

# TRANSCRIPT

## LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

### **Inquiry into the Multi Purpose Taxi Program (MPTP)**

Melbourne—Thursday, 21 October 2021

#### **MEMBERS**

Mr Enver Erdogan—Chair

Mr Bernie Finn—Deputy Chair

Mr Rodney Barton

Mr Mark Gepp

Mrs Bev McArthur

Mr Tim Quilty

Mr Lee Tarlamis

#### **PARTICIPATING MEMBERS**

Dr Matthew Bach

Ms Melina Bath

Dr Catherine Cumming

Mr David Davis

Mr David Limbrick

Ms Wendy Lovell

Mr Andy Meddick

Mr Edward O'Donohue

Mr Craig Ondarchie

Mr Gordon Rich-Phillips

Ms Harriet Shing

Ms Kaushaliya Vaghela

Ms Sheena Watt

**WITNESSES** (*via videoconference*)

Mr Dominic Taylor, General Manager, Rides, Australia and New Zealand,

Ms Pia Brunner, Manager, Public Policy, Australia and New Zealand, and

Mr Damilola Ogundeji, General Manager, Transit, Australia and New Zealand, Uber.

**The CHAIR:** The Economy and Infrastructure Committee's public hearing for the Inquiry into the Multi Purpose Taxi Program continues. Please ensure that mobile phones are switched to silent and any background noise is minimised.

I wish to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land. I pay my respects to their elders past, present and emerging. I wish to welcome any members of the public that are watching via the live broadcast.

My name is Enver Erdogan. I am the Chair of the committee. I would like to introduce my fellow committee members: Mr Lee Tarlamis, Mr Rod Barton, and Mr Andy Meddick will be joining us shortly.

All evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and further subject to provisions of the Legislative Council's standing orders. Therefore the information you provide during the hearing is protected by law; however, any comment repeated outside the hearing may not be protected. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

All evidence is being recorded and you will be provided with a proof version of the transcript. Ultimately transcripts will be made public and put on the committee website.

We welcome your opening comments but we ask that they be kept to a maximum of 5 to 10 minutes to allow plenty of time for discussion. Could you please begin by stating your names for Hansard and then start your presentations. Over to you.

**Mr TAYLOR:** Sure. Why don't I introduce the other Uber people for the sake of Hansard, and then I will move on to a couple of words so that we can get into any questions that you might have?

**The CHAIR:** Sure.

**Mr TAYLOR:** So let me start. Thank you, Chair, and thank you, committee, for having us here today. I am Dominic Taylor, General Manager for mobility here in Australia and New Zealand, and I am joined by Dam Ogundeji, head of transport for Australia and New Zealand, and Pia Brunner from our public policy team.

We appreciate the opportunity to appear before the committee's Inquiry into the Multi Purpose Taxi Program. At Uber we are proud of the role ridesharing has played in increasing transport choice. However, Australians with disabilities have not always enjoyed the same benefits of that increased choice. That is in large part because state-based subsidy schemes, for legacy reasons, do not include ridesharing. We commend the Victorian government for leading the way in reforming the MPTP to ensure that Victorians living with a disability and accessibility needs have those same choices as other Australians. We are also really proud of the custom technology that Uber built in order to integrate the MPTP in with the Uber app. This is a world-first tech solution for Uber and a solution that was specifically built for Victorians. We made this investment because we believed everyone should have choice in how they get from A to B.

I would like to just take a couple of minutes to touch on some of the safety measures outlined in our submission that we have in place to keep MPTP members and drivers safe on trip. The first is disability education. We have developed robust disability awareness education for driver partners in partnership with the Australian Network on Disability. Each driver partner is required to undertake a mandatory disability awareness and support module as part of a wider rideshare safety course as they sign up. The second is GPS tracking. Put simply, each trip is GPS tracked. That means that trip information is available to both the rider and the driver to share with their own family and friends. It also means that no trip on the Uber platform is anonymous, which has been of assistance in recent times, for example, in assisting health authorities with contact tracing. Of course these are in addition to the range of safety features in the Uber app outlined on pages 9 and 10 of our submission.

The committee may be aware that the Uber MPTP program was launched in January of this year after a trial in 2020 to test the integration of this custom technology. We received very positive feedback from MPTP members who participated both in the trial in Geelong and across Victoria when we surveyed them in March of this year. Some of the common themes that we heard were that riders liked the transparency and simplicity of up-front pricing and the automatic discount; they liked not needing to bring their MPTP card with them when they travelled; they liked the on-demand nature and not needing to book in advance; they liked the GPS record of the trip so riders knew the route that had been taken; and finally, they liked the ability to choose whether or not they disclosed to their driver that they were travelling under the MPTP scheme.

Of course while some MPTP participants will opt for rideshare, like Uber, others will continue to prefer using other commercial passenger vehicle operators. We believe that choice is most important. It is important that people with a disability or accessibility needs are able to choose a service offering which best suits their needs, and the provider-neutral approach that the MPTP has adopted supports this. As one Geelong trial participant wrote to us in an email to say, and I quote:

[QUOTE AWAITING VERIFICATION]

People with disabilities deserve choice about how we travel from A to B.

We can recommend other states and territories across Australia follow Victoria's leadership in this space. Thank you, and we look forward to your questions.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you for that, Mr Taylor. You have segued to a few of my questions, but we might start off with Mr Barton, and then we will go around the committee. I know Mr Tarlamis has got some questions. I do as well. But Mr Barton will ask the first couple of questions, and then we will go around and keep giving everyone an opportunity.

**Mr BARTON:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you, team, for coming in. Can you tell me when you first had discussions about the Multi Purpose Taxi Program with the Victorian government?

**Mr TAYLOR:** Dam, did you want to take this one? I can jump in if there is anything else to add.

**Mr OGUNDEJI:** I am happy to take this. Thanks, Dom. Thanks for your question, Mr Barton. We were first invited to discuss the entry into the scheme in May 2018. My understanding was that we were invited along with six other organisations, and it was a continuation of advocacy from independent groups that were advocating for the expansion of the program to other service providers and operators.

**Mr BARTON:** Yes. So what we know is that the vast majority of trips in the Multi Purpose Taxi Program is actually in the wheelchair market. That is the numbers. Do you have any wheelchair vehicles operating in Victoria?

**Mr OGUNDEJI:** No, we do not accommodate powered wheelchairs on our platform. However, we do accommodate collapsible wheelchairs as part of our MPTP offering.

**Mr BARTON:** Sure.

**Mr TAYLOR:** And if I can just jump in there, of course we have an Uber Assist program, which is a special program, or product I should say, that would appear on the app where drivers have been trained in dealing with people with collapsible wheelchairs, and so that option is available. As I touched on in my opening remarks, that is why we believe choice is so important—that people have choice about what is the right transport to move from A to B depending on their specific needs.

**Mr BARTON:** There is no argument about choice. Everybody should have the choice. Just a question: who has to pay for that choice? You know, does the government pay for that choice, or should the consumer pay for that choice, or some mixture? Do you run any wheelchair vehicles in any other state or territory in Australia?

**Mr TAYLOR:** We do not currently. It is worth noting that we ran a trial in Newcastle between 2017 and 2020. One of the key points to talk about, with the business that we run, is obviously it is a platform that connects riders and drivers, so we do not have a fleet of vehicles per se like other operators; we connect the riders and drivers on the model.

The other point is that we are on demand. And where on demand works really well is where there are really large groups of riders and drivers. What that allows us to do via our technology is very much get the driver that is closest to the rider in order to minimise the amount of time that the driver needs to drive in order to pick up the rider. What happened when there was a small number of vehicles, like occurred in Newcastle, is that in order to make sure that those drivers were earning enough money they were often despatched on non-wheelchair trips and so they were not available for people with wheelchair needs. So that is why we think the model here is suited to on demand.

**Mr BARTON:** One of the issues we are seeing here is that we know that taxidrivers are moonlighting between jumping on a rideshare platform, whether it is your platform or one of the others, and they are parking their wheelchair-accessible vehicles in the driveway on a Friday afternoon so they can go out and do surge pricing. It is almost like a catch 22: we lose drivers that should be supplying wheelchair vehicles, but they are jumping in an Uber vehicle so they can chase the surge pricing on a late Friday afternoon when it is raining in Melbourne and Collingwood is playing Essendon and there are no cabs around.

**Mr TAYLOR:** Yes, I cannot talk on the specifics of the drivers that you are referring to. Maybe what I can do is shed some light on surge pricing. Effectively, as you say, surge pricing is in place in order to pick up where there might be periods of time when there are a lot more riders in an area than drivers, and so the price would be increased in those circumstances in order to incentivise or attract the drivers to go to those areas so that we can offer a reliable service.

When we think about our product, it is critical that it is safe, affordable and reliable, and that is an important part of that—as you say, when a football game might be on or the upcoming Melbourne Cup or things like that.

**Mr BARTON:** Do you think it is appropriate that the vast majority of people in the Multi Purpose Taxi Program have a cap—I think it is about \$2100 a year—and that they will be paying higher fares and burning their allocated funds quicker to go? Would you consider having guaranteed no surging in the multipurpose taxi space?

**Mr TAYLOR:** Well, the problem with that would be that it would affect the reliability of the platform. What I can say is that 90 per cent of trips that have occurred on the MPT Program have not been affected by surge. The other point is that we provide the price to each of the riders up-front, including the surge price, including the MPTP discount, and so we are providing that information to the rider so that they can make that decision and work out whether they want to use Uber at that point in time.

**Mr OGUNDEJI:** I will also add that I think the function of surge is to make sure that every rider who wants a ride will get a ride, and that is of utmost importance. And we give full visibility of the pricing to the rider, as Dom suggested, and then we in turn report all that information to CPVV as the administrators of the scheme. So we make sure there is full visibility of the fares and everyone is free to make their choice as to whether they take the ride. Booking a trip on Uber and using a subsidy on Uber does not preclude you from using it on any other provider under the scheme.

**Mr BARTON:** Sure. Just in terms of the trial down in Geelong, can you tell me how many people participated in that trial?

**Mr OGUNDEJI:** So we had six participants in the trial in Geelong.

**Mr BARTON:** Six participants. And do you think that is a sufficient amount to draw the conclusion that it has been a huge success, considering we are in a pandemic, considering no-one is traveling, considering nobody was moving around?

**Mr OGUNDEJI:** I think it is first worth noting that the purpose of the trial was really to test two things, primarily to test that the technology worked. As Dom suggested earlier, we built this purpose-built technology for Victoria and for the Multi Purpose Taxi Program, so we wanted to test that the validation was working properly, that we could validate members to make sure they were eligible for the program, and also to test that the subsidy was being drawn down for each of those individual trips. Then, secondarily, we wanted to test that it was a good customer experience, to test that the riders who participated in the trial spoke about the trial in a favourable way and that they felt safe on all the trips. So we were able to validate those things with the participants in the trial and the amount of trips they took, in partnership with the CPVV.

**Mr BARTON:** Well, many people are questioning the validity of that trial under the circumstances that it was done. Can we just have a little quick chat about the training? How do you do your training?

**Mr OGUNDEJI:** So prior to getting onto the platform every driver is required to undertake mandatory training with several different modules, and I think is worth noting that we are the only rideshare provider that mandates this training prior to accessing the platform. And as part of that there is a safety module that is devoted to transporting people with disability and accessibility needs.

**Mr BARTON:** And is that an online course?

**Mr OGUNDEJI:** Yes, correct.

**Mr BARTON:** You do not actually get them in and show them how to deal with people with disabilities getting in and out of a car. Certainly we heard from Geelong taxis how they have a staged program, and they have to do over 100 shifts—not 100 jobs. Do you do something similar to that before they are eligible to participate?

**Mr OGUNDEJI:** So for our base product, again, they undertake mandatory training as part of their—before they gain access to the platform. For our Assist drivers, which is, you know, a higher level of care, a driver is required to take a minimum of 100 trips and have a rating of at least 4.72 out of 5, and we usually require larger vehicles before they take Assist trips. So again it is about going back to rider choice, the ability for the rider to opt in to the appropriate service for them. It is also worth flagging that the majority of trips are actually happening on our UberX product, our most ubiquitous product. I think it speaks to people's desire to want, you know, the true on-demand experience: to request a trip and get it within a number of minutes. So I think that is quite telling about how people are currently engaging with the MPTP and with rideshare.

**Mr BARTON:** Sure. Can you tell me how many trips you have done under the Multi Purpose Taxi Program since January.

**Mr OGUNDEJI:** I do not have those exact numbers with me, but I can say that, looking at the stats and the data from the MPTP website, we account for just under 1 per cent of trips and enrolled riders for the overall program.

**The CHAIR:** Just on that point, Dam—that is important; that is actually a question that I had—it would be helpful if you could inform the committee and get that information to us about how many trips you have facilitated since operations began and if you could, and obviously we understand the commercial sensitivity, describe the general profile of the people that have chosen to access your service. I think that would be helpful for the committee in its deliberations going forward—just to see how the utilisation has been since this option has been provided. I think that would be interesting.

Mr Barton—sorry, I know Mr Tarlamis has got a couple of questions as well—I will come back to you. I might go to Mr Tarlamis.

So, Dam, yes, if you could provide that figure to us, that would be helpful just so we get an idea—

**Mr TAYLOR:** We will take that on notice.

**The CHAIR:** Okay. All right, no problem. Mr Tarlamis.

**Mr TARLAMIS:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you for coming along today to talk to us about this inquiry. I note that you said earlier on that Uber does not have wheelchair-accessible vehicles. I note that you said that you do not have a fleet as such; you have people on the network—you do not have any at this stage. Do you have any plans to add wheelchair-accessible vehicles to your network and platform, or that availability, and if so, do you have any time lines by which you are aiming to achieve that?

**Mr TAYLOR:** We do not have any plans with regard to adding wheelchair-accessible vehicles. We will continue to always assess how we can help more people move from A to B if there is demand there. So if there is demand there for our product, then we will look into that, but there are no current plans in place and no time line to update on

**Mr TARLAMIS:** Given that the vast majority of trips that are undertaken in the Multi Purpose Taxi Program are for ‘wheelchair-accessible’ clients and you are talking about wanting to provide choice and address the needs of the system, can you explain why you do not have any plans to enter that space, given it is a large portion of the market?

**Mr TAYLOR:** What I would say is that obviously there are others with disabilities that are using the program. We spent a lot of time talking to Vision Australia, for example, about how our product can be used and improved, quite frankly, for people that might have impairments to their vision. As I said earlier, we ran a WAV trial in Newcastle in New South Wales for a number of years, and it was not successful in helping to solve the problem at hand. So that is why we are focusing on the on-demand product at scale where we can help the majority—the most people—move from A to B.

**The CHAIR:** Sorry, Mr Tarlamis. Mr Taylor, could you give us a copy of the Newcastle trial or some evidence or research or paper or findings of that, because it would be interesting. I know you have already explained your business model being a platform, but still you have obviously trialled it before. So if you could provide that, that would be helpful.

**Mr TAYLOR:** Of course. We had a great deal of surveys and interaction, so I can share with you some documents from that.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, please. Thank you. Mr Tarlamis.

**Mr TARLAMIS:** Thank you. You spoke about the importance of having choice for clients and having a provider-neutral approach in Victoria. I am just wondering: do you think it is appropriate that some operators have different requirements to others that are participating in the Multi Purpose Taxi Program, which could over time lead to less choice?

**Mr TAYLOR:** I think that is a question for government, and really, we will comply with whatever requirements we are required to. What I can say is that we are creating a product where, as Dams has mentioned, less than 1 per cent of MPTP users are using it, but those users that are using it are really grateful for it and they are enjoying it. And they like it for the reasons that I laid out above: they love the on-demand nature of it; they love that they can click a button and a car is there in under 5 minutes; they love that the discount is up-front. So we are just focused on providing the service that we do at the moment, and really, it is worth calling out that Victoria have been trailblazers here in leading all state governments in the application of this to rideshare. We really applaud the government in their pursuit of doing that.

**Mr TARLAMIS:** Just stepping over to a slightly different issue at the moment, we have heard from a number of witnesses who have tried to get into this market with various technological products and have been experiencing some difficulty. How has your experience been with CPVV—you stated that you have built a purpose-built technology for the MPTP—did you have any issues working with CPVV in terms of getting that approved and working through the various stages of development?

**Mr OGUNDEJI:** I think I can speak to that process. We began the conversation, as I said, back in May 2018, and from then we thought about how best to serve the needs of CPVV and the riders under the scheme. I cannot say it was a particularly difficult process, but as Dom mentioned, we are trailblazers, and this is the first of its kind so we really wanted to get it right. That is why we went through, not to speak of just the Geelong trial but a lot of internal iterative testing, to make sure that the solution worked. Generally it has, and we are quite proud of the process we went through just to make sure there was the right product, and I think it is giving us a lot of learnings for if we want to do this again in the future and expand a program such as this.

**Mr TAYLOR:** If I can just add on there, of course Uber is a technology company, and at our core we are helping to solve mobility problems of moving from A to B in the physical world. We have an engineering team based out of the US where we were able to bring this bespoke build to the issue at hand, and we are really proud of that two-step whereby we are able to authorise that a rider is part of the MPT Program and then continually communicate with the MPTP database to make sure that they have enough credit on their account throughout the course of the year.

**Mr TARLAMIS:** You mentioned that you began discussions in May 2018. In terms of the tech aspect and that proof of concept, do you have an idea about how long that process took in terms of approval?

**Mr OGUNDEJI:** I believe the formal build and the schematic of the process started from late 2019, but I can go back and check that and take that question on notice.

**Mr TARLAMIS:** That would be great if you could. Thanks. That is all the questions I have at the moment, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. I might go to Mr Meddick, who has joined us, and then to Mr Barton.

**Mr MEDDICK:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you all. I want to cover off a few different aspects about your presentation today and your submission and some experiences out in the community too, but as a first principle can I just establish, and would you agree, that this sector that uses the Multi Purpose Taxi Program is a cohort of people who are our most vulnerable citizens, or amongst our most vulnerable citizens? Would that be a fair comment that you would agree with?

**Mr OGUNDEJI:** Yes.

**Mr MEDDICK:** Yes, okay. As such, would you agree then that all people that participate in the Multi Purpose Taxi Program should therefore have to pass not only some sort of internal program of, you know, training et cetera, but also police checks to see whether they have any convictions against vulnerable people in our community, and also working with children? Often there is a very large section of this vulnerable section of the community that are young people, and in any other section of the disability workforce they are required to pass a working with children check. Would you agree that that should be something that your drivers should then undertake if they are going to be part of this program?

**Mr TAYLOR:** Well, let me say that safety is table stakes for us here at Uber. It is of utmost importance for all participants on our platform—riders, drivers, eaters, restaurants and couriers. Police background checks, as you say, are something that we led the industry on and all our drivers have been covered by police background checks right across Australia for many years now. With regard to working with children checks, working with children checks are not a requirement under the current CPVV requirements. What I would say is that part of that program of how you sign up to be a participant on the MPTP on Uber requires that you are over 18 years old, and so that is part of the verification that we do with the MPTP that we require of the participant. So actually it is not something that you can be using if you happen to be on the MPTP but you are under 18, and so that is why I think the current requirements under the current regulations are fit for purpose with the needs of how the program is working today.

**Mr MEDDICK:** Okay. I just want to approach the business of surge pricing. Again, a lot of participants in the program might not necessarily be aware of the surge pricing and what it actually means. For instance, where taxis are limited so there is a set fare, wouldn't it be fair then to have a level playing field and continuity for those people who are looking to use Uber in that space—that the same thing applies? Because, again—and I come back to the fact that these are vulnerable people on limited incomes—it is completely unfair to subject them to a surge in price for a trip just because they are taking it at a different time of day.

**Mr TAYLOR:** I would note two key important points in terms of the user experience when you go to book that trip: we tell you in the app that the prices are above normal and so we make a point of telling riders when that is occurring, firstly; and secondly, the up-front price that we provide to that rider includes the surge trip as well as the discount from the MPTP. So really what we are trying to give participants here is the information for them to make that decision based on price and reliability and whether they want to make that. I think the key point, however, is that 90 per cent of trips that have occurred on the MPT program since we have launched have not been surging, and so for the large majority of people it really has not been an issue, but when it does occur, we provide that information to the user.

**Mr MEDDICK:** I understand where you are coming from. There is a vast difference between providing information for someone who does not have the capacity to understand that information to begin with—because we see many times that people who, for instance, suffer some sort of intellectual disability who are quite functional out in the community for other things and live independently or in shared accommodation are taken advantage of by other markets in different things because they simply do not grasp what that means. I guess that speaks to why I am asking: why don't you just offer the same as the rest of the market offers, because that offers a protection for those people? Don't you think that that is a fair thing to ask?

**Mr TAYLOR:** As I have mentioned—and I completely understand where the question is coming from, and I think it is a good question—the reality of surge pricing is that it is a key part of our reliability. So if you have some trips that are surging and some trips that are not, then drivers are not going to accept the trips that are not surging, so the flow-on effects for the users would be that they are not getting a reliable service from Uber as a result of that. So it is really important that we have a whole-system approach to pricing with reliability at its core.

**Mr MEDDICK:** I get that, and I thank you for that answer. But I guess my point that I am coming to for that is the fact that what we are talking about here—and this is evidence that we have had from other witnesses from various parts of the sector—is that people feel that this service that is being provided, whatever you like, whether it is taxis, whether it is buses, whatever it might be, is an essential service to a vulnerable section of the community. Therefore the standard market rules that apply to everything else do not apply to these people. This is an essential service. There are relationships that are formed. There is a section of the community that relies heavily on the availability of this, regardless of any other extraneous circumstances. They view this in a completely different way than you or I or anyone else might. I guess that is what I am leading to: the fact that there should be a recognition of that and that perhaps Uber should alter its entire market strategy, if you like, where these people are concerned. If you want to work in that space—as a statement, I suppose—you must work in that space to what that space is asking of you, not what you want to impose on them. I guess that is where that goes to. But I am happy to move on from that point.

I just want to come back to two last points, if I can, Chair. The trial that was held in Geelong: I live in the Geelong region, and I can tell you there are a hell of a lot more than six participants who might want to avail themselves in that way. There are literally hundreds of people in various organisations, NGOs and others, that are reliant upon this sector. The criticism that I heard from going out and speaking to people on this—most of them did not even know that the trial was taking place; some of the organisations that deal with it did not even know it was taking place—and the feedback was that, well, if it was only six people and it was held over such a short period, then it was not really a trial at all, it was deliberately selective and not independent and basically just nothing more than a self-affirmation exercise. I mean, how do you respond to criticisms like that when you consider that when you are dealing with vulnerable people and you are talking about entering a market where traditionally a user has a relationship with a particular driver that has built up over years—so not individual trips and different drivers but the same driver over years. How do you counter that?

The criticism that I have had is that all organisations should have been contacted and included in the trial and that it should have been offered up to particular clients of theirs. It should have had literally hundreds of people and been held over perhaps even a 12-month period or longer so that you could actually get some real qualitative data and great feedback on that and how that all works. I mean, doesn't it strike you that you may as well have not even bothered?

**Mr TAYLOR:** Dam, please jump in in a second, but let me let me start. CPVV sent out the expressions of interest to those people that invite them into the program. They sent them out to 150 people, I believe. Correct me if I am wrong, Dam.

**Mr OGUNDEJI:** Yes, 100 people.

**Mr TAYLOR:** And, quite frankly, we were hoping for 150 responses. We were funding the program during the trial, and we only received six responses. The information that we had was on six riders who were really excited to trial the program, and so that is the trial that we ran. It is important to remember, though, that Uber has been operating in Victoria since 2012, and we have millions and millions of trips worth of information that allows us to understand how our platform works in Victoria, how we pick up users from A to B, how we are continually improving it and how we have increased the role of safety in rideshare. Really, the crux, or what the focus of the trial was, was the technology that we had built to make sure that it was fit for purpose and that it worked. The really good news was that the resounding feedback that we got from those six participants, both in the form of quantitative and qualitative comments, was that they loved it. And so that is what gave us confidence to shift to a full rollout across Victoria.

**Mr OGUNDEJI:** Yes. And I can add to that: I will just clarify some of the numbers. The trial invitation was sent out to 500 members and we had six responses, but the trial was also set to be capped at 100 users as well. Going through our experience with open email rates, subscription rates et cetera, expecting one-fifth of people



to respond to any kind of invitation is very difficult. So our preference was obviously to expand and get as many people as possible, given we wanted to make this something great. But we went along with the trial as specified. That is something that I understand CPVV has done in the past, you know, with another provider called Net-Cabs, where they ran a similar sort of trial, and so we were just kind of following that process.

**Mr MEDDICK:** Sure.

**Mr OGUNDEJI:** Yes. And as Dom said—

**The CHAIR:** I think in replying to Mr Meddick, Dom, you are doing a reasonable job, but we need also to understand that some of the parameters are probably for the next witness, for the regulator, so we should ask the regulator some of it as well.

**Mr MEDDICK:** Yes. I have only got one more question, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** All right. Because we have got Mr Barton and I have got a question too.

**Mr MEDDICK:** Just that last question, and it is one that I have asked of all of the witnesses we have had: would you be supportive of a mandatory code of practice that includes things like quality of build, like minimum standards in cars—to be provided with security such as cameras et cetera—and minimum standards of training and accreditation, which I believe you already say that you do anyway? Would you be supportive of that, particularly keeping in mind where the car build is concerned that the majority of these trips are for wheelchairs? Particularly I know that it is a majority in the Geelong region—that that is the case. Would you be supportive of that?

**Mr TAYLOR:** We would be open to all proposals that were put forward. Our view is that the current regulations are fit for purpose with the types of trips that we complete, but we will take every proposal on its merits.

**Mr MEDDICK:** Great. Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. I know Mr Barton has got a couple more questions, and I have got one more as well. So, Mr Barton.

**Mr BARTON:** Thank you, Chair. Just a statement first. I reckon if we wrote to 500 people and we only got six responses, I think that would be an indication of market demand. That is what I think on that one. We have really been focused on safety and where we need to go, because overwhelmingly people have been talking about safety. Now, recently in New South Wales the point-to-point commissioner fined Uber \$200 000 for failing to meet their statutory obligations. Can you reassure us here in Victoria that because of that all your processes and checks and balances have all been done and that we can say that what happened in New South Wales has absolutely not happened in Victoria?

**Mr TAYLOR:** So as you note, Mr Barton, we operate in a regulated environment in each of the rideshare jurisdictions across Australia, and part of the nature of a regulated environment is that we will be audited from time to time. So we have been audited by CPVV, we have been audited by the point-to-point commission—

**Mr BARTON:** Sorry, Dom, did you say you have been audited by the CPVV?

**Mr TAYLOR:** There have been audits that have occurred by the CPVV, yes.

**Mr BARTON:** Over safety?

**Mr TAYLOR:** The specific one I am thinking of was with regard to COVID.

**Mr BARTON:** Okay. So not safety?

**Mr TAYLOR:** Well, COVID fits well within the safety—

**Mr BARTON:** We are talking about sexual assault in cars and things like that. That is what you got fined for in New South Wales. What I want you to reassure me is that we cannot have that issue happen here.

**Mr TAYLOR:** So what I would say is there were a number of areas of improvement that were set out by the auditor, and we welcome them because that improves our safety. They are things that we are already working on and where we have closed the gaps, and of course we will continue to work on safety right across Australia.

With regard to notifiable incidents, which you refer to, if I can just explain what the notifiable incident regime is in case anyone is not across the details, essentially in the regulations there are certain events that occur where we are compelled to notify the regulator when and if those occur. There are a wide range, from the most serious things to relatively minor things, like if you were to have a passenger in the back of your car and you reversed and dinged a car, we would have to notify the regulator of this. The reality is that we receive each week about 200 000 pieces of information from customers, from across social media, from external sources, and it is our job to be able to go through those 200 000 pieces of information and make sure that we are picking up on the occurrences that we are required to notify the regulator of in our regulatory requirements. Put simply, that is hard, and so what we have led the industry on is going back and looking at our own work and marking our own homework and making sure that there are no gaps in our processes that involve human error. And so there will be errors. The incidents that were notifiable in New South Wales were on the back of us doing a proactive audit of our own work and proactively taking that to auditor, and of course there was a fine that came from that. That is the same practice that we will do across all states and territories.

**Mr BARTON:** Have you done in Victoria though?

**Mr TAYLOR:** We continually do back checks across Victoria, and we will continue to do so. We strongly believe that this is all about a culture of reporting, and technology helps us—because we have so much more information—be able to collect that information and then pass that on to the regulator. And so we can improve the safety outcomes as a result of that.

**Mr BARTON:** Lovely. One question—and it is a yes or no answer I will need—all your data collected by the Multi Purpose Taxi Program customers, is that stored in Australia or does that go offshore?

**Mr TAYLOR:** As a US company, it goes to the US.

**Mr BARTON:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much for that. Kind of touching on the same themes, one final kind of like area as policymakers we do need to consider. Obviously we have had an interesting debate, and I appreciate your candour in some of those responses. But just about the complaints handling process—it is always a question. Obviously your apps—I am familiar with them, and I have got family and friends that are familiar with them. They do like—there was a message that you said about it—that the cost estimates are up-front and all that, kind of like fixed-price transportation et cetera. And most times those trips are successful and they are without issue.

But there are going to be times when there are complaints, and complaints handling is an issue I am concerned about—with all corporations and governments, so that is not just unique to Uber, but I think it is important. Because what we heard in the evidence was that some of these, I guess, more vulnerable cohorts, a lot of them still like using the telephone to call someone. I know that a former answer was that Uber does not have a telephone contact. What is your customer complaints handling process? How is that managed? Is it just automated responses, or there an actual person on the other that people can actually get in touch with? Can you just explain that a bit?

**Mr TAYLOR:** I can start at a more high level and, Dam, you can build on for MPTP specifically if need be.

**The CHAIR:** Yes. MPTP, yes.

**Mr TAYLOR:** Yes. I think most importantly we have a 24/7 support team which is available around the clock 365 days a year, so that if you ever send in an issue, we will immediately have someone that will work through a triage process whereby we will work out the right person that will respond to that in the right amount of time. For our most serious of incidents, that will be handled by a team of specialists that are based here in Australia. They are trained experts in dealing with very serious accidents or issues when and if they occur. Dam, I am not sure if you wanted to build on that for MPTP specifically.

**Mr OGUNDEJI:** Yes, absolutely.

**The CHAIR:** Yes. I want to see if you have made any adjustments for them, any improvements, over the last 10 months, as well.

**Mr OGUNDEJI:** Yes. In the process of trialling and then getting access to the scheme we developed like a separate what we call a node or a support process for people on the MPTP scheme. So whenever there is either a rider that is registered for the MPTP scheme or they reference MPTP in their complaint within the app it automatically gets flagged to our Sydney team and also to the operations team supporting it, so we always make sure we review any complaints or any feedback from that cohort separately and then we act accordingly with support from our global team.

**Mr TAYLOR:** We also make a point of sitting down with various advocacy groups. So we received information recently from Vision Australia about the way that our support node was not helpful in the structure of how it was set up for people that might have a vision impairment, and so we improved that. And that is the sort of organisation we are, where we are continually listening to customer feedback and we are improving our operations.

**Mr OGUNDEJI:** So very regularly we will talk with some of the organisations we talk to: Vision Australia, Blind Citizens Australia, National Disability Services—and that is another channel which we get feedback through. We surface any issues that might happen or any feedback, and again we can incorporate that into our regular workflow to address those issues in the future.

**The CHAIR:** Yes. Thank you for that. So you do not have a telephone line, but you are kind of online at base to chat. It is handled in Australia by people that are trained appropriately, but in particular for this Multi Purpose Taxi Program you have a dedicated group. Is that right? Is that what I am hearing, like a dedicated—

**Mr TAYLOR:** That is correct, and they would receive a phone call.

**The CHAIR:** Oh, they would?

**Mr TAYLOR:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** Because that is an issue I know for the general customer—that is not an option. So obviously broadly most people do have, like I said, a positive experience with your platforms, but some people say that that does not seem to be an option. That was my final question for the moment, but obviously deliberations are ongoing. It would be fantastic if we could get that information in a timely fashion about the number of trips you have facilitated this year. I believe it is helpful that we use qualitative data. I think there are some broad discussion points about consumer choice and options, but obviously as policymakers we also need to consider the moral hazards as well about, you know, ‘Will it mean that other subsections, like the wheelchair access, might be disadvantaged?’ and broader in making recommendations to government.

But I have appreciated the discussion. I want to thank all three of you: Dam, Dominic and Pia. Like I said, thank you for coming in and appearing before our committee. I look forward to receiving that information. If we have any further questions—because we have got CPVV and the Department of Transport next, so there might be some questions that come after that—are you happy for us to reach out to you, Dom? Is that the most appropriate if we write to you, if we have some questions on notice?

**Mr TAYLOR:** I think the secretariat has been working with Pia, so we should just include them in—

**The CHAIR:** No. That is right. It is through the secretariat with Pia. That is all right. We will continue on that channel. Thank you very much. We really appreciate it. It was really insightful, and we all learned a lot today, so thank you very much. The committee will now go to a lunch break, and then after the lunchbreak we will have CPVV and the Department of Transport.

**Witnesses withdrew.**