

Project Officer
ACT Taxi Industry Review
Office of Transport - Department of Territories and Municipal Services

Email: Taxiservices@act.gov.au

Dear Project Officer,

ACTCOSS is aware the period for submissions in response to the ACT Taxi Industry review have recently closed, however it is hoped the Review team is able to consider the issues raised in this letter as part of their deliberations.

Taxis are integral to a sustainable public transport system. Importantly, taxis contribute to the social inclusion agenda. They enable those without access to cars or other means of public transport the opportunity to attend appointments and participate in social and other activities. Taxis may be used by people experiencing disadvantage, and who live in areas where other public transport options may not always be available. It can also be an important means of transport for older people and people experiencing disabilities, for whom it may not be physically viable to use a bus or other means of public transport.

In August 2009, ACTCOSS published *A Path Less Travelled: Transport and Social Inclusion in the ACT*. The report discussed the role of taxis within the context of a broader sustainable transport system. Three recommendations, particularly concerning taxi services arose from the study. Firstly, there is a need for a more effective Wheelchair Accessible Taxi (WAT) service. Secondly, there is a need for greater access to taxi vouchers for people experiencing disadvantage and thirdly, greater awareness and sensitivity is required regarding the needs of vulnerable people on the part of the taxi driver. The following commentary seeks to reinforce those recommendations made in the 2009 report.

A Path Less Travelled is attached with this letter and can be accessed at http://www.actcoss.org.au/publications/Publications_2009/2409REP.pdf We encourage the Review team to consider *A Path Less Travelled* as part of their consideration of issues impact on the ACT taxi system.

Review the Voucher System for People Experiencing Disadvantage

Because of the relatively high cost of fares, it is often assumed users of taxis belong predominantly to higher income groups. However, taxis are a very important form of transport for a number of low income groups. Although there is limited data available about the characteristics of taxi users, the NSW Transport Population Data Centre Household Travel Survey found that approximately 18.5% of taxi trips in Greater Metropolitan Sydney were taken by people from households in the lowest income quintile. Given that in the ACT there are even less regular transport options than are available in Sydney (trains, buses and ferries, as well as taxis), a similar or even higher proportion of low income people might be required to use high cost options, including taxis.

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Currently, in order to qualify for subsidised taxi vouchers, a person is required to demonstrate they are unable to use other public transport (i.e. buses). This is overly restrictive and difficult for people, who may, for example, not feel comfortable catching public transport in the dark due to mobility or other restrictions. There are also concerns about the limitations on subsidised taxi vouchers. Users reported the vouchers are only able to cover a limited distance or fare amount that is not enough, for example, for a trip from Gungahlin to the Canberra Hospital in Garran.

Wheelchair Accessible Taxis

One of the primary concerns around Wheelchair Accessible Taxi Services (WATs) in the ACT is the difficulty many service users face in booking and relying on the service. In 2009 it was estimated by the WAT Action Group that although there are 26 operational WATs in the ACT according to official statistics, only nine actually operate as WATs at any given time. These nine operate predominantly on weekdays and during business hours. The Action Group was concerned about the state of the equipment in these vehicles, which may not be up to acceptable standards. There have also been reports of WATs preferring to take other fares over people with disabilities to save time and increase cost efficiency. This leaves people with disabilities waiting for extended periods of time for taxis or not receiving a taxi service at all.

Awareness Training for Operators

Taxi operators need to undertake training to develop their awareness and understanding in the following areas:

- Cultural sensitivity around the needs of people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds;
- Gender sensitivity around the differing needs of men and women;
- Disability awareness training around meeting the needs of people with a disability and gaining an understanding of different types of disabilities; and
- Privacy and Confidentiality training around protecting the rights of people who access services.

To better meet the needs of the diverse range of service users of WATs and other transport services, programs and options should be explored that support a diversity of drivers and staff.

Sustainable transport is inextricably linked to social inclusion. Taxis are one important means of transport, connecting people to education, employment and other social services. The Taxi Industry Review needs to consider the needs of people experiencing disadvantage, and those with special needs. This should form part of the development of an equitable and sustainable public transport system for the ACT.

Yours sincerely,



Roslyn Dundas
Director

11 June 2010