

INQUIRY INTO CROSS CITY TUNNEL

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Theme:

Summary

NSW TAXI COUNCIL LTD

JSC CROSS CITY TUNNEL

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The Director
Joint Select Committee on the Cross City Tunnel
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Sir/Madam

The NSW Taxi Council wishes to express its concerns regarding the outcomes arising from the Cross City Tunnel (CCT).

Our concerns relate to the apparent lack of consideration given to the loss of public benefit arising from the traffic restrictions associated with the CCT and the apparent refusal of the tunnel operator to display the amount charged for tolls.

When other toll roads have been opened in Sydney, users opt to use the road generally because it provides a faster and more convenient option than the alternative routes. There has been no need to alter the existing alternative routes as the toll roads have been able to "compete" with these routes by providing a cost-effective option that drivers choose to utilise. In these cases there is a clear public benefit as nothing is taken away from the public whilst a new alternative is provided.

The arrangements regarding the CCT have been vastly different. The benefits of a new alternative provided by the CCT have been offset by the removal and restriction of other existing routes.

The CCT provides fast and convenient access between Wolloomooloo and Darling Harbour, as well as access to the Harbour Tunnel and the Eastern Distributor from these locations. In this respect the CCT provides benefits for road users and consequently for taxi passengers and their drivers. Introduction of Bus Lanes in parts of the city have also provided benefits by reducing journey times and hence the cost for taxi passengers.

However, taxi passengers and their drivers have also been inconvenienced and face increased costs caused by the restriction of access to the Harbour Tunnel and Bridge from Paddington and Darlinghurst and increased traffic congestion in Macquarie Street which drivers are forced to use. Other problems have been created on the Eastern Distributor where traffic exits the CCT. Apart from increased costs to passengers, service levels are reduced as taxis take longer to arrive to pick-up passengers and taxi driver earnings are also reduced.

These factors serve to erode the public benefit provided by the CCT and it seems public benefit has been negated or substantially reduced by the commercial interests of the CCT Operator.

New South Wales regulations require taxi passengers to reimburse taxi drivers the amount of tolls that apply to the journey. The NSW Taxi Council has made a number of requests to the CCT operator and the Minister for Roads to have the amount of toll displayed in or outside the CCT so that passengers are informed of the amount required to reimburse the taxi driver. Clearly there is a public benefit in passengers being able to confirm the amount of the toll. However, there seems to be no requirement for the toll to be displayed and hence there is no simple way a passenger can know whether they have been charged the correct amount. This problem is creating numerous disputes and unnecessary angst for taxi passengers and drivers.

There has been an exception to this case. During the toll-free period in November 2005 the operator of the CCT chose to display a message to say that the toll was free. At other times, presumably for commercial reasons, the CCT operator chooses not to reveal the toll amount at the time people use the CCT.

The NSW Taxi Council requests the Committee to consider the extent to which the process and methodology involved in the development of future infrastructure projects ensure the projects deliver clear and unequivocal public benefits and prevent commercial interests eroding or negating the benefits intended to be provided by the infrastructure and use of public assets in the first place.

Yours sincerely



Peter Ramshaw
Assistant Executive Officer