



Inquiry into MPTP Feb 22

1. a review of the minimum safety requirements for vehicles operating within the MPTP scheme

The VTA recommend that safety requirements are not set as a statewide standard as this may drive providers away in the smaller country towns. The committee need to remember that in these smaller towns many of the existing operators have been providing services for years incident free. They also need to remember that in these smaller towns the service providers and users are personally known to each other and have developed friendships from years of service. There is not likely to be any other consistent service providers become available in these areas and if changes are made then it may in fact reduce availability. It is all very well to say the client has choice but how safe is it for the client to have choices between 9:00am & 5:00pm Monday to Friday but no choices at all outside these hours. Economic rationalism only works when there is an abundance of users and suppliers and this is not the case statewide.

We would also recommend the committee define what they mean by safe, is this simply relating to the physical attributes of the Vehicle being used, seat belts, cameras, tracking etc., or should it relate to service provision and checks done on the Driver of the vehicle. Without regulation it is difficult to insist on guaranteed service provision given there is a maximum number of hours a driver can safely drive. However we believe the committee should look at a minimum requirement to the Driver Accreditation (DC) and have it include a NDIS Check which is currently not required.

2. the consideration of a mandatory maximum fare rate across all MPTP work;

How can you even be looking at this?? You are wanting the best of both worlds and that is not a luxury you can afford anymore. That is the price of deregulation. You are essentially trying to say the client has and should have choices, but we do not trust those choices. The Government cannot afford the expense of those choices so we will make the supplier come up with a way to limit the amount charged. Sorry guys just as the existing suppliers took a hit when the previous regime was dismantled now is the Governments turn to pay the piper. To reintroduce this will again mean service providers leaving MPTP clients behind as the cost of compliance would be astronomical. It would also lead to MPTP users becoming second class passengers as service providers would be concentrating on the more lucrative full fare paying passengers. We would suggest you meddle in this at your peril, please remember the bet you are making, should you chose to make this idea a reality, will be paid by some of the most vulnerable in our community through lower service availability, it is not about dollars being saved. There is an old adage that says careful what you wish for as

you might get this. Where we are right now is what the Government had planned for this industry through deregulation.

3. an examination of how roting and exploitation of vulnerable users will be prevented

The addition of NDIS checks would be a major step toward for this aim. Again, you seem to be wanting the best of both worlds here. You want the MPTP member to have choices, but then want limits in place should those choices be poor ones. It is an unfortunate fact of life that there will always be people who prey on those that are weaker. Coaching and grooming will happen, by having a vital and sustainable network of Booking Service Providers (BSPs) who will assign these trips to a variety of different drivers this helps limit grooming opportunities. The independent single person operator does not limit this opportunity. Please be clear I am NOT saying all independent operators are rogues, in some cases they provide better service through personal knowledge of the client. In some cases, also the single operator is the only option that is viable for the town.

4. an assessment of the financial impacts to services within the broader disability sector and how this will be managed

With deregulation it has made it far more difficult to justify the previous cross subsidy of the wheelchair fleet. As more changes are made to the MPTP programs this will add to that pressure. A simplistic example of cross subsidization is the fact that a member of our association Bendigo Taxis are a small depot with 6 staff. In round figures we have a fleet of 50 vehicles of which 10 are wheelchair taxis. If we were to shut down our wheelchair fleet, and yes this is looked at from time to time, we could save 4 salaries. So, 66% of the wages bill does work for 20% of the fleet. Many BSPs are in the same position due to them offering a coordinated service so that people can make plans and are secure in knowing what time Vans will arrive as opposed to the sedan bookings where sheer weight of numbers (of Cars) mean that passengers will get collected. An excellent example of this being essential was last Christmas Day in Bendigo. Whilst Covid made it difficult for people to make plans they ended up being fully booked. This meant that everybody who booked knew what time they were getting picked up and taken home, even if it was not the most desirable time, they could work around the times left to them. This of course meant those who tried to book on the day missed out as the fleet was already at capacity. Imagine what would have happened to those 128 trips if more were simply thrown into the mix in a totally uncoordinated way. It would have meant 100 trips would have been late or missed. It is unfortunate that everyone wants to travel at mealtime so putting the resources into educating passengers gives us the opportunity to avoid future problems next year. What is also unfortunate is the very people who ignored the suggestion made in October to get more drivers on the road for Christmas day(this suggestion was to double the lifting fee for that day only as had been done during the Pandemic), are the very same people looking down their collective noses that someone was left behind, what is even more unfortunate is that no one, to our knowledge, has bothered to tell the passenger why this happened so the chances of the situation being repeated are massive.

5. an examination of pathways for the industry to absorb major change post-COVID-19

We are sorry but we are simple country boys and have no idea what those pathways are, or where they lead to and from. As for changes post Covid-19 how will anybody know what they will be given we are not through it yet. It is impossible to logically think of options due to the illogical nature of the decisions made so far. For example when a ring of steel was placed around Melbourne and millions spent to enforce the ring of steel it was Ok for a driver to drive out of a designated hotspot to a regional area and park at the local railway station or shopping centre to try and get work. Equally unexplainable is the need to disinfect between passengers, record and keep those disinfecting records for a year if driving a CPV but if you drive a bus or train then there is no need to clean between passengers a simple once a day disinfection is deemed all that is needed with no cleaning sheets being needed, are CPV passengers more infectious? How about before the disinfecting requirements were made mandatory, industry was advised that taking people to and from Covid testing Centre's was not considered transportation of high-risk passengers. With a history of such amazing and contradictory decisions being made, which seem to disregard any form of logic, how could we even contemplate what the requirements may be post Covid -19.

6. ensuring proper probity and good governance are applied following careful consideration and reporting of all possible ramifications of consultations with both industry and disability stakeholders

The committee could set as its first task just exactly what was to be achieved by any changes to the existing system. This would need to be in clear English and not open to historical interpretation. Here is an example of what we mean, the current PBBS scheme is in place if you ask the CPVV to ensure disability passengers get the same level of service as non-disability passengers. Let us ignore the fact that you would get a different interpretation from many of the BSPs but focus on the fact the CPVV has just rewritten the disability definition. It is only paid on those trips transporting passengers with a disability who have a M31 wheelchair card, not on transportation of passengers with a disability. When asked why, answer is its always been like that. This is given as an example not to start another discussion but rather to try and get the committee members focused on what is trying to be achieved. Once you know what you want to achieve, or why a change is being made decisions get a lot easier. More importantly it also quickly becomes apparent if something was a success or not when results are measured against concrete goals rather than feel good mission statements. How can the CPVV possibly identify if a vehicle is safe or not, or the driver is aware of their obligations, if they cannot tell at a glance which vehicles are or are not CPVs. A simple sheet of paper is on the dash can easily be removed once a compliance team is spotted. Consideration could be given to quarterly inspections being conducted on all MPTP service vehicles, ideally all CPVs, through prearranged inspections being carried out at the local Vic Roads Office. How about departments work with each other instead of them all trying to reinvent the wheel.

7. An assessment of the impact of the expansion on MPTP clients, taking into account feedback on the expansion from Victorians living with disability and the disability sector.

During this assessment do not simply seek the feedback from those using the new service also seek feedback from those choosing not to use it or are unable to use it. Have their services suffered because of the expansion, are they seeing different operators fighting over the same lucrative passengers and leaving the less lucrative to fend for themselves. As an example, it is not uncommon now that they have 2 taxi companies, and several rideshare companies as well as independent cpv operators all working in Bendigo that they have no cpv's available in the very early morning hours mid-week. Sure, people have greater choices during the traditionally busy hours but no service at the less busy times. This is a direct result of the deregulation of the industry and the push to have only operator/drivers in the vehicles. Choice is fantastic as long as all MPTP members get that choice. Unfortunately, only those members with a smart phone, along with the ability to use it, as well as a credit card, can be part of the new expansion. Anywhere else this would be called discrimination, but not here. It is not going to take long for the grand kids to scan nans MPTP card details into their phone and start getting discounted rides home as the latest expansion only connects phones to each other, not people. If you are going to have an expansion surely it needs to extend to most, if not all, those in the geographical area that the new entrant works. This last entrant would be lucky to be offering services to 5% of the MPTP members due to the phone/credit card requirement. It is also interesting to note that the passenger used as a poster boy in the announcement of the expansion and how wonderful it was for everyone has already been in touch with the CPVV to complain the traditional taxi company won't come 20 minutes out of Geelong to collect him. It would appear he is already not using the expanded service.

If the committee wants some real live feedback how about the members take the time to travel with some passengers, talk to them, ask them what they think. Maybe stand at a rank and ask those travelling why they are choosing one form of transport over another. We think it is fair to say that many of those who rely most on MPTP support are not the most social media savvy, this of course means that feedback cannot be obtained from that source alone. Ballarat, Bendigo, and Geelong BSP's will happily arrange for any committee member to travel in their fleet, with MPTP members to get some direct feedback. The only condition on this offer is that it is done discreetly, this is not to be done as a media exercise but rather an opportunity to gain first-hand information and experience at the source. Our passengers are happy to help but deserve their privacy and dignity to be respected.

The committee needs to be aware that the CPVV CEO has been saying for years now, that the Industry needs to be business focused. BSPs need to be making a profit. At one meeting in Bendigo when told the likely changes (this was prior to deregulation) would mean Rochester Taxis would close simply stated that if a town was not capable of sustaining a viable taxi service why should it have one. A poignant statement that left the room shocked, but also a very clear message about where the industry was heading as it would have been 5 years ago this was said. So, for years now we have been told to act like a business please do not be surprised if we start doing this, unfortunately the first culling point will be the wheelchair fleet. This is simply a statement not a threat and the reality are many would not have the heart to do this, but their successors would not have any such issues. If you are going to provide greater choice to a chosen few please be aware it comes at a cost to those outside that group through potentially less choice than they currently have.

Years ago, it cost a lot of money to get into this industry as an operator. This meant that only those who really wanted to be part of the industry made that sort of investment. For the last 3 years the government has been pedaling the idea that for \$ 100 a year any monkey can do this job, that has been a massive mistake, as many only see this industry as one of last resort and do not intend to stay in it for long. As such they don't care how much damage is done as some are taking a slash and burn attitude to get as much as they can while they can. Any expansions need to encourage longer term players to stay in the industry. It needs to recognize quality service and provide incentives to offer services even when they are not profitable to do so. It needs to ensure price gouging such as doubling or tripling of fares during times of high demand does not happen, we see this as different to setting maximum fares. Fares should be consistent and not fluctuating as demand increases.

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