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Submission from Spinal Life Australia about the

Transport and Other Legislation (Personalised Transport Reform) Amendment Bill 2017

The Landscape:

Queenslanders with a disability such as our members are looking at the Parliament with concern, wondering whether its representatives are aware of the landscape at the time this Bill proceeds.

Queensland's disability sector relies on the Maxi Taxi fleet state-wide which comprises 19% of the total taxi vehicles in Queensland. This fleet of Toyota Hi-Ace vehicles with hoists serve the disability and Over 60s community's well by delivering a 'safe, predictable, reliable' service. And note, across most regional areas, it is the only form of accessible transport available.

The current service model has been 'built' over 20 years by a triumvirate of Queensland Transport, taxi companies and consumer advocates working together, their enhancements supported by previous Parliament's and participation facilitated through the Taxi Subsidy Scheme (TSS).

Because of those years of patient work, Queensland's most vulnerable citizens have the opportunity to participate in their communities. This is now endangered.

Financial support gone:

Financial transport support that underpins Queenslanders with a disability to participate in their community has been through the Queensland government Taxi Subsidy Scheme.

However, as transition to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) occurs, recipients automatically lose the Taxi Subsidy Scheme.

Whilst the NDIS has a transport support package, it is considerably less than the benefits of TSS membership for many. And NDIS recipient transport funding will be exhausted faster because they will pay full price compared to TSS members.

By 2019 when all eligible Queenslanders will have transferred to the NDIS, the TSS membership will be significantly depleted and the strength of the Maxi Taxi market minimised. Current customers fear they will lose a 'reliable' service because this lost market will cause viability issues for Maxi Taxi operators.

In December 2016, the Queensland government announced a commitment to ongoing funding of a \$20 lift fee for TSS jobs but that offers no comfort to consumers required to transfer to NDIS funding for their supports nor to drivers in a diminishing market. People with a disability require a predictable service. We fear the erosion of the Maxi Taxi fleet because its diminishment would see Queenslanders having a confined life, i.e. they have NDIS supports to give them independence but are unable to leave home, especially in regional areas, where licenses were boosted by the Queensland government in 2005 in recognition of the lack of transport options.

It is unlikely Ride share organisations can offer predictable accessible services. To do so, their vehicles would need to meet the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002 (Cth). This requires, as an example, entry/exit vertical heights of 1500mm floor to ceiling for mobility device access. And they must be able to accept all mobility devices with tie downs within the national footprint for mobility devices. It costs over \$80,000 to establish a new Toyota Hi-Ace Maxi Taxi for service. It will be a dilemma for ride share organisations to develop a fleet of compliant vehicles like the current maxi taxi fleet because it does not fit their business model.

Safety:

We are concerned by safety slippage in the proposed Bill as follows:

Vehicle age limit:

The Bill proposes no age limit on vehicles for hire e.g. very old vehicles can be operated. This appears to ignore 'design life' of vehicles, auxiliary systems, floor, seats, restraints and seat belts. The accepted life of a Maxi Taxi is 8 years. The material in seat belts has a 10 year life. Stress corrosion cracking can occur to various components. We are concerned about reducing the catastrophic consequences of an accident for a vulnerable person in a wheelchair because a hoist snaps and the wheelchair user falls backwards to the ground.

Less safety inspections:

Instead of the current 6 monthly Certificate of Inspection vehicle inspections by the Dept. Machinery, Transport & Main Roads, the Bill proposes these become annual. Note: taxis can clock 90,000 Klm in six months. We are concerned about metal fatigue, stress corrosion, rust, fatigue in hoists and items such as seat belts located in a roof line with no backplate. We are concerned that when a Maxi Taxi is replaced after 8 years, its hoist is also replaced. For Queenslanders to have confidence in a transport service, safety is paramount. We urge 6 monthly inspections be maintained.

Driver training erosion:

The Bill proposes driver training will be required but not to Registered Training Authority standards. A Maxi Taxi service requires appropriate training for the safety of the passenger and the driver, given the combined weight of a wheelchair and occupant can exceed 200kg. A competency unit (TLC 2040) of the national Transport and Logistics Industry training package shows the way. It is training to 'Provide wheelchair accessible taxi services to passengers with disabilities'.

In all honesty, we cannot leave Maxi Taxi training to the goodwill of service providers.

Service levels:

The current 'predictable' service will disappear because the Bill proposes to abolish fare structures which means booked hire providers can charge what they like. This means vulnerable Queenslanders such as Maxi Taxi customers can be exposed to inconsistent pricing and inflated charging.

Conclusion:

Maxi Taxi customers who are Queenslanders with a disability and the over 60s require a 'safe, predictable, reliable' service. That has been achieved over the past 20 years with a model that could be improved but serves this State well enough.

The proposed abolition of vehicle age limits, reduced inspection regime and driver training would increase potential for equipment and human failure.

The aspirations of Queenslanders with a disability becoming NDIS recipients were exhilarating in their scope and excitement. The removal of the TSS for NDIS recipients is inextricably bound to the proposed Bill and the Maxi Taxi fleet in order for them to live, work and play as they had hoped.

Against this landscape, the Parliament needs to be a force that supports its most vulnerable citizens who have waited decades to have choice and independence, to be a full participant in their community and most of all, to be integrated.