

Wheelchair accessible taxis

Review of fares and subsidies 2012

Meeting with WAT users and representatives
Hobart, 26 March 2012

- There was overall support from attendees for Option 2 as outlined in the Discussion Paper (that is, abolishing the \$30 per-trip cap).
- The meeting observed that taxi fares are very expensive for people who have no choice to use a taxi – either because they cannot use other forms of transport, or because there is no other accessible transport to their destination (e.g. the airport).
 - ⇒ It was reported that many people use taxis because they have essential travel (e.g. medical appointments). It becomes very expensive if they want to travel for non-essential purposes, so they often don't take those trips.
- Some users reported that WAT drivers told them they had been instructed to stop the taxi every time the meter clicked over to \$50, unload the user, put them back in the taxi and start the meter again – for very long trips.
 - ⇒ DIER noted that this was a result of the \$30 cap on the subsidy, and meant that the passenger received the 60% subsidy for the entire duration of the trip, not just for the first \$50. It also meant that the operator received an additional trip subsidy every time the meter was started. This was not the way the TAS was intended to operate.
 - ⇒ Technically a taxi cannot operate from outside its licensed taxi area into another taxi area, so once the trip extends beyond the boundaries of the licensed taxi area, the taxi is not legally able to re-start another journey.
- The meeting discussed taximeters. Some users reported that their drivers would turn the meter on before the taxi was ready to go (when loading the passenger and their wheelchair into the taxi); others said that the meter is only turned on when the taxi starts to move.
 - ⇒ DIER advised that the meter should not be turned on until the taxi starts to move, and that this had been discussed at length in the taxi review in 2006. This was considered to be the easiest option to make sure everyone did the same thing for all passengers.
 - ⇒ The higher flagfall for WAT users is intended to cover the extra time needed to load a wheelchair-reliant passenger into the taxi.
- Some users reported difficulties in obtaining taxis at certain times – e.g. around 8.00 to 9.30 on school days when many of the WATs are doing school runs. WATs can also be difficult to obtain during some evenings around 10 pm. One user said he had waited 2 ½ hours for a taxi one night (Claremont, 10.30 pm).
- Most people reported good service from most WAT drivers/operators but it was noted that there was a 'rogue element' that was doing the wrong thing. Examples included:

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- ⇒ Charging extra for providing extra service (e.g. putting luggage in the boot),
- ⇒ Deliberately prolonging the journey (e.g. going the longest way, taking routes with lots of traffic lights) and refusing to take the route nominated by the passenger.
- Concerns were expressed about some taxi drivers refusing to pick up passengers with disabilities. This is addressed for users with Guide Dogs by providing them with a card that reminds drivers it is illegal to refuse to transport a user who is accompanied by a Guide Dog. Attendees asked if something similar could be done for people with a physical disability.
- Attendees noted that there can be problems with identifying some drivers. If a taxi is not affiliated with a radio room, it is difficult to identify the driver unless the passenger can get the number of the taxi. This is not always easy.
- Concerns were expressed in respect of people living in residential areas where several WAT users live. It was reported that some taxi drivers might reveal too much information to people about where they have taken their neighbours (e.g. that they have taken someone to a medical appointment or that someone will be away from home for several days).
- There was a brief discussion on temporary disabilities where the person has to travel in a WAT:
 - ⇒ There was no firm position on this, but it was suggested that many people in this situation might not know they are being charged a higher fare. This doesn't excuse the discrimination, and there needs to be a mechanism to subsidise these users as well.
- Attendees noted that visually impaired people have difficulty (or cannot) filling out Transport Access Scheme (TAS) vouchers.
 - ⇒ DIER updated the meeting on the proposal to issue all TAS members with swipe cards.
 - ⇒ There was general agreement at the meeting that the cap was too low and should be abolished. However, if it had to be increased rather than being abolished, it was suggested that the cap should be indexed so that it kept pace with increases in taxi fares. It was noted that the cap had remained the same since it had been introduced.
- Users expressed concerns about interstate vouchers. It was reported that some drivers refuse to take them, or in some cases in Melbourne charge the passenger the lifting fee that is supposed to be paid by the Government. Also, some drivers refuse to pay the subsidy that the user is entitled to in their home state and only pay the subsidy that is applicable in the state where the person is travelling.
 - ⇒ DIER advised that the Victorian Taxi Directorate has stated that drivers should not charge interstate users the lifting fee and that if this happens, the user should obtain a receipt for the fare and the lifting fee and forward this to the VTD for investigation. Users said that they have done this and nothing has been done about it.
 - ⇒ DIER to follow up.
- The meeting acknowledged that the high occupancy tariff was necessary to keep WATs on the road during the less busy times.

CONTACT DETAILS

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