



All Aboard Network
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MPTP Review

Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources
Melbourne
Victoria 3000

Submission on the Multi Purpose Taxi Program

Introduction

All Aboard is a network of individuals and representatives of community and local government organisations who have an interest in the accessibility of public transport in Victoria for all people who wish to use it.

All Aboard advocates for non-discriminatory independent access to all forms of public transport for all people. One of the reasons that people with disabilities are regularly subject to discrimination in the provision of public transport is because fewer choices are made available.

Taxis and hire cars are both currently viable transport options for most people but many people with disability, particularly those who require a wheelchair accessible vehicle, are prevented from using hire cars because of financial or accessibility reasons.

MPTP application process

All Aboard supports a simplified application process. A single form supported by a single medical assessment could be used to apply for the MPTP, disabled parking permit, free public transport pass and any other related state government scheme that makes life a little easier for people with disabilities. All Aboard can assist with the development of such a form.

Maximum fare on which MPTP subsidy is paid

All Aboard believes that the maximum fare on which the MPTP subsidy is paid should be indexed to inflation annually.

This indexation would account for any increased costs to the user because of any fare rate increases as well as increased fares due to additional time on the meter because of traffic congestion.

The maximum fare, currently \$60, on which the MPTP subsidy is paid, perhaps has the greatest impact on regional taxi users given the higher average distance of a taxi journey. All Aboard would support an MPTP review to consider whether increasing the subsidy in rural and regional zones where trip distances are necessarily greater.

MPTP integration with other forms of public transport

All Aboard supports integration of the MPTP with public transport free travel programs. While there is still a long way to go in making public transport independently accessible, particularly in regional areas, we encourage more flexibility for users to choose the mode of travel that is most appropriate for them for each individual journey.

This opens up an opportunity to introduce a Transport Card with photo ID. If the technology allows, this same card could be used in taxis and hire cars as well as on other forms of public transport . a combined MPTP/Myki (free travel pass for persons with disability).

All Aboard sees the opportunities for people with disabilities to engage much more in community life, employment, education, leisure and recreation activities if a better mix of transport options were made available. For instance, perhaps the first leg of a journey could be made by a short taxi or hire car ride to the train station or bus interchange. With a reliable booking system, the last leg of the journey from the station back to home, which is often the most difficult, can also become much more user-friendly.

These initiatives would support the meeting of Goal 3 in the Victorian State disability Plan 2013-2016 which is to provide more transport options.

Group travel and fare splitting

All Aboard supports the introduction of a system whereby group travel and fare splitting by MPTP users is an available option. Thought should be given to establishing an equitable default method of fare sharing between passengers, with an option to over-ride in circumstances where the passengers wish to come to some other agreement.

It should be noted that this would need to be supported by having vehicles available that can accommodate groups that include at least two wheelchair users.

All Aboard supports pre-negotiated fixed fares for users who require a regular service.

MPTP user feedback

A method is required whereby MPTP members, in fact all taxi customers, can provide instant discreet feedback to the TSC. Feedback may be positive or negative. Some examples could be:

- Outstanding service by a taxi driver
- Dirty or poorly maintained taxi
- Unprofessional conduct by driver
- Involvement in a traffic accident
- An unsafe situation
- Refusal of a short trip

- Overcharging

A simple method may be via a text message to a dedicated TSC number. Ideally, a mobile phone app could be created, with a number of pre-programmed buttons for common types of feedback. Fields for taxi number, time and place of incident and identity (maybe MPTP number) of feedback provider should also be included.

Not only could action on serious incidents be taken immediately, but valuable data could be collected for later analysis.

Text message or app is an ideal form of providing immediate feedback in most cases because it is discreet and can be done without alerting the taxi driver, who may be the subject of the feedback. It is often important to be able to provide feedback immediately whilst all the details, such as taxi number, time, location etc are still available.

Vehicles

Stories from All Aboard members indicate low satisfaction with the comfort and safety offered by the most common type of wheelchair accessible taxi (WAT) - the Toyota van. We understand that these vehicles are relatively cheap to purchase and convert compared to other vehicle types. This is likely to be the reason that they are favoured by the taxi industry. However, the view of the taxi passenger, particularly a wheelchair passenger who is strapped in the back of a WAT, is very different.

The view from the rear of a Toyota WAT is very limited. A wheelchair passenger frequently cannot determine either route or location because the window line is very low in relation to eye level. The ride is very rough and the high seated position tends to amplify vehicle movement as it accelerates, decelerates and turns corners. This also has implications for passenger safety as the natural forces of momentum can be increased by a high, vulnerable seating position.

All of these factors add up to make for a generally uncomfortable ride with limited ability to be able to see the world outside. A wheelchair user may find a ride in a WAT as being comparable to being treated like a piece of cargo being hauled from one place to another. A wheelchair user has no choice in this, and it is unlikely that any other taxi passenger would find a similar situation to be acceptable.

All Aboard would like to see the MPTP review address the types of vehicles being used as taxis and hire cars.

All Aboard members have also expressed concerns about the securing of wheelchairs and the provision of seatbelts in WATs. We have heard stories about taxi drivers not securing wheelchairs correctly, perhaps because of inadequate training or perhaps because they are taking short-cuts. We have heard many stories of wheelchair passengers actually having to ask for a seatbelt!

One occasion, after he had been loaded and the wheelchair tied down in the back of a WAT, an All Aboard member asked the taxi driver to undo the restraints and lift him back

down onto the roadway because there wasn't a seatbelt available. The taxi driver was asked to call for another WAT and explain the reason to the operator.

Central booking system MPTP

All Aboard member Brian Caccianiga has provided some thoughts on how a central booking system might work:

It seems that the powers of B and probably the larger taxi Co's have this misguided concept that to keep adding more vehicles to the fleets will solve out travelling issues. ie; in particular waiting times, cabs not arriving and wheelchair travellers not treated as priority by drivers, even though they are driving a purpose built vehicle and understood that at time of starting.

Ray, as a past radio operator for 15 yrs in most every commercial group, ie; taxis, hire cars, couriers, taxi trucks, and tow trucks. It has always concerned me that the belief is that a limited number of vehicles can operate effectively and efficiently under an en-masse vehicle automatic despatch system. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Since the year 2000 here in Victoria and prior to that another 10 years in Sth Aust I have adamantly campaigned that no matter what else you do, the procedure of operation needs to change.

My firm belief based on my experience as an operator is that the MPTP has always needed to be run on a Power to Direct operational system.

The figures produced at All Aboard on Wednesday stating that 20% of WAT's do 80% of MPTP work is blatant proof that adding more vehicles does nothing to improve the system.

It doesn't matter how flash, fast, magnificent looking the train is. If the tracks aren't laid properly it won't work.

When the Power to Direct operational system is put in place, then an operator would be working alongside the automatic despatch system and overseeing the minute by minute allocation of work to the nearest available WAT vehicle.

Resulting in less empty travelled kilometres by the driver, better despatch stats on the computer and a far better service to the traveller.

To have a system where each individual driver runs his own little business is like having a kitchen where each chef has his own menu and nobody gets fed. As in a kitchen where a head chef directs the operations of the kitchen and all the other chefs work under his guidelines then so should the operations of the MPTP. Only and only then will we see a marked improvement in the service levels.

Hire cars and other pre-booked services

All Aboard considers that it is important to provide MPTP users real choice in their mode of transport. Extending the MPTP program to hire cars and other booked services (such as Uber, should they become legalised and regulated) would provide that choice.

All Aboard is of the view that competition, subject to regulation, would ultimately benefit users of the MPTP. The greatest challenge however, may be ensuring that adequate numbers of wheelchair accessible vehicles remain available for those that need them.

Wheelchair accessible vehicles are expensive to purchase or to modify from standard. This could be a barrier to entry, especially for operators who choose to purchase a vehicle based on comfort and safety for the passenger, rather than on cost.

The currently most popular vehicles used as WATs are also the cheapest. This indicates that the WAT segment of the taxi industry in general has a greater focus on profit than on the comfort and safety of passengers. Regulation and incentives may be required in order to create a viable business model for taxi or hire vehicle operators to service this important market segment with vehicles of a higher standard than those originally manufactured for commercial freight work.

Single access point for mobility related services

All Aboard supports the establishment of a one stop shop+website or similar that could provide easy access to mobility information and services. This could provide information on subjects such as:

- Where to apply for the MPTP
- Information on taxis, including WATs
- Protocols to be followed by taxi drivers . acceptance of assistance animals, how wheelchairs are to be secured, provision of seat belts, clearly visible taximeters and driver credentials etc
- Where and how to board a train or tram
- Protocols and driver assistance on buses where the allocated spaces are already occupied by other passengers
- Current accessibility improvement projects planned, underway, recently completed
- Public transport maps, route information and timetables
- Maximum dimensions and weight of mobility appliances for access to public transport
- How to book a taxi or hire car and what information needs to be provided to ensure an appropriate vehicle is despatched
- Public transport training for new users who have mobility or other difficulties

Local and community transport

All Aboard supports the investigation of ways to utilise local and community transport assets in the provision of transport to the public at large. There may be many currently under-

utilised vehicles and staff that could be injected into the public transport system, providing local fixed or semi-fixed neighbourhood routes.

Adding local and community transport vehicles and drivers could potentially be good for employment, good for the local community and good for the environment as more people, with or without disability could make more short trips without having to use a private car.

MPTP transparency

All Aboard would welcome regular reporting of MPTP statistics including program usage, average wait times, average fare, trip time and distance, program costs and user satisfaction. Information about eligibility requirements, fraud prevention measure may also be of interest.

User renewal and photo identification

All Aboard would support a periodic renewal which would include the issue of a new card with photo identification. This process could operate similarly to a drivers licence renewal, but with the addition of a short doctor's report.

After receiving the MPTP renewal notice (perhaps every 5 years), the program member could take the notice to the doctor for that section on mobility to be filled out. Then the program member could take the notice to the Post Office where the photo could be taken. The Post Office staff could then forward the notice and photo to the MPTP office where it is processed. The MPTP office could then issue the new MPTP card and public transport pass (if this is to be a separate card) and provide information to the relevant local council for a disabled parking permit to be issued without any further action from the program user.

Merits based review panel

All Aboard encourages the transparency of the merits based review panel. It is important that MPTP program users are aware of the existence and function of the panel so that it can be accessed if needed.

Recommendations

1. Single, simple application form for MPTP, Access Pass, Disabled Parking Permit etc
2. Annual indexation of maximum fare (currently \$60) upon which the MPTP subsidy is applied
3. An increase in the maximum fare upon which the MPTP subsidy is applied for regional and rural areas
4. Integrate the MPTP with a free public transport program to encourage people to use the most appropriate means of transport available to them for any given trip
5. Develop and introduce a flexible fare payment system that allows ride sharing and fare splitting
6. Develop and implement an real-time feedback mechanism for taxi and hire car users to report positive and negative experiences

7. Investigate alternate types of vehicles that can be used as wheelchair accessible taxis . to replace the converted delivery vans that are currently in common use and are the source of much program user dissatisfaction
8. Create and maintain a well designed and well resourced central booking system that will be effective in providing MPTP users with a reliable and efficient service that has wait times comparable to the rest of the industry
9. Create a market where the MPTP covers taxis and hire cars, whilst enhancing the quality and availability of wheelchair accessible vehicles, so that program users may have freedom of choice for their travel needs
10. Create a single access point for information relating to transport that can be easily used by current and potential MPTP program users
11. Integrate community transport into the overall public transport mix by bringing in under-utilised assets and providing easily accessible information to potential users
12. Increase public reporting of MPTP data
13. Introduce photo identification on MPTP cards along with periodic renewal (suggest 5 years)
14. Provide public information about the merits based review panel

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours faithfully,

Ray Jordan
(Admin)
All Aboard Network