

Submission
No 68

INQUIRY INTO NSW TAXI INDUSTRY

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taxicommittee - New South Wales Taxi Industry Inquiry

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Subject: New South Wales Taxi Industry Inquiry

The Director
Select Committee on the NSW Taxi Industry
Parliament House
Macquarie St
Sydney NSW 2000
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New South Wales Taxi Industry Inquiry

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to you as a part-time taxi driver who has held a taxi authority on an off for the last thirty eight years.

I do apologise for this late submission to the inquiry, but I feel that there have been no other drivers willing to voice their ideas on how the industry should be run.

I have seen quite a few changes to the industry over the years, many of them for the better, but still the legislation is just about as antiquated as it was when I first obtained an authority some thirty eight years ago.

Picking Up

I know that taxis are an essential component of public transport, as they fill in many of the gaps that any system, either now or in the future, has. This is because they are not limited as to their route and can pick up and set down almost everywhere. However, they are very much treated as second class citizens by the legislation and are very much hindered in doing this very essential job. This is because they cannot stop on a bus stop even though they are public passenger vehicles, and have to contend with the dreadful changes to the parking laws which introduced No Stopping Zones in preference to No Standing Zones. No Stopping Zones have invariably replaced No Standing Zones on every street corner, when in fact these should really have been converted to No Parking Zones. There is a place for No Stopping Zones, but these in most cases should be Clearways. Taxis need to be able to share bus stops with buses, instead of being hounded off them by buses, at least for the purpose of setting down and picking up passengers with perhaps a three minute time limit, except where the passenger is disabled, in which case there should be no time limit. If bus stops need to be increased in size to accommodate taxis, then additional areas should be allowed for at least one taxi to occupy the end of a bus stop in order to do their job. In addition they need to be able to double park in order to set down and pick up, especially in the city, where there is generally nowhere to pull off the road to do this.

The worse case that I have encountered was right across the road from Parliament House outside

of Park House, where I used to have to drop off people with limited sight and blind people as all of the available spaces are almost always occupied. There needs to be at least four parking spaces for dropping off and picking up passengers here, with say a five minute limit, except for disabled people. It was shameful that I had to double park one morning to set down a world war II veteran. I had to get him into his wheel chair which had been carried in the boot. At that time I was driving a Hire Car, but the same would apply to Taxis and any other vehicle.

Please go outside of Parliament House in the morning to see what is happening.

There are many four hour parking spots which could be converted for passenger pick up and set down, and some disabled parking.

Taxi Zones

There is a shameful need for taxi ranks in Macquarie Street starting at Number 1, to service the Opera House, particularly at night when the opera gets out at around 10.15 pm.

There is also a need for a taxi rank in Darlinghurst Road in Kings Cross outside of the train station. This is currently a No Parking Zone, and there are quite a number of spaces. I propose that about four spaces should be set aside as a permanent taxi rank behind the bus zone, and that the other No Parking spaces be converted to a taxi rank for late night use. This rank should be manned by trained personnel that can sort out multiple hireings. This area is extremely busy on both Friday and Saturday nights. Multiple hiring is a way to relieve shortages of taxis at key times.

Multiple Hiring and Touting

It is shameful that taxis are able to make Multiple Hiring's without the means to do so. This is because touting has long been banned for over forty years. This is totally against the introduced laws dealing with free trade. Taxis must be the only industry that is not able to freely ply their trade, apart from the medical profession. Multiple hiring's should be encouraged as there is no other way that taxis can move a large number of people in peak times such as late night. It does not matter how many taxis you allow to be registered. Unless there is adequate income, drivers will not work in the industry. Fares need to be worked out to give the passengers a reasonable discount, and greater income for the driver.

Multiple Hiring is a means of moving larger numbers of people at times such as New Years Eve, and other occasions when taxis are in peak demand.

In preference, this should be done at taxi ranks, preferably by a suitably trained officer.

Destination Signs

This is also a practice that has fallen into disuse. It should be possible for a taxi driver to display a general destination sign whenever he needs to. Commonly this would be at the end of the shift. However, shifts should be staggered to overcome the three o'clock changeover problem. It should therefore be possible to display destination signs at any time of the night or day. The only restriction should be on the way in which they are displayed.

Taxi Fares

The current levels of taxi fares are only viable when the industry is busy, such as on Friday and Saturday nights. It is shameful that the charge made for a phone booking is currently only about two dollars. On busy nights, at least half of phone bookings cannot be picked up because either the passenger has called two or more companies, or the job is too old to start with. Driver's are not usually informed as to how old a job is, resulting in sheer frustration when they have to report an M3 or "No Job". Saturday before last, I successfully called on four jobs and all of them were M3's. As it is the fee for a phone booking is woefully inadequate as one needs to collect at least fifty dollars an hour to make any sort of living at taxi driving. This is because there can be a lot of down time, and because the charges made by the owners are generally quite high. These charges are much higher than to rent a car from Avis, etc. It generally takes ten minutes to drive to a phone booking and another five minutes can be taken up trying to make contact with the passenger. Driver's need an incentive to do phone bookings. I would therefore suggest that this fee should be at least Five or Six Dollars. Further to this, it should be a set minimum to protect the drivers. I suggest that a maximum should not be set, but that this should be left to the individual radio co-ops such as Combined to set, provided that they informed the prospective passengers of the fees at the time that the booking is made. This could simply be done by altering their voice message. A higher fee would allow them to charge a higher rate for a better class of vehicle such as a Ford Fairlane or a Holden Statesman. These larger vehicles are more ideal for taxi work. However, it would cost me at least ten dollars more per shift to drive such a vehicle, but I personally cannot see that I could recoup this under the current system and decline to drive such a vehicle. Higher phone booking fees would encourage drivers to make these pickups, and their earnings would improve, allowing for drivers to stay in the industry. This may also deal with M3's as there will be more drivers encouraged to do this type of pickup.

Another charge that is not adequate is the waiting time. Currently this is only around fifty dollars an hour. When it is considered that taxis are not hired all of the time, the current charge is very low. It should be increased to around sixty five dollars an hour, in my opinion.

If the regulation of taxi fares is to continue, then a maximum pay-in should be set, lower than the current pay-in system, to reduce the exploitation of drivers.

Unless drivers are encouraged to stay in the industry, there will continue to be a very high turnover in this occupation.

Contracts

When most drivers go to a taxi manager, they really have no idea of many important matters. Some of these are:

- who the real owner of the vehicle is;
- whether they will be covered by comprehensive insurance on the vehicle, and who the insurer is;
- what their responsibilities are, especially when it comes to an accident (such as who is liable for the excess);
- that they are covered by worker's compensation and who the insurer is;
- how much they are expected to pay for the vehicle for a shift;

- how will the payment be affected by a break down;
- what happens if a driver is too ill to work; etc.

There needs to be a standard written agreement between the bailee and the bailor, that is required by the legislation.

Control of the Radio

Regulations giving passengers rights to the use of a radio receiver, tape-deck, MP3 Player or CD player in the car were made long before it became apparent that things such as the use of mobile phones were a distraction to a drivers attention to the road. When I drive a taxi it is normally of a night time, and I would estimate that many of my passengers are intoxicated to one degree or another. Often they are young and want to extend their party on the way home or to the next bar at Kings Cross, and many insist on playing hard rock at high noise levels. I don't know whether you have been in a situation where you have had to drive a vehicle with the radio up high with a lot of drunks in the car while you are driving along Darlinghurst Road at Kings Cross, trying to keep an eye out for other drunks that want to cross the road without notice, but I find that it is most distracting and that I should not have to put up with such antics on safety grounds. So, I would hope that the Committee would agree to recommend a change to the legislation so that drivers can refuse to play the radio, etc on safety grounds. I am not saying that a passenger should not be able to object to the driver listening to the horse races on a Saturday afternoon, when they wish to listen to the football, but I do believe that there are times when these devices should not be used as they are a decided distraction to safe driving. Driver's should not feel intimidated by passengers or poor legislation in such cases

Traffic Rules and the Points System

Like all commercial drivers, taxi drivers spend long hours on the road, but they are subject to the same points system as private motorists.

Taxi drivers would commonly drive up to ten times more kilometres than private motorists each year. The current legislation is therefore most unfair to commercial drivers. Points can be lost for doing as little as a few kilometres over the speed limit. This is directly against public policy as most drivers try to drive at the designated speed limit. This invariably means that they will accelerate until they are at or slightly above the speed limit and then allow their speed to drop until it goes below the limit and then repeat the process. Process engineers call this on-off control, with the set point being the designated speed limit. It is the same type of control mechanism that has been used in things like ovens and hot water heaters to decades to control temperature. Motorists should not be penalised for doing ten kilometres over the speed limit, as this is simply within the normal range of speed. This is simply part of everyday control of the speed of a motor vehicle. Surely speeds of twenty or more kilometre over the speed limit are the type of thing that should be heavily penalised and policed.

Further to this, drivers are fined one point if it is claimed that they have exceeded the speed limit by ten kilometres, then three points if they exceed the speed limit by 11 to 20 kilometres, etc. Surely a much more appropriate and fairer fines and points system would be one in which the penalties are on a sliding scale. So, for example, no points for speeds in excess of 10 kilometres over the limit, then one tenth of a point for each kilometre above ten kilometres over the limit, up to say twenty kilometres over the limit, at which case the rate of points accrued would increase to

0.2 points for each kilometre over 20 kilometres per hour over the limit, etc. Similarly with the fines.

So, this would equate to:

Kilometres over the limit	Points Penalty
0 - 10	Nil
11	0.1
12	0.2
13	0.3
14	0.4
15	0.5
Etc.	
20	1.0
21	1.2
22	1.4
23	1.6
24	1.8
25	2.0
26	2.2
27	2.4
28	2.6
30	2.8

I am sure that you know what I mean. Basically, a fairer system should be used.

Taxi drivers need access to the Courts in order to have any loss of licence reviewed, as do all citizens. I have found that the bureaucrats in the RTA and SDRO are doing their very best to deny drivers natural justice and to maximize income from fines. This cannot last. People do not respect an unfair system and will not vote for members of parliament that do not protect their rights, and when they do digress, to ensure that the legal system treats them justly, whether those rights are for a safe roadway, or a just system of penalties.

Too many taxi drivers are harassed by the legal system, and this needs to come to an end.

I therefore hope that this inquiry will lead to better legislation for both the public and taxi drivers as change is long overdue.

If I can be of further assistance, I would be very happy to do whatever I can to assist you.

Yours faithfully,