

## **IPART review of fares for taxis, private buses and private ferries in NSW**

### **Department for Women submission**

#### **Service quality of taxis**

NSW Department of Transport figures<sup>1</sup> show that women make up almost 52% of taxi users on an average day. Women's reasons for taxi usage, usage patterns and customer service priorities may differ from those of men, making it important that any assessment of service quality in the taxi industry takes account of women's specific concerns. The Issues Paper does not contain sex-disaggregated data, which makes it difficult to assess the level of satisfaction that women have with taxi services.

We suggest that IPART and the DoT could improve their gender analysis of service quality and customer satisfaction. This would enable the development of a regulatory framework that is responsive to the needs and concerns of women as customers as well as men. To this end, we recommend that:

⇒ *Questions which capture women's perspectives be developed for any future passenger survey.*

⇒ *Customer satisfaction statistics be analysed according to gender.*

In the interim, the Department for Women has several suggestions to make, based on our experience of this issue, and knowledge of existing research.

In order to assess whether taxi industry is catering to women's needs, it is important to understand the reasons women use taxis. These include:

- fear of waiting for or catching public transport at night,
- fear of walking home at night,
- difficulty of using public transport with small children and shopping bags,
- inadequacy of some public transport routes, or inadequacies in terms of frequency at certain times of the day;
- lower rates of car ownership than men, and
- sometimes limited access to household car, particularly during the day.

#### **Safety**

Safety is a key issue for women. For example, *The Safe Women Project*<sup>2</sup> phone-in found that many women choose to use taxis due to fears related to public transport, particularly at night. For this reasons, an important determinant of women's level of satisfaction with taxis will be the degree to which they are perceived as a *safe* form of transport.

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<sup>1</sup> NSW Dept of Transport – Transport Data Centre, *Taxi Trips by Age and Sex on an Average Day*

<sup>2</sup> ABS 1996, Women's Safety, Australia, in *Plan it Safe*, The Safe Women's Project, 1998

With this in mind, it is of concern that DoT data shows that the number of registered complaints of 'assault, abuse and dangerous driving' remain high. On current trends it would appear that the number of complaints of this type will be similar in 2001 to the high number recorded in 1999. While it is understood that the data for 1996-1998 is not directly comparable to that for 1999-2001, it is at least indicative of a failure to significantly reduce these types of crimes committed by taxi drivers and operators.<sup>3</sup> This is an area of great concern for women.

We also suggest that complaints in the category of 'trip refusals, no shows and lateness' should also be seen as a potential safety issue. Given the fear many women have of waiting in public places, particularly at night, it is of concern that the performance measures set down for taxis to arrive reliably and within a reasonable time are not being met. For women, these indicators are not simply measures of how convenient taxis are, but have a great impact on their perceptions of how safe and reliable taxis are as a form of public transport.

Customer safety should remain an integral part of any assessment of service quality in the taxi industry. The Department for Women considers that the maintenance of acceptable levels of customer safety should be a condition for granting the taxi industry permission to raise fares. We recommend that:

- ⇒ *Increases in fares should be tied to an agreement by the taxi industry to develop and implement strategies to address the number of complaints relating to safety. These include complaints in the DoT complaints register categories of 'assault, abuse and dangerous driving', 'trip refusals, no shows and lateness', and 'poor vehicle cleanliness and safety'.*
- ⇒ *The customer service component of the current training course for new drivers, the Taxicare Professional course and the taxi drivers' refresher course should all include mandatory modules on discrimination law and sexual and sex-based harassment and should clearly set out the penalties involved for inappropriate and illegal behaviour. Training should also include appropriate behaviour and conduct between drivers.*
- ⇒ *Complaints data be collected, analysed and reported in the DoT annual report according to sex.*

The issue of safety is also relevant to the issue of **taxi fare structures** discussed at 5.1 in the Issues Paper. In particular, the aspect of the current fare structure which most concerns the Department for Women (DFW) is the night time surcharge. This surcharge has particular implications for women, who are more likely to use taxis for safety reasons. The higher cost of taxis at night may particularly disadvantage women who are using taxis due to fears about the use of public transport after dark.

- ⇒ *In order to make taxis as accessible as possible at night, the night time surcharge should be kept to the minimum practicable level (consistent with maintaining an adequate supply of taxis at night).*

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<sup>3</sup> In addition it should be noted that many women do not report this type of crime, so the real figures are likely to be much higher.

## **Women as drivers**

The concerns and priorities of women drivers and operators may differ from those of their male counterparts and, because of their under-representation in the industry, may be easily missed if special care is not taken to consult them and consider drivers' issues from a gendered perspective. Anecdotal evidence suggests that female drivers have been the subject of harassment by their male colleagues. It is essential that:

- the DoT complaints system is able to monitor these types of offences, and
- that the taxi industry respond to these problems in order to create a safer working environment for women drivers.

To address these issues we recommend that:

- ⇒ *The DoT complaints register record complaints by drivers as well as customers, both disaggregated by sex. That this data should be presented and analysed to enable clearer identification of areas for improvement.*
- ⇒ *If not already in place, a Sexual Harassment Policy be developed for use in the taxi industry. This should cover both issues of harassment within the industry, for example of women drivers, and harassment of customers.*

## **Accessibility of taxis to parents with babies**

Many women attempt to use taxis as a means of travelling with small children. However, there is anecdotal evidence that there are too few taxis equipped with baby capsules, and that waiting times for those vehicles that do carry this equipment are unacceptably long. This situation means that women with small children do not find taxis an accessible transport option.

As noted in the Issues Paper, the interim standards that DoT has in place for taxis relate to operations, telephone answering standards, delivery standards and customer services. However, it is noted in considering service quality standards, IPART has taken the following approach:

*“Due to their direct effect on customers, the Tribunal has focussed its attention on telephone answering and delivery standards”.*

While it is true that delivery times are an important indicator of service for most people, the data on delivery times for taxis (at least as presented in the Issues Paper) does not measure waiting times for taxis with baby capsules. Many women indicate that there is an unacceptable waiting time, both at ranks and for phone bookings for a taxi with a baby capsule. In order to judge whether this is indeed a widespread problem, we recommend that standards relating to baby capsules be added to the performance standards used by DoT. These would include:

- ⇒ *An set proportion of taxis carrying baby capsules*
- ⇒ *Set standards for waiting times for phone bookings for taxis with capsules*

Further we recommend that:

⇒ *The DoT complaints register create a new category to record complaints relating to a lack of access to taxis with baby capsules*