

Submission to IPART on Taxi Fares from Sydney Airport

IPART has called for submissions on Taxi Fares from the Airport. This follows on the decision by the NSW Government to fundamentally change the intent of the Point to Point Act, 2016 which provided the exclusivity of Rank and Hail for Taxis.

Under the guise of a trial to assist incoming Passengers, they have instead been exposed to all the extortionate practises of “surge pricing” and unregulated Fares to and from the International Airport. Taxis have had their access and numbers limited and are subject to regulated maximum Fares which do not take into account the particular conditions of Airport pick-ups.

There are three aspects to this issue :

The notion of a Short Fare System, the notion of a Minimum Fare, and a Fixed Fare to the CBD

The ATDA response is that there should be a Minimum Fare of \$35 and there should also be a reintroduction of a short fare system at the Airport, both Domestic and International. Inevitably, when the Airport management creates an effective Rank or Holding Bay with a capacity for the now reduced 250 Taxis, there will still, at most times, be extended waiting times. It is not unreasonable to introduce a Minimum Fare in that situation.

With the advent of smart “soft” meter’s it is quite straightforward to have a \$35 start fee for both Domestic and International Pick-ups with the Meter set to resume incremental display of the Fare after reaching that \$35 set fare distance / time. Such a change would go to compensate Drivers for their usually extended wait, and reduce arguments and the improper Fare Refusals for short fares.

At the same time, a Short Fare system could easily be re-introduced, in which one Bay at the Terminal Pick-up point is reserved for those Taxis who prefer and opt-in for a specifically Short Fare. This would probably require a separate Lane and Signal routine from within the Holding Bay to facilitate an equitable traffic flow.

A Fixed Fare to the CBD is a more contentious. The actual Fare differences between a non-tolled trip Domestic to Central Railway Station and a tolled trip International to Milles Point can easily be \$20. There will inevitably be arguments as to fringe drop-offs.

A Minimum Fare with metering resumed after \$35 is easier to follow and implement.

Historically, the Airport Taxi Holding Bays provided free access for up to 400 vehicles to effectively be on Stand-By for arriving Passengers. There were amenities provided - Toilets, Prayer Room and Fast-Food Canteen. More recently the Airport Management imposed a now \$5.80 fee on all Pick-ups. Most recently the area was reduced to fit only 250 Taxis and with the threat of a \$10.00 charge for waiting for more than an Hour.

Traditionally, many Drivers advantaged themselves of an opportunity to go to the Toilet, for some to say a Prayer, and have a bite to eat. And to talk to their fellow Drivers. Sydney Airport would discourage this socialization and the chance of a break .

We would also take this opportunity to urge comment from IPART on the fundamental, and Regulated, requirement on Hire Vehicles to not Ply for Hire, stand on a road or road related area, or to take Bookings from a place where they are already at. We note that the Gazetted Exemptions now being trialled at the International Airport are both discriminatory and at odds with the intent of the Act and Regulations.

Since all Uber trips are “booked”, there is already the easy option to charge a minimum fare, and, worse, to “surge” that price at its choice. Taxi Drivers are restricted to the regulated maximum Rank & Hail Fare.

Taxi Drivers are not opposed to Passengers choosing to book a “rideshare” vehicle. That is a free and frequent choice. What we are opposed to is the “Ranking” of Uber vehicles only able to queue and wait for Passengers without prior acceptance of a specific Booking. Calling it an “e-hail” should not reverse that from being a “Rank & Hail” job.

Again historically, the Airports accounted for up to 15% of all Sydney Taxi Trips. The single best guarantee of getting a Fare was to go to the Airport, and for inexperienced Drivers, it was the start of a learning curve. But it was, and is, a trap for inexperienced Travellers against whom the un-professional Driver may take advantage.

A Minimum Fare, inclusive of Tolls, is almost certainly the best solution. It must be accompanied by a smart meter, incapable of being manipulated.

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