



Submission
Inquiry into the Multi Purpose Taxi
Program

Transport Alliance Australia

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The Transport Alliance Australia (TAA) welcomes the opportunity to make this submission for consideration of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee

Background

Transport Alliance Australia (TAA), formerly the Commercial Passenger Vehicle Association of Australia (CPVAA), is a peak body for owners, drivers and stakeholders in the point to point passenger transport industry. This includes stakeholders from services provided by taxis, hire cars, rideshare, limousines and specialised vehicles.

TAA is a not for profit body established in 2014 with a membership base primarily within Victoria where the association originated as the Victorian Hire Car Association (VHCA). Since these humble beginnings, representation has now grown to include other Australian states and territories.

Current Market Conditions

The committee no doubt appreciates the magnitude of the impact on the Commercial Passenger Vehicle (CPV) industry as a result of government restrictions being imposed to help contain COVID-19. Local, interstate and international travellers are all impacted and the industry is devastated, with reportedly up to a 90 - 95 % reduction in trips and associated revenue across all areas, both in the booked and unbooked market.

Booking Service Providers (BSPs) that are still in business are operating with skeleton staff in an effort to reduce costs and remain in business. A good proportion of CPVs have been parked or sold. This is a consequence not only of the current situation but also a long period of major upheaval and industry adjustment which has caused great frustration and a decline in financial return for drivers. As destructive as COVID-19 has been, for many participants this is the straw that has broken the camel's back. It is highly anticipated that many drivers will not return to the industry.

The CPV industry operates an essential service for vulnerable members of our communities. Those transporting MPTP participants give an added layer of service and this standard needs to be maintained now the MPTP is available to new participants. Serious consideration was required when considering whether to open up the MPTP program to new participants, and it appears that this was neglected. We have serious concerns for the users of the MPTP program.

In this submission the TAA will make recommendations, that urgently need attention and action, to ensure the needs of MPTP users are met now and in the future and their safety is given priority.

Recommendations

TAA recommends -

1. Introduction of mandatory training for all drivers operating within the MPTP scheme
2. Introduction of a mandatory requirement for approved cameras in vehicles operating within the MPTP scheme
3. Introduction of maximum fare rate for all MPTP trips
4. Introduction of a requirement for MPTP participants to have a minimum % of their fleet as approved wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAV)
5. Introduction of mandatory requirement for MPTP participants to have Comprehensive Insurance as well as Public Liability Insurance cover of \$10million, by an insurance provider adhering to the legislation governed by APRA

Minimum Training Requirements for Drivers to Ensure MPTP Users Feel Safe & Secure and are not Taken Advantage of.

It is difficult to fathom how drivers are permitted to transport passengers with a disability without receiving any **training in Disability Awareness**. At the very least drivers transporting passengers with a disability need to know:

- What a disability is
- Different types of disability
- How to communicate with a person with a disability
- Most common disability aides
- What not to say to a person with a disability
- How to offer assistance
- Special considerations that need to be made for a passenger with a disability

In Queensland it is a mandatory requirement for all personalised passenger transport drivers to complete Disability Awareness, Sexual Harassment and Anti-Discrimination training¹.

With the rideshare industry being plagued with sexual harassment complaints, and reports of drivers discriminating against passengers with a disability, it is paramount drivers are educated.

This request for training requirements is not a new one, the topic was raised multiple times in EIC hearing into ride sourcing in 2017.

¹ "Personalised transport industry—driver training (Department of" 28 Jun. 2021, <https://www.tmr.qld.gov.au/business-industry/Taxi-and-limousine/Industry-information/Personalised-transport-industry-driver-training>.

At a public hearing in Bendigo, Ms Mary Sullivan, Customer and Service Delivery Manager for Scope, emphasised the need for safeguards for people with a disability:

... a lot of the people we support are quite vulnerable. They have communication issues, cognitive impairment, so it is really important that the safeguards are there — that the drivers are trained; they have an understanding of people with disabilities and there is good regulation of it — so that our vulnerable customers are not taken advantage of and do feel safe and secure in what they are doing².

Kate Begley, policy advisor, Vision Australia said in the same inquiry;

I am going to talk about driver awareness training. Driver awareness training for those in the ridesharing industry is essential for the safety of the blindness and low-vision community. People who are blind or have low vision can sometimes require door-to-door assistance in order to safely reach and enter the vehicle and, in turn, safely arrive at their destination. Passengers must not be made to feel like a burden or a 'parcel' if they are being assisted by a driver. Driver awareness training also needs to extend to the legislation around seeing eye dogs' access to public transport. On occasions when people are refused access to transport on the basis of their seeing eye dog, it is not only unlawful under anti-discrimination laws but it can also present safety concerns when people are left roadside in isolated locations³.

In the same inquiry in 2017 the city of Yarra made the following recommendation:

Implement training to ensure safe and adequate assistance of passengers with disability, as a compulsory requirement for licencing of ride sourcing drivers⁴.

In 2015 Guide Dogs Australia conducted an internal research study (by EY Sweeney). Key findings in this study were:

- In 2010 40% of Guide Dog handlers reported issues with Taxis
- After 2010 Guide Dogs NSW/ACT were conducting monthly taxi driver education to all new drivers (via NSW Taxi Council)
- In 2015 the number of Guide Dog handlers reporting issues with Taxis had dropped to 21%.in NSW
- As a comparison, in 2015 Guide Dog handlers in Victoria, where there was no formal driver education, handlers reported 46% issues with Taxis.

² Page 9 "Inquiry into ride sourcing services - Parliament of Victoria." 8 Mar. 2017, https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/SCEI/Ride_Sourcing/Report/EIC_58-07_Text_WEB.pdf. Accessed 30 Jul. 2021.

³ "Transcript(PDF 35.38 KB) - Parliament of Victoria." 7 Sep. 2016, https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/070916_CORRECTED_Vision_Australia.pdf.

⁴ Page 15 "Inquiry into ride sourcing services - Parliament of Victoria." 8 Mar. 2017, https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/SCEI/Ride_Sourcing/Report/EIC_58-07_Text_WEB.pdf.

Rideshare drivers sexually harassing their passengers are frequently reported in the press and has been a topic raised at countless government inquiries around the globe. We could waste our time giving you pages of examples of this yet choose not to waste your valuable time.

We recommend the CPVV exceeds the training standards set in QLD and introduce mandatory training for all point to point passenger transport drivers in four areas:

1. Disability Awareness
2. Sexual Harassment
3. Anti-discrimination
4. Fatigue Management

Recommendation 1: The TAA recommends mandatory training for all drivers operating within the MPTP scheme

Minimum Safety Requirements for Vehicles operating within the MPTP Scheme

The way the MPTP model stands at the moment, a MPTP user, typically a vulnerable member of our society could get in a vehicle where:

- The driver has limited to no knowledge of disability awareness or anti-discrimination and sexual harassment laws
- No-one has physically met/interviewed the driver to determine his suitability for servicing people with a disability
- There are no protections in place for the user, anything can happen in that vehicle and there is no facility to check the turn of events.

With rideshare companies approving drivers to drive on their platform, with only the minimum required document checks, there is no human interaction to vet the suitability of drivers to transport vulnerable passengers.

MPTP passengers are typically vulnerable and require extra care and attention by drivers who understand disability and have the skills and personality to respectfully assist and communicate with MPTP users. Without thorough vetting, training and monitoring there is no way to ensure drivers are suitable for the role.

Having the monitoring of an approved camera in the vehicle will give MPTP users peace of mind and ensure they have an extra layer of safety.

This recommendation for mandated cameras is not a new one, this was raised multiple times in the Economy & Infrastructure Committee (EIC) hearing into ride sourcing in 2017

During the hearing in 2017, the city of Yarra made the following recommendation:

Mandate a percentage of wheelchair accessible vehicles as a condition of allowing the legal operation of car sharing and ride sourcing in the market⁵.

⁵ Page 41 "Inquiry into ride sourcing services - Parliament of Victoria." 8 Mar. 2017, https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/SCEI/Ride_Sourcing/Report/EIC_58-07_Text_WEB.pdf. Accessed 30 Jul. 2021.

In the same inquiry the RACV recommended:

mandate a percentage of wheelchair accessible vehicles as a condition of legalising ride sourcing⁶

Recommendation 2: The TAA recommends that all vehicles operated by MPTP participants must have an approved security camera installed and operational.

Preventing Rorting & Exploitation of Vulnerable Users

Opening MPTP participation to rideshare operators puts MPTP users at risk of surge pricing during busy periods. MPTP users have access to the subsidy as they have a disability and a validated need for support for their transportation needs. Subjecting MPTP users to price surging will unfairly gouge into each individual users annual limit and also funnel tax payers money into the pockets of the rideshare company, rather than being used to support the needs of people with a disability.

This topic was also raised in the EIC hearing into ride sourcing in 2017 by the city of Yarra who made the following recommendation:

Extend the MPTP subsidy to passengers of accredited ride sourcing operators, ensuring that passengers do not pay more due to the different pricing model of ride sourcing services⁷

To further prevent exploitation of MPTP users, mandatory training in Disability Awareness and Anti-discrimination as previously recommended, will educate drivers in their moral and legal responsibilities.

Recommendation 3: The TAA recommends introducing a maximum fare rate for all MPTP trips to protect MPTP users and tax payers dollars.

Financial Impacts to Services Within the Disability Sector

Not all MPTP users require a WAV. Many MPTP users ride in sedans.

It costs approximately \$90 000 to put a WAV on the road and thousands each year to maintain. A typical taxi company operating WAV's uses the income from the other vehicles in their fleet to subsidise the cost of the WAV's. Allowing MPTP participants to operate without WAV's is taking sedan work from the participants who have WAV's in their fleet. This will have a flow on effect crippling the already struggling BSP's with WAV's and reducing the number of WAV available to MPTP users

If a Booking Service Provider (BSP) decides to service the disability sector they need to do so fully and not only implement a service model that services some people with a disability and not others. This **discriminatory service model** that excludes people using a wheelchair is geared for financial gain with no consideration for the needs of the disability sector.

⁶ Page 16 "Inquiry into ride sourcing services - Parliament of Victoria." 8 Mar. 2017, https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/SCEI/Ride_Sourcing/Report/EIC_58-07_Text_WEB.pdf. Accessed 30 Jul. 2021.

⁷ Page 15 "Inquiry into ride sourcing services - Parliament of Victoria." 8 Mar. 2017, https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/SCEI/Ride_Sourcing/Report/EIC_58-07_Text_WEB.pdf. Accessed 30 Jul. 2021.

We urge that this discriminatory service offering be disallowed. We recommend the introduction of a mandatory requirement that an MPTP participant must maintain a minimum % of their fleet as approved, registered and operating WAV's

In the EIC hearing into ride sourcing in 2017 Link Community Transport warned that this could give rise to 'potentially oppressive market conduct' and increase the potential for adverse consequences:

Failure to achieve equitable accessibility for mobility-impaired people via wheelchair accessible taxi's (WAT) in Victoria has been a perennial problem. Recent Uber roll-outs in the USA have resulted in material detrimental effects (~60% reduction) on WAT availability and service levels.

Recommendation 4: The TAA recommends for MPTP participants to have a minimum % of their fleet as approved wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAV).

Protecting MPTP Users

To protect MPTP users it is critical that all MPTP participants have comprehensive insurance as well as public liability Insurance. Public liability insurance kicks in where comprehensive insurance stops. Public Liability insurance is what is relied on in scenarios where the driving journey has ceased eg If a passenger trips on the gutter and falls after disembarking the vehicle or if a mobility aide accidentally gets damaged while being removed from the boot.

Recommendation 5: The TAA recommends mandatory requirement for MPTP participants to have Comprehensive Insurance as well as Public Liability Insurance cover of \$10million, by an insurance provider adhering to the legislation governed by APRA.

TAA is committed to assisting the Economy and Infrastructure Committee with its work on this MPTP review and welcomes further opportunities for discussion of the issues raised and solutions proposed as part of this submission.