



# Department of Human Services

Secretary

50 Lonsdale Street  
GPO Box 4057  
Melbourne Victoria 3001  
DX210081  
www.dhs.vic.gov.au  
Telephone: (03) 9096 8580  
Facsimile: (03) 9096 9220

29 JAN 2008

e1118392



Mr Greg Wilson  
Chairperson  
Essential Services Commission  
Level 2, 35 Spring Street  
MELBOURNE 3000

## Response to the ESC Issues paper *Taxi Fare Review 2007-08*

*Greg*

Dear Mr Wilson

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the ESC Issues Paper *Taxi Fare Review 2007-08*, December 2007.

The primary area of concern shared by the Department of Human Services' Concession, Health, Aged and Disability areas is ensuring access and affordability for low income and vulnerable taxi users. The Department's submission is based on the premise that effective and equitable access to transport is essential for participation in social and economic life, and provides the basis for a fair and safe society.

Whilst the Issues Paper refers to the Multi-Purpose Taxi Program (MPTP), its customers are generally not distinguished from other general customers. The MPTP contributes approximately 24% of total taxi revenue and is a key source of income especially for wheelchair accessible taxis.

Consumer submissions to a number of recent enquiries have identified wide spread problems of severely late arrival or non arrival of MPTP taxis, however, the volume is unknown. This is reflected in the Issues Paper where you cite the 2002 *National Taxi Users Survey* finding that in Victoria 30% of customers indicated that on some occasions in the preceding six months they had been unable to get a cab, and that waiting times may be discouraging some demand.

It would be instrumental to know if MPTP customers experience a similar or greater problem to the general population. The HREOC *Time To Respond Realising Equality for people with a disability utilising taxis report (2007)* highlighted the inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms to monitor and enforce standards in relation to equal response times between regular taxis and wheelchair accessible taxis as well as concerns in relation to safety, availability of taxi rank services and driver knowledge of dealing with wheelchair users.

*The Review of the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport Draft Report (2008)* found that the taxi industry has not been able to meet The Transport Standards requirements for response times for accessible taxis.

That the current industry structure does not lead to consistent outcomes regarding reliability and quality of service for MPTP customers, suggests a need for greater attention to be paid to the specific issues relating to this customer base. Closer attention to the MPTP customer segment could examine affordability, especially in country areas, along with practical issues such as the recommendation of the recent HREOC report and the Country Taxi Review (May 2006) Working Group that limiting the MPTP subsidies for longer distance trips tends to disadvantage the small operators who operate in the remote areas of the state.

The Final Report of the Country Taxi Review May 2006, also raised a number of questions regarding the eligibility rules and application process of the MPTP. These included disincentives, such as the use of periodic payments, to servicing MPTP customers.

The Department of Human Services would welcome the opportunity to meet with the ESC to discuss this proposal. Andrew Muscat, Manager Concessions Unit, has coordinated this response and can be contacted on (03) 9096 5120 or by e-mail

[Andrew.Muscat@dhs.vic.gov.au](mailto:Andrew.Muscat@dhs.vic.gov.au).

Yours sincerely



**FRAN THORN**  
Secretary