

TAXI INDUSTRY INQUIRY SUBMISSION

City of Melbourne

July 2011

BACKGROUND

The City of Melbourne strongly supports the Taxi Industry Inquiry's sentiments in *Setting the Scene* that, 'taxi and hire car services are an essential part of Victoria's transport system'. Taxis are a form of public transport, offering 24-hour service, door-to-door delivery, services for special needs, responsiveness to demand and flexibility in destination. Taxis also play a vital role in welcoming and guiding visitors to Melbourne and are integral to minimising negative perceptions of safety in our city late at night.

Visitors from interstate and overseas are the primary users of taxis in the city. They account for 59 per cent of weekday trips and 79 per cent of weekend trips. Visitors from other parts of Melbourne account for four per cent of weekday taxi trips and seven per cent of weekend taxi trips, while business travel is 31 per cent of travel on weekdays and virtually zero on weekends.

Taxis are the main public transport service operating on Saturdays between 4.30am to 5am, (after the last NightRider service at 4.30am and before the first train or tram service commences at 5am), and on Sundays from midnight to 1.30 am and from 5.30am to 7am. These are times when there are still significant numbers of people in the city.

The City of Melbourne allocates kerbside space for taxi ranks at locations throughout the municipality, to make it easier for people to find taxis and reduce the need for taxis to drive around looking for fares.

Reference to taxi services features significantly in the City of Melbourne's corporate planning and provides a comprehensive understanding of the taxi industry's importance within core activities.

- Future Melbourne
- Council Plan
- Strategy for a Safer City
- Policy for the 24 Hour City
- Transport Strategy 2006 to 2020
- Taxi Management Strategy
- Melbourne Hospitality Strategy 2008-2012
- Melbourne Retail Strategy 2006-2012
- *Our Melbourne* Disability Action Plan 2010 - 2013
- The City of Melbourne Tourism Plan 2007-2012
- Life Long Melbourne 2006 - 2016

Our planning is based on extensive community and industry consultation, research and evidence based evaluation. This applies also to the content of this submission.

City of Melbourne's submission includes:

- Part One: City of Melbourne's relationship with taxis, issues and recommendations
- Part Two: Other factors for consideration and recommendations.

- Part Three: Conclusion

PART ONE: CITY OF MELBOURNE'S RELATIONSHIP WITH TAXIS

A. FUTURE MELBOURNE-A BOLD, INSPIRATIONAL & SUSTAINABLE CITY

Future Melbourne is the community of Melbourne's long-term plan for the future direction of all aspects of city life. Developed by the community, it sets out the goals for the future, key trends and challenges and outlines strategic growth areas.

Managing our 24 hour city environment is a key issue for City of Melbourne. The municipality's resident population and its recreational and entertainment culture continue to increase. Public transport services for the city have not kept up with demand.

The resulting increase of pressure on the current levels of service is apparent. This is particularly so for people with disabilities or mobility impaired; and for visitors to the city in the late night hours.

Reliable availability of and access to transport of every type is integral to meeting the needs of workers, visitors and residents. Hence *a connected city* is one of ten targets selected to help City of Melbourne measure progress towards its goals for the municipality by 2020.

City of Melbourne wishes to achieve an accessible and integrated public transport system, and which must include taxi services.

Recommendations

1. Public transport stations and stops are designed to provide for efficient and safe movement of increased users of relevant modes of transport.
2. Increased availability of maxi taxis to service disadvantaged groups.
3. Increased availability of taxis throughout the night.

B. COUNCIL PLAN

Council will focus on advocating for safe, efficient and sustainable movement throughout the city and make sure Melbourne is accessible in the broader regional and global context.

Council's key objective is to make Melbourne safe for users of public, private and active transport. As part of its commitment to city safety, the council has introduced more Safe City taxi ranks to help late night patrons get to their destinations as quickly and safely as possible. A total of seven new Safe City taxi ranks will be established by end of financial year 2011 – 2012.

C. CITY OF MELBOURNE'S POLICY FOR THE 24 HOUR CITY

The *Policy for the 24 Hour City* sets out guiding principles and a decision making framework for a safer, more vibrant and diverse Melbourne. The framework helps the City of Melbourne ensure community needs are balanced as the city moves from day through night and responses to city issues are integrated and coordinated.

The key aim of the policy is to balance activation with regulation and thereby promote a safe, vibrant and inclusive city by day and by night. Improvements to all public transport services are important to meeting the demands of a 24 hour city.

D. STRATEGY FOR A SAFER CITY 2011 - 2013

As a local government authority, City of Melbourne has a key role in community safety and crime prevention. This is achieved through our many responsibilities in planning, advocacy, service provision and enforcement responsibilities. Late night transport services and the management of harm in and around transport hubs and entertainment precincts are priorities within our strategy.

City of Melbourne is committed to enhancing personal safety in and around its Safe City taxi ranks and is working with key stakeholders through its Safe City Transport Steering Committee to improve service delivery, patronage and promotion of its Safe City taxi rank scheme.

City of Melbourne's Safe City Taxi Rank Scheme

Melbourne's Safe City taxi rank scheme aims to address concerns about getting home safely and efficiently late at night. Safe City taxi ranks provide a safer environment for passengers waiting for a taxi and for taxi drivers waiting for passengers.

Safe City Taxi Ranks are located in improved popular pedestrian routes with lighting and signage and Safe City security cameras.

Current Safe City taxi rank locations include:

- Flinders Street Station, Swanston Street.
- 50 Bourke Street
- 8 King Street
- 55 King Street
- 131 Queen Street
- 200 Queen Street

Each taxi rank is staffed by security personnel in a distinct uniform. The ranks are also monitored by security cameras:

- from 11pm Friday to 5am Saturday
- from 11pm Saturday to 5am Sunday
- during special events such as the Melbourne Grand Prix and New Year's Eve

Late Night Transport Options map

The City of Melbourne has just released its latest *Late Night Transport Options Map* for city users. The pocket-sized map details late night transport options and also provides tips for travelling safely late at night. The map includes location of:

- Safe City taxi ranks,
- NightRider bus services
- police stations
- toilet facilities

The maps are distributed by Youth Street Teams and Victoria Police.

Resourcing of Safe City taxi ranks

Over the last four years the political landscape has again had a targeted focus on the central business district's late night environment due to increased violence and anti-social behaviour. This has led to an increase in serious incidents where perceptions of safety in and around transport hubs including taxi services has received negative media attention and where incidents between taxi drivers and patrons have tainted the communities perceptions of catching taxis in the City of Melbourne, in particular late at night.

City of Melbourne commits significant resources to expand, maintain and promote its Safe City taxi ranks. Discussions with our key stakeholders and community consultations through City of Melbourne's Safe City Transport Steering Committee have identified opportunities to improve the following elements of the Scheme:

Issues identified:

- Efficient movement of people in and out of the CBD.
- Availability of taxis, especially within the CBD late at night and particularly so between 3am and 5am during the scheduling of the taxi shift change.
- Total costs associated with servicing late night taxi ranks.
- Employing suitably qualified security personnel, and providing appropriate training.
- Number of staff required to service large ranks and to manage potential challenges at ranks.
- Infrastructure improvements at safe city taxi ranks.
- Data collection methods at Safe City taxi ranks to ensure strategic basis for any future planning.
- Flexibility is needed in the design and delivery of any safe taxi rank. A rank's size, location and services depend on its environment: for example, passenger demand at night varies across any given entertainment precinct.

Recommendations

The meetings and discussions with key stakeholders including venue owners in the municipality have highlighted the following to improve the customer service and perceptions of safety at Safe City taxi ranks:

4. State wide investment in corporate identity of Safe City taxi ranks. It is integral to the use of ranks by drivers and passengers that the public can easily identify such services no matter where they are across the state of Victoria.
5. Investment in resourcing with industry experienced marshals (see Brisbane City Council link: <http://www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/community-support/safety/night-safety/index.htm>), where the taxi sector, or state government fund the operations at Safe City Taxi Ranks.
6. Support the identification of new late-night enhanced taxi rank sites. Council has committed to installing two new late-night ranks each year of its term.
7. Restrict hailing of taxis at informal locations within the CBD. This strategy would aim to improve passenger confidence that waiting times will be minimised by queuing at the "safe" late-night taxi ranks and prevent potential safety problems caused by potentially inebriated passengers waiting at various informal locations along the city streets.
8. Determine and utilise key learning through national and international best practice models of late night taxi services.
9. Consider extending the operating hours of late night public transport services on weekends to provide alternative options during the high demand periods when large

queues of people are waiting for taxis. The City of Melbourne has been working with Metlink and the transport operators to investigate ways of improving late night and weekend public transport services.

E. TRANSPORT STRATEGY

Council's transport strategy, adopted in 2006, is currently being updated. The current policy supports the Victorian Government's commitment to better taxi services and also commits to working closely with the industry to enhance the taxi industry's contribution to public transport.

Short term actions for City of Melbourne:

- Improve the knowledge and service levels of operators and drivers;
- Review locations and availability of taxi parking zones.

The City of Melbourne commissioned a small piece of work in 2009 to better understand the role of taxis.

Findings

- Taxis represent 0.5% of transport to the City
- Taxis in the City are mainly used by interstate and overseas visitors (59% on weekday users and 79% of weekend users).
- Other important user groups are work-related business (representing 31% of users on a weekday) and people with disabilities, many of who rely on taxis significantly for mobility.
- Generally on Saturdays and Sundays between 1-7am public transport is limited to Nightrider bus services or taxis: The Victorian Taxi Association (VTA) report highest late night taxi demand inside this time.
- There are also pockets of time where demand is evident and the only public transport is taxis.

Data Gaps

The project also determines that there are three main data gaps. The following is not known:

- Where origins and destinations for taxi use are.
- How many taxis are operating in a given area (such as the City) at any point in time.
- Weekend and night-time data for train travellers, and data after 19.00 for tram travellers.

Recommendations

The State Government and City of Melbourne work together to:

10. Investigate possibilities of closing the gaps where general public transport and Nightrider services do not operate.
11. Gather data to determine the point at which patronage warrants extended hours of public transport services.
12. Collect additional data on late night mobility including: origin/destination of taxi users; mode split; and taxi availability. Initial data collection methods have been put forward.

F. TAXI MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Taxi Management Strategy was endorsed by Council in May 2010. This strategy aims to improve taxi operations within the central city CBD and Docklands precincts.

In particular, the strategy recognised that at certain time periods there is often an imbalance in taxi supply and passenger demand. This imbalance can at times lead to circumstances where there are either:

- Large number of people queuing for taxis at a formal taxi rank, or dispersed around the streets competing to hail a taxi; or
- Large supplies of taxis exceeding the total supply of formal taxi rank spaces throughout the central city and thereby parking in other areas or illegally within statutory 'No Stopping' areas at the tail-end of taxi ranks, across driveways or double parking.

Extensive surveys undertaken by the City of Melbourne suggest that the excess passenger demand for taxis (large queues of people waiting for taxis) generally occurs after midnight on Friday and Saturday nights and that the excess supply of taxis (large queues of taxis trying to park all over the city) generally occurs on Sunday to Thursday evenings and night-times.

Recommendation

13. Investigate means to reduce the imbalances between taxi supply and passenger demand.

G. TOURISM

The City of Melbourne's vision for its work in tourism is to engage and connect visitors with the Melbourne experience. The importance of taxis to Melbourne's success as a tourist destination is well summarised in '*Setting the Scene*'

'Taxis and hire cars also have a critical role to play in tourism, giving visitors their first and last impressions of our state. The quality and quantity of taxi and hire car services therefore has a major impact on the long term 'brand' of Melbourne and Victoria.'

First and last impressions of Melbourne are critical to a visitor's experience of Melbourne and to their decisions about returning for future visits. Ultimately, first and last impressions are key contributors to the strength of the city's visitor economy.

For many visitors, a taxi journey is their first experience of Melbourne and Melburnians. For some visitors it is a warm, welcoming journey with drivers who act as ambassadors for the city, keen to share their local knowledge of the many things to see and do. For other visitors, it can be a less pleasant journey.

Taxis are often the first major contact point for visitors from interstate and overseas be they tourists business people or others. A good first impression or otherwise could impact on a person's view of Melbourne and therefore potentially reflect badly if they have a negative experience. An attribute of the taxi industry is the diversity of the multilingual drivers that could be better promoted and utilised.

Issues identified

- Inconsistency seems to be an issue within the industry: inconsistency of taxi safety, service standards, and inconsistency of training and knowledge.
- No research has been undertaken by the City of Melbourne on tourist satisfaction with the city's taxis. However, anecdotal information and occasional letters from visitors indicate that the good journey can be excellent and the bad can be equally memorable.

Recommendation

14. Address the inconsistency of standards of service provided by the taxi industry including levels of safety, training and knowledge of taxi drivers.

H. MELBOURNE HOSPITALITY STRATEGY 2008-2012, RETAIL STRATEGY 2006 – 2012 AND THE MELBOURNE LICENSEES ALCOHOL ACTION PLAN 2009

The *City of Melbourne Hospitality Strategy 2008-2012* acknowledges that Melbourne's hospitality experience is part of the broader city experience, of which accessibility and safe transport options for workers and consumers is vital.

Taxis are integral to the hospitality and retail sectors. Melbourne's retail, hospitality industry and late night venues require reliable transport options for staff and patrons. Influences of a good or poor experience include bookings, timely response and access to services through to the quality of the journey.

This impacts greatly on the city's reputation.

Recommendation

15. That the taxi industry promotes its partnership opportunities with local councils, hospitality and retail sectors to enhance the broader city experience for shoppers, and patrons.

I. LIFE LONG MELBOURNE 2006 - 2016

Australia's ageing population is a central social, political and economic issue for all levels of government. Over the next decade, the City of Melbourne expects its number of residents aged 55 years and over to increase by 75 per cent from 10,800 in 2005 to 18,904 in 2015. Existing service delivery models and approaches to aged care are insufficient to meet the demands of an increasingly active, informed and sophisticated generation of people over 55 years of age.

Key elements for consideration by the taxi industry include:

- The baby boomer generation will age differently from previous generations and will likely have higher expectations of the service system.
- The baby boomer generation is likely to spearhead a shift from a 'needs based' approach of previous generations to a 'rights based' approach.
- This emerging generation does not necessarily see themselves as having entered old age, but prefers to see retirement as a time to reinvent themselves and explore new aspects of life.
- Existing service delivery models and approaches to aged care will be insufficient in meeting the needs of this emerging generation. As a result, the taxi industry will need to present a significant change in approach to service provision for older people.
- As the population of older people increases, their political power will also strengthen and as such, baby boomers will have higher expectations of the service system.

Issues identified

- Older persons experience difficulty in accessing the service for short distances due to lesser priority afforded by drivers to trips and destinations that provide a smaller monetary return.
- Anecdotal reports from older persons have indicated that there is resistance from drivers to assist with shopping and door-to-door support.
- Numerous accounts have been reported about older patrons not reaching their destination or a longer route taken due to driver unfamiliarity with the roads and/or inability to navigate.

Recommendations

16. Increased understanding by drivers of the specific support needs of older persons with physical and sensory disabilities is required to maximize the safety of this target group.
17. Training of taxi drivers should include information regarding how to strengthen customer centred practice for older people.

J. OUR MELBOURNE DISABILITY ACTION PLAN 2010 – 2013

The City of Melbourne's mission is to lead the systemic removal of barriers in the physical, attitudinal and informational environments to ensure a truly just and inclusive community for all.

One of the key objectives of the *Disability Action Plan* is to work with transport and other relevant stakeholders to increase the accessibility of public transport, accessible taxi and car parking spaces across the municipality.

Council has long advocated through its disability action plans for improvements for the taxi industry, particularly for people who experience a disability. The performance of the taxi system has been frequently discussed by Council's Disability Advisory Committee.

Members of the Committee have recently participated in a workshop with the Victorian Taxi Directorate regarding the Multi Purpose Taxi Program (MPTP).

Issues

- Increasing the provision of Multipurpose Taxis across the city. Individuals constantly report experiencing extreme waiting periods for taxi services.
- Users report a lack of confidence in being able to book a taxi and receive the service in a reasonable time frame. This results in users making personal arrangements with individual drivers to enable timely service. People have a need for spontaneous travel that is not catered for in the current system.
- While the larger wheelchair accessible taxis can cater for multiple users, it is reported that often people with mobility restrictions are not getting priority access to these vehicles. For many people the MPTP is the only means of independent travel and priority should be given to people with limited mobility.

- Individuals report a lack of training and communication skills within the industry. Users would like to see improvements in the training that drivers receive particularly in terms of communication with people with complex communication and general awareness of people with a disability.
- While the situation has improved users have still reported levels of discrimination within the industry; e.g. drivers objecting to taking an individual who uses an assistance animal, drivers begrudgingly using the securing seatbelts for passengers in wheelchairs. Again further training and awareness raising is needed to ensure that there is a high level of competence and customer service provided by the taxi industry.

Recommendation

18. Increase the provision, reliability and equity of access of the Multi Purpose Taxi Service for people with a disability.
19. Training of taxi drivers should include information regarding how to strengthen customer centred practice for people with a disability.

PART TWO – FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

K. PERCEPTIONS OF THE INDUSTRY

In the last two years there has been an increased perception of a lack of late night mobility including a perceived lack of taxi services in the City of Melbourne. One of the key issues identified from stakeholder feedback was the manner in which the CBD is serviced by taxis, which was observed to be fraught with problems.

The following issues were identified (Community Village Review 2009; Village Well, 2009):

- A lack of taxis servicing the CBD.
- Potential patrons who are frustrated by a lack of service, walk onto the roadway to flag taxis, or in some cases physically stand in front of moving taxis forcing a dangerous set of action.
- Patrons line up at nominated taxi zones for in excess of 1 hour, only to be refused service because the fare was considered too short or for no apparent reason at all.
- Taxis drop off within a short distance of a taxi zone, and then collect off the street, in preference to patrons who had waited in designated areas.
- Taxis refuse fares or engage in dialogue with various groups to identify and take the longest fare.
- Patrons engage in conflict while trying to obtain a taxi.

Through their observations in the city late at night, the Community Village volunteers reported that the current level of taxi service strongly contributes towards an environment where people cannot leave the CBD, and that this may contribute to a higher likelihood of conflict.

Recommendations

20. Encourage targeted and regular key stakeholder feedback.

21. Investigate options for improved quality service provision to enhance the overall corporate identity of the taxi industry.

L. MELBOURNE'S BUSINESS COMMUNITY AND SHORT TRIPS

Feedback from Melbourne's business community via Council's various business consultation programs around liveability, which is seen as a key point for the business sector could be directly traced back to ease of use and safety of taxis.

The ability and more importantly a preparedness to move across and within the city on short trips for business people is a significant benefit to business. In some cases people may be carrying large amounts of documents for only short distances but to walk or catch public transport would make this difficult.

Anecdotal information, feedback from customers and late night venue owners continues to highlight drivers' reluctance to accept short trips.

Recommendation

22. Investigate the viability of short trip fares and implement findings.

M. DRIVER EDUCATION, STATUS AND TREATMENT OF DRIVERS

Discussions with members of City of Melbourne's City Safety Transport Steering Committee, security personnel at Safe City taxi ranks and members of the Melbourne Licensees Forum have highlighted that driver education, status and treatment of drivers are paramount issues to be addressed.

City of Melbourne understands the challenge of employing suitably qualified staff in the taxi industry and believes empowering the drivers through the provision of appropriate training as imperative to transforming the current image of the industry.

City of Melbourne views drivers as ambassadors for the City and believes drivers should be afforded this recognition formally through the development of appropriate media campaigns to encourage improved public perceptions and behaviour. This would enhance their status in the community and put the public on notice regarding anti-social and or violent behaviour against drivers.

It is imperative that drivers understand their role in managing difficult patrons, dealing with conflict, reporting incidents and use of calming methods to prevent and reduce harm to themselves and patrons. Training opportunities should also be provided to enhance knowledge of their local area including better understanding of popular destinations, key landmarks, the streets and essential services.

Alternative pay structures could be considered to improve interest, retention and advancement of taxi drivers. Drivers need to feel valued for the service they provide. State Government could support this by advocating for resources and explore career advancement opportunities to encourage better perceptions of the industry and ultimately improve relationships between drivers and community members.

Recommendations

23. Explore the development of tier structured training, including introductory and advanced training courses for drivers who are interested in furthering their career paths in the industry.

24. Explore improved remuneration packages for taxi industry participants which reflect the importance of the role of taxis in the public transport system.

N. LACK OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE DETAILED TRANSPORT ROLE OF TAXIS

There is currently no data available on origins and destinations for taxi trips, numbers of patrons for each trip, or taxi availability at any particular time.

City of Melbourne collects destination data manually at its Safe City taxi ranks and there is currently a small data visualisation project providing anecdotal information regarding popular destinations out of the city late at night on weekends. This work provides samples only and could be enhanced with improved data capture and be useful for identifying new locations for future installation of safe city taxi ranks or for enhancing late night transport services on weekends.

Recommendation

25. Consider improving the process for capturing data including such information as destination of taxi trips, number of patrons for each trip or taxi availability at any time.

O. THE CHANGING ROLE OF TAXIS

The role of taxis is likely to change in the future. As the city becomes more pedestrianised and public transport use increases, demand for taxis may increase and taxi ranks may need to be moved.

Improved public transport to the airport and information technology may reduce the role of taxis at the airport.

Recommendation

26. Further explore and strengthen partnerships between state, industry and local government.

P. MARKET DESIGN THAT IS EFFECTIVE, EFFICIENT AND PROMOTES COMPETITIVENESS

Recommendations

27. Consider the introduction of new “weekend-only” taxi licenses. This would aim to increase the supply of taxis on Friday and Saturday late-night periods when there are often large numbers of people waiting for taxis.
28. Introduce taxi operation restrictions to reduce the number of taxis allowed to operate during low demand periods.
29. Consider other models to improve demands late at night i.e. flat fare systems.

Q. SUSTAINABILITY, IN ECONOMIC, ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL TERMS

Recommendations

30. Increase enforcement of taxis illegally parking. This may include taxis storing in statutory 'No Stopping' parking areas on the departure side of intersections at the tail-end of formal taxi ranks or taxis "double-parking" while waiting to access mid-block taxi ranks. Currently, Council's Parking and Traffic enforcement officers have only been requested to investigate safety related areas such as the southern end of Exhibition Street outside the Ernst and Young Building which is entirely restricted as 'No Stopping'.
31. Investigate the installation of an off-site taxi rank holding area on fringe of city. This area would primarily be utilised by taxis during Sunday to Thursday evening periods when there is currently an excess supply of taxis in comparison to the low passenger demand. It is noted that a convenient site would also need to be identified.
32. Improve the balance and subsequent impacts of "shift changes" for taxi drivers. It has been noticed that shift change periods for taxi drivers can create a shortage of taxis and subsequently an excess passenger demand for taxis. It is considered that by removing standard shift change periods and encouraging taxi drivers to have shift changes throughout the day, and particularly during low demand periods would improve operations significantly.

Part Three: Conclusion

The City of Melbourne values the opportunity to provide its response to this Inquiry. It is hoped that the issues and recommendations presented will form the basis of a commitment by the State Government to work hand in hand with City of Melbourne to address all operational, behavioural and safety related issues with regard to taxi services in the central city.

This will form a solid platform for the taxi industry being recognised by all stakeholders as a professional component of a 24 hour sustainable transport network.

If you would like to discuss this submission further, please contact Mr Haig Poulson, Principal Engineer – Traffic Engineering on 9658 8711 or Dean Griggs, Manager – Community Safety and Wellbeing on 9658 9993.