to push people in the right direction to ensure that accessibility is there? I am not arguing against the law or not,

but I am just saying if we are working on people's good spirits in terms of providing access when there is a financial disincentive, it may not work.

Mr SAVLE — I guess it is not going to happen overnight for a start. I would like to see perhaps that we have a specific — and here we go — committee or a working group that will look at this effectively. Because Alex and I could come up with all sorts of suggestions right here and right now, but I think this needs some clear thought about also what are the likelihoods of the type of — as you suggested before — incentives? For example, we mentioned a couple before where the Taxi Services Commission provides financial assistance for regional taxi operators, for example, to purchase a wheelchair-accessible vehicle. That can be opened up, in my mind, then not just for taxi operators but for everybody.

Let us not forget that the taxi industry is going to completely change with the deregulation, with the licensing conditions — all that is going to change. I cannot look at my crystal ball, if I had one, and say, 'Yes. we will still have the same number of cabs out there that will provide wheelchair-accessible services'. I just do not know. What we do know from evidence that has been presented and that we have gathered from overseas is that wheelchair-accessible taxis have declined. That is a fact. Therefore if we follow that, I tend to think that that might change as well, but how do we minimise that? I think we have to set some regulations in place.

Fiona Patten was wanting to introduce a private members bill, and that is still being worked through. But I directly said to Fiona, 'I'm happy to look at your draft, happy to make sure that people with disabilities are addressed', but when it was mentioned to me, 'Well, you've got the disability discrimination legislation', I said, 'Yes, just have a look at buildings and facilities, for example'. There are still buildings and facilities being built that are not necessarily accessible, even though we have got the legislation. We need to also put this down to ground level and make sure it is set in regulation that things have to happen and those things, in terms of accessibility for vehicles, must be accessible. Maybe we could look at quotas. I do not know really, but with quotas I am a bit worried about that as well.

But let us throw a number of things in the mix. Currently what exists in the taxi realm? Let us have a look at that and then let us look at applying that across the board, so everybody gets a fair slice of the pie, so to speak. If there is incentive, say, with the \$16.50 wheelchair lifting fee that taxi operators receive just to load a chair into the vehicle. That should be opened up for others. So whether it is cheaper services or Mum's Taxi services or Uber services, if they all have that same ability to be able to access the multipurpose taxi program, then that would go a long way as well. Sorry, you were going to say something?

Ms HOLLAND — A bit more research needs to be done into wheelchair-accessible taxidriviers and why they are not picking up the wheelchair jobs. We already know that picking up someone at the airport and driving them into the city is going to be more lucrative than picking up a wheelchair in South Melbourne and taking them to St Kilda. So I think more incentive needs to be put on picking up wheelchair trips, and I think we need more evidence to say why drivers are not incentivised enough to take wheelchairs.

Mr SAVLE — Yes, and to take that point further, Alex mentioned that we would see a lot of taxis congregate at the airport. Wheelchair-accessible taxis are not exempt from that, and you will find that there are a lot more congregating because they can take a lot more people, take a lot more luggage. They see: 'Hey, I can make some money here'. What I used to say was, 'Let's look at that taxi operator and see what else they can do to bring in some income'.

If you have gone, for example, shopping, there is no reason why you could not take a large screen TV in one of those accessible vehicles. Sure, people would jump up and down and say, 'Hang on a minute, that takes the job away from wheelchair work'. But I am saying, 'No, that improves their options out there for that operator to be able to do more than just wheelchair work. But the priority is wheelchair work'. So if a job comes in, then that is your first priority. Once you have cleared that, knock yourself out, go do anything else that is going to bring in that money, because keeping a taxi on the road, for example, is where your income is derived from. Just sitting there is not going to do anything.

So we have tried to say within the airport realm, 'Don't just sit there for an hour or so thinking that the big-ticket item is going to come in. It is going to come and land and you're going to go down to Frankston or somewhere'. It might happen, but there are many other trips that you can take throughout your day that can also assist in putting some extra dollars in the bank as well. So if we spread that out to the rideshare industry, they see there are opportunities there. I mean, let us not kid ourselves. Uber see this as an opportunity to, let us say, provide a

service that the taxi industry cannot provide, or fails to provide, or there is an opportunity at least for another operator to come in. There is plenty of room there. All we are saying is that we need to consider that access for people with disabilities be looked at.

It was told to us at one stage, ‘Well, why aren’t you jumping up and down about limousines?’. How about we get the general vehicles accessible first and then let us look at limousines. Yes, limousine should perhaps be accessible. But there are a lot of people that have waited a long time for an accessible vehicle point-to-point service, so let us try and address that situation. In terms of, like Alex said, ‘incentivise’, there is also the notion of being able to make sure that there is adequate education of those out there, in order to be able to transport a person with a disability.

Our illustrious Mr Jeffrey Kennett, a former Premier of this land, when he introduced taxis to be yellow I kind of thought that was a good idea because everybody recognised yellow — ‘Yes, that’s a cab’. So we can look at what is going to improve the accessibility of vehicles out there, so that vehicle can be utilised for other things, not just wheelchair work. There used to be this stigma out there that one of those yellow vans — accessible taxis — was kind of like Scope, or previously the Spastic Society, and there was a disincentive to actually take one of those taxis, or to even sit in one. ‘Oh no, that’s for disabled people, isn’t it?’. Well, no, it is a vehicle that is accessible, yes, but you can utilise it for other things. So, I guess, get that message out across as well: it is rideshare service, yes, but you can transport other things as well. But specifically for people with disabilities our main focus is getting people to be able to access those services that are going to be introduced — whether it is Shebah services or Mum’s Taxi service, it is irrelevant in my book. I do not care who comes into play; the question is: can I access your service? Can a woman with a disability access Shebah’s service? Try saying that!

So there is a variety of things that we need to assess. At the moment, and what has been in the past, the Taxi Services Commission has provided incentives to taxi companies so that the taxi company will encourage wheelchair-accessible taxi operators to do that job and get the job done, even if they have to drive those few extra kilometres to go and do that job late at night. So let us look at what other options we can provide to the rideshare industry, because, let us face it, it will be a growing industry; there is no doubt.

The CHAIR — Of course. Indeed.

Mr BOURMAN — You have covered it all off — pretty well everything I can possibly think of.

Mr SAVLE — That is saying something. Thank you.

Mr BOURMAN — I guess what I am taking out of this is what you would like to see is more wheelchair-accessible vehicles, not necessarily just taxis, not just waiting for a wheelchair fare. You were talking before about someone who can do another fare and put a TV in the back, but what you do not want is someone who takes that fare, goes for an hour’s drive and 5 minutes after having taken that fare someone with a wheelchair wants to get in it. So what I am taking from this is it is a numbers game. Whilst there might be more taxis off doing other things, there are more wheelchair-accessible taxis, so someone does not have to wait for them to go an hour there and then an hour back.

Mr SAVLE — Sure.

Mr BOURMAN — So the incentive should be applied to everyone.

Mr SAVLE — That is right.

Mr BOURMAN — So that is correct?

Mr SAVLE — Exactly.

Mr BOURMAN — Yes, okay.

Ms HOLLAND — I think if the rule for accessible taxis is they are allowed to pick up non-wheelchair jobs, that is fine, do it all day. But I believe that as soon as a wheelchair booking comes to the operator the nearest wheelchair-accessible taxi should be mandated to pick it up.

Mr SAVLE — That is one thing we have failed to have had happen over many years, and that is the power to direct. In other words, as Alex quite rightly said, as soon as a wheelchair job came up on their screen the taxi company should have said, ‘Okay, how many accessible cabs have we got in that vicinity? That is the first one. You go and do it’. No ifs or buts. There used to be a three strikes and you are out sort of situation. ‘Oh, I am having lunch’, ‘Oh, I’ve got a flat tyre’, ‘Oh, I’ve got a toilet break’. Well, yes, fine, we can accept some of those, but if you think repeating these sorts — —

And we would see who these drivers were that kept doing this, and we wanted to break that, and not just by hauling them in or getting the taxi company to provide some sort of — I will not say retribution — talking to. We need to encourage those not to do that. What is an incentive to stop them doing that? Because if you just have fines, it is ‘Oh yeah, I can afford that. I will pay that. I will cop that fine’. We want to encourage drivers out there to do that wheelchair work. There was a push at one stage to have more wheelchair-accessible cabs on the road and encourage taxi operators to take up those vehicles. Then they were ringing the Taxi Services Commission, saying, ‘I can’t get a job’. I would say, ‘Well, have you gone out to the nursing homes? Have you gone out to hospitals? Have you put your card around? Have you said you can provide this service, “Call me, any time”?’. ‘No, I just figured that the taxi company would let me know if there is a wheelchair job that needs doing’.

Well, yes, if you are hooked up to a taxi company, where that was a requirement, and you paid your monthly fee to be hooked up with that particular taxi company, Fine. But that did not stop you from going out to your special schools, to your adult day training centres, to your hospitals, to your nursing homes, and saying, ‘Hey, I’m here’, throwing around a few cards and pamphlets. ‘I can provide you a taxi service if you’re going out with a group of you. Let’s go now. Let’s be a booze bus’. Have a look at ways in which you could do that.

So it is the same now, with the transference to rideshare services. They are saying, ‘We’ll do anything. We’ll take plasma. We’ll take dogs and animals. We’ll bring your ice cream to you. We’ll deliver your pizza’. Fine. They are looking at other ways of doing business so that the contractor, the person providing the vehicle, gets paid. So let us look what other ways we can incentivise those folk to think about, ‘I wouldn’t mind getting a wheelchair-accessible vehicle. Let us look at what I need to do. The government’s got a plan here. If I am thinking of buying one of these, they can assist me with a variety of things. Great’.

So let us look at a partnership, I suppose, in terms of that, rather than us and them, rather than the taxi industry against the rideshare service. If it is deregulated — and that is what we are heading towards in that space — then everybody has got a slice of the pie. I do not want to just limit it to the taxi operators there, because it just means that we should spread the load across all spheres.

Mr LEANE — Sorry. I merely acknowledge I was late.

Mr SAVLE — So was I.

Mr LEANE — I just had something I really had to deal with, and I do apologise.

Mr SAVLE — Not a problem.

Mr LEANE — I came at the end of your presentation, and it sounded like you were making a lot of sense.

Mr SAVLE — Thanks. I appreciate that.

Mr LEANE — We had Uber in as a witness today, and I asked them how many of their 1400 vehicles that they have got on the road currently, or the contractors they use, are vehicles able to pick up people with wheelchairs, and I do not think I got the answer. I think the answer is none.

Mr SAVLE — I think it is that.

Mr LEANE — Yes, I think the answer is none.

Mr SAVLE — With all due respect — and we have spoken to Uber privately as well; I must admit that too — they did trial something up in Queensland, in Brisbane, when there was a particular conference going on, which had people with disabilities, funnily enough. But what they used was a wheelchair-accessible vehicle that was owned by a parent to show how they could transport. And yes, of course that worked, but it was one.

Mr BOURMAN — That is not someone's everyday car, is it?

Mr LEANE — So that was one.

Ms HOLLAND — That was one.

Mr SAVLE — So, yes, but I would not call that 'Look at what we've done'. Do you know what I mean? Yes, it could work. But I still am concerned, in my experience, limited though it is, as president of Disabled Motorists Australia. I have looked at ways in which people with disabilities can drive vehicles themselves if they have got a disability. I drive one myself. I had a hoon-mobile, like a Monaro, in my younger days — a few years back.

Mr BOURMAN — Good man.

Mr SAVLE — And then I drive what I call a tinny, which is a Subaru Liberty station wagon. I looked at it from the point of view of, 'What do I need to modify the vehicle in order for me to be able to drive'. But if I modify it, I modify it for me. Likewise with a wheelchair-accessible vehicle, the parents or the carer or the husband or the wife — whoever — will modify it to suit that individual, so it does not necessarily follow that you will then be able to use that vehicle for other purposes. Dare I say, we have got the statewide equipment service, which also provides funds in order for you to be able to modify your vehicle of up to \$10 000.

Mr LEANE — I was going to ask you that.

Mr SAVLE — Yes, and beyond if there needs to be specific modifications to the actual vehicle itself for you to be able to drive. So there is an incentive there. But the problem is I do not think they would take it too kindly, because in essence the modifications that are done are being paid by the state, and so you are not going to then try and use that for something else.

Ms HOLLAND — You are not allowed to use that for commercial purposes.

Mr SAVLE — Exactly. It is for you.

Mr LEANE — Does that work well?

Mr SAVLE — Look, I do not have the figures, honestly, but it is difficult because you are on a waiting list. You have only got a certain amount of money that the state government does put across to the state equipment program, and it is not just for vehicle modifications. It is for modifications to your home and to your independent living, so out of that bucket of money — —

Mr LEANE — So it does not go very far.

Mr SAVLE — Yes, and given that we have got the NDIS coming in, there is still a cloud now as to how the state manages that as opposed to NDIS coming in, so that is going to be a little bit more difficult. I would not go down that — —

Mr LEANE — No, I did not want to.

Mr SAVLE — I would not look at that.

Mr LEANE — It was just out of interest. Just going back to what I was saying — and you are right, the industry is getting deregulated — I think one of the biggest issues is accessibility going into the future. Taking Uber, for example, now — I am not having a go at them; they did say that they wanted to work in with governments and disability groups and see — —

Mr SAVLE — And they said to us directly the same thing.

Mr LEANE — Yes, and see what they could do. So I think going forward they know that they are going to have to take responsibility in that area as well as any other operator, but I — —

Mr SAVLE — And we welcome that. Can I say, I mean, we have had this, as I said, private meeting.

Mr LEANE — Good.

Mr SAVLE — We do not have a problem with that.

Mr LEANE — I think I am agreeing with you in that there has got to be a dedicated position around accessibility into the future. The bottom line is — and no offence against Uber or anyone — they are in it to make a buck.

Mr SAVLE — Absolutely. It is a business.

Mr LEANE — They would not be doing it if — —

Mr SAVLE — You are not a charity. If it was Disabled Motorists Australia Incorporated running a service, yes, but that is a different story. This is business; you are out to make a profit.

Mr LEANE — And in the examples that you have given just in the taxi industry about, ‘I can’t make it’ and ‘It takes ages to get one’, that is the same thing really.

Mr SAVLE — Of course.

Mr LEANE — So I suppose this is probably one of the biggest issues that has come to this committee about the new world, I think, and it is interesting. There are obviously people with different types of disabilities. It sounds as if, for the vision impaired and people with different types of disabilities, Uber is going to be fantastic.

Mr SAVLE — Yes, it is.

Mr LEANE — It sounds like it is going to be great.

Mr SAVLE — True.

Mr LEANE — As long as there are certain things in place. But I think your discussion today is probably one that the government, the committee and all people in Parliament really need to put their minds to into the new world.

Mr SAVLE — Let us face it, it is going to be a big learning curve out there for the rideshare industry in itself because, like I said before — and we did not really touch on education — people need to know what are the requirements in terms of assisting a person with a disability. When I was in state government we brought out a video specifically for the taxi industry, for the wheelchair-taxi operator that was the newbie or the one that had been there and thought, ‘Yeah, I know how to do this’. We brought out a video in terms of providing customer service — how you provide that to a person with a disability who may not be able to communicate with you, or may have difficulties in telling you where they need to go and difficulties in getting out even just the taxi card and so on.

If this new wide world is going to be what we think it might be, again there needs to be the education component, and whenever something goes wrong there needs to be the complaints handling issue, because that is always a problem. Whenever something goes wrong, how do you manage that? We have got problems already now with the public transport industry in itself in terms of, let us just say, even the recent level crossing issues and sky rail as opposed to underground and so on. I went to a meeting yesterday that PTV held with respect to heights. What are the acceptable heights that you would build a ramp, say, for example, to get to the railway station? We brought up issues of people with claustrophobia, people with management issues, mental health issues, trying to negotiate a ride and feeling safe in that environment if it is one of under or below ground.

Mr LEANE — Yes, you are subject to challenges because you over an area and you still have to do a journey upwards or downwards at some time.

Mr SAVLE — Absolutely. If that fails, how do you evacuate? That is another thing. If we are bringing it back to the rideshare service, it is a strange analogy that I bring, but the thing is that again this will be something that we have not tried; we have not tested it. But in that journey that we are going down the path of we need to set some things in place and one of the things I would like to see is that we do say that any rideshare service

needs to consider the accessibility side of things and transporting people with disabilities. We are part of the community, and that needs to be accepted.

The CHAIR — Of course. Time has got away from us

Mr SAVLE — I could talk for ages.

The CHAIR — I am afraid we will have to leave it there. Thank you, Ms Holland, and thank you, Mr Savle, for your contributions today. You will receive a copy of the transcript for proofreading and that will ultimately make its way onto the committee's website. Once again, thank you both for your attendance today.

Mr SAVLE — We appreciate it, Chair. Thanks for your time.

Witnesses withdrew.