

**PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES (WA) INC**

**SUBMISSION FOR THE REVIEW OF PEEL'S TAXI AND OMNIBUS SERVICES**

**AUGUST 2013**

People with Disabilities (WA) Inc (PWdWA) would like to thank the Department of Transport's Passenger Services Business Unit for the opportunity to provide comment for the review of Peel's Taxi and Omnibus Services.

PWdWA is the peak disability consumer organisation representing the rights, needs and equity of all Western Australians with disabilities via individual and systemic advocacy.

PWdWA is run BY and FOR people with disabilities and as such strives to be the voice for all people with disabilities in Western Australia.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **The Passenger Services Business Unit (PSBU)**

The PSBU contributes to the government's commitment of providing accessible and safe transport system for the community. In order to achieve this, the PSBU's principal role is to regulate the taxi and omnibus industries in Western Australia. Passenger Services includes a compliance team, a policy unit and an administration / licensing section. Passenger Services also administers a number of transport subsidies including the Taxi User Subsidy Scheme (TUSS).

This submission aims to contribute to the work being undertaken by the PSBU to promote equal rights and access to taxi and omnibus services for people with disabilities. The issues listed in this submission have been obtained through consultations with PWdWA's Peel Advocate and PWdWA Members and Associates.

PWdWA acknowledges that the PSBU may already be addressing some of the issues presented.

## **2. DISABILITY RIGHTS - RESOURCES & WEBSITES**

The following list of hyperlinked resources and websites is aimed to assist the PSBU in understanding the rights and needs of people with disabilities when accessing transport services.

### **Disability Access & Inclusion Plans**

[WA Department of Transport](#)

[City of Mandurah DAIP](#)

[Shire of Boddington](#)

[Shire of Murray](#)

[Shire of Serpentine-Jarrahdale](#)

[Shire of Waroona](#)

## **Legislation and Standards**

[Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) - specifically Articles 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 16, 17 and 21.

[Disability \(Access to Premises - Buildings\) Standards 2010](#)

[Disability Services Act \(WA\) 1993](#)

[Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002](#)

[Disability Discrimination Act 1992](#)

[Equal Opportunities Act \(WA\) 1984](#)

[National Disability Strategy 2010-2020](#)

## **Commissions**

[Australian Human Rights Commission - Disability Rights Homepage](#)

[Disability Services Commission](#)

[Equal Opportunities Commission of Western Australia](#)

## **Disability Services / Organisations**

[Disability Services Commission's Directory of Service Providers](#)

## **3. FEEDBACK**

### **3.1 COUNTRY TAXI LICENCES**

#### **3.1.1 Background**

The application process for country drivers is different to that for metropolitan drivers. Country drivers do not have to undergo the formal training, aptitude or registration tests. Country drivers are also exempt from the four hours of professional development training every two years that all metropolitan taxi drivers are required to complete. The number of taxi licences issued in the metropolitan area is based on the performance of the taxi industry while new

licences in the country are issued based on the recommendations produced in 3-yearly reviews or more often as necessary in specific locations.

### **3.1.2 Issues & Recommendations**

The feedback we have received shows that people with disabilities and their representatives within the Peel region are very concerned regarding the lack of aptitude testing and professional development for country taxi drivers. We do not know what the level of training is in disability awareness for Perth metropolitan drivers, though we assume that there is some training in relation to the Taxi Regulations 1995, Taxi Drivers Code of Conduct Policy, and Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002. In contrast, country drivers do not appear to have this training and also do not appear to receive any monitoring of their driving ability and customer service skills. This is very concerning.

**Recommendation 1:** PWdWA recommends that country drivers undergo formal training, and aptitude and registration tests, including training in disability awareness, with the aim to remove any discrepancies between country and metropolitan drivers in the quality of service they provide.

## **3.2 STANDARD TAXI SERVICES**

PWdWA is aware of an incident where a person with vision disability was reportedly overcharged when using a taxi within the Peel region.

The Taxi Regulations 1995 states that:

(1) Where a vehicle is being operated as a taxi the driver, the plate holder, the operator and the person providing the taxi dispatch service involved, if any, shall ensure that the fare schedule is displayed in an approved position from where it is clearly visible from the outside of the front passenger window and from the front passenger seat.

(2) The name of the taxi dispatch service involved is to be included on the fare schedule displayed under this regulation.

A driver shall display an approved identification card, in the form and manner directed by the Director General,

(a) in a prominent position in the taxi he or she is driving; and

(b) in a position and in a manner that allows a passenger in the taxi to be able to read it from the front and the back seat.

Unfortunately, the regulations on displaying information are of little reassurance to people with vision disability.

The [Swan Taxi Smart Cab App](#) makes it easier for people with vision disability and hearing disability to book a taxi service and estimate the fare. However, we are not aware of private taxi services within the Peel region adopting this type of service. Also, there are many people with disabilities who access taxi services and do not use smart phones. In America some taxis are being equipped with a [computerised voice system](#) that will announce the fare throughout the trip. In Victoria, there has been some progress in making talking taxi meters available.

Please refer to [Blind Citizen Australia's submission in response to Victoria's draft Taxi Industry Inquiry Report](#). This report also includes other factors that may be considered in improving access to taxi services for people with vision disability.

Other issues experienced by people with vision disability when accessing standard taxis in WA include difficulties finding some taxi ranks without tactile paving, and we are aware of an incident where a person accompanied by a guide dog was refused a taxi service. Reports across WA highlight the need for adequate training of standard taxi drivers in understanding the needs of people with different types of disability; such as asking the person with disability what their needs are and training in how to appropriately fold manual wheelchairs.

**Recommendation 2:** PWDWA recommends that all taxi drivers receive disability awareness training and are trained in compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and related policies and standards.

**Recommendation 3:** PWdWA recommends that the PSBU reviews innovations in technology used by other states and countries to help improve access to transport services for people with disability and compliance with human rights standards.

**Recommendation 4:** PWdWA recommends they the PSBU discusses with different disability groups their specific needs in accessing taxi services and other transport services within the Peel region (if this type of consultation has not already been conducted).

The feedback provided in the following two sections of this submission has been informed by people with disabilities, their families and carers living in country and metropolitan areas of WA. Even though these comments do not specifically refer to services within the Peel region, it is likely that many of the issues listed are universal to all areas of WA.

### **3.3 MULTIPURPOSE TAXI SERVICES**

#### **3.3.1 Background**

A multipurpose taxi (MPT) provides a taxi service for people who travel in wheelchairs or scooters. The MPT fleet is currently coordinated by both Black and White and Swan Taxis who have a contract with the Department to manage the service. The MPT service welcomes people who:

- like working with people;
- have patience and understanding;
- have good communication skills; and
- believe in a high level of customer service.

#### **3.3.2 Issues & Recommendations**

People with disabilities their families and carers report the following issues in accessing taxi services in WA.

- 1) Unreasonable waiting times.
- 2) Taxis not arriving.
- 3) Difficulties getting a taxi at night.
- 4) Drivers choosing other fares over fares from people who use wheelchairs.
- 5) Drivers not adequately trained to deal with restraining different types of wheelchairs.

- 6) Lack of duty of care and regard for passenger safety.
- 7) Harassment and victimisation.
- 8) Advanced taxi booking refused for a weekend service.
- 9) Taxis operating with broken equipment (e.g., lift system).
- 10) Taxi leaving a pick up address without giving enough time for the person with disability to get out of the house.
- 11) Drivers within some regional areas having a monopoly on the service which makes it difficult to make a complaint.

**Recommendation 5:** PWDWA recommends that the PSBU has an effective system in place to address issues with multipurpose taxis and monitor compliance with the [Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002](#) and Schedule for Implementation.

### **3.4 TAXI USER'S SUBSIDY SCHEME (TUSS)**

#### **3.4.1 Background**

TUSS provides taxi travel at a reduced rate for people who have a severe permanent disability that will always prevent them using a conventional public transport bus service.

To be eligible for TUSS you must:

- Be a permanent resident of Western Australia.
- Have a severe permanent disability that will always prevent you using a conventional public transport bus service.
- The disability is required to be continual and fall within the specified categories of:
  - severe permanent mobility disability
  - severe vision disability (legal blindness)
  - severe cognitive/intellectual disability

#### **3.4.2 Issues & Recommendations**

##### **3.4.2.1 Driver's and Member's Responsibilities**

We have received reports that some TUSS members are not aware of their rights and responsibilities when using the TUSS vouchers. We understand that this important information is available at the front of the TUSS voucher booklet but in its written format may not be accessible to some people depending on their disability (e.g., vision disability or intellectual

disability). We are also aware of several incidents where drivers have misused the vouchers and overcharged passengers.

**Recommendation 6:** PWDWA recommends that TUSS voucher booklets (and related resources) are made available in a range of alternative formats. Alternative formats include electronic, Easy Read, audio, Auslan, large print and Braille.

For further information on producing Easy Read resources please refer to the following hyperlinked websites.

1) [Information Access Group](#)

2) [Photosymbols](#)

**Recommendation 7:** PWDWA recommends that there is sufficient driver training and monitoring to ensure drivers understand the rights and responsibilities under the TUSS.

#### **3.4.2.2 Eligibility Criteria**

There is concern among people with episodic disabilities that they will not be eligible for the TUSS as they are sometimes able to use conventional public bus transport services when they have the capacity to do so. It is unfortunate for people with episodic disabilities that they may be excluded from the TUSS just because sometimes they have good days.

**Recommendation 8:** PWDWA recommends that the eligibility criteria is reviewed taking into account the needs of people with episodic disabilities.

#### **3.4.2.3 Subsidy Limits**

Some TUSS members still find it too expensive to travel to work each day and access full time employment, even with the help of the subsidy.

**Recommendation 9:** PWDWA recommends that TUSS subsidy limits are reviewed in conjunction with other subsidy and benefit schemes to improve access to transport services and promote inclusion for people with disabilities in social and economic life.

Please also refer to feedback obtained from the [Taxi Industry Board's 2012 Inquiry into Wheelchair Accessible Taxi Services and the Taxi User's Subsidy Scheme](#).

### **3.5 OMNIBUS SERVICES**

#### **3.5.1 Background**

The omnibus licence applies to a wide range of vehicle types and operations undertaken by the operator. An omnibus licence is only required where the vehicle is operated for 'hire and reward'.

Omnibus licences include:

- (1) Tour and Charter Licence
- (2) Safari Tour and Charter Licence
- (3) Regular Passenger Transport Licence
- (4) Shuttle Service
- (5) Tourism Transfer
- (6) Specialty / Novelty Vehicles

#### **3.5.2 Issues & Recommendations**

We have received feedback from people with disability stating that tour buses are not accessible and are unsuitable for people who use wheelchairs. For a list of additional issues relating to accessible bus services, please refer to [PWdWA's submission for the review of the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport](#).

One issue experienced by a person with a mobility disability living within the Peel region related to difficulties accessing a bus with his gopher. He reported that with adequate assistance from the driver this would not have been a problem. Another incident in the Peel region involved a person who is legally blind receiving no assistance from the driver when she was being harassed by a passenger.

**Recommendation 10:** PWdWA recommends that drivers are trained in disability access and inclusion, and how best to provide assistance when required, while promoting the rights of people with disabilities to be free from abuse and neglect.

There are also a number of initiatives in WA which PWdWA encourages omnibus services to participate in. These include the WA Companion Card Scheme and You're Welcome Access WA.

### WA Companion Card

The Companion Card is a card issued to people with a significant and permanent disability who require attendant care support from a companion to participate at most venues and activities. Cardholders present their card when booking or purchasing a ticket from a participating business. Participating businesses will recognise the Companion Card and issue the cardholder with a second ticket for their companion at no charge.

The Companion Card program has been running in Western Australia since April 2006. The program aims to:

- promote the existing right of people with a disability to fair ticketing;
- assist businesses and organisations to comply with existing legislation; and
- provide a simple and consistent method of identifying people who legitimately require attendant care support to participate at venues and activities.

### You're Welcome Access WA

The You're Welcome Access WA Initiative assists people with disability, their families and carers to find accurate and detailed access information. This information is necessary for people with disability to make decisions about which businesses, community services and facilities meet their access requirements. People with disability place a high priority on business and community becoming more accessible, including the provision of appropriate customer service.

You're Welcome Access WA aims to assist people with disability to access community life by:

- providing detailed and accurate information about the accessibility of facilities and services
- encouraging businesses and community organisations to make their services and facilities more accessible.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

In summary, the three main areas of concern experienced by people with disability accessing taxi and omnibus services within the Peel region relate to:

- 1) Driver training and professional development.
- 2) Compliance with relevant legislation and standards.
- 3) Awareness of the rights and needs of people with disabilities.

This submission has highlighted some of the issues and concerns people with disabilities have when accessing taxi and omnibus services. Though we recognise that many people with disabilities have positive experiences in using transport services. As an advocacy service we do not often hear about positive experiences, though we know there are some very good taxi and omnibus drivers working within the Peel region, and we strongly support initiatives such as the PSBU's current review to help improve access to transport services for people with disabilities.