

Submission to IPART : Taxi Service Quality

The Minister for Transport has indicated that, at least for Public Buses, Trains and Ferries, he would not accept a recommendation from IPART for an increase in fares above the rise in Consumer Price Index unless there was an improvement in service levels. Presumably he has the same views about Private Buses, Ferries and Taxis. Sounds reasonable.

But unless you can measure service levels how can you determine an improvement or otherwise. For Taxis there is a problem.

Whilst IPART notes that the taxi industry appears acutely aware of its levels of service, it also notes that an industry-wide picture of performance levels was unobtainable. In other words, we know about it, but aren't telling.

In its Issues paper, IPART points out the way forward, and notes for the third year in a row, the need for annual information returns on revenue, cost and performance indicators. It notes also that performance standards need be properly defined, monitored and met.

This Submission by an activist Taxi Driver, focuses on Taxi Service Quality.

Complaints Registered with Transport NSW

The Transport Workers Union Submission discussed Transport NSW's Complaint Register and the already released Customer Feedback Management System. The major anomaly of Taxi Drivers being unable to register a complaint, record an assault, notify of a robbery or fare evasion was pointed out. The fact that Fare Evasion is no longer an offense, but merely a breach of the Regulations was pointed out. The comment from TNSW that it expects recorded complaints from passengers to increase substantially with the new system was noted.

They say that an increase in complaints is expected, not because more incidents occur, but because it will be easier to complain. The effect necessarily will be an apparent worsening of [mainly driver] standards. Will this be used as a justification for refusing a fare increase?

3154 complaints on 60,000,000 trips is one in 20,000.

[The Taxi Council says one in 51,000, but they are still counting passengers, not trips and still exaggerating with 170 m passengers]

In the last available recorded statistics there were 2200 assaults and 1600 robberies a year [1995] on Taxi Drivers and the Keatsdale Report suggested that only 10 % of incidents are reported.

See the Australian Institute of Criminology Report 178

<http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/tandi/ti178.pdf>

Taxi User Satisfaction Surveys

The last survey of Customer satisfaction with Taxi services is five years old. Before any use of such 'information' is made we need an update.

There are two other measures theoretically available for interpretation

Network Telephone Answering Standards

Of these standards, which basically require that 90% of calls be immediately connected, and that of those connected 70% are answered within a minute and 90% are answered within two minutes, IPART noted a broad indication that the targets were met. With a continued misuse of statistics, of the 40,000 calls a day in Sydney its OK for 4000 calls not to be connected immediately, and for 3600 calls to wait for longer than two minutes.

An interesting comparison with a mere 3154 complaints about drivers in a whole year.

Taxi Delivery Standards

The so called interim standards of 1993 called for an 85% pickup within 15 minutes, a further 13% within 30 minutes and the last 2% within an hour. Generously, IPART says that the taxi companies did not perform so well. Alarmingly it says that TNSW has some reservations about the accuracy of some of the information. Incredibly, it says that the THCB of TNSW was unable to provide quarterly reports from each network.

So what is going on? The critical numbers are not all there !!! And what is there are bewilderingly and significant variations. Where is the actual data upon which decisions of such importance to the Taxi Driver will be made?

Where is the transparency of the process ????

The Taxi Council in its Submission very unambiguously avoids mention of these delivery standards. They happily counsel IPART to liaise with TNSW to analyze telephone booking service performance, but that's it. The very best they do is to say that complaints may arise from a mismatch between what the public expects and what taxi services can reasonably provide.

Possibly we can expect no more, given that in 2002 the Taxi Council disclaimed any and all responsibility for delivery standards. Interim or Draft Service Standards notwithstanding.

The Taxi Council have taken the position that it is up to the driver, having been given the detail of the booking to do the rest and pick up within the time frame. That's not what the standards say.

It not about what the Networks are empowered to do, direct and pursue.

And if the booking call is not accepted whose then is the responsibility ?

An interesting measure might be the percentage of M3's [booking no show] of all bookings. That's when a cab turns up and there is no one to pick up. A total waste of time and money for the cabbie.

So what's the problem ?

The problem is that for IPART to suggest an increase in fares above CPI, it appears necessary to demonstrate an improvement in service levels. But there is no available measure of the level of service.

We do not know the number of fares, or a meaningful number of telephone bookings [outside of the TWU estimates so effectively supplied], let alone the time rate at which pick ups were effected. We have no current measure of customer satisfaction with taxi services. We do have a rate of complaint of one in 20,000 trips or one in 51,000 journeys.

And why are such measurements not available. If even the Interim Standards were being met, such information should be on the record. If the Service Standards that were preempted at the time of the 2000 Amendments to the Passenger Transport Act and presented to the NSW Parliament in the Minister's second Reading Speech were promulgated, such a lack of information would result in fines of \$22,000 on each network.

The issue we therefore would highlight to IPART is that the recommendations that Taxi Drivers might reasonably expect it to make, are likely to be rejected, and therefore possibly not even advanced, on the basis of unmeasured and unmeasurable service performance. That TNSW has not enforced its interim service standards on networks, and that TNSW has not fulfilled its regulatory and statutory function by effectively instituting the Service Standards for Networks and Operators is a matter of concern.

There is currently a matter before the NSW Ombudsman's Office that addresses this issue of Departmental non-performance. Resolution has not occurred due to TNSW's involvement in the Waterfall train disaster, but a reply from the Department is anticipated.

If the Service Standards were in place, the data would have to be available. But at the same time the Networks would have the authority to direct drivers such that the standards could be met. Again, what's the problem?

I respectfully request that IPART seek and utilize more data in relation to delivery service standards, and that it emphasize in its recommendations that the lack of verifiable data should not be an impediment to Taxi Drivers in their Campaign for a fair share of a fare share. We want a fare increase, more than a CPI rise, which brings Taxi Drivers almost up to the National Minimum Wage hourly rate.

Drivers and Service Standards

Drivers make their money from picking up fares. For some, drunks are to be avoided. Some avoid short trips. Some never make Airport pick-ups. We all avoid fare evaders and vomitors—if only we could pick and choose. To a limited extent, with Radio Bookings, a driver can pick and choose.

But an adequately managed network can, by best practice, with GPS job allocation, payment of running costs and the like, ensure that every booking is picked up and within time. Indeed, with the new Standards, the networks are specifically empowered to direct drivers to a pick up, or a location.

There has been debate that the provision of ` job destinations ` to drivers as a part of the job offer reduces service to passengers. There is as much argument that it improves service. There can be no valid argument that a passenger should be unable to get a cab within an hour. And that is a network issue.

Service delivery standards are the role of the networks – they have the information on job and cab locations and the power to make a match. Drivers want and need all the fares they can get. That's why they are out there driving cabs. There must be no risk that the Driver's campaign for a fair share of a fair fare is prejudiced by the Networks' failure of their obligations to meet existing service standards or to embrace the new Service Standards that are an integral part of the Passenger Transport Act and Regulations.

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Wednesday, May 14, 2003