



Taxi Fare review

Public Hearing Transcript

28 October 2024

Location: Zoom online

Transport >>

Acknowledgment of Country

IPART acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands where we work and live. We pay respect to Elders both past and present.

We recognise the unique cultural and spiritual relationship and celebrate the contributions of First Nations peoples.

Tribunal Members

The Tribunal members for this review are:

Carmel Donnelly PSM, Chair
Dr Darryl Biggar
Jonathan Coppel
Sharon Henrick

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The Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal

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Contents

1	Taxi Fare public hearing	1
1.1	Welcome	1
1.2	Introductions	3
1.3	IPART presentation	6
1.4	Discussion	9
1.5	Closing remarks	30

1 Taxi Fare public hearing

1.1 Welcome

Andrew Nicholls (IPART): Good afternoon, let's make a start. Welcome to today's public hearing on maximum taxi fares for rank and hail services from the 1 of July 2025. My name is Andrew Nicholls, and I'm the Chief Executive Officer of the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal.

I'll be managing the public hearing today, and I'll start with just a few housekeeping notes. First, please keep your microphone muted when you're not speaking to avoid feedback and background noise. We encourage you to keep your cameras on if your internet connection is up to it and provided you're comfortable doing so, of course.

And please, if you could make sure your name, and if relevant, if you're representing an organisation is showing, and there are instructions for doing this in the chat box. To help with accessibility today, we have made Zoom captions available and there's also a message in the chat on how to turn these on.

Now, just so you're aware we will be recording today's hearing to allow it to be transcribed. We don't plan to make the recording publicly available, but we will put a copy of the transcript and our presentation slides on our website in a few days' time and also being a public hearing the media and others who are present here today are free to publish and refer to what is said during this event that said, though we want to create an environment where everybody feels comfortable to speak.

So, we do ask that we are respectful of each other's time in the length of your comments in the way you convey your views, and of course, being respectful towards each other, and everyone who's attending here today.

Now, in a moment IPART's Chair Carmel Donnelly will commence with a welcome and Acknowledgement of Country. The review team will then give a short presentation, and then we'll open the discussion session.

The discussion session is an opportunity to provide comments or feedback on issues that are important to you. Everyone here today is encouraged to share your views, and we've set aside 2 hours for today's public hearing so that we can get a chance to hear everyone's views. I'll now hand over to Carmel Donnelly, IPART's Chair.

Carmel Donnelly (IPART): Thank you, Andrew. As Andrew said my name is Carmel Donnelly, and I'm the Chair of the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal known as IPART for short. With me today are fellow Tribunal members, Darryl Biggar, Sharon Henrick and Tribunal member, Jonathan Coppel sends his apologies this afternoon. We're assisted by IPART staff including Jennifer Vincent, Tess Bellamy, and Martin Tran.

So let me start by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the lands where each of us are joining from today and acknowledge the ongoing connection that Aboriginal people have to this land, and we recognise Aboriginal people as the original custodians. I'd like to pay my respects to the Elders, both past and present, and extend that respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are joining us today.

Now let me welcome you and let you know how much we value your input. This is an important part of our consultation. We really appreciate you making time to participate in today's hearing and thank you very much for attending. We're looking forward to a very productive hearing.

And we will be very much listening and wanting to understand the current situation for taxis in NSW and I will talk in a minute about the terms of reference for this review. But let me first just give a bit of background about IPART for those who may not be so familiar with us.

IPART's role is to help the people of NSW get safe and reliable services at a fair price. We are an independent Tribunal that investigates and gives advice on services and prices and other issues across a range of sectors.

Now turning to taxis point to point transport, including taxis, is an integral part of both urban and regional mobility, offering convenience, speed, efficiency, and door-to-door service for customers.

We know the whole point to point transport sector including taxis has experienced significant change both in itself and to regulation and market structure over the past 10 or 15 years. Now booked trips in different forms of point to point transport are now regulated in the same way, including there being no maximum fare regulation for booked trips.

However, fares for a taxi caught from a taxi rank or hailed from the street, are regulated by the government, and we understand that's on the basis that passengers for rank and hail services don't have the same ability to shop around at that point in time. So, regulation of rank and hail taxi fares has been an important mechanism to protect customers from being charged excessive fares.

Now, most recently, the Minister for Transport has asked IPART to review the current maximum fares for rank and hail taxis under the Point to Point Transport Act. We will make recommendations and ultimately Transport for NSW will set the maximum fares through a fares order that would apply from 1 July 2025. So next year.

Now, as you can see on the screen our Terms of Reference ask us to deliver a report covering a pricing framework for setting maximum fares and adjusting them into the future. A methodology for maxi-taxi fares, affordability and availability for people with disabilities, and looking at fare structures for both country and urban areas. And there are some other considerations in the Terms of Reference, and they're available on our website.

We will be considering the effects of licence supply deregulation and point-to-point reforms, innovation, competition, customer satisfaction, the costs of providing taxi services and consumer protections. We are listening today, and we might have a few questions for participants. But mainly this is about the Tribunal finding out and understanding. I would like to acknowledge that taxi industry having been through so much change which has affected participants in the industry and some passengers as well.

We are particularly interested in hearing about your experience and potentially looking at case studies from people here today. So, I do invite you to be open and candid with us. Now, before I hand over to Jennifer Vincent and the team to provide a short presentation to give you an overview. I would like to invite anyone who's here today who would like to just quickly introduce themselves and tell us what is of particular interest to you.

Just before we get underway with the presentation. And just so we get a sense of what will be important to people joining us today. So, Andrew and I both keep a lookout for anyone who puts their hand up to introduce themselves, and we might be able to just hide the slides for a minute so we can see people's faces if that's okay. Andrew, I think there's a gentleman with his hand up.

1.2 Introductions

Andrew Nicholls (IPART): Yes, me oops, can you hear me? Nick

Nick Abraham - Taxis NSW: Yeah.

Carmel Donnelly (IPART): Hi Nick.

Nick Abraham - Taxis NSW: Good morning. Yeah. Good morning, Carmel. Good morning, everyone. First, I just want to say good day and acknowledge obviously the panel. IPART but also acknowledge the team led by Jennifer and Tess and Martin on the work that's being done in regards to getting us to this point.

I'd like to acknowledge my Chairman, Geoff Ferris, who's the Chairman of Taxi NSW, and the President of the Country Taxi Operators Association and fellow directors also with us, but also all the other members and industry stakeholders. And I also noticed that we've got representatives from outside the tax industry also on here, and I'd like to say good day to them.

I do want to just to answer your question, Carmel sorry just to acknowledge the Transport Minister for giving us the time to hear our concerns from the outset, and to obviously write to the Premier of NSW, obviously noting that they would be engaging with IPART on this review, but then to extend that contact to, obviously with the scope of the review.

And I know we'll hear from Jennifer shortly. But in relation to this isn't what I see as your typical standard review of what we've seen in the past. And looking at the terms of reference and looking at the way this whole review process has been approached, and you know, noted by IPART, I do see a breath of fresh air in this in this process with regards to the acknowledgement that it has been a long while since a review of this kind has taken place.

Whilst there was a minor review back in 2018, to be fair it's been since 2014 since such a review took place, and I guess, without holding up and my fault today I want to more here from others and industry representatives. I just wanted to acknowledge the work that's been done, but also the level of consultation and collaboration through IPART, and particularly Jennifer and the team and taking the time out, you know, in 8 o'clock being over at Orange in 8 o'clock on one of the evenings, and also being online, and some other workshops that we've done and so forth. So, I just want to say, thank you. And I'm looking forward to like yourself hearing from others, but also and seeing the process continue in the spirit of the way it's been so, thank you.

Carmel Donnelly (IPART): Thanks, Nick. Who's next? Andrew?

Andrew Nicholls (IPART): And we've got Phil.

Carmel Donnelly (IPART): I think you might be on mute, Phil.

Phil Doyle (Bailee taxi driver, western Sydney): Yeah. Sorry. My name is Phil Doyle. I'm a Bailee taxi driver from Western Sydney, mainly north Western Sydney and the Hawkesbury and yeah, give it to the next person.

Andrew Nicholls (IPART): Great. Thanks. Phil.

Carmel Donnelly (IPART): Thanks. Phil.

Andrew Nicholls (IPART): There was a gentleman with his hand up physically rather than the virtual hand. Yes, your handle is Motorola one macro, which I suspect is maybe the name of your phone, so you might want to introduce yourself. And you're on mute. Gently, sir. Are you just on mute, sir?

Nick Abraham – (Taxis NSW): It's Trevor Bradley there by the way.

Andrew Nicholls (IPART): Great Trevor. Not sure if he's hearing me, Trevor, can you hear me?

Trevor Bradley: Can you hear me now?

Andrew Nicholls (IPART): We've got you loud and clear now, Trevor.

Carmel Donnelly (IPART): Perfect.

Trevor Bradley: Right? It's on mute. Yeah. Trevor Bradley from the Taxi Drivers Association. Sorry about that. Yes, I want to talk about fare increases. Do you want me to say more now?

Andrew Nicholls (IPART): Sorry, I didn't quite catch that actually, Trevor, would you mind just repeating what you were wanting to focus on.

Trevor Bradley: I would. I want to focus on fare increases.

Andrew Nicholls (IPART): Fares.

Trevor Bradley: For the industry, increases.

Andrew Nicholls (IPART): Oh, fare increases. Yeah. Great. Thank you. Must be my hearing. Yes, great, thank you. We'll take a note of that. Thanks very much, Trevor. Anyone else wanted to introduce themselves at this point, Billy.

Billy Pringle (CPSA): Hi, yeah. My name is Billy Pringle. I'm Senior Policy Officer for Combined Pensioners and Superannuants Association. We represent interests of older people and people in low incomes in NSW and I think the main issues that I'm sort of on the lookout today are making sure that you know the issues affecting older people are factored into this discussion.

Obviously, we want to make sure that the taxi drivers are able to have an economically sustainable model. But I want to also make sure that that's something that our constituents can afford. And also making sure that people in rural and regional areas are not kind of left out of the discussion and are properly considered as well. Thank you.

Andrew Nicholls (IPART): Brilliant. Thank you, Billy. And Tara.

Tara Russell Community Transport Organisation (CTO): Hi, everyone my name is Tara Russell. I'm from the Community Transport Organisation in NSW. Our industry are large users of taxis. But we're also very interested in the wheelchair accessible taxi landscape at the moment, and making sure that we can find a way to meet everybody's needs in that space. So, thank you for having me.

Andrew Nicholls (IPART): Great. Thank you. Tara. Geoff Ferris.

Geoff Ferris- (CTOA): Thank you. Just wanted to say that as well as being chairman NSW Taxis. I'm also the Chairman or the President of Country Taxi Operating Association. So, I'm obviously very interested to ensure, like Tara, that the people in rural and regional areas aren't forgotten. And in the vital role that taxis play for those people, that a lot of places there is no other public transport, and that their needs are a little different than maybe some similar participants within the urban areas.

Andrew Nicholls (IPART): Great. Thank you very much for that. Geoff. Bastien.

Bastien Wallace (PWDA): Hello, Bastien from People with Disability Australia (PWDA). Our stake in this is that I represent our members, who again often have no access to other forms of transport, or this is their only way to connect to accessible transport. So, there's a real need. We don't have an attachment to what people get paid. But we want this to work really well, because our members all across NSW, and especially in rural and regional now, can't get around. So, we really want this fixed. Thank you.

Andrew Nicholls (IPART): Great. Thanks for that introduction. And Tess.

Tess Rittenhouse (SCIA Wheelchair Book & Ride): Sorry about that. Hi, I'm Tess Rittenhouse. I am the manager of the Centralised Booking Service, which is the only booking service that's authorised by the Point to Point Commission, and we run all the wheelchair taxis within the Metro Sydney, we dispatch all the work out to them.

For us this is most important that we have this sorted for the lack of availability of vehicles and the commitment and the coverage of vehicles for our community to be able to be picked up. Having a look at how this is working as a centralised booking service. It does work; however, we do need the commitment from all parties and all stakeholders involved to be committed to having the one centralised service.

Andrew Nicholls (IPART): Thank you. Tess and Daniel.

Daniel Peric (TWU NSW): Hi, everyone. My name is Daniel. I'm from the Transport Workers Union of NSW. Our stake in this is that we represent Bailee taxi drivers across all of NSW and overall, we just have an interest in I suppose the methodology behind the way the actual maximum fares are going to be set and what level they're going to be set at. But we also hope to have a bit of a discussion on the relationship between traditional point to point transport, and ride share, and what the long-term competitive liability will be for point to point transport in relation to these proposed increases. Thank you.

Andrew Nicholls (IPART): Alright. Thank you, Daniel. Anyone else before we get to our presentation? There'll be plenty of an opportunity after our presentation to go to Q&A and anyone we haven't met. We can certainly catch up with you then. So, thank you all for those introductions. I might now hand you over to Jennifer from the review team, who'll talk a bit more about the review and setting the scene before we move to Q&A.

1.3 IPART presentation

Jennifer Vincent (IPART): Thank you, Andrew and I'll try and be as quick as I can with these contextual remarks, so we can get to the important business of hearing from you. I'll start with a little bit of background on IPART's involvement with recommending taxi fares. Then I'll take you through what we've heard so far from stakeholders, and then just make a few remarks about the way we're thinking about approaching the methodology for recommending fares going forward.

So, to start with a little bit of history. IPART has been involved with the taxi industry for many years. Our role has varied depending on the regulatory conditions for taxis at the time. We recommended taxi fares annually between 2001 and 2015 and during that period between 2012 and 2015 we also made annual recommendations about the number of new taxi licenses to be released.

Then in 2018 was the first taxi fare review under the new regulatory framework for point to point transport and this is the first review we have conducted since then, that 2018 review was the first one to only focus on rank and hail services because booked fares for booked taxi services had been deregulated at that point.

And in 2018, and as I think Nick pointed out earlier, we did recommend, and the Government accepted that maximum rank and hail charges didn't need to change on the basis that at that point the cost of providing services were decreasing, particularly through the lower cost of licences. Since then, there has been one fare increase in January 2023, which was 10 cents per kilometre on each of the distance charges in the fare structure.

And there's also been further regulatory changes, including removing the restrictions on the supply of licences and removing designated operating areas on licenses. So, the fare structure that we're currently dealing with is set through the transport fares order and that sets the maximum fare components, such as flag fall, distance rates, the peak time charge, and waiting time rates. And this is a maximum fare schedule or 2 fare schedules, one for urban areas and one for country areas.

Which means that the fare can't exceed these maximum amounts per component, but fares can be charged that are lower than these components. And one of the things that we have noted is that meters or fare calculation devices, as they're now known in the legislation are more flexible than they once were, and so they can potentially accommodate different fare structures. So, one of the things we're interested in is whether there are variations to this quite traditional fare structure that stakeholders might be interested in pursuing, although in terms of the feedback we've received so far, there hasn't been much support for a move away from this traditional structure. But we welcome any comments today on what people might be interested in and what might be feasible.

And of course, we're also interested in feedback on the level of these different components and whether or not there should continue to be 2 separate schedules, one for urban and one for country.

Now we've talked a little bit so far about what services and the lift fee for wheelchair jobs is outside the fares order. But we are interested in any feedback that you have about how this affects the incentives for what drivers and the availability of services for wheelchair users.

Moving on to a bit of a summary of what we've heard so far, we put out an initial call for submissions that was open for 4 weeks it closed on the 20th of September. We've now published the submissions we received in response to that on our website. If you'd like to have a look at those.

We've met as well with stakeholder groups, peak bodies and other industry representatives to get a better understanding of how taxis are operating and how accessible people are finding those services. Six key themes have emerged that we'll continue to explore and hopefully discuss today.

On fare levels, many, but not all, drivers and operators have expressed the views that fares should be increased due to cost-of-living pressures on people in the industry and on increase due to increased operating expenses.

But, as I mentioned, there's been no support for significant change to the existing fare structure or the existence of 2 fare schedules. Secondly, there's been feedback on changes to costs, and also some feedback that the level of demand for taxi services, particularly rank and hail services because that is what we're focusing on in this review is decreasing.

And we are currently surveying drivers and operators on the cost of providing services with a survey that's in the field, and that closes today. So, if you're halfway through that, and you're intending to submit. I urge you, after this public hearing, to go and complete that survey. And we're also obtaining information on costs from other sources, such as Fueltrac and the ABS.

The third main theme is taxis as an essential service, particularly for people with disability. We've heard that taxis play an essential role in many communities across NSW, particularly for more vulnerable groups. And taxi industry has told us in submissions that if rank and hail fares become unaffordable for people, and or that if taxi supply decreased, that these communities would be left without alternatives.

And we've also heard from disability representatives that wheelchair accessible taxis in particular are obviously an essential service without alternatives. Other feedback on WATs, and the reason we are looking closely at WATs is that although WATs and TTSS hirings are usually booked rather than hailed or engaged at a rank maximum rank and hail fares do apply to all TTSS trips. So the importance of what accessibility and affordability has been reiterated in all our contact with disability peak organisations.

Stakeholders have said that the problem of short fare refusal is particularly acute for WATs users. Some have called for an increase in the lift fee that goes to drivers for wheelchair jobs. It's \$15 in NSW while it's \$25 to \$30 in most other Australian jurisdictions and industry stakeholders have pointed out that there used to be an additional incentive to obtain and operate a WAT when WAT licences were free or very low cost and ordinary licences were expensive, and that helped overcome the disincentive of the high cost of a WAT fit out, and that differential no longer exists.

Another theme is the competition and definition of the market particularly competition with rideshare and obviously competition in the point to point transport market led to the deregulation of booked fares in 2017. But rank and hail fares continue to be regulated to protect consumers who are unable to shop around and access substitutes from a rank or from when hailing in the street.

Some industry stakeholders we've heard from argue that the differences between taxi and rideshare requirements under the Point to Point Transport Act add to taxi costs, as they're either more prescriptive, such as the security arrangements that are required for taxis or elements such as CTP insurance, are more costly compared to higher vehicles which include rideshare.

On the other hand, we've heard that passengers are increasingly able to access substitutes for rank and hail, whether that's a book taxi, service or rideshare. So, the assumption that people aren't able to shop around may no longer hold.

And then I guess sixth theme that we've identified is being able to set fares to balance supply and demand. So, stakeholders pointed out that rideshare and booked taxi services as well can have fares that respond to demand and increase when demand is high or the willingness to supply is low for example to get more drivers to take a vehicle out.

There is some variation in rank and hail fares with the night rate, and the weekend rate in the country intended to act as an incentive for drivers to work at a time when demand's higher or when hours are less suitable for the majority of drivers. So, stakeholders have called for a more responsive maximum fare structure, but have also noted there's practical barriers, such as communicating changes to drivers and passengers and who is able to determine when a higher charge applies if it's not fixed by time of day as it currently is. So, we're very interested in hearing some input on ways that that might be able to be done.

Turning to our proposed way forward on fare setting. The first question really is, what are we trying to achieve here. And the key points are consumer protection from excessive prices and the second point is that fares should be set at a level that mean that there's an adequate supply of taxi services, rank and hail taxi services when people want them and that we can allow for innovation and differentiation to facilitate competition between suppliers.

We're proposing to undertake 2 methodological approaches to fare settings. So, first of all, we're looking at supply and demand. So, this approach tries to evaluate whether there's excess supply. That means too many taxis having to wait too long between rank and hail jobs or excess demand too many passengers having to wait too long at a rank or in the street at the current fare level, and that would be an indication of the direction that fares need to go in.

We're also considering the availability of alternatives, such as booking services, either booking a taxi service or another form of point to point transport instead of rank and hail and the types of source data we're looking at include the annual point to point transport passenger survey that IPARTs done for many years that we've just received the latest data for.

The taxi driver and operator cost survey that I mentioned that closes today, and we're obtaining data on taxi rank queue length. So that's queues for both the taxi vehicles and for passengers. And we'll complement this supply demand approach by benchmarking the current level of fares in NSW against similar services, such as for other forms of hire vehicle in NSW and taxi fares in other jurisdictions.

One of the things we've been asked to do as well is look at a method of adjusting future fares. And so the main ways of adjusting fares between reviews such as this one would normally be an index approach that could be an industry specific cost index, and we acknowledge that some jurisdictions, including other jurisdictions in Australia, actually use the taxi, continue to use a taxi cost index for setting fares as well as adjusting from year to year.

And so the taxi cost index identifies the main cost components of providing taxi services and accounts for how those are changing over time. The change in fares is then set equal to the change in costs. And we historically used a taxi cost index prior to 2012 ourselves. But then we considered due to the changes in regulation and in the point to point transport market, that it was more appropriate to be looking at the balance of supply and demand and the availability of substitute services.

Another approach to adjusting fares would be to use a readily available published index, like the CPI from year to year. And as I've mentioned a couple of times, we are particularly interested in understanding the availability of what services and methodology, for while fares are the same in the maximum rank and hail fares are also used for WAT services there are also the additional charges and subsidies that are outside the fares order.

So a little bit of a summary of what we'd like to learn more about, taxi costs as one of the elements we were required to look at in our terms of reference, and making sure that fares are sufficient to cover the costs of providing services. We'd like to learn more about who are the people who do rely most on rank and hail taxis, and what alternatives they have available to them.

We're interested in ways of ensuring that WATs available, WAT services are available for people who need them. And I guess, thinking about what role fares play in that availability, if any. And finally, we're interested in understanding a bit more getting some ideas on innovative practices. So maximum fares can allow for innovation can allow for some level of dynamic responsiveness to demand and supply conditions. And brings my quick caper through the contextual remarks to an end. And I will hand you back to Andrew.

1.4 Discussion

Andrew Nicholls (IPART): Great. Thank you, Jennifer. In a moment I'll open up discussion to the floor, and I encourage everyone to share views or ask questions.

Just a gentle reminder, as I mentioned at the outset. If we can be respectful of everybody's time to give everyone a chance to talk and ask questions or make statements. Now we are using the chat box in Zoom, so you can either let us know that you've got a question by entering your name and organisation and the question in the Zoom chat, and I'll aim to come to those questions as soon as or comments as soon as we can.

Or you can use the other method of virtually raising your hand within Zoom and again, I'll try to get around to as many people as possible. If you've got a key point that you want to make drop it into the chat. If you don't feel like speaking at the hearing, please drop your comments in the chat. We will pick up all the comments in the chat even if we can't get to all of them today, as comments or feedback as part of this review process.

So very much encourage you to drop questions or comments in the chat, or, as I say, please feel free to raise your hand to raise any points. So, with all of that housekeeping out of the way, who would like to break the ice. There's a lot of issues that we need to cover in these terms of reference. And I'd be interested to hear from somebody who'd like to kick off. Phil, you've got the floor.

Phil Doyle (Bailee taxi driver, western Sydney): Yeah, I'll start things off. On the third of March 2021, I was shot driving a taxi on the Junction Road in Riverstone and I mentioned this to illustrate to people the sort of things that taxi drivers have to deal with, and having to drive my passenger, he had 4 bullets inside him to Windsor Hospital in peak hour certainly focuses the mind but driving around with a 9mm bullet in your belly is probably at the more extreme end of the risk spectrum.

But I can speak for everybody on this forum who's driven a taxi is that on a weekly basis, you'll deal with a lot of unpleasantness, you know a lot of people that are rude, that are arrogant. I've been spat on. I've had knives pulled on me. I've had people, a lot of people run off without paying. These are things that we, as taxi drivers have to deal with, and then, when that's done, we've got to get up and get to the next passenger and we can't just dump our rubbish on them.

We have to focus on making sure that they get a good service, because I love cab driving. It's my vocation. And taxi driving is a helping profession and if you're not in the business of helping people. You shouldn't be behind the wheel of a cab because that's what taxi drivers are here to do. We're here to help people get from A to B, and we deal with the whole catastrophe of the human condition. There are a lot of vulnerable people that catch taxis, elderly, people with mobility issues, people with disabilities that aren't immediately obvious. We deal with a lot of people with mental health problems. We deal with people in significant stress situations, domestic violence, people that are released from jail, things like that.

And this is all part of the job of being a cab driver. And I'm doing all this working a 40-hour week for \$30,000 a year. Now, my friends, look at me and think that I'm mad but I love it, once again. I say, I love the work. and we're coming here today as Bailee cab drivers to ask, not for a fortune for driving a cab. We don't want to get rich from it but we want to be able to keep doing it, because in the current trajectory we cannot continue to drive taxis.

You cannot live in the Sydney Basin on \$30,000 a year. You can't. It's not physically possible we have to obey the laws of physics and those people who say that a significant increase in the cost of rank and hail fares, which also inform booking fares as well, too, because we run the meter on a lot of booking fares. And what we're talking about here is dealing with metered fares which includes the vast majority of booked fares as well, too.

Is that we need to have a sustainable income that makes driving a taxi a going proposition, because the problem you've got at the moment is that you're attracting a lot of people to the industry who are completely unacculturated on the needs of their passengers.

And like rideshare, where we've got statistics out here at the moment that show that over half of current Rideshare drivers have been doing it for less than a year. I think if you ran a similar survey of bailee taxi drivers, you'd find a similar figure. And that's because people are coming and doing it for a short period of time getting a bit of money and then looking for something else.

It's also the same report that came out of the University of Melbourne on Uber drivers also showed that 80% of Uber drivers were either working another part-time job, looking for another job, or was studying. They weren't viewing it as a vocation. They weren't going to hang around, and if you've got people that aren't going to hang around, you can have all the compliance and enforcement that you want from point to point. But these drivers won't care. They won't deliver the sort of service that we need in a reliable point to point sector, and you know I don't care if it's rideshare or taxis. You need people behind the wheel that have got their passengers first and foremost in their needs.

And we're not getting that. And the problem is that good drivers, good vocational drivers are going to pack up and leave the industry. And you're going to be replaced by casual drivers. Which is why I'd like to address some of the submissions that were made briefly.

First, I would like to support the submissions from Kell, Haq and Ward. I thought they were pretty good. There was also some anonymous submissions that also all pointed to the fact. The taxi drivers across the board simply don't earn enough money. Even the submission from vision Australia recognized that taxi drivers are underpaid. I'd highly recommend the report from Mr. Stewart, from Southern Highlands taxis, who are a great taxi operator. I've used their cabs and they provide a great context for why we're in the mess that we're in now.

I'd also highly recommend the report from Mr. Mullins, from dub a radio cabs illustrating that we need a 40% increase in the income for taxi drivers to bring us up to the level of other professional drivers. 42% actually. And with in terms of the report from people with disabilities Australia, I agree there are bad drivers out there, you know there really are, and these people should not be behind the wheel of a cab. But you know you're going to get those drivers. If you pay peanuts, you're going to get monkeys, and this is the situation we're in.

It doesn't matter. All the incentives you can like, and I think we could look at something like we're in Victoria, where they do a partial lifting fee for things like folding wheelchairs and things like that. I think that's something that's worth looking at for sedan taxis because I take a lot of people with folding wheelchairs, folding scooters. Because that's going to be easier for them than trying to wait for WAT taxi in Kurrajong, you know, at two o'clock in the morning, you know. That's just not going to happen.

The one other report that I would like to just briefly mention. As we say we try to keep civil. But the submission from A to B, which is the old combined guys. It's just hopeless, I mean, like all they've done nothing for the bailee cab driver. They want to kick this problem down the road for another 6 months and we've nothing is solved, nothing is resolved, and all they're interested in is counting the money that they make from a network, and they don't care if you treat a driver like he's a tire or a headlight bulb. They use them till they burn out, and they throw them away, and they get another one, and they don't care how unacculturated or suitable that person is to be sitting behind the wheel of a taxi.

And this is a real problem in the industry is we're finding it hard to attract people to the industry. This is unsurprising. Given the remuneration. But it's also rideshares got the same problem as well, too. They can't. The drivers aren't hanging around at rideshare, either. I mean over half their drivers aren't even there for a year. And the idea that we can sort of compete with Uber on price.

I mean these people who are worried that if we raise taxi fares, people are going to leave the industry. They've since 2019, taxi fares have gone up nearly 30% Western Australia. I haven't any reports from Perth of the collapse of the point to point transport industry with regard to taxis over there. And we need. That's what we need here, because it's a 30% catch up from when we last had our last, you know, rise in our metered fares.

So having said that all the price sensitive demand has already left. They've gone to Uber. They've gone to Rideshare. They've gone to Diddy, Gogo. Whatever, what we're dealing with is people who need a taxi. There's a lot of push factors behind.

Taxi demand that it's not related to price is very low on the queue. When people need a taxi, people need a taxi because they need to get from A to B primarily, either because they lack the ability to operate a car or their car's out of action, or they need just need to get from A to B, and that's what I deal with every day of the week. Behind the wheel of a cab is people who need to get from A to B, and they haven't got another choice. And so in that regard, I don't think the price is going to affect that. And I'm lucky that I've got a good and ethical operator, because there's a lot of operators out there that need to have a look at themselves. I mean, there's a lot to do the right thing. Let's get it right.

There's a lot to do the right thing out there in the cab game. What we don't want to see is the good operators leave because it's no longer financially viable and be replaced by operators and bailee drivers who aren't up to the job. And so one thing that I would ask at this stage is that we do have a significant increase in rank and hail fares, because that'll flow across through the other areas that we operate in. And that this actually is brought forward from when it's proposed for next year, I'd actually be asking, as I said in my submission, that at the close of this hearing that an urgent letter be sent to the Minister for Transport, recommending a fares increase for metered fares from the first of November. Things really are grim.

And I'd also illustrate that point if we want drivers out there to doing the right thing, not because you're going to get in trouble by point to point or going around dressed with their stab vests. But because you're going to do the right thing because it's the right thing to do, and you're a cab driver, and you're proud of it. Thank you.

Carmel Donnelly (IPART): Thank you, Phil, and I just want to say how sorry I am to hear about what happened to you on the 3rd of March and other unacceptable behaviour. I've taken quite a lot of notes from what you've said, so I won't go through everything, but I do acknowledge the insights that you've shared, and so thank you very much for being so open about the situation from your experience and we'll take all that into account.

Andrew Nicholls (IPART): Great. Thank you. You'll appreciate it. Just before I come to David, I think, Trevor, you might have had your hand up before, so I'll go, Trevor. And then, David. You're just on mute, Trevor.

Trevor Bradley: Can you hear me now?

Andrew Nicholls (IPART): Yes, loud and clear. Thank you.

Trevor Bradley: Don't know why it goes on mute all the time. Yeah, I must endorse everything, Phil said. He's probably ahead of me. Actually, I've got. I'm going to say, much the same thing. The taxi industries in a bad way. It's been choked to death. There's hundreds of taxis lying idle because they can't get drivers. We must have a fair increase just to survive. That is right, exactly. We haven't had an increase since 2014. We are more than 30% behind in inflation.

My suggestion is rather than just have a straight increase. I should try to suggest we restructure the fares because the few people that take longer fares, they're the few people that keep us surviving. And we don't really want to overburden them because of the few people that help us, our business keep going.

So I suggest that we have a split distance right. The first 10 kilometres is more 20% more. It's only about \$4.50 per fare for everybody. I think it's fairer. It's not a huge amount of money.

That's the best thing. But we need to bulk up the short and medium first. That's where we lose most of our money. On airport pickups. It's classified as a street hail. A street hail is Hi! Cabby pop! 45 seconds off the Randwick, or wherever airport pickup is 45 min, Thomas, one or 45 min, times .45 min times. and also 99% of people from the airport, of course, have a bag.

Yeah most of almost all of them have big bags. So, combining the bag, I mean, it's not feasible to have a baggage lift fee as such. So, combining the baggage fee plus the waiting time. I think a modest \$5 for an airport pickup is fair to cabbies and encourages them.

We also lose money in heavy traffic so I would suggest increasing waiting time to a dollar a minute to offset what we are. We are losing. As Phil said, we need an urgent fare increase and that has been now put up to 2025. So I've just made a request. My request. A special request is at least there's a minor adjustments this year round up the flag, to \$5 implement rate, 2 at weekends and public holidays for metropolitan drivers, the same as the taxi country drivers. And establish a minimum fare of \$20 from the airport. And so to summarize those things. Flag for \$5 rate, public holidays, minimum airport fare, \$20, and in my next July split the distance rates with an extra 20% for the set 10 kilometres, which is only \$4.50, a \$5 airport picket pickup and increase the waiting time. So those are my suggestions. But if we want to get along with Phil and get even, take it even further, I would agree with him to be honest. So thank you.

Carmel Donnelly (IPART): Thanks. Trevor.

Andrew Nicholls (IPART): Great. Thank you, Trevor, for that. Input and it's great to hear of ideas around innovation. As Jennifer was saying, so really appreciate that, too. I'll go to David, and then I'll go to Fred, and then I'll pick up Michael's comment online. So David.

David Samuel (A2B): Thanks, Andrew. Thanks for the opportunity. David Samuel, from A to B. Australia. Sorry, Phil.

I agree with a lot of what Phil said. I won't respond to comments about whether or not our staff care and things like that are just. I think it speaks for itself. Our staff care deeply about our drivers. And if they're not making money we're not making money. It's very simple. In fact, it'd be easier for us to say. Just stick the fares up, and we'll take some more each month.

But to Phil's point I get what he's saying. It's an exceptionally tough environment at the moment.

Driver earnings are the lowest I've ever seen them. In the 15 years I've been doing this I've never sat in front of one of these inquiries before, and said, I don't think it's the right time to lift fares. The reason, I say that is not because I think drivers are making enough money. The reason I say it is, I'm concerned. The elasticity in the market has changed a lot with competition, and that's I'm speaking about elasticity of demand here. So once upon a time, I agree with Phil, you could raise fares quite quickly and quite sharply, because there was no other options in the market, so customers couldn't go to another transport provider, because no one else provided the same service with the emergence of Rideshare and others who, by the way, are dropping their prices at the moment.

We face a much tougher market in the sense that lifting your price at in the short term could actually do more damage because it'll reduce demand for the product further. But it is a very tough question, and it's a very hard question to measure, because until you do it, it's very hard to know what the outcome will be. I would like to think you could stick fares up, and there'd be no impact, and drivers that make more money. But I think what we're saying, Andrew, is, we're not saying, kick it down the road and do nothing we're just saying at the moment, we're probably in the most volatile part of a very difficult economic cycle. We're seeing inflation start to come off, which is fantastic. We're talking about rate cuts again coming into next year, which we fantastic for everyone, I'm sure, on this call.

And we're saying that perhaps the right thing would be is not to wait for another few years and review it again, but just slow it and see what happens over the Christmas period into the earlier next year, and then make a decision at that point. Now, if things haven't changed, the decision might well be. As Phil says, we're just going to have to suck it and see and put the price up.

Because drivers can't continue to live on these earnings. But our concern, Andrew, to address Phil's point is not about driver income. As such. It's more about the impact of price increases on a market that's changed significantly over the last decade. For all the reasons that you guys pointed out.

The final point I would just make is around wheelchair accessible taxi services. We're tremendously concerned about the viability of these services moving forward. NSW is a long way behind other States in terms of the lifting fee. I don't think lifting fees is a long-term solution to this problem, but it would certainly help in the short term. If drivers were actually paid more to do that work. I don't think anyone is incentivised by money in terms of earning. I think it'd be naive to believe increasing the lifting fee wouldn't have a short-term benefit to both the consumer and the driver in that market. And I think that's something needs to be seriously looked at. And in the background we need to take a deeper look at this market. It's been treated as a standard taxi service for too long. It's not the cost. Profiles are completely different.

A vehicle is far more expensive. They don't write on hybrid technology. They require diesel or unleaded fuel, which is vastly more expensive than a Toyota. Camry would run with a very good efficient hybrid engine. There are significant problems here, and it's becoming increasingly attractive to encourage drivers to do this work and take on those costs because the revenue simply isn't there to pay for them. Most of the people we see providing the service now are people that have been providing it for 25 years. They're not new people coming in the market to do it. As Phil said. Unfortunately, we do have a lot of itinerant people that come through our industry. They have a short-term interest. They don't take a long-term view of it. And they behave in ways that we don't like. But we do have a lot of very, very good taxi drivers doing a great job.

And in that wheelchair space, if we want them to continue to do that because I don't see a substitute for it. To be quite frank, our wonderful rideshare competitors, despite all their rhetoric, don't provide any of these services, or seem interested in doing so. So I don't want to see this community let down. I don't want to see these drivers let down, either. We need to address the fundamental business model and ensure they're making enough money to provide that service.

As I said, a lifting fee might be a good way to go about in a very short term longer term, though we need to find ways to carve this section of the market out and regulate it differently. That's our view. Essentially, we're doing work with the South Australian Government who are doing in that. I'll leave it at there, Andrew, just to say quickly. I'm only speaking on behalf of metropolitan issues here. We don't operate our business in the regions.

But I do understand the difference between metropolitan and regional is significant in terms of cost structures and demand and supply. So, I'm really commenting here specifically on the metropolitan or urban area.

Andrew Nicholls (IPART): Great. Thank you very much, David, for that. Input and different perspectives and the different views that everyone is respectfully putting so very much appreciate that feedback. I will go to Fred, and then Michael, and then I think we've got somebody with their hand up. I don't have their name, but I think it's a gentleman in the yellow shirt, so I'll go in that order. So over to you.

Did I lose Fred?

Fred Lukabyo (GM Cabs): I'm still here, I assure you.

Andrew Nicholls (IPART): You moved on the screen for me.

Fred Lukabyo (GM Cabs): That I can't account for. Thank you, Andrew, and thank you, chair. Ms. Donnelly, Tribunal members and staff very much appreciate the opportunity to attend this public forum. I'm here for GM. Cabs, and as many of you know, I wear a lot of taxi industry hats, but in this case, I'd like to apply some structure to some of the issues that people have been raising. But also, I'd like to address a point that David Samuel just made, which is the difficulty of assessing price, elasticity of demand.

Now it is very hard to assess this, but all we can look at is other cases, and those cases I would give you are all the other jurisdictions in Australia which have had taxi fare increases over the last one year, two years, or many years. And I'm referring to, I'm referring to the fact, most of the States and Territories now. These arise in some cases because of reviews, in some cases because of automatic result of an index. But we haven't seen a massive reduction of demand following what are relatively small price changes even at the even a large taxi price increase is still a relatively small one.

In fact, it would be fair to say that where the public has seen large increases in taxi prices, it's in levies charged by the NSW government increasing rather than in anything which goes towards the operation of the taxi to apply a little bit of structure to it.

I guess. I would start with the issue of equity. People have spoken about the tenure of taxi drivers in this industry, and it's fair to say that the vast bulk of taxi drivers had not thought of driving a taxi the last time there was a material fare increase in NSW.

And it's rare for me to be saying similar things to the submission from the TWU. But on this case, in this case I am. It is simply too long the decision which was taken to say that because the industry is going through massive amounts of change.

We will just leave those settings in place whilst all the change happens, and then, when all the change has happened, we'll see we'll see if there's any pieces to pick up and assess has resulted in really difficult conditions for taxi drivers and the mechanisms which have given rise to that include the entire issue of competition for labour, which is, there has never been a time when there are more driving jobs available to somebody who wishes to drive, whether that is rideshare taxi, food delivery, Amazon parcels, whatever it may be. The competition for Labor has, in fact meant that it is hard to keep competent taxi drivers in the taxi industry.

The issue of utilization of taxis has fallen in most jurisdictions. Following a removal of license caps, volume caps. There's an increase in number of taxis amazingly. Not so in NSW. In fact, the total, the total number of taxis has not increased. And this is because it's not an attractive proposition that is, even with the change to license costs the amounts available. Now do not make it an attractive proposition for drivers and for those who face the costs of putting money into the industry.

Now nowhere is that seen more than in the world of wheelchair accessible taxis. But if we have a look at other jurisdictions. They have all acknowledged that with similar cost models. Their fares have had to rise significantly, and they've done so continuously, whereas it has been many, many years since there has been a material increase in taxi fares in NSW. I'm very keen to see the passenger transport survey data. I don't know if it's been publicly published yet. Ms. Vincent referred to it having been completed. And I am. I'm very keen to see where that data is this time around because there has been a real disincentive for people to drive taxis.

There have also been a bunch of unintended consequences. No one wishes to reward a taxi driver for unlawful behaviour in terms of overcharging. But There is no shock when taxi drivers see the infinitely variable dynamic pricing of rideshare competitors, and also have not had a fair rise other than a trivial one in more years than any of us can remember that those sorts of unlawful behaviours are out there and happening now it. This is always going to be a hard one to get exactly right.

But I will, I guess, go back to where I started, and say that sitting back and waiting to see how the regulatory changes fell out before a review of fares was done is understandable, but from a sheer equity perspective to drivers who work every day for a living, and as others on this meeting. I have driven taxis drivers who work for a living. It is. It is quite simply too much to bear. This has been a very, very difficult time. Now, if we have a look at the utilization of taxis falling.

There are environmental factors which follow from this one of the things about taxis is, they've traditionally been high usage vehicles with the new models and with the lack of fair review, it has reduced more and more taxis to part-time vehicles with the broad environmental impacts that come. With that. I think it is well past time for a fair review for taxis. And I've made submissions that way elsewhere, and thank you.

Andrew Nicholls (IPART): Right. Thank you very much, Fred, for those insights very much appreciated. I will go to Michael Jules next.

Michael Jools (Taxi Drivers Association): Thank you, Andrew, and thank you for the for IPART in general. My point that I would be strongly making is that we have an opportunity to hit one small aspect of the taxi industry, and that is the WATs area.

It's within the capacity of government and the industry to, in fact massively increase the subsidy payable through the TTSS. And thereby increase activities for taxis in general. From an equitable point of view the current situation is abominable. The average commuter in Sydney has a cap of \$80 a week on his public transport fares.

There's no such cap that is applied to the disadvantaged and the disabled, who are obliged to use a wheelchair taxi from an average point of view of a wheelchair user. He or she can achieve that \$80 a week in just a couple of trips. So they're being discriminated against enormously. I would also be pointing out to IPART that you are recommending public transport fares generally in a situation where the government is actually subsidizing by anywhere up to 75% of the operating costs of sorry by over 25% on average of the operating costs of buses, trains, and ferries.

But the subsidy you're actually giving to taxis is minuscule. I believe that what we can do by increasing the TTSS subsidy to 95% of the fare would be to stimulate a small less than 10% of the numbers of taxi users in both the watch area and the M40 or regular taxis or the regular taxis who carry passengers who are equally unable to use public transport, but are not in a wheelchair.

If we were to increase the TTSS by a massive amount, but in terms of NSW government budgets, a very minimal amount we would, we would be stimulating the industry as a whole. and we would see a shift in usage utilization. And the very fact that a wheelchair bound passenger averages about 2.3 trips a week in his WAT vehicle. It's crazy. He's limited enormously, and he's discriminated against enormously.

I think that if we focus on what IPART can suggest to government. Eg, an increase, a massive increase in the TTSS subsidy at a minimal cost, we might see a stimulus point to the industry as a whole. and I urge IPART to stretch to the absolute limit the point of activity in the TTSS and Watts area which at the moment is a upcoming disaster. Thank you.

Carmel Donnelly (IPART): Thank you Michael.

Andrew Nicholls (IPART): Pardon me. great, thank you for that, Michael. And certainly we're very interested in exploring the these issues of WATs and how we can support people who have disabilities. So that's a very helpful input. Thank you. And there's a gentleman in a yellow shirt. I'm sorry I haven't caught your name. You're on then I'll jump to you then to Nick, and then to Tess. You're just on mute, sir.

Andrew Nicholls (IPART): We still haven't caught you, sir. I think you're just on mute.

Mike Burridge: There we are!

Andrew Nicholls (IPART): There you are! We've got you!

Mike Burridge: Mike, Mike Burridge

Andrew Nicholls (IPART): Hi, mark.

Mike Burridge: I'm set, I'd like to say I'm not used to these Zoom Meetings. I have attended meetings right through, when Dr. Boxall was Chairman, and so forth, and we had a lot of arguments. I'd like to say that I was in the taxi industry for many years.

I think what a lot of people forget, what has altered since then is the fact that when I bought my plate I had to have a taxi license, and I had to prove every year that I drove it with the department over and over. Also, I was not allowed to lease the cab unless I was pensionable age, I was medically unfit, or I died, and my next of kin wanted it.

Unfortunately, over the years, especially in the eighties and nineties, all these restrictions were lifted by the Government. I'm not sure quite why but it resulted in the fact that when I started to attend IPART meetings in early days our fair rises, as it was said before, was taken with a basket of items such as fuel insurance, and so forth, etcetera.

IPART decided that the price, because 60% of the taxes were leased in the early two thousands, IPART considered that the increase in lease fees was an expense. Well, as it was an expense for people that lease the cabs, it wasn't. It was not an expense for me.

With that, how fares did go up with that proportion? Added, from the increase in in the lease fees, we then find years later that IPART says our fares are too expensive because they had given these rights. So we'll put on a thousand new cabs which the Government leased out. I cannot see how the number of cabs would reduce the fares it. It reduced my income, but I worked the cab 24 hours a day with a number of drivers and myself to balance that.

As I try to explain to everybody. If you bought an investment property and you rented it out at the market price per week. If your mortgage increased, you couldn't say to the tenant, oh, you've got to pay a hundred more because I've got a mortgage. No, you would get that money from somewhere else, or balance the books somehow. Now I think all these situations have arisen, because people making decisions like the old Department of Transport, or even transport for NSW now, and IPART. Even people like Professor Fels have never driven a cab and do not know or understand how it works properly. A cab should be on the road constantly, to minimize the cost of running, and also to maximize the amount. Then the money can be filtered down to the owner and the drivers.

Unfortunately, all these big decisions have been made by people who do not understand the industry. and finally, even people like Professor Sturgis, who gave his report in 2015 I wondered if he thought that then, when he gave his report about what should happen to the taxi industry that we're in a position now where there used to be.

WAT, wheelchair, accessible taxis that has dropped by 30%. As somebody else mentioned, it was because of the comparison price before. If somebody wanted to enter the industry as a career, and I say, as a career, not as a casual drive or anything, but as a career. he would enter it and buy a straightforward taxi plate for whatever price it went for. When the market for the wheelchair accessible taxis came in, the price to enter was minimal as far as the as far as the fee was concerned, but the price of the vehicle was costly. Now you've got a complete reverse. Somebody can come into the industry now and lease a \$200 a year cab from the from the Government by a standard vehicle. Why would they? This does explain why there hasn't been diminished in the wheelchair. Accessible taxis, I do admit. Now, after many years, in February I had to hand my plate back to the Government. I was discouraged to carry on as a career.

I had no visions of ever giving up the taxi industry at all. But unfortunately I, who I considered, was a very good operator, had to leave, and this is the decision that has got to be made by you. IPART understanding the taxi industry. It's not so much the fare. What you've got to understand is how long a taxi waits for a fare. In other words, wasted time. That is more important than the actual supply and demand for the taxi. If you got to, you'll be surprised how little how much waiting time is for the taxi, and not productive enough. Thank you very much.

Andrew Nicholls (IPART): Thank you very much for that.

Carmel Donnelly (IPART): Yeah, thanks, Mark, and we will be looking at the waiting time for taxis who are very interested in that.

Andrew Nicholls (IPART): And thank you for your other perspectives there, too. That was terrific. We'll go to Nick, and then Tess, and then Billy, in that order.

Nick Abraham (Taxis NSW): Thank you, Andrew. Thank you, Andrew. Thank you, Madam Chair. I will just get a few points here. I want to just touch on. I will be talking about obviously impacts on the urban area. But I think there hasn't been as much discussion, probably on country, and I do want to touch on country and regions in NSW as part of my response here as well. But just a couple of things from the outset.

Initially, IPART noted that they're going to be considering effects of licenses, disabilities, and other aspects. One area I'd like you to also consider is other markets. You look down the road and look at what's happened down in Melbourne, and I know David and Fred have already referenced other States. Let's look at just over the across the sea there with our cousins in New Zealand, and have a look at what's happened, and I'd be more than happy to connect you with some of our colleagues in those markets, just to show you how catastrophic some of those decisions and situations have been. In actual fact where those markets are looking to go back the other way. So, I think it's an important point where particularly, and I'm thrilled that I haven't heard the word of the word deregulation in this conversation today in regards to rank, and hail fares. Because I know as part of terms reference. It was something there, but it's something definitely we would totally discourage.

I think, to your point about protecting consumer protection is absolutely important, which takes me over to my next points, and that is, should there be separate fare structures, urban and country absolutely. And I'll take a personal experience that I had in the last few months where I've been trying to advocate for an increase for fare structures across NSW.

I will commend drivers for one moment, because during that process I saw and experienced something in my years in this industry I've never experienced, and that is taxi drivers in urban. Say, look, maybe just pull back. For now, because of the fear of the announcement of Uber dropping their pricing, and so forth. Now that that is really sad to say, you know, to have that fear to say. Look, we want to put our own earnings interest aside for a moment, because the fear, fear of competition or fear of what it's going to happen even further to what they've already experienced.

And this whole view around the listening of competition, I believe, is an unintended consequence. And I'm really concerned if we have a look at the total number of trips, taxi trips over recent years, and the impact of that of what's happened is really concerning. And what's even more concerning is where that's heading, particularly when we have the NSW Government putting in exemptions for specifically for the likes of Uber to contravene regulations like A and B, where they're allowing them to apply for help, however, without having the needs of

what taxis have to comply with signs, markings, security cameras, GPS, the lot, and I can keep going on and on. And the impact that that's going to have on further rank, and how market for taxis is really concerning. And the question that I have is, who's looking after driver earnings? Who's looking after the operator earnings and the network earnings. And I think the fact that we do need to keep in mind that the decision for 1st of July this year we were pushing for an increase. However, the decision was not to increase fares, and the real loser in all of that particularly regional and country, NSW, where, as we know, the operating model is very different, and if they had a slight adjustment in an increase, not only would the driver have benefited, but operators would have got some relief.

It wouldn't have solved the problems but would have got some relief towards their operating costs. Because when fares go up in regional NSW, both operators and drivers benefit because of the commission split of that fare box. So, I think we've got to keep that in mind, and for that reason, and what we experienced in the last few months is really evident that you know the markets are different, and I think we need to treat them differently, and therefore I think we do need to continue to have the separate model from that perspective. Point, I want to talk about the effects of the around incentives for WAT drivers. And this is a really big one. And I know it's a live issue. There's been round tables, and there's been a report that came out a couple of weeks ago on this, which I won't touch on for today.

But the impact here, the lack of incentive. There's multiple parts to this, the lack of incentive for people to come into this space, and that is, operators putting very expensive vehicles on the road, and then managing the ongoing cost of those, as well as the lack of incentive for drivers to come in this space, because, as a former, WAT driver myself and as a chair of the disability reference group. Now, members that we've got here today with the disability reference group, we hear time and time again the concerns and issues that they are having around the lack of wheelchair services. And that's because of the drop, a significant drop. And what's driving that? Well, a couple of factors. And this even goes back to my days in driving over 15 years ago, were where we had a lot of wheelchair users that don't have or don't our participants of what incentive? We've got a lot of wheelchair users who weren't previously wheelchair users, but unfortunately their condition has deteriorated over time. We've got changes in regulations that say a driver cannot start the meter until the wheelchair is safely loaded. But who's looking after the driver for the wait time? Who's looking after driving in regard to when that passenger doesn't have a what or lift fee involved, or anything like. And this is where, unfortunately, the regulations and the incentives have not kept up at all.

And the other big thing that we are seeing, and this is particularly in regional NSW is the cost to operate the vehicle. As I mentioned earlier, we are seeing operators now transition their taxi to a private for hire vehicle. They're saving thousands on CTP, they're saving hundreds on their registration costs. They're saving. And these are just some of the costs that I'm talking about. And then there's obviously other significant costs. And it's the same vehicle with the same driver picking up the same passenger, doing the same type of work, but saving thousands of dollars. In that regard, I've got a town, I've got a town in regional NSW that has some taxis and some rideshare vehicles like for like kilometres like for like services, and the Rideshare companies are paying about \$4000, in total in comprehensive insurance taxis are paying over \$10,500, in their comprehensive insurances.

And that's why we're seeing these taxis converting over to Rideshare as well as the issue around networks, having to fund themselves for services to go out on any given night, particularly from Sunday to Thursday, where on a night, they might not even pick up a single wheelchair, but just to ensure that service is available. Because these services are, you know, will get there quicker for an emergency situation. We'll get there quicker in a domestic violence situation. Yeah, we'll get. We'll make sure that, particularly in regional NSW, they are the emergency services in many cases, and getting people into a safe place, and so forth, and that needs to be acknowledged. But there's a cost to doing that, and that cost is making it a lot harder and harder for these those business to remain viable.

IPART noted that they have a responsibility around consumer protection. Well, I can tell you from my experience I have not seen anyone taking on a greater responsibility for consumer protection than the taxi industry. You look at rank and hail market in country and regional NSW. At best you might get the greatest town with the greatest rank, and hail might be 10,15,20% of its business of its work they could have deregulated well, not, could have book fares are deregulated. They could have increased their fares significantly since booked fares are deregulated but they've chosen not to because of consumer protection. They provide a commitment to the local communities, and that commitment is like little old Mary that comes out of her grocery shopping every week, and makes sure that that \$10 is still in her wallet because she knows that \$10 is what's going to get her home. If they follow the State's government following of just increasing their book fares, little Mary could be paying anything. That's okay. The networks legally can do it. The problem is that they've chosen not to and that has not been acknowledged or has not been recognized from that perspective. And look enough in that sense.

I'm just quickly going to go. Sydney airport's been talked about, I think. That's a that's a broader part of this review. And I think that's something that needs to be considered particularly around having zones and set fares across certain parts of the city again, part of consumer protection. But I'll leave that one alone for a moment.

The final point I just want to make here is the point about who is looking after the drivers, the operators, and their networks earnings, and the biggest concern that I have when we talk about increases in fares, and the fact that fares have not increased in many years, and I will note the increase we had on one January was a request we made for fuel adjustment, mind you, that took months to come through. So, it wasn't your traditional fare increase, if you like, or fair review. It was a request for fuel adjustment from that perspective.

But turn on the TV at any given night, and you will hear people screaming from across different industries about the increases that they are getting not being sufficient. Yet we have an industry here with the humble drivers who are actually all they're asking for is an ongoing ability to review and adjust fares on an annual basis. And the fact is, it has been six years since there's been a proper review done in this particular case, and we've got people on the other side actually saying, no, no, what you're giving us is actually not enough. So, I think the industry is probably hard done by over the many years, and we're hoping that that changes moving forward. Thank you very much.

Andrew Nicholls (IPART): Great. Thank you, Nick. Appreciate all of those input points from taxis. NSW. Very appreciative. Tess.

Tess Rittenhouse (SCIA Wheelchair Book & Ride): Thank you, madam. Chairman, thanks, Andrew, and thank you, everybody, and I don't know everybody here, but I would like to discuss from the perception. Sorry from the perception. Yeah, from our perception. At SCIA we run the centralized booking service to give you an indication about the importance of the TTSS of what Nick is talking about. What Nick is related to there, and some of you also have from January to October this year we have not been able to get fares picked up by drivers if it's not a minimum of \$30. So the analysis that we're seeing here is a driver obviously cannot make a quid if he can't get a fare that's going to start from at least \$30. Now that also needs to take into account that not every passenger has access to TTSS.

We don't advise when we take the bookings as a centralized booking service. We don't advise if they do have a TTSS, because there should be no more discrimination against the community that is already got the discrimination there, that they're not getting enough service. We have done everything we can to try and convince drivers to pick up the work. But unfortunately, the short jobs and not having a lift fee for the work that they're doing. The drivers do a lot. They are absolutely required to take care of that passenger. From the minute that they accept that job they get there they pick them up, they put them in, they strap them in. They've got a lot of requirements to meet, and none of that is paid for. If you think \$15 for one part of the journey is enough for somebody, it is not the right way to look at it. These passengers are needing more and more care. We are getting a much older, elderly, frail community. You've only got to look at nursing homes and see and retirement villages and see where our community is headed.

Now, in saying that as well also think about this. Are your children there helping you? No, they don't. They're not. You can go to any nursing home. The children aren't there to help, so a driver is left there to help to get the parent from the Nursing Home to the children's home, for whatever reason it is. Now I'm going to give you a statistic which is quite shocking. You probably have already seen Christmas Day. I hope you all got to spend it with your parents, because there were only 30% of bookings that were made for Christmas Day this year alone that we actually had picked up and taken the Christmas. So 70% of our bookings on Christmas Day were not fulfilled. That is a first for me. I've been in this industry for 20 years.

I've been running the CBS for three and a half, and that is a set for me for that to ever happen. We fulfill at least 90%. We may not get you there on time for Christmas lunch. But why, Jesus, we will get you there, so you can spend Christmas Day with your family.

The incentives for the drivers are not there. You can't blame just the drivers on this. This is about cost of living. We have drivers out there who have taken it on their own on their own ability. I don't pick up a passenger unless they pay \$170 for my journey for that day. It's a public holiday. Why wouldn't I charge extra?

Unfortunately, this area of wheelchairs is a separate entity to itself, and it's been swept in with all the changes that have come in. And it's not being looked at. What it is. It's a specialized area. You need to have somebody in IPART. You need to have somebody in transport. You need to have somebody in point to point who actually understands exactly what has been alerted to before. If you can't walk the walk, you can't talk the talk. If you don't understand how this is working and how much work goes into this. I've got 5 drivers that are doing 90% of the work out of 411 vehicles that are apparently on the road drivers. And you explain to me how that's a fairness across the board and tell me that these people are all doing the right thing. They are not doing the right thing. Yes, I don't believe a driver is making a quid. But yes, there are drivers who are coming in here because they can do whatever they like, and no one is really looking at it to see that it is correct. If you have a wheelchair taxi license, you are trained in a specific way. You should be tied to that license to perform those duties in the best way. We've had a passenger who's been strapped into a vehicle backwards, was injured because the driver is in so much of a hurry to get to his next fair, because he's not making a quid.

The increase in incentives is a must, whether it be tacked on it to be that we have a particular fare for wheelchairs within itself, for a wheelchair job as a separate area, as a meter on the fare. Whether it be that the incentive is paid for both pickup and drop off. The work in both areas is no different. I don't understand why you would only pay it if you're having to take the security and the safety at one point. But you're not doing it at the other end. Drivers do need to make a quid, and we need to understand that there are companies out there now that are saying that passengers call them, and they say I need a wheelchair taxi guarantee I'll be there \$85. Do you know what the estimated fare is. The estimated fare on the meter is \$17. Wheelchair passengers are now so desperate to get to their medical appointments that they're missing to get to their family functions that they're missing, that they are paying whatever a driver is asking because they have to.

There is just not enough understanding of wheelchairs within itself, and what this particular demographic does. I would love to see our community and I would love to see those stakeholders that are involved in it, that we all work together to come to a better solution. We can't work differently. We have to come together, and I thought it was a great, great way. Starting with the CBS. It does work; however, we all have to work it together, and it is all of us together that need to come together to make it work forward.

This is not for wheelchairs. I feel it's not just about an increase. It's about an understanding of it. Yes, everybody wants an increase. And you're right, Nick, on the news every night you see that all these different industries are striking because they want more money, more money. I get it. Everyone's going through a real cost. a real cost structure that is not viable. But for people who are in wheelchairs. That one trip may be their only social interaction to go and get the bread and milk and talk to somebody. The driver on the way there, and on the way back. That may be the only time that they actually get to see their family is at Christmas Day, because it's a must for everybody.

My heart broke on Christmas Day last year when this happened, I could not believe it. I can't believe that our industry is in such disarray. I've been in wheelchairs for 20 years, and this is the worst I have ever seen it.

So, I really hope that IPART are taking on board here the requirement to really look at this industry, especially wheelchair. The incentive has to be increased, and it should be both ends if we can afford it. The State seems to be able to afford so many things, but we can't afford things for our physically challenge people? Yes, we've got metros. Yes, we've got trains. Yes, we've got buses. But do you know, I can catch the ferry from Manly. Get off in Manly in my wheelchair. I can get on a train at Central. I can catch the train, change it, change at Central and get a train to Blacktown. I can get a bus from Blacktown to Sydney Zoo, the most accessible zoo in the southern hemisphere. But I can't get off at Sydney Zoo, because there is nowhere for the bus to actually let me down.

So public transport doesn't work for everything. It doesn't work for point to point, getting you from A to B and medical appointments and pre bookings. It should be that if you are going to accept that booking, you're going to do that booking. It is heartbreaking to be hearing people say, that's three times my father's not been able to get to his neurologist appointment because the fare is only \$20.

So, I am probably in a very unprofessional way, begging. I part to look at this from the perspective of a person who does not have a lot of money but needs to and relies on this transportation.

Thank you.

Carmel Donnelly (IPART): Thank you, Tess, and thanks for being so straightforward and forthright with us, and we are really turning our minds very much to this area, and whether it needs to be thought about differently. So very much. Thank you for your input.

Andrew Nicholls (IPART): Thank you, Tess. It is a challenging issue, and very much appreciate getting all the feedback and views that are being shared today on these important issues. Please keep the comments coming in as well on the chat.

We probably won't get time to get to all of the comments, but we do read them all. We do treat them as input as part of our review as well. So please encourage you to do that. If we don't have time to get to everybody today, I'll go now to Billy, and then I'll go to Daniel. So, Billy.

Billy Pringle (CPSA): Hi, thanks very much, and thank you very much to both Phil and Tess for the honesty and the Candor that you expressed in both of you. Questions and statements there. Hearing all of this, the thing that immediately comes to mind for me is that this is sort of the result of a system that has kind of been left to operate as a market without any kind of influence from government. And you know any courage for one of a better word to ensure that it's operating in a way that in that makes sure that everyone is taken care of. We're getting cabbies pulling out of the industry because they can't make ends meet. We're getting, you know, the cost of trips more and more concentrated on, you know, a, a smaller and smaller user base. Whether or not that's people with mobility issues, whether or not that's older people in regional areas stuff like this. You know, the introduction of ride share into this has taken out a huge diversity of you knows what used to be the users of taxis taxi services. And you know, I noted Phil's point in the in the chat about Uber, only having just recently started turning a profit, you know. That's a pretty clear case of predatory pricing. And yet it's just not really kind of taken seriously. It seems like in this industry.

My concern is, you know, obviously there is an absolute need to ensure that that drivers are paid fairly, and that they are paid commensurate with the work that they do. And it, you know, from everything I'm hearing, it is incredibly demanding work.

And at the same time, I think that there is a real need to ensure that the cost of that increase in wages does not fall on a dwindling and increasingly disadvantaged user base. The only way that I can see that changing is with government intervening as it has done in the past, you know we were a big defender at CPSA of the regional seniors travel card, in part because it ensured that people were allowed to take taxis in regional areas and get to appointments and see family and do things that they might not have been able to do otherwise. It supported the taxi industry in those areas. It made sure that people were able to afford to take those trips.

Yes, there were some issues with it, but that sort of scheme that you know provides a subsidy for users is something that I think the Government absolutely needs to look at, and it needs to look at in a pretty broad way, because, as in as much as the TTSS a good support for the people who are able to access it. And you know, for the people who are able to access it as intended it, it could be very much expanded because accessibility issues and mobility issues far exceed the scheme. You know the parameters that are described in the TTSS. So I think to only talk about this as a, as an issue of supply and demand, as an issue of you know the cost to the driver compared to the cost of the consumer, is just completely abrogating responsibility for government. To treat this as the essential service that it is again to going to Phil's point. This is an emergency service in Western Sydney. It's an emergency service in large parts of the State. We just need to accept the fact that we, we treat public transport as something, and taxis need to be considered as part of that network and need to be subsidized as part of that network, or else we're going to keep going in the direction that we're going. As I see it.

Andrew Nicholls (IPART): Right. Thank you.

Carmel Donnelly (IPART): Thanks, Billy.

Andrew Nicholls (IPART): Yeah, thanks very much for that, Billy. And yes, certainly. There's some points coming through in the chat there. I think Miller has raised some points, and Terry as well around government subsidies. So, thank you for those points coming through on chat as well. I'll turn now to Daniel.

Daniel Peric (TWU NSW): Thank you, everybody. I think some fantastic points have been raised so far. and you know, at the end of the day the lack of a material increase over the last decade. You know, we can describe it as nothing short of inequitable right in its entirety. So, it's necessary for there to be some manner of cost, relief for taxi drivers now, and you know, if that is an increase in fares, the TWU supports an increase in fares.

And we'd encourage the NSW Government to reflect on the decisions made and enjoyed by other jurisdictions in recent years, right? Where we've seen an indexation of point to point. Transport fares in other States.

But, you know, determining an actual flat increase in in the interim is its own challenge. But definitely, you know, we believe that indexation is a good is a good way of moving forward for the years to come. But I'd like. I'd like to point to something, and I think Nick raised this earlier. But to do to do with vehicles in Rideshare, not having to comply to the same standards that taxis do, and that's accurate. You know, Rideshare is operating in a completely unregulated mode of transport that's effectively competing parallel to traditional point-to-point transport.

And we've seen taxis suffer for it over the last decade. And we know that with the last increase, you know, Uber's market penetration hadn't really occurred yet. So, we've had this whole new animal in the market since the last increase. And at the end of the day we agree with many of the points raised so far, and we definitely bat for an increase for our drivers. But we believe the NSW government should be looking at the regulation of rideshare in addition to supporting the taxi industry internally.

Right? Because when you look at rideshare the employment relationships in that space, in the gig economy is completely different to what we're seeing in the traditional point to point transport, right. I forget who raised it earlier. But it's true that uber is able to manipulate their own prices at will. Right? And it's just fundamentally. it's fundamentally impractical. The taxi operators to absorb the necessary cost to compete with that on a long-term basis. And we're also seeing our taxi drivers suffer as a result, right where they're struggling to keep food on the table.

You compound Uber's presence and rideshare in general, with that lack of an increase in this decade and serious work needs to be done. you know, these gig models. Their algorithms are completely exploitative right? They're unforgiving algorithms. They'll boot you off the algorithm if you don't do enough jobs quick enough. And it's just these rideshare drivers are expected to work harder and faster, and taxi taxis often in these metropolitan spaces struggle to compete. so, we would just raise that. Yes, the NSW government should absolutely be looking at regulating ride share in addition to improving point to point transport internally. that would be the main point that we would raise, because we would echo the same thing. A lot of other people have said in this hearing so far, and I mean having read some of the other submissions, and I'm sure if anybody's read the two submissions, they would say, this, this ride share points pretty focal. It's a big part of what we're talking about. So yeah, just would urge the NSW Government to consider the regulation of rideshare in addition to what we're doing in the point to point transport space. Thank you.

Carmel Donnelly (IPART): Thanks. Daniel.

Nick Abraham (Taxis NSW): Can I ask a question, Andrew? If you don't mind? Sorry. I don't want to take up other people's time. If there is an issue that sits outside of the scope of this review. I am quite mindful that there are a couple of statutory reviews that are forthcoming. Unfortunately, we're probably still a little while away from the major review, which is due by 10 years of when the act was enacted in Parliament. Is IPART able to, whilst it may sit outside of terms of reference or this process make recommendations that, hey? We've also heard the industry, you know, whilst fares are an important part. But there are other aspects, and what Daniel and other we've talked about earlier with it, with all those inequities that still exist between you know, taxis and rideshare between the results of the unintended consequences that we've seen particularly over the last few years since the reforms came in. Is there the ability to take that back as part of the feedback process, because we are trying to put more pressure on the government too. You know they do have a duty of care and responsibility to have a look at that and say, well, we did not quite intend for this to happen, and we need to, probably. We're talking about, some real, dire and urgent matters that need to be looked at sooner than later.

Carmel Donnelly (IPART): Well, Nick. certainly, what the tribunal usually does. It's early days for this review yet, but usually what we will do is be open to hearing whatever people want to tell us while we've got. You know, our clear terms of reference. we know that you know nothing exists in isolation. There's often quite a complex history and other sort of related issues.

We will usually, in our draft report and final report. acknowledge and reflect the broader input that's come about the context. Even if something is out of scope for us or can't be addressed in our timeframe and where we do have ability in terms of reference such as this review, which we do have just that kind of ability for the tribunal to look at any other matter that we consider relevant, then we will turn our minds to whether some of those other points are relevant from the perspective of the tribunal, and we may make some other suggestions. I can't say whether we'll do that or not, because we're going to go through the process, and we haven't got to that point in our thought processes. But that's the long answer. The short answer is, yes, possibly.

Nick Abraham (Taxis NSW): Thank you. Thank you, madam. Chair.

Andrew Nicholls (IPART): Thank you.

Carmel Donnelly (IPART): I might actually ask a question unless Andrew there's someone else waiting. I'm just quite interested to understand. just looking at rank and hail as a as a special kind of service. That is there, as we've been hearing for people with disability. People in regional areas, you know, people who just want to be able to continue with the same sort of arrangements they've had with consistency, such as you know. An elderly shopper wants to know what the fare will be to get back. Wouldn't, would, would continue to use taxis is there? Continued erosion of the taxi service continuing.

So, things like those butler services I'm just interested in, whether it's you're expecting that it's going to continually diminish in terms of how much business there is with that kind of customer that is, is not necessarily price sensitive, but just really needs the service that they need or chooses to have the service that they've always had from taxis. And is there continuing to be erosion of that just even as an example, these taxi butlers are that changing is that changing things for people in the industry.

David Samuel (A2B): Not so much taxi butler's Carmel. They are just another booking platform, like an app is but there's no doubt looking at the numbers, and I can only speak on behalf of our fleet that over the last few years and rank and hail has, like dramatically dropped, particularly in NSW. Sydney was always of all the markets that we operate, and we operate in every at sort of apart from Tasmania and every State in Australia. Sydney always had the largest rank and hail market. By some measure and those numbers have come down, while at the same time the booking numbers have remained static.

So I think that more alternatives in the market and a new player that can provide a service very quickly has definitely impacted on that. And you know the story of kids being out the front of a pub where there's a taxi rank and multiple cars sitting there, and they're still staring at their phone.

An Uber or a Didi, or whatever it might be. So I think that's had an impact. But where it's critical, and that certainly has an impact on your commercial viability, because, as you say, where it really counts is those services no one else can provide. And that happens in regional areas that happens with people with a disability. It happens at most airports. And it particularly happens at major events because when you've got all the people walking out of a gate. You can't all be on your phone booking a car and then have cars coming from everywhere in an orderly fashion to pick you up. So that's what's hurting at the moment, I think. Is that what we're seeing in Sydney is a reduction in that market.

But it's just the essential nature of its service hasn't changed and it's still very much relied on by a lot of people. If you look at country areas, app bookings only make up about 2% of all trips in Sydney. They only make up about 10% of all trips. So rank and hail is still a very important part of the market. It's just not as fashionable or cool to talk about.

Carmel Donnelly (IPART): Hmm, okay. I just wonder if anyone else wants to. Add anything.

Andrew Nicholls (IPART): Has got his hand up.

Carmel Donnelly (IPART): Phil. Yeah.

Phil Doyle (Bailee taxi driver, western Sydney): Yeah, I think, what we need to recognize is that what we're talking about, rank and hail is what we're actually talking about is metered fares. So a lot of work that you take as a booking. We'll just run on a meter. That's what the passenger expects to pay. That's what it's there for your point, you know. Somebody said much this going to cost, you say, well, we'll see when the what the meter says when we get there.

You know this is, you can give people an estimation, but I'm not in the business of haggling with people who've made a booking for a taxi. We'll see what the meter runs. You know, there's a whole lot of factors that operate with a meter like traffic delays things like that, you know, and you can get a good run. It could be cheaper. You can get a bad run. It could be a lot more expensive that, said we still do it. I drive for a very good operator and all good operators. A lot of people in this room have been around the cab industry for a while will know that a good operator has their regulars and about 50 to 60% of our work is regulars, and a lot of them are elderly, but it's not like that. They you know, elderly people, do pass away. It's very sad, but we're also constantly being replenished with new people that are coming into that market, because, for reasons they don't drive and as Tess alluded to before the growth in demand, we're living longer. More people with disabilities are requiring services. So the short answer is, no.

Carmel Donnelly (IPART): Thanks.

Andrew Nicholls (IPART): Right. Thanks. Anyone else like to make any comments on that question.

Carmel Donnelly (IPART): Or anything else.

Andrew Nicholls (IPART): Or anything else that you'd like to add. We've got about two minutes left before we move into the wrap up. Thanks for all of the comments online. We've heard what other States do a couple of times. I see, Phil, you've mentioned what they do in Victoria. I think Nick alluded to that, I mean, do we have a sense of whether other States have cracked it in terms of the of the WATs.

David Samuel (A2B): Victoria's the best performing state. Sorry, Phil. Victoria performs the best. and I think that I think Fred might have alluded to this around NSW, licensing deregulation that in Victoria, when it happened, there was a massive explosion. In fleet size. So you went that the industry almost doubled within 6 months in size. Now that came back and then Covid destroyed it completely, and it's now settled where it's settled.

But the people doing those, I expected when they deregulated licenses in Victoria we'd see wheelchairs leave the market. Because if you're coming into the market, why wouldn't you take a \$30,000 vehicle over \$110,000 unless you have a business model that's directly related to it. And I think the biggest difference between NSW and Victoria outside of the fact that Victorian fares are higher and the lifting fees in the thirties now, and drivers do the work. I think the biggest difference is the amount of corporate work you get in Melbourne as opposed to Sydney. Drivers have consistent pools of work that makes it attractive to stay into that industry.

In NSW we've seen the opposite happen. We've seen since the deregulation of licensing a decline in the number of vehicles, I think, Michael said, and accurately said, the 30% decline in the number of vehicles since 2019, with a decline of 30%, unless it's being made up by some sort of extraordinary gain in efficiency and productivity. You've got to have a poorer service at the end of the day.

So I think what you can learn is money counts in the short term, and you will get drivers doing the work if you pay them more. I mean it's not rocket science, and secondly, that having said that you need to have a look at the underlying structures of the businesses, and what makes them viable, unviable, and where competition works and where it doesn't and where there's market failures, and there isn't.

So you can argue that in the Sedan market there isn't really a market failure. It's consumers choosing. I agree with Daniel. Those choices are somewhat dictated by the behaviour of certain companies and the way that they price their product. But in the WAT market. We have a requirement that we, as a booking provider, we have to be able to supply a wheelchair accessible service in exactly the same time as a sedan. That's just ludicrous, because in order to do that you would have to massively oversupply the market with vehicles, so that there was always 5 min away from a customer, but that would make the business completely unviable, because there wouldn't be enough work. All you'd be doing is dealing with the elasticity of the trip and the fact that if I'm here and I have to get to there, it takes longer than it does to get a sedan to that booking because there's more of them.

So it's just structural things. There's the dynamics of the vehicle itself. There is still an ADR mandated cube for a vehicle which is so out of date. It's not funny, meaning that we can't even bring in purpose. Built vehicles.

So Toyota in Japan are now building wheelchair, accessible vehicles that are sedans, and you can fit one wheelchair passenger in them. They're fantastic because they address the issue of being able to move resources to the demand very quickly. But where you've got two unique fleets you can't do that. So I think Australia's just sort of lagging now in that space and some of those ADRs are hard things to change. I know that I've tried, but you know it is really stifling. The market and its ability to innovate.

Phil Doyle (Bailee taxi driver, western Sydney): Just quickly, if I may. Just, I think that we really need to explore the idea of a partial lifting fee for sedans, for foldable wheelchairs and foldable scooters. I know the foldable scooters weigh about 20kilos. Just going to make some drivers give up. But look, this is a really practical solution that we're already doing on the ground in the Hawkesbury, and I think that it's something that could be rolled out across the State if we brought in a partial lifting fee as they've got in Victoria for the same service.

Carmel Donnelly (IPART): Thanks, David and Phil for that. I think we're nearly out of time, aren't we, Andrew? Yeah.

Andrew Nicholls (IPART): Yes, I was just going to thank everyone for their comments online, and we didn't quite get to all of them. But I think we picked up most of the points and acknowledgement that a number of you have made comments here about the increases in costs over the last few years. I think that's an important point as well. That perhaps didn't come out as strongly in all of the points, and quite a number of important points here about wheelchair taxis and how we support people with disabilities. So if I can just acknowledge and thank everyone who's put comments online, as I say, all of them are important and will factor into that review process. But unfortunately, we've run out of time for the hearing today, and but it's been very useful to hear from all of you, and I'll now hand back to Carmel to close out the hearing.

1.5 Closing remarks

Carmel Donnelly (IPART): Thank you, Andrew, and look on behalf of IPART. I'd like to thank everybody for participating today. There's been a lot of insights shared. I've made pages of notes. I'd like to thank you very much for all of that very useful input. It's certainly been very constructive and helpful for us, and I hope it's been helpful for you.

If you want to review what's been said today, or share it with others, we will publish a summary on our website as well as the presentation slides. That'll be available probably next week or in the next week.

There'll also be other opportunities to have your say. We will do some work and come up with our draft report in December, and invite submissions on that, and have another public hearing early next year and everything will be taken into account as we work towards the final report.

If you would like to get in touch with someone at IPART, you are most welcome to do that. I think we've got Jennifer Vincent. Her details are up there, and Tess Bellamy. and that's also we've also got contact details on the website. If you need to go back and check later. Very happy for you to get in touch, we'd be interested if you've got specific case studies or experiences or perspectives that will help us throughout the review. So with that I will close the public hearing and thank you very much for giving us your time and candid insights, and I hope it has been helpful to you. It's been extremely useful for us. Thank you.

Andrew Nicholls (IPART): Everyone have a good afternoon. Thank you.