

**Submission
No 64**

INQUIRY INTO NSW TAXI INDUSTRY

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I am a wheelchair user and have been on the Taxi Subsidy Scheme since i was at university in 1990/91. I have used taxis virtually every week day since then, and use up to six per day in trips to and from and amid my current job as a community development worker for the Home and Community Care (HACC) Program. I can transfer from my wheelchair, and it folds up, so i generally travel in 'normal' vehicles; i only occasionally use the WATS if i am very tired or unwell.

My preferred taxi provider is my local St George Cabs. To ensure my personal safety i choose to never flag taxis, but ring the booking service for short, local trips and call on specific drivers for trips over 30 minutes; sometimes, Diamond vehicles respond. The longer trips include difficult destinations, such as underground garages and hard-to-find community services, and when i have to meet an appointment time. I am extremely happy with my treatment by St George drivers - i find them overwhelmingly respectful, professional and helpful.

I think taxi drivers receive a lot of negative press which is undeserved, and i see a big difference between weekday, career drivers and the weekend casuals. I also suspect that some drivers who receive criticism are responding to extreme disrespect and mistreatment by passengers, including those with unrealistic expectations of response times, fares etc and racist people. During the past decade, I have only had a handful of less-than-ideal experiences with drivers, which is far less than i would expect given the law of averages! Only two issues were serious enough to warrant complaints. The first was an elderly driver with poor driving skills (i never heard back from the Taxi Council re that feedback); the second was a driver who did not follow my instructions and caused me to fall when getting out of the vehicle (St George Cabs investigated and dealt with that to my satisfaction). The only other problems in recent years have been due to the St George Cabs computers and booking system, which the drivers have suffered through as much as passengers! I have just learned to work around it by planning ahead, where possible, ringing drivers directly on their mobile phones etc.

I actively recommend taxi travel to friends and co-workers, including services that work with frail and disabled clients, such as Community Transport, and would be very pleased for the chance to give this feedback to the Inquiry.

Melinda Paterson

7/2/10