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Committee member NSWTD

2008 Taxi Fare Review

Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal

Dr Michael Keating, AC, Chairman

Dear sir,

I note with alarm the casual, or out of the blue suggestion to scrap the harbour bridge toll return. This reminds me of the enormous conflict and damage to the taxi industry when some bright spark in the Transport Department suddenly decided to bring in no destinations as a panacea for all the taxi industry ills. I can remember we were laughed at by the Minister and the Director General when we told them as clearly as we possibly could that "it just won't work". After a year's cruel, unnecessary, and debilitating 'experiment', in their final report they said virtually the exact same thing "we didn't realise that it just wouldn't work". I hope, I do really hope, that we are not going to go through all that again, are we? Not cabs on the city streets, honking horns, demonstrating, blocking the harbour bridge, blocking up the traffic. It's a massive, disastrous, unpleasant situation for all concerned. Let's not go there.

We in the Taxi industry suffer from the burden of the dead weight of government on our shoulders. People who do not understand our industry, making our decisions for us. The best way for any decision makers or public servants to well by us, and to improve the taxi industry, and to give the public a better taxi service, is to listen and take advice from the people within the taxi industry. It may seem quirky or have anomalies but the nett accumulated wisdom of the taxi industry usually reflects the status quo. In other words everything is there for a reason and unless the people within the taxi industry ask for a change it is better to leave it alone.

Regarding tolls, I think the tolls are a ripoff! I hear IPART people talking about monopolies, I'll say monopolies, The tolls are a classic example of how monopolies operate, and then some! Do you realise that someone cabbing from the airport to lets say Baulkham Hills pays \$17.50 tolls for one trip. Someone who goes a bit further, and uses the m7 can pay over \$20, for one trip! So as I say tolls are an absolute ripoff.

That being the case, we taxi drivers can only pass on the disbursements. We are on the only on the road as part of the public transport network. Therefore we are transparent to the tolls, or at least we should be. I know that in my case after allowing for disbursements, I still pay more out of my own pocket for tolls than the average motorist. I know that this is similar for other cabbies. Please believe me we do not make a profit out of tolls. Tolls most definitely are not a profit centre for us. In fact I believe it's a hidden loss that has not been accounted for.

As for the notion that it is a principle that Taxis are not entitled to return tolls, and that therefore the bridge return toll is just an anomaly, I believe that essentially the opposite is the case. From memory, about ten years ago we were allowed return tolls by the legislation. I can remember, quite legally, charging return tolls on other than bridge tolls.

Then, as the private ripoff tolls began to climb, the government became embarrassed, so the Department of Transport issued a directive stating that taxies could not collect return tolls on the private motorways, the bridge and harbour tunnel tolls being excepted from this directive. That directive was in contradiction to the legislation. To my knowledge, that legislation is still

in force. Even when we had the harsh directive imposed on us that robbed us of our just entitlement to return tolls on private motorways, they still retained the bridge toll because they realized that the bridge toll is essential for taxi fleet operations. So historically, it is not true that the bridge toll is an aberration, rather that it is a retained residual right for good reasons, and, this issue has been examined before, and the judgment is that it must be retained.

It seems to be that IPART believes that vaguely the same number of fares are available from the north to the south as from south to the north. That is not the case. There is about one chance in ten, if that, of a return fare over the bridge. The idea that a taxi driver can make big profits going back and forth over the bridge is not true. It's been tried and it doesn't work, that is why the return toll is retained. To think that removal of bridge return tolls would not affect taxi operations is uninformed and naive in the extreme. If this draconian blunder is enacted, then taxi drivers will start to refuse to carry fares over the bridge, and it will cause a great deal of argument, friction, anger, frustration, and a poorer taxi service all around. If it is IPART's view that taxi drivers are not entitled to consideration, like second class citizens, then I am saying that is not fair. It seems that the view is that IPART is acting as a white knight to save the innocent passengers from the crooked taxi drivers. Let us then look briefly at things from the passengers point of view. What is it that passengers really want? What they really, really, want, is a taxi when they need one, a good service. If this proposal goes ahead, I can see a line of frustrated, exasperated, and forlorn, passengers on a Friday night, waiting, and waiting, and waiting, to go north over the bridge, for taxis that are just not going to be there. That situation will really, really, really, really, upset our dear passengers. 99.9% of passengers do not care three figs about the three dollar bridge toll, what they really, really, want, is a taxi when they want one. This principle has been well understood by the authorities in times past, and it has been reviewed more recently with the same result. That is why the bridge return toll is in place. I hope I have made my point.

Faithfully Trevor Bradley
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