**People With Disabilities (WA) Inc. (PWdWA) and Carers WA submission in response to The** **Green Paper for On-demand Transport (Green Paper).**

**People With Disabilities WA (PWdWA)**

Since 1981 PWdWA has been the peak disability consumer organisation representing the rights, needs, and equity of all Western Australians with a physical, intellectual, neurological, psychosocial, or sensory disability via individual and systemic advocacy. We provide access to information, and independent individual and systemic advocacy with a focus on those who are most vulnerable.

PWdWA is run by and for people with disabilities and aims to empower the voices of all people with disabilities in Western Australia

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**Carers WA**

Carers WA is a non-profit, community based organisation and registered charity dedicated to improving the lives of the estimated 310,000 family carers living in Western Australia. Carers WA represent carers’ interests in the Western Australian community. The role of Carers WA is to work in active partnership with carers, persons with care and support needs, health professionals, service providers, government and the wider community to achieve an improved quality of life for carers as well as offering services to carers.

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**Introduction**

West Australians with a disability rely heavily on On-demand Transport to access the community and go about their daily activities. Therefore it is imperative that there is a system that is both responsive and flexible to the needs of people with a disability now and into the future.

**Despatch Services**

People with disability who use Multi-Purpose Taxis (MPT’s) have long voiced their dissatisfaction to PWdWA of the current system of two MPT despatch services. The current system is confusing and unreliable for the service user as well as inefficient use of the MPT fleet. PWdWA is aware of numerous occasions where a person with a disability has booked taxis with both despatch services, no taxis have arrived, and consequently the person has been left in either a dangerous and vulnerable situation or inclement weather.  
**PWdWA recommends a review of the current MPT despatch services and the implementation of a single point of despatch.  
  
Universal Access**

PWdWA has long advocated for the development and rollout of a universally accessible taxi service which would meet the needs of all taxi users. This is still our position and we are disappointed that the opportunity to develop this concept was not explored when the London Cab trial was first considered.  
**PWdWA recommends a long term plan be developed and implemented to ensure that on demand transport vehicles such as airport shuttle buses and limousines become more accessible to people with disability**.

**Training and Awareness**

It is crucial that all drivers are educated as to their responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act and requirements related to carriage of guide dogs. All drivers, whether they drive a multi-purpose or conventional vehicle should be required to undertake this training. **PWdWA recommends that a program be developed to ensure that all on demand transport drivers receive disability awareness training before they commence work in the industry as well regular refresher training** **PWdWA also recommends periodic refresher training for drivers to ensure they are aware of contemporary mobility aid restraint techniques.**

**Protecting the most vulnerable and complaints handling**

People with disability, in particular those who are non-verbal are some of the most vulnerable people in our community. On Demand Transport drivers are in a position of trust and power so it is imperative that a suite of measures are adopted to ensure the safety and security of people with a disability be protected. **PWdWA recommends such measures must include security cameras being installed and positioned in multipurpose taxis so that they cannot be tampered with or obstructed. Vision from these cameras should audited at random times and be stored long term for retrospective viewing.** **PWdWA recommends the handling of complaints about On-Demand Transport services stemming from or involving a person with disability needs to be strengthened.**  When a complaint is made by a person with disability alleging criminal activity**, PWdWA recommends that the Department of Transport should as a matter of policy support the person to engage with WA Police and an Independent Disability Advocacy service. Furthermore PWdWA recommends that when a person with a disability makes a complaint about someone who is licensed or approved by the Government to provide a service e.g. taxi drivers, that the complaint is handled by an agency such as The Health and Disability Services Complaints Office (HADSCO) or Ombudsman.**

**Embracing technology**

Technology is rapidly evolving **and PWdWA recommends the development of systems and apps that allow passengers to share their journey with a third party such as a friend, colleague or family member so they can track the progress**. This would provide another layer of security and peace of mind for the passenger and families. **PWdWA recommends the implementation of a system where the fee per kilometre or hour is made known to the passenger so that people with cognitive or intellectual disability don't get cheated.** Alternatively an estimate of the total fare could be given at the commencement of the journey. **PWdWA also recommends that consideration be given to implementation of ‘talking meters’ across the entire vehicle fleet.**

**Taxi User Subsidy Scheme**

**PWdWA recommends that the Taxi User Subsidy Scheme (TUSS) system be overhauled and a swipe card system be introduced to replace the current voucher book.** Not only would this be more convenient for passengers, security measures could be programmed into the card to reduce misuse and fraud. If the level of subsidy eligibility was also be programmed into the card this would remove the uncertainty and confusion encountered by drivers with the current system of different vouchers. Furthermore investigation into a system where a swipe card could be ‘loaded’ with credit should be considered. This would reduce the need for the passenger and driver to exchange money. **PWdWA recommends that the TUSS be expanded to include all On-demand Transport services such as limousines, charter vehicle and ride-sharing services.** The geographical footprint of Perth and congestion on the road system has increased considerably in recent years adding to the cost of on-demand fares. The maximum subsidy amount available to TUSS members has not kept pace with the increase in travel costs and **PWdWA recommends a review and subsequent increase in the maximum subsidy available.**

**Carers WA recommend that eligibility of people with disability due to chronic mental health issues are included in the Taxi User Subsidy Scheme.** Many people experiencing mental health issues may have difficulty in utilising public transport where there is considerable stimulus and crowding which can exacerbate their condition. By providing these services to individuals who are unable to transport themselves independently, their reliance on their support people such as carers to transport them will be reduced, freeing carers to meet their own needs and pursue their own goals as well as increase social and other participation of the person with disability.

***Carers WA have provided the following comments in relation to the WA Taxi User Subsidy Scheme***

Carers WA have previously heard of cases in which people were being charged from the moment the vehicle arrives at the home, rather than upon leaving. Carers WA had been told that for some it may take half an hour to have equipment attached to the vehicle and the person assisted into the vehicle. Such time frames added considerable costs to the fare charged for individuals and families accessing taxi services. Such an inequitable issue, can result in additional costs being incurred by the carers who commonly supplement the income of those who require significant support. **It is recommended that Taxi Drivers are subsidised for the time taken to assist a passenger to embark and disembark the TAXI (including the time to safely leave/reach the entrance to their home) so that the person with disability does not end up incurring a higher fee.**

**Carers**

Providing transport can be a significant aspect of the caring role, which can be very time consuming for carers. Carers commonly assist the people they support to and from, for example, social events and medical appointments. Carers are commonly relied upon in this manner to enable the effective social participation of the individual and to ensure that their needs are met. By enhancing and improving services to individuals with care needs that enable the individual to be more autonomous and independent, the time required providing care may be reduced. This may facilitate carers in meeting their own needs and goals, such as enabling and/or increasing workforce participation.

Carers commonly also subsidise the costs and income of the individuals they support. Carers are often under considerable financial stress. Many are unable to participate in the workforce due to the extent of their caring role, and have to cover medical and other costs of the person they care for. **It is recommended that the development of more equitable and reduced costs to those with care needs would subsequently result in a reduction in costs incurred by carers.**