

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the Multi Purpose Taxi Program (MPTP)

Melbourne—Thursday, 9 December 2021

MEMBERS

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Mr Bernie Finn—Deputy Chair

Mr Rodney Barton

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Mrs Bev McArthur

Mr Tim Quilty

Mr Lee Tarlamis

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Mr Gordon Rich-Phillips

Ms Harriet Shing

Ms Kaushaliya Vaghela

Ms Sheena Watt

WITNESS (*via videoconference*)

Ms Colleen Furlanetto, OAM, Former Commercial Passenger Vehicles Victoria Disability Commissioner.

The CHAIR: I declare open the Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee subcommittee hearing for the Inquiry into the Multi Purpose Taxi Program. 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, and I pay my respects to their elders past, present and emerging.

My name is Enver Erdogan. I am the Chair of the committee, and I would like to introduce my fellow committee members that are present here today: Mr Rod Barton and Mr Lee Tarlamis.

To witnesses giving evidence, all evidence taken is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and further subject to the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information you provide during the hearing is protected by law. However, any comments you make outside 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 following today's hearing. Ultimately, transcripts will be made public and put on the committee's website.

For the Hansard record can you please state your name and whether you are appearing on behalf of an organisation or in a personal capacity and then start your presentation. We welcome your presentation. If you could keep it to under 10 minutes that would give us plenty of time to ask questions or have some discussion. Thank you. Over to you, Colleen.

Ms FURLANETTO: Thank you. My name is Colleen Furlanetto, and I am here in a private capacity. Thank you for your time and the opportunity to be here. I was the inaugural Disability Commissioner at CPV Victoria, a role I commenced on 1 January 2018. I completed my term on 31 December 2020, the first year of COVID. My role included specific oversight of accessibility, including the MPTP, at the appropriate level.

I feel it is also appropriate at this point to declare that I am an MPT scheme member, although not active at the moment. With COVID I have not had anywhere near the trips—minimal use of the scheme—like so many.

I am also here not with a connection to CPV. Here as a former commissioner, I am not here with any other link to an organisation or connection, and I am unsupported. I am here present as me as such.

People with disability face barriers and discrimination in their lives every day, including access to work, opportunities, education, health services, social gatherings and general connectedness to friends and family. One barrier, as we know, is often transport.

I have worked closely in CPV with industry stakeholders, including booking service providers, drivers and industry specialists—also, importantly, the people who use CPV, including members of the MPT scheme. I also actively engage with disability organisations; wider sector agencies, including other transport organisations; and committees like PTAC, now ATAC.

I introduced the disability access forum at CPV accessible on transport. It was a collective of the disability and the access sector. I chaired the forum and believe the forum was very successful. The forum's membership drew from the disability sector, emergency sector and multiple stakeholders with a direct connection. This included the seniors commissioner, the disability services commissioner, emergency management, Carers Victoria, the Department of Health and many more.

Why have I stated this list, because there is more I didn't? I did this to ensure that the committee today understand the breadth of connection and reach of the MPT scheme as it directly and indirectly connects. For example, the seniors commissioner has seniors making up 75 per cent approximately of the MPT scheme, with the highest users being aged from 18 to 34. So you will see it is a very diverse scheme and membership. I was also a regular attendee at the industry implementation committee, which displayed a massive commitment from

the industry. Insights, challenges and possibilities were equally provided—industry regulation information, code of conduct, safety reporting obligations, including the MPT scheme, and the importance and the benefit for the industry as well as the consumer as you cannot have one without the other. People have somewhere they may need to be and they may need a CPV. COVID has shown us that people, with or without access needs, have had less places to be. Therefore the impact on the CPV industry has been devastating to their business continuity and the ability to maintain themselves for hopefully the re-entry to a service to the community in the months and years ahead. I encourage you, if you have not already done so, to please review the CPVV disability accessibility action plan. It was the first plan of its kind for the industry at CPV.

People with disabilities and those with access needs have a right to access and a right to be able to be where they choose, when they choose for the reasons already mentioned, and those without access needs can often take this for granted. COVID has showed us that people, with or without access needs—I'm reading that again, sorry. The accessibility lens I brought to—

The CHAIR: You are doing a fantastic job, by the way, Colleen. It has been very informative, so please continue at your own pace. I am really enjoying it.

Ms FURLANETTO: No worries. Thank you. The accessibility lens I brought to CPV and with CPV supported by the commission and the commissioners saw us draw on relevant legislation like the *Victorian Disability Act 2006* to develop, maintain and review a policy like the accessible action plan at CPV to ensure we reduce barriers to persons with disability accessing goods and services and facilities, reduce barriers to persons with disability obtaining and maintaining employment, promote inclusion and participation in the community of persons with disability and achieve tangible changes in attitudes and practices which discriminate against persons with a disability.

In addition to the *Victorian Disability Act 2006*, people with disability are safeguarded against discrimination under both state and commonwealth laws. These include the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*, commonwealth; the *Commercial Passenger Vehicles Industry Act 2017*, Victoria; the CPV industry regulations 2018, Victoria; disability access to premises standards 2010, commonwealth; *Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002*, commonwealth; the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*, Victoria; and the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act*, Victoria.

People with disability service provision is not a 'nice to have'; the laws clearly state that it is a 'must have'. The social model of disability is outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and defines disability. It highlights the impacts of barriers placed by society on people with disability rather than the person's known impairment. It puts a person at the forefront and highlights that it is the environment or the negative attitudes that are the disabling factors for people with disability and those with accessibility needs. In embedding access and inclusion as core business we will create a culture where the environmental and the attitudinal barriers are removed and accessibility is widely considered in our policies, processes and decisions.

Whether a booking service provider, driver or wider community member, when at CPV we were committing to collaborate as one and focusing on the barriers and working together. This obviously largely relies on the MPTP program, but the training and quality service that the industry provides also assist in the quality and service to not only MPTP members—quality is quality. We are all consumers of services. We all expect choice and control. The MPT scheme supports this for the industry and the consumer. The MPT scheme is one tool to ensure equality and equity to accessible service.

The MPT scheme commenced in 1993 with the purpose to ensure the scheme met the increasing needs and rights of access and to this day offers genuine choice and access to a range of services. Over the decades the need for a whole-of-community service will be necessary and has and will only increase in future years. At every public connection I had with accessible community they often stated, 'When can I choose to use my MPTP card in other CPVs? Why am I blocked from the choice that others take for granted?'. Many in the community and in the industry agree that the MPT scheme and expansion progress can provide opportunities to improve how people with disability can stay connected, have access to reliable accessible service and information and have dignified and equitable experiences while staying safe and having a choice.

It is my experience that training is a gap with many in the current service delivery. The minimum requirements, I appreciate, may be considered appropriate, but all people with disability are individuals, as are the drivers who interact with the person. The service delivery by too many providers is less than satisfactory at times. This is why disability access awareness training must be provided to all connected in the service delivery across all CPV industry stakeholders. With a more contemporary minimum standard, as too many cases, whether reported or anecdotal, leave me with a sense of frustration and sadness that there is systemic discrimination within the industry that occurs to this day. It at times feels like a roll of the dice, that you do not know what service you are going to get. As a consumer that is very concerning. We all have a right to active citizenship. Usually our lives require transport. People with disability and people with access need endure attitudes all too often that are not inclusive and are unfairly seen as a cost burden.

The MPTP is a growing scheme, as people with disability may be provided more access to active citizenship by funding mechanisms, including, but definitely not limited to, the NDIS. An individual's disability or an individual's access needs are as diverse as our own fingerprint. Not all people with disability are wheelchair users, for example. Indeed, most people with disability have non-visual disability. As there is diversity with people with disability or people with access needs, so too is there diversity of where we live in Victoria as to the service and what it means to have transport options. In rural areas the tyranny of distance of some sees many scheme members over and above the cap of what the scheme subsidy provides. This does not mean this does not happen in metro or regional centres, but for many not that far out of Melbourne the only transport options are that they may be using CPVs and have access to the MPTP.

It is not all about money either. It is about knowing that the person committing to providing the service is trained, respectful, informed, not rushing the passenger, being respectful and providing quality and safety along with communicating effectively and respectfully is a constant. Sadly, all too often this is not the case for far too many who use the program, along with other Victorians who experience less than satisfactory service from the taxi and rideshare industry all too often.

Having said that, I want to be really clear that there are magnificent operators who care and go above and beyond and do so often with an economic hit. When we lose the human connectedness and it becomes simply a financial transaction, the quality of the service, the availability of the service, the trust in the service can be really challenging for all involved as the benefits are not measured in financial cost benefits alone; it is the non-financial risk and the ethical approach we must consider in schemes such as this.

I am not sure, as I do not know the committee here today, if you have ever had to consider any of the above—what I have already stated—but if not, please listen to those of us who have. People with disability are disproportionately disadvantaged, including in emergencies like the pandemic. Getting people's trust to get back into the vehicles, knowing they will be safe, is key. I am sure this is a priority. People with disability and those with access needs are not unserviceable. People with disability and access needs are not asking for anything special; they are asking for access, safety and respect. The industry must and needs to be supported and as a community we need to ensure we all have a world-class service providing access and choice where we are all respected.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much for that, Colleen. Again, I want to just thank you for making time out of your own schedule in a personal capacity to attend and appear before the committee. In your opening remarks there is a lot to absorb. I especially found interesting your insight and your outlining of the expectations of people with disability in terms of service, and as you outlined, access, safety and respect. I found that really refreshing and very authentic, so thank you very much on behalf of the committee. I might go around to the committee members to ask questions. I might go to Mr Barton to ask the first few questions. Mr Barton, over to you.

Mr BARTON: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Colleen, for coming in. I appreciate you coming in not as the commissioner now but as an individual coming through. I want to thank you for the work you did, because people do know, from the industry, the enormous amount of work that you have done, but there is an issue about how the Multi Purpose Taxi Program is being expanded. First off, I will just go to what we refer to as training. We have allowed a rideshare company to come in that allows people to do an online tick and click for training, where the taxi industry actually puts people off the road and do day courses and in some cases for several days doing courses. I have a bit of information we got out of New South Wales, from the point to point commissioner up there. They discovered 10 per cent of all their drivers completed their training within

10 minutes, 15 per cent of their drivers had their training done in 10 to 20 minutes and 25 per cent of drivers had completed it in less than 20 minutes. Now, we know this is online, but we do not even know if those people were actually doing it or whether their 14-year-old son was actually doing it. When you compare that level of training for people who work casually in the industry to a full-time commercial passenger vehicle driver such as a taxidriver, how did we say that is okay, having this different standard of training for the rideshare industry and a different standard for the taxi industry?

Ms FURLANETTO: Thank you for the question, Mr Barton. Reflecting on when I was in my capacity there, I will take it in two parts around the training and the consistency across the organisation. I could not agree more that it should be consistent, but, Mr Barton, it is very inconsistent as it stands depending on the booking service provider or the driver currently. And as stated in our state of the industry report on accessibility, people that were interviewed, which included drivers and people with disability, for that report, which was not meant to be a review; it was a snapshot in time—it found that one in 10 who were seeking service in vehicles needing support did not have their seatbelt put on, 49 per cent of the people that were the drivers driving WAVs had not done training, had not had any refresher training for more than five years. So I suppose the point is I totally agree there needs to be consistency, and I think the agreement of what that is—I am pretty sure the disability and accessibility sector would absolutely feel that little with limited updated training at the moment is cutting it.

I take on your comment about several days of training. When I was speaking with booking service providers and drivers et cetera, it was very, very, very minimal and varied. I have some colleagues who occasionally, as people with disability, were asked to go into organisations and provide that training, and those organisations said that they felt there was so much more value in having someone with a disability present on accessibility, so I think that is an opportunity. Like I say, Mr Barton, there are some who do this very well and there are some who do not, and I could not agree more that we need consistency. We do not need to reinvent the wheel around accessibility and what that looks like. Absolutely with the operation of equipment there are standards, different ways to tie down chairs et cetera. There are rules and regulations and ways of doing things. But disability awareness training—there are packages that are online that are from credible organisations, disability organisations available, now that people could be taking on. And indeed I know, Mr Barton, that there were some drivers who told me that they went over and above and sought out these courses because they wanted to be the best service provider. So they are the ones that are the champions that went over and above. I think a minimum standard needs to be reviewed, and now is the time for a review and for it to be consistent and fair.

Mr BARTON: Chair, can I ask another question?

The CHAIR: I just wanted to also announce that a committee member, Mr Quilty, has also joined. Back to you, Rod.

Mr BARTON: Thank you, Chair. Colleen, did CPVV consider doing the training itself rather than take it away from, you know, the commercial reality of ‘How cheap and how quick can we do this to meet the minimum standard’? Did CPVV ever look at saying, ‘Well, you know, we’re not happy here. We need to lift the standard’ and they should do it?

Ms FURLANETTO: In my time at CPVV training was absolutely discussed, including of what, by who and to what standard and was definitely something I asked about. We did say we have to find a way to be making this more consistent and do better. I am not sure if you are aware, Mr Barton, but I did present at the industry implementation group meetings regularly, and we talked about accessibility. I shared resources; I shared connections to other states, the way they were doing things. And as a regulator I was there in my own capacity—there are always ways of ensuring that there is training and consistency. What I do know is when we brought service providers together there was collegiality. Even though people may have had their differences, they came together and shared information, and I do believe that is something that CPV could pursue—and maybe they are. But I was asking for building capacity to be pursued, because when you get people in the room they learn from each other, they go back and use the resources and they are not reinventing the wheel, they are sharing the knowledge. Even though it is a competitive market, I was always surprised by the industry helping the industry, particularly the smaller providers, making sure that they were able to come along because the regulatory change was very daunting for a lot of people. So CPV definitely has a role to play, in my personal opinion. I am not sure if this is the role of the regulator, but perhaps it could be.

Mr BARTON: And I think one of the challenges for the industry, too, is that we have had such an upheaval in the industry and such an expansion and now we have got 25 to 35 per cent of the fleet which are now not affiliated to a network. They are individuals, they are independents, and we have lost control of what those people are doing and we do not know who is out there and who is not out there. So that is a challenge. Chair, someone else can ask a question.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I might pass over to Mr Tarlamis, then Mr Quilty. Mr Tarlamis, over to you.

Mr TARLAMIS: Thank you, Chair. I just wanted to ask: in relation to WAVs, during your time as the commissioner did you hear or were you aware of any concerns about the number of registered WAVs being higher than the number that were actually operating in the market?

Ms FURLANETTO: It was certainly a question that I and that the commission sought clarity on at different levels and at different times, particularly when we were doing the state of the industry report, developing the action plan, trying to get the demographic, particularly with the forum that I chaired for accessibility for the disability communities. Questions were asked like, ‘Well, how many are there? Why does it take so long?’—all of these questions along with the need to be supported to ensure quality WAVs out there, with the best equipment possible. I think that there were an awful lot more WAVs-accredited drivers than there were vehicles—many thousands more different. So as to how many were actually on the road at any one time, I do know at my time there it was approximately 800, and I do not believe that I was ever able to see in absolute black and white how many were out there and operational at that time. Now, that could be for a variety of reasons. It could be very complex reasons, so I cannot give that a blanket ‘They said 800 and there were only 500’. I do not know that depth. That would be something you would need to ask CPV.

Mr TARLAMIS: All right. Thank you. Are you aware if there has been any work done to ensure the availability of WAVs and that that is not compromised with the addition of additional rideshare companies into the Multi Purpose Taxi Program?

Ms FURLANETTO: I suppose I am happy to speak about the elephant in the room that is being alluded to, and I tried to open in my opening comments around choice. I find that as a person living with a disability and having choice limits at times on how I can get somewhere, I feel very personally affronted if someone is making a decision as to what will be in the market that I am worthy to have. If I choose to go by train and I am able to go by train or I choose to go in a rideshare vehicle, as I was asked constantly, which I said in my opening statement—and I mean constantly, I am not talking several times. People wanted choice. So I think that we need to not see this as ‘them and us’ industry. I think we need to look past that, to be quite frank, and we need to look at it as a service provision. If there are quality services and safe services and regulated service and, to the other comments that have been made, consistent levels of service and monitoring, then that will mean that there will be some traditional players that may not be in the market, but it will mean that as we move along in time things cannot always stay stagnant or the way they were. Life changes. Service changes. I worked in the health industry for years. Nursing is very different and during COVID it is really different, and it will be different from this day on. So I do think that we need to move past the ‘them and us’, to be quite frank, because people with disability and those with access needs are getting caught in the middle and not having the choice. I do think this is very important for me to say—I did have a request from the Premier for me to look into some challenges around people with disability using different services and how they were treated. Now, I spoke to these people, these consumers, and their concerns involved being bullied, intimidated—that if they were seen in another vehicle type, they need not think that they would get back into the traditional service provision where they were. Now, that is just not acceptable at any level. This was also anecdotally shared on many other occasions.

Mr BARTON: Colleen, did you report that? Because I just find that horrendous.

Ms FURLANETTO: Yes, it is horrendous.

Mr BARTON: Did you report it?

Ms FURLANETTO: Yes. I spoke about it, but we can report things, Mr Barton, but as people with disability, when we do report, it is not an easy process. Now, the Acts and everything that I read out that should protect and respect all CPV users, an unintended consequence of legislation is that someone can refuse to take a person with a disability, and it is not discriminatory unless they say, ‘I’m not taking you, because of your guide

dog'; 'I'm not taking you, because of your facial difference'. People do not want to report and go through the complaints mechanism, because of fear of retribution as complaints are to go to the BSPs in the first instance. This largely occurs in rural settings, because there are very limited services and if you tick off one of the major service providers that you have used over the years—now you may have choice, but you are intimidated not to use that choice, because if they complain, they may not get from A to B if the different service falls through.

I have to say, in three years in my role I felt we were just starting to get to building that relationship and building that culture, and it comes down largely to attitudes. We are all people first. Most of us have great attitudes. Some of us have really bad attitudes, and that can be people with disability who have a bad attitude just as much as a provider. So I do think that we need to remember that people often do not complain. I try to encourage people to complain. I had the Premier ask me to please talk to this person, but they would not come forward. And then there were others who said, 'Yes, it happens to me, but we can't come forward'. And that was something that I felt that I was starting to get some legs on, to be able to build the trust for us to be able to really move forward on that. So that is a barrier, because of fear. Without acknowledging the issues and working on building capacity for all involved to build respect in services like CPI.

Mr TARLAMIS: Absolutely. Where I am coming from is absolutely I support choice for people in the sector and having the best service that they can—and the appropriate choice. My concern is that lack of sight about what is happening within the sector. For instance, if you have on paper a number of WAVs that are saying they are available but are not actually available and you have WAVs leaving the sector or not being available but then you have players who have no intention of being in that market—so there is not service that it is available; it is available on paper but not actually available, so it is not actually there—we need to have line of sight of that, because the system is not actually working, so that we can address it. I think there is a role for the regulator to play to be aware of that so that they can advise government so decisions can be made to put in place processes to address that to make sure that the system is meeting all those needs about accessibility, choice and all of those sorts of things. That is why I am sort of just making sure that we have got those parameters and settings right so that we know what is happening within the sector.

Ms FURLANETTO: I think a barrier to information is data collection and access to that data. I was asking for data: 'How many? Where are they? Where are they located? How old are these vehicles? When will they be renewed?'. WAV availability is one thing; WAV safety is another. I was very keen for WAV platforms to have a higher edge around the side, because as a wheelchair user backing out backwards onto that, it is very risky. But to change all the standards, to do all these things, 'It's too hard'. That was coming from not just CPVV, it was because that is a huge undertaking. But it is safety, and the modern chair today can get up the side of the lip on that platform as easy as anything. So WAV availability is critical, as is transparency, as is the adaptability of standards.

On your point around WAVs not being available, I have used WAVs an awful lot, and when people book—and people with a disability also go out at night-time, on the weekends. It is often very difficult to get a vehicle home from the nightclub, when someone might have had just as good a time along with their mates. So there are barriers, but there are huge opportunities. I am a realist, but I also want to be positive. If we can get communicating and we can have some real, solid, respected structures, I think that some of the less professional or those who may come in and not be around, just dipping their feet in to see what this is and not really committed to it—well, they will see you need to commit to it. This is a privilege, to have access to subsidies, access to taxpayers dollars, but again, not just from the financial position, if we can look at it from a human point of view as well, that would be great.

Mr TARLAMIS: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Quilty, do you have some questions?

Mr QUILTY: So if there were passengers getting unsatisfactory service and they did make complaints, would people get weeded out of the industry? How does that work?

Ms FURLANETTO: Well, I can give you some personal accounts, because while I was commissioner I had possibly more than half a dozen quite serious safety concerns as a passenger in a WAV, which was quite ironic. So I went through the reporting process, and I would have to say that the onus was on me as the person. I did not get any favours from being the Disability Commissioner; I wanted to go through the same process that

everybody else went through, because I wanted to be able to go, 'This is a problem'. So an example of that was on the front of the CPVV website where you go to make a complaint if not satisfied with the BSP who was connected with the incident you would put in your name and possibly an address, and almost the next question down was, 'Are you prepared to go to court?'. Well, until you have told your story and it is in context, having that question there is a barrier. People are going to go, 'Whoa, hang on a minute, I'm not going there'. So that question was removed. That question was not there to make it so there was less work, it was there because it was not designed and accessible. Noting complaints in the first instance are meant to go through the BSP of the service delivered. This rarely goes well or achieves much.

So I know for a fact that we do not receive—or did not receive in my time when I was at CPV—anywhere near the reporting of the challenges that were out there. We also need to celebrate those that do well and celebrate those that give quality service—some way of making the community aware that this is a five star. They have done real training. They have got a certificate in front, or whatever that standard is. And like I said, a lot of this training is already out there around disability awareness, communication, diversity—all of those things. I think we could consider making the provider more accountable and not so much of an onus on the passenger—and someone to help the person through, if they so choose to make their complaint, because we cannot change what we do not know and we cannot change what we do not acknowledge. But it has to be safe for people to do that. So I think it would be great if we could have a review of the training, also recognising those that have taken the time to do that extra training and have them as preferred dispatch with people and holding the organisations, no matter who they are, to account—that they keep to that one standard, consistent across the whole sector. Now, that is no easy task, but it is not impossible.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Colleen, it has been a very good discussion so far. There is one question that always kept popping up with our previous witnesses: the issue of surge pricing. Is it your view that there should be some sort of maximum fee/fare regulation on MPTP trips? What is your opinion or view on that issue?

Ms FURLANETTO: Because I can see that people driving in the service—that is their business, that is their job, effectively. Now, it may not be their first job and it may not be their only job, or it might be an occasional job. I do feel that people need to be paid for their service. So everything from the lifting fee to the other—during COVID, trying to get people out and about, the increasing of the 50 per cent and the \$60 limit and all of those things. Incentives to provide service comes at a cost.

If I could add I do not want to divide the state, but it is very different to receive a service in rural Victoria than in the city. Now, in the city you have got traffic, you have many other challenges—distance, minimum services, all of that. But we need to be really reviewing what is a feasible amount that people should be expected to pay. I do not feel as a scheme user that I need to not pay anything. I absolutely should pay for a service, and I am very aware that I am a white woman of privilege and I can afford to pay a little more than someone else. But for so many with disability, because of the social model of disability they may be excluded from employment often—and opportunity to earn an income—they may not have disposable cash. They may be very limited in what they can do. So I do see both sides. We need to be making sure that consider holistically the service and the need to be there in the first place.

And like I said in my opening remarks, we cannot have one without the other. They are both key. If you have consumers and you do not have providers, or you have providers and do not have consumers, guess what? Neither one gets where they want to or neither one gets paid. So we need to have a scheme, and a whole-of-industry look at how this all works. I know that that is really challenging.

But I just want to reiterate that there are far more good operators than not, but there are some that are doing a great disservice to those that are good operators.

The CHAIR: All right. I understand that. And we have touched on the issue of training quite a bit. So on that prospect I do not have, actually, any additional questions right now. Does Mr Barton or anyone else have any additional questions? Mr Barton, over to you.

Mr BARTON: Thanks, Colleen. You said previously about the two different markets coming in and, you know, we have got to get over it. I do not think you will find anyone in the taxi industry who says we are opposed to the competition. All the industry is saying is that whatever the conditions are for the rideshare industry, it should be the same for the taxi industry. There is a huge disparity between the cost and the burden

of operating a cab and operating a rideshare vehicle that you might operate on a Saturday night once or twice a month or whatever. From the industry's point of view, they absolutely accept. I think the industry is genuine about wanting to be able to achieve an improvement in this area, and I know there has been a lot of work done around those areas. Just in terms of the things the Chair raised about the differences between them—the money, for instance. The rideshare industry can charge whatever they like; taxis can't, right? So that gives them a commercial advantage to get more drivers to go to that section, and then it impacts the taxi industry. It will actually reduce the number of taxis. Was any work done around that? Because we know that sedan taxi work subsidises the wheelchair work. Was there any work that you are familiar with around the impact of that?

Ms FURLANETTO: Again, going by discussions, there was not just one rideshare player that wanted to be part of the expansion for the MPTP. There were multiple smaller players and some not so small players, but they were all at different stages. I think the fact remains, and I think I have tried to stress really categorically, that I think the industry—traditional industry—is coming from a good place, not ill intent. I do not believe that is the same for anyone else coming into it, whether it was two years ago or it is next year. But there was a significant change in the industry. That was out of my hands; that was out of most people's hands. It has happened, and now we need to move forward as to what that best way will be. People need to get into the room and talk together and work out how this policy and how these different modes of service provision can occur.

I did have it explained to me—and I do not mean to be flippant, but I just think that this is a great analogy: if you go to your local pub and you order a parma, and you go, 'Next week I'm going to have the fisherman's basket', you are not saying to the poultry farmers of Victoria, 'I don't appreciate chicken parma'; you are saying to the fisherpeople of Victoria, 'I want to try fish tonight'. That is a choice. This analogy was from someone with a disability whose humour is the way they cut through. Now, I do not mean that to be flippant, I mean that respectfully. But there is a point: because we can, for any organisation, be challenging, expensive. I understand; I run a business. I know the cost of registration. I know the cost of running vehicles. I am not a CPV provider, but I really feel that we need to appreciate that sometimes service delivery of what someone has traditionally done can change—or not—and that is a choice. But when the choice is forced on people because of economics—and throw in COVID, and I know that that makes everything very difficult—it is really complex, and I am not in a position where I could look into the crystal ball and tell you what the answers will be. But I think we really need to get to the table to hear that and have a conversation, and I would implore you as our members to please ensure that you have people with access needs and people with disability at the table. It is essential, because we are one community and we are not behaving like one community in this regard. People with disability or those with access needs know what service they need and choose, and we should respect that as much as everyone else connected in the industry.

Mr BARTON: Yes. There is a commercial reality. We have now had evidence from major networks and rural and regional operators who are not replacing their wheelchair-access vehicles now because of the boundary shift on the market. And it is really the government has deregulated the industry and there are consequences of a deregulated industry—people want to replace the money. I accept your position; you are absolutely correct. But what we are asking people to do is to go and buy a \$100 000 vehicle, and let me tell you something: if anyone comes to me and says, 'I'm going to buy a \$100 000 wheelchair vehicle—do you think I can make a living out of it, pay my way?', I am going to have to tell them, 'No, I don't think you can'. Those are the circumstances we have got now. This is one of the very important reasons why we need to have this conversation. And you are absolutely right, it is very challenging. But we are here, so that is the starting point.

Ms FURLANETTO: If I could just add very briefly around the different service providers. People see that there is a market and an opportunity and a sense of responsibility, when we think about transport for women and children in particular. I also want to mention that there are some who are not CPV drivers who would like to be, who have children or people in their home with disability, and they have got a \$100 000 vehicle that might not quite meet the requirements—the measurements, the heights—but are really very close. So you have got people that are trained, people that understand disability, people who respect those who they will be assisting. They could be servicing a young person, young people, going out at night knowing that they are safe, knowing that they are with a provider who gets it—and obviously it gives that person employment as well. It is a win-win. So we have got to explore all opportunities.

Mr BARTON: You will get no argument from me. The more we have out there the better.

Ms FURLANETTO: That is right, but there are barriers there. So that is an opportunity that could be looked at, because I have had many people say to me, 'I want to work. I could do this. I am trained. I know how to do it. Let me do it'.

The CHAIR: On that note, sorry to interrupt, it has been a very insightful discussion. Thank you, Colleen. As I said, your lived experience is very valued by the committee and it will be assisting us in our deliberations going forward. I note that we have reached 3 o'clock and we have got our next witnesses waiting in the waiting room and they are eager to get on too. On behalf of the committee, we say thankyou to you for your contribution. If we have any other questions that come to mind after, are you happy for us to reach out to you?

Ms FURLANETTO: Absolutely. You have my details. Thank you for the time and appreciate your effort.

The CHAIR: No, thank you as well again on behalf of the committee. Have a good afternoon.

Mr BARTON: Thank you, Colleen.

Witness withdrew.