

Accessible Point to Point Transport Working Group Forum Summary of Minutes

Wednesday, 19 June 2019 – 2pm – 3.30pm

Wanaka Room, Level 2, Energy House, 18 – 20 Cavenagh Street, Darwin

1. Welcome

Present

Consumer Representatives

| | |
|---|---|
| Karen Stewart (via video conference call) | Alice Springs Consumer |
| Susan Burns | State Manager – National Disability Service |
| Robyn Burridge | User Group – Integrated Disability Action |

Industry Representatives

| | |
|--|-----------------------------|
| Imran Nadeem | Darwin Radio Taxis network |
| Fred Franklin | Darwin MPT Driver |
| Georgina Bracken (via telephone call) | Tennant Creek Transport |
| Colin Dawson (via video conference call) | Alice Springs Taxis network |

Government Representatives

| | |
|--|--|
| Rose Nardone on behalf of Sam Livesley | Department of Health, Office of Disability |
| Christine Wright | Office of Disability |
| Christine Johnston on behalf of Traci Keys | Anti-Discrimination Office |
| Bernie Ingram | DIPL (Chair) |
| Simon Gillam | DIPL (Darwin) |
| Taunya Miller | DIPL (Secretariat) |

Apologies

Consumer Representatives

| | |
|----------------|------------------------------------|
| Sue Shearer | User Group – Council of the Ageing |
| Terry Thommeny | CEO Disability Advocacy Services |

Industry Representatives

| | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Kais Alselawi | Gove Transport network |
| Sam Abolghasemi | Katherine Taxis network |
| Bill Piantoni | Metro Minibus network |
| Terry Pachos | Blue Taxis network |
| Hira Samy (via video conference call) | Alice Springs Multiple Purpose Taxi (MPT) Operator |

Government Representatives

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| Erin Ingham | Deputy Director – Office of Disability |
| May Taylor | DIPL (Alice Springs) |
| Greg Turner | DIPL (Deputy Chair) |
| Michelle McColm | Manager Disability Services - Somerville |

2. General Business

2.1 Confirmation of Minutes from Meeting 5 March 2019

The Chair welcomed all present and an introduction of all members was conducted.

The Working Group did not raise any issues with the tabled previous meeting minutes.

2.2 Previous Action Items

The Working Group discussed the action items from the previous meeting, including:

1. Amend the previous meeting minutes (December 2018) to reflect that drivers should take a ride in an MPT, in a wheelchair (as a wheelchair passenger) as part of their training regime in future.

The group accepted the revised minutes.

This action item is completed.

A member advised the group that one of her drivers undertook driver training, which included taking a ride in a wheelchair as a wheelchair passenger and he found it beneficial.

A member noted that it is difficult to see out of a MPT from the back, in a wheelchair and further noted that she waited over an hour for her MPT today to bring her from Palmerston to Coconut Grove. Another member, however, noted that it can take at least 30 minutes to drive from the city to Palmerston area.

2. MPT (Multiple Purpose Taxi) Data

- a) Provide the Working Group recommendations to the Northern Territory Government regarding:
 - I. The issuing of any new taxi licences in Darwin and Alice Springs to be MPTs only; and
 - II. Any taxi operator with a current standard taxi licence can be transferred to an MPT licence in order to improve transportation services to wheelchair passengers.

The Chair advised the Working Group that the Northern Territory Government accepted the recommendation that the issuing of any new taxi licences in Darwin and Alice Springs are to be issued as wheelchair accessible/MPTs only.

The Chair further advised that there are currently two available taxi licences in both the Darwin and Alice Springs region and Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics (DIPL) is currently in the process of informing the taxi industry of the upcoming taxi licence ballot. The taxi licences will be issued as MPTs and not standard taxis as per the Working Group recommendation.

A brief overview of the taxi ballot, including the criteria to apply was provided to the Working Group.

Concerns were raised that the two taxi licences to be issued in both Darwin and Alice Springs will be issued to new operators only, as it may be tough for any new operator to join the industry, particularly owning an MPT. Also, that the operators of these MPT licences will need to ensure they undertake wheelchair jobs, otherwise it will defeat the purpose of issuing the licences as MPTs.

The group noted that having an additional two MPTs on the road after the taxi ballot will assist wheelchair passengers to be picked up by rank or booked jobs.

A member noted that all taxis in London are wheelchair accessible, however; it was discussed that unfortunately the London wheelchair accessible vehicles do not meet the Australian standard.

Action item 2(I) is completed.

In terms of action item 2(II), the Chair noted that this recommendation has not progressed, however, it can be provided to the Northern Territory Government at a later date when further recommendations are made and that this matter can also be included in the Department's review of the reforms in 2020.

3. Minimum MPT Job Performance Indicators

- a) Implement the 20 percentile range for MPT low wheelchair passenger job numbers and trial it for six months. The group to reassess in six months' time.
- b) Continue to monitor and contact operators of MPTs who have completed low wheelchair passenger numbers.

The Working Group was informed that DIPL is continuing to monitor the wheelchair passenger numbers and have written to the operators of the MPTs that have been identified as completing low wheelchair passenger jobs against the 20-percentile range for its region of operation.

The Working Group discussed a response (Attachment A2) received from an operator that was identified as completing low numbers of wheelchair passengers in its MPT.

The operator response noted that:

- the Network in which it operates under does not have formal contracts with disability organisations;
- disability organisations are also carrying out their own transportation of their clients in their own vehicles;
- TEPTS (Top End Patient Transport Services) is also offering free wheelchair passenger transportation services;
- the work is declining and its difficult to get drivers;
- the taxi industry is severely disrupted with the potential for Uber to also take on MPT services; and
- the low wheelchair numbers are mainly the result of a lack of wheelchair work in the region.

In response, the group discussed:

- that whilst some Networks have contracts in place with disability organisations that there are opportunities for wheelchair jobs through booking and rank jobs;
- there are no rideshare companies that are operating wheelchair accessible vehicles at this stage;
- from a Network point of view, there has not been a decline in wheelchair jobs and that the Network is considering to use minibuses in order to assist in the catering of transportation of wheelchair passengers as long as they charge what the taxis charge;
- from an organisational point of view, the demand for transportation for wheelchair passengers has increased as organisations are handing back these services to the taxi industry due to the high cost associated with their own vehicles;
- that the reason for disability organisations obtaining their own vehicles to transport clients may be due to not being able to consistently get wheelchair jobs through the taxi Networks;
- that the Department of Health clarified that the TEPTS service is for patients covered under Patient Travel only and covers people from remote communities coming into Darwin for surgery and or appointments. The service transports patients from appointments to their hostel and returns; and
- that as a suggestion, as it is nearing the end of the financial year where TSS members' funds are dwindling that the number of wheelchair jobs may be decreasing and that the scheme needs to be reviewed to ensure the correct level of funding is provided to the members.

The group also discussed the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) in which one member noted that her NDIS package will pay for her own wheelchair accessible vehicle only which may be impacting the taxi industry. It was, however clarified that NDIS has three tiers and depending on what tier the clients fall under, they can obtain funding for (taxi) transportation services.

The group discussed that Queensland has implemented a subsidy to assist with maintaining a wheelchair accessible vehicle (for private use). The Chair noted that this matter could be considered in the Department's 2020 review.

A member suggested that the wheelchair passengers could pre-book their trips in advance so that they can ensure that MPTs are available for them, however, it was noted that they should not have to pre-plan all their trips.

A member queried whether the Networks know how many MPTs are on the road operating each day and noted that taxi drivers sometimes choose what jobs they want and at times avoid wheelchair jobs.

It was confirmed that the Networks do know the number of MPTs operating under their Network each day and it was agreed that some drivers intentionally avoid picking up wheelchair jobs.

It was also noted that drivers ask passengers if they have funds available at the time of pick up and if the passenger does not have any lift incentives left that the drivers turn on the meter while the wheelchair passengers get into the taxi.

The Chair advised the group that taxi drivers are entitled to do this and it was noted that TSS members may have lift incentives available to them even if their funds on the cards have been completely used.

4. Identify Key Priority Areas to Improve Customer Service

- a) Discuss key areas to improve customer service at the next meeting, specifically issues with drivers not able to use the Transport Subsidy Scheme (TSS) card or how to work the lift mechanism.

The Working Group was referred to Attachment A3 (instruction sheet for using NTTSS and LIS) and Attachment A4 (NTTSS EFTPOS Terminal and Receipt Messages).

Attachment A3 is provided to all persons with a TSS card and provides instructions to members on how to pay with their TSS card.

Attachment A4 was drafted by DIPL and identifies the actions required by a Taxi driver using the TSS card when the card is approved or has an error message.

DIPL will provide Attachment A3 and A4 to all TSS members and Networks.

5. Driver Training

- a) Anti-Discrimination Office member to review the online Australian Disability Awareness Course and provide feedback to the Working Group on its relevance to the Northern Territory.

The Working Group was advised that this member is an apology for this meeting, however; she has provided her feedback by email, advising she believes the information for general education is brilliant with heavy reliance on Scope and Australian Human Rights Commission.

For legal content, the information on the *Disability Discrimination Act* and its genesis and related instruments is very good and thinks participants will have a clear understanding that discrimination is against the law. There is a very brief reference to state law and believes that whilst users will understand that they have obligations under Federal law, a few may not understand there are also state obligations. There is also no information about what happens if you breach the law (Federal or State/Territory).

The group was also informed of another disability course 'Disability Confident Managers' on the Northern Territory Government webpage. The course has three modules about disability, communication and creating enabling environments for employees. This course is primarily targeted for Managers and Leaders in a working environment and may not be beneficial for taxi drivers.

This course is open to as anyone and can be found at: <https://mylearning.nt.gov.au/login/index.php>

- b) Member to provide feedback from his discussions with the Australian Taxi Industry Associations (ATIA) regarding driver training.

The member advised the group that he has not yet been able to meet with the ATIA to discuss driver training, however; he intends this meeting will still go ahead at a later date and will advise the group accordingly.

The Working Group continued to discuss driver training including that the drivers should meet certain criteria such as the ability to speak English; reverse a vehicle up a driveway and know how to operate the taxi ramp.

The Working Group was informed that the taxi industry took over training of taxi drivers and the Department's 2020 review will look into the training component.

To improve driver training in the interim, the Working Group suggested that upon issuing licences to drive a commercial passenger vehicle which is noted as a 'h' endorsement on a driver licence that they complete a driver training course and that drivers should undertake refresher training courses.

The Working Group was informed that Commercial Passenger Compliance Officers actively undertake on-road audits on MPT drivers to ensure they know how to safely operate the taxi lifts and ramp mechanisms.

The Working Group discussed the issue of drivers not ensuring their passengers have seatbelts on, however it was clarified that drivers do not have an obligation to ensure their passengers wear a seatbelt; the driver is exempt from being fined if they are pulled over by Police where the passengers do not have a seatbelt on.

It was reiterated to the group that the onus of training a driver on the use of a vehicle needs to be placed on the operator and that with a high turnover of drivers, the training should be done at the time their 'h' endorsement is issued.

It was noted that National Disability Service (NDS) delivers a program called 'Lets Talk Disability' for work places about to how to have conversations with people with disabilities and breaking down barriers and stigmas. This program is not mandatory or regulated but has been successfully run across the country.

6. Taxi Subsidy Scheme (TSS) and Lift Incentive Scheme (LIS)

- a) Review the current lift incentive amounts against the current usage and budget.
- b) Explore different approaches to the administration of Lift Incentives, including performance based options.

These matters are ongoing pending the outcome of the Department's review and with the transition of the NDIS, the Department will ensure that this is first implemented and will then provide the options for TSS and LIS from the review to the Northern Territory Government.

The Chair confirmed that the Government is committed to working with NDIS.

3. New Business

3.1 Identify key priority areas to improve customer service

The group discussed the:

- convenience of fold up wheelchairs in taxis, however, it was noted that wheelchairs are customised for each client and its not the place for taxi drivers to recommend wheelchairs to passengers and within the sector. Information has been shared regarding portable wheelchairs; and
- minibus in Tennant Creek is not a TSS provider, however; they are an NDIS provider.

3.2 Other Business Items

The Working Group did not raise any new business items for discussion at todays' meeting.

4. Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday 24 September 2019 at 2pm.

Meeting closed 3.30pm

Point to Point Wheelchair Transport Services Working Group – Action Lists (Active and Pending Review) as of June 2019

| Actions Arising / Active | | | | |
|--|--|---------------------|----------------|--------|
| Action Item | Description of Action | Date Action Raised | Action Officer | Status |
| 1. Minimum MPT Job Performance Indicators | a) DIPL to respond to the operator counteracting his reasons for his vehicle transporting low wheelchair passenger numbers. | June 2019 | DIPL | Active |
| | b) DIPL to continue to monitor and contact operators of MPTs who have completed low wheelchair passenger numbers and advise the group accordingly. | March and June 2019 | DIPL | Active |
| 2. Identify Key Priority Areas to Improve Customer Service | a) DIPL to provide Attachment A3 and A4 to the Networks for distribution to their drivers. | March 2019 | Working Group | Active |
| | b) DIPL to provide Attachment A3 and A4 to all TSS members. | June 2019 | DIPL | Active |
| 3. Driver Training | a) DIPL to provide the link to the online Australian Disability Awareness Course to industry and include all disability awareness training resources on the Working Group Webpage. | June 2019 | DIPL | Active |
| | b) DIPL to deliver information on the National Disability Service 'Lets Talk Disability' program to industry. | June 2019 | DIPL | Active |
| | c) DIPL to provide written reminders to all operators of MPTs on the importance of ensuring their drivers can safely operate the vehicle. | June 2019 | DIPL | Active |

| Ongoing Actions Pending Review / Active | | | | |
|---|---|---------------------|----------------|--------|
| Action Item | Description of Action | Date Action Raised | Action Officer | Status |
| a) MPT Data | i) DIPL to include action item 2(II) in the Department's review of the reforms in 2020: 2(II) - any taxi operator with a current standard taxi licence can be transferred to a MPT licence in order to improve transportation services to wheelchair passengers. | March and June 2019 | DIPL | Active |
| a) Driver Training | i) Member to provide feedback from his discussions with the Australian Taxi Industry Associations (ATIA) regarding driver training. | March 2019 | Member | Active |
| | ii) DIPL to include driver training in the Department's 2020 review. | June 2019 | DIPL | Active |
| b) TSS and Lift Incentives | i) DIPL to review the current lift incentive amounts against the current usage and budget (ongoing). | September 2018 | DIPL | Active |
| | ii) DIPL to explore different approaches to the administration of Lift Incentives, including performance based options (ongoing). | September 2018 | DIPL | Active |