

Submission
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INQUIRY INTO NSW TAXI INDUSTRY

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NSW Taxi Industry (Inquiry)



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Introduction

This written submission is based on ongoing research on the accessibility of the cities for people with disabilities where the impact of NSW Taxi Industry on the social participation of the group is significant [1-15]. The submission also draws on my experience as a power wheelchair using quadriplegic who has used the NSW Taxi system for 27 years. This personal experience is referenced to the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport (DSAPT). As such, there are specific issues regarding Wheelchair Accessible Taxis (WATs) that will be discussed. Before outlining these issues, I wish to applaud the improvements in all aspects of WATs from the deplorable state of service when I first started using the system in 1983. In particular, the WAT drivers who regularly pick me up are first rate and the 0200 communication to consumers is very good. However, as I will outline, there are still significant issues that result in consumers with disabilities being treated as second class citizens.

A. Availability & Wait Time

- The submissions from other inquiries and sources [16], and the research I have completed has highlighted the inequity of access to WATs from region to region. For example, there are only five WATs in Newcastle and many areas of Sydney are under serviced. This leads to significant wait times well beyond those experienced by the general public. These issues have been well documented in numerous past inquiries and other submissions to this inquiry.

Personal experience

I have a travel diary from 1999-2010 inclusive that shows I regularly wait on a weekly basis between 15-45 minutes and intermittently wait over 1-1½ hours.

B. WAT design

- Some WATs are currently being approved that in my opinion as an Accredited Access Auditor do not comply to the DSAPT. The DSAPT requires a "minimum" allocated space dimensions of 1300 mm long x 800 mm wide x 1410 mm high (internal) and 1400 mm high at the door entrance. The major issues are the length of tray and the interpretation of the internal dimensions of the space. If the internal dimensions do not allow a standard wheelchair user access then the outcome is not fulfilling spirit and intent of the DDA. This is a poor outcome for both consumers with disabilities and the taxi operator who thinks that they are getting an accessible taxi that will accommodate all wheelchair users.

Personal experience

I have been travelling in the system for 27 years and it has only been in the last 2-3 years with the introduction of Taragos and Kias that I have been unable to fit into vehicles due to the tray length not being compliant. However, it is not so much the vehicle but the type conversion. Every time I have not been able to access a vehicle the conversion has been completed by **Company name Withheld**. This need not be the case as Figure 1 shows Taxi [number withheld], which is a short wheelbase Tarago, has an ample tray length and internal dimensions.

Figure 1: Taxi [number withheld] Short Wheelbase Tarago



Source: Simon Darcy 2010

- The majority of new vehicles approved do not have **retractable over the shoulder lap sash seat belts**. This is a major **SAFETY** issue. Are we the only group of consumers not to be guaranteed our safety and comfort in taxis through the provision of retractable over the shoulder lap sash seat belts? How has this situation been allowed to occur?
- While most new vehicles provide sound visibility from the wheelchair seated position, the new Toyota Hiace are still poorly designed for visibility. Are we the only group of consumers not to be allowed to see where we are traveling?

C. Cost of use of WATs

- The subsidized cost of the taxi transport subsidy scheme (TTSS) system has not increased with the cost of living. In fact, the TTSS in NSW has not increased since its inception but fares have regularly gone up. Consumers with disabilities using the system in 1981 had significantly more subsidy than consumers in 2010. Quite simply you cannot travel as far as you previously were able to for the \$30 subsidy. The individual has had to finance the gap between the subsidy and the real cost of traveling or not travel. This effectively privatizes the cost of the only accessible public transport that some wheelchair users with high support needs have as they have no other access to public transport.

Personal experience

I regularly work in the City of Sydney and commute from Terrey Hills. In 1999, the meter charge would be between \$45-\$50. However, in 2010 this meter fare is now \$75-\$80. As Table 1 shows, this has increased my cost of transport by some 250% or \$14,400 and created a major cost burden in maintaining transport to and from work. Note: Figures are from my travel diary and are based on 10 trips/wk over 48 weeks.

Table 1: comparative out of pocket expense 1999-2010

Year	Total	Sub	MyCost	Yearly
1999	\$50	\$30	\$20	\$9,600
2000	\$80	\$30	\$50	\$24,000

Source: Simon Darcy Travel Diary 1999-2010

D. Wheelchair Footprint Research

- The whole system of the A80 wheelchair footprint is based on research with questionable validity and reliability. Future trends in wheelchair design, increased scooter use and the ageing of the population will further make a mockery of this dimension. This will create a competitive disadvantage both domestically and internationally. I call this the **Las Vegas effect** where the baby boomers have a higher expectation for continued community participation than previous generations of older people. Las Vegas is a city where the effects of this are already being seen with the proportion of scooter users being a higher than the norm due to the city's tourist role, climate and destination for retirees. The ABCB commissioned research on the wheelchair footprint but never released the research results [17, 18]. Why? Why has no further research been commissioned by the Attorney General's Department, the ABCB, Standards Australia or other responsible bodies such as the NSW Taxi Industry? This would provide a foundation on which to build an economically efficient, socially sustainable and competitive operation.

Conclusion & Recommendations

Transport is one of the foundation considerations for citizenship for people with disabilities along with: Health; Attendant care; Housing; Built environment; Education; and Personal Aids for disabled people. Only once these are in place can people with disabilities think about: Employment; Community involvement; Recreation & Tourism; Relationships; and Dreams and desires. There is no doubt that since the introduction of the DDA Standards for Accessible Public Transport that there has been an overall improvement in accessibility of the public transport system. However, there are noticeable pockets of provision that are inconsistent, unpredictable and complex. One of these areas, is the accessibility of the NSW Taxi Industry.

I would be happy to present or discuss any aspect of information presented within the submission.

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