



NSW TAXI COUNCIL LTD

Ref: 104/2012 PR

10 September 2012

Mr Bjarne Nordin
Inquiry Manager
Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety
Parliament of NSW
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000



Dear Mr Nordin,

Driver and Road User Distraction

Thank you for your letter of 29th August with the proof transcript of my evidence and questions on notice.

I have made some minor corrections to the proof on the enclosed copy.

I am also attaching my responses to the questions on notice.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any queries or if I can be of any further assistance.

Yours sincerely

Peter Ramshaw

Chief Executive Officer

NSW Taxi Council Questions on Notice

1. The Taxi Council is concerned about the development of smartphone applications bypassing the dispatch system.
 - You argue that your system provides safety benefits due to its voice activated nature and ease of operation for drivers. Does the use of a screen not provide a source of distraction for drivers when bidding for a fare?
 - How does a fixed smartphone, mounted in an appropriate location, differ from the system you are using in your taxi fleet?

Answers:

Authorised taxi network dispatch systems are purpose-built devices designed solely for use inside vehicles. Whilst a screen is a potential source of distraction, studies have shown the risk is amplified by the amount of time that the device requires the driver to take their eyes off the road. Dispatch systems are designed in a manner that minimises the risk of distraction to the driver. This includes the layout of the screen as well as the colour and size of “buttons” on the screen, to simplify the task and minimise the time required to look at the screen. The ability for the device to convert text to voice also minimises the need for the driver to take their eyes off the road whilst driving. Systems are also designed to avoid the need for the driver to respond immediately when a booking is dispatched. A time delay is made available which gives the driver the opportunity to concentrate on their driving and avoid being distracted at critical times. As providers of the equipment, authorised taxi networks are held responsible under Workplace Health and Safety laws. This provides a level of accountability for the safe design and use of authorised dispatch devices. In addition to this, the Passenger Transport Act 1990 requires authorised taxi networks to provide specific training to all taxi drivers regarding the safe and proper use of the dispatch equipment. Whilst an authorised dispatch system does pose a potential source of distraction, all the features described above as well as the level of accountability for taxi networks supplying the equipment provide assurances that the systems are designed to minimise the associated risks. In addition, the dispatch system screen forms part of the essential alarm and response system playing an important function in the safety of taxi drivers who are potential targets of attack.

A smartphone differs from an authorised dispatch system because it is not designed for use in a vehicle. A smartphone is designed to carry out a wide range of functions, is designed to be held in the hand and is hence not purpose built as a dispatch system or for mounting in a vehicle. The devices have small screens that take longer to read than a larger screen designed for the purpose. A smaller screen requires greater concentration to manipulate and read commands, hence poses a significantly greater source of potential distraction. There is no requirement for any training to be provided to drivers for its safe use and it is unclear if anyone could be held accountable for the safety of the design or use of a smartphone by a driver. All of these issues are likely to make smartphones significantly more risky devices than authorised dispatch systems.

Peter Ramshaw
CEO NSW Taxi Council