

CEO's Welcome: What a Big Year!

What a big year 2009 has been – the accreditation regime roll out, the catastrophic fire at Silver Top Taxis, extending the WAT subsidy to non-metropolitan networks, ACCC action on rostering, increased consultation with operator and driver groups, and increased support for VTA members.

As we take a short, but welcome, break over the Festive Season, it is never far from our mind of what 2010 will bring. In this edition of the Transmission we have highlighted industry issues that will be high on the agenda in the New Year, in particular our position on the imminent release of licences.

There is also plenty of information for taxi drivers and operators on events occurring over the festive season. I hope that you all have a rewarding December and maximise on the opportunities that exist in January with the Australian Tennis Open in Melbourne as well as an influx of holiday makers travelling throughout Victoria. Please be sure to look over the rank location and dates for the Australian Open as well as the cruise ship timetable.

I wish everyone associated with the taxi industry a safe and happy Festive Season and hope that you enjoy time spent with family and friends.

Neil Sach | VTA CEO

Cabcharge EFTPOS Units

Even though the Taxi Directorate has approved a number of EFTPOS units for fitment in taxis, operators and drivers are reminded that taxis must still be fitted with a working Cabcharge Fareway EFTPOS unit. The Cabcharge Fareway EFTPOS unit is the only unit that can be used for the Multi Purpose Taxi Program (MPTP) card, and is the only unit that can accept Cabcharge cards and eTickets.

Model Bailment Agreement

November last year the Minister for Public Transport announced a taxi initiatives package that included the development and introduction of a Government version model bailment agreement. A draft was released shortly after that and by December comments had been received by Government.

The VTA was advised early this year that the model bailment agreement would be finalized by the end of this year - and so it has been.

The Minister for Public Transport, Lynne Kosky, released the Government's version model bailment agreement on 7 December.

Copies of the model agreement can be obtained from the Taxi Directorate in person or request copies be mailed, or down loaded from the VTD website.

To assist operators and drivers, the VTA will carry a stock of the VTD model agreement as well as the VTA's model agreement.

Vehicle Inspections

The Taxi Directorate has announced that all WATs (irrespective of age) are now required to be inspected by a Licensed Taxi Tester every six months, and that WAT operators will receive a "Notice of Inspection to Obtain a Roadworthy Certificate" when the WAT is due for inspection.

The Taxi Directorate's explanation of why suddenly 12 months became 6 months is because of the state of un-roadworthiness of WATs found across the State during the Safe Taxi Audit.

As a reminder to all taxi operators, the revised inspection frequency of standard taxis by a Licensed Taxi Tester is every 12 months irrespective of age. The Taxi Directorate will send operators a "Notice of Inspection to Obtain a Roadworthy Certificate" when the taxi is due for inspection.

Additional Taxi Licences

On 19 November 2008 the Minister for Public Transport announced that the Government would release:

- 200 additional standard licences into the metropolitan and outer-suburban taxi zones.
- 330 additional Wheelchair Accessible Taxi (WAT) licences into the metropolitan taxi zone

In the 12 months that have passed since this announcement, the Victorian Taxi Association (VTA) has maintained a firm, considered and consistent position on the need for additional licences.

The VTA strongly supports an improvement in the standard and reliability of service offered by taxis to the disability community and the transport isolated. In line with this view, the VTA accepts that there is a need for some additional WAT licences.

However, if additional WAT licences are to be released, the VTA emphasizes that they be sold on an individual basis with a plausible business case attached. To be successful, applicants should be required to demonstrate how the granting of the licence will result in better service to the wheelchair community and the transport isolated.

The VTA has previously requested that strict quotas be introduced to ensure that the first priority of WATs is providing service to the disability community and transport isolated. Anecdotal evidence indicates that 20% of WATs undertake 80% of the work required by these groups. If true, this is unacceptable.

The VTA is of the view that the release of 200 additional standard taxi licences is not necessary at this time. Taxi licences should only be released relative to increases in demand for taxi work. There is strong evidence to demonstrate that the current occupancy levels of metropolitan taxis (measured across a standard shift) are low, at between 25 and 30%.

Furthermore, economic modelling completed by La Trobe University has established that the release of 530 new licences at once would reduce driver earnings by between 10 and 12%. Given this, the VTA continues to urge the Government to develop a mechanism that ensures the release of taxi licences in proportion to increases in demand for taxi work.

Minister Kosky has made great in-roads into many of the problems that have traditionally plagued the taxi industry. Her policy initiatives have made taxi drivers safer, improved the level of service offered to the community, and removed rogue operators and drivers.

The VTA continues to urge the Minister to carefully consider the consequences of additional licences on those she has fought to protect as well as setting out industry concerns to her cabinet colleagues. The VTA also urges the Minister to continue to work with the taxi industry to explore the development of new taxi markets, particularly in the event that additional licences are released.

As the likelihood of a release of additional licences increases, the VTA calls on industry and Government to work together in a calm and composed manner to ensure a sustainable outcome is achieved for all.

STOP PRESS!

On 10 December 2009, the Minister for Public Transport advised the VTA that the 530 additional licences will be released commencing in 2010. Rather than being sold they will be issued as 10 year leased licences which can be transferred but not assigned.

Early next year the Government will issue a prospectus for the two licence categories (WATs and standard). Interested parties will be invited to submit tenders in accordance with the prospectus.

The 10 year lease fee for the 200 standard licences will be payable up front. The WAT lease fees will be payable on an annual basis. The WAT vehicles can be single wheelchair.

(For further information logon to www.taxi.vic.gov.au)

AIRPORT DRIVERS BE MINDFUL

Drivers, as we enter the busy festive season please be mindful of the Melrose Drive taxi holding area speed limit of 10kph as well as all other rules that are applicable to the airport holding bays.

Public holiday surcharge for urban and country taxis

Country and Urban zone taxi drivers are permitted to apply an additional surcharge (off the meter) on Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Eve.

For taxis fitted with a Schmidt taxi meter:

Christmas Day and Boxing Day and from 6pm New Year's Eve 2009 until midnight on New Year's Day 2010 – a public holiday surcharge of \$3-70.

For taxis fitted with other than a Schmidt taxi meter:

Christmas Day 2009 and Boxing Day and New Year's Day 2010 –

- between 6:00am and midnight – a public holiday surcharge of \$3-70
- between midnight and 6:00am – a public holiday surcharge of 70 cents*

New Year's Eve 2009 – between the 6:00pm and midnight – a holiday surcharge of \$3-70.

(70 cents only as these meters will apply the normal late night surcharge of \$3-00 between midnight and 6-00am.)*

Swanston Street Redevelopment

The redevelopment of Swanston Street has been on the agenda at the City of Melbourne for some time now. The Lord Mayor, Robert Doyle, recently announced his preferred option for a significant part of the Street stretching between Flinders and Victoria Street.

Unfortunately, the Lord Mayor's preferred option completely excludes taxis from entering the redeveloped section of Swanston Street. During the consultation process the VTA expressed the view that at the very least taxis doing wheelchair work should be granted access.

The VTA is concerned that the option that will be presented to Melbourne City Council for consideration does not adequately account for the needs of those requiring disability transport. The VTA has, and will continue to, call on the City of Melbourne to reconsider the appropriateness of the Mayor's preferred model.



Checking the status of drivers

The VTA raised with Government the ongoing problem for taxi operators of being able to check the status of the driver accreditation (DA) and the driver licence of a taxi driver.

Attempts in the past to have a system available to operators to check status have hit a brick wall because of privacy considerations, even though operators only need to know "yes or no" to the status questions. (Operators don't need to know the details of why a licence or accreditation has been suspended or cancelled.)

Some years ago VicRoads developed the Driver and Licence Status (DALs) system, but this was "switched off" for privacy and administrative reasons.

But, there is now good news on this front.

The Taxi Directorate has put in place a system whereby a taxi operator can check the status of a driver's accreditation by phoning the VTD's Licensing and Accreditation section and quoting the DA number. The VTD will advise whether the DA is valid or expired or suspended or cancelled.

As the status of the DA is conditional upon the status of the driver licence, the status of the DA includes the status of the driver licence.

VTA Office Closure

The office of the Victorian Taxi Association and Taxi Industry Training Victoria will close on Thursday 24 December and re-open with limited services on Monday 4 January 2010. Normal services resume mid January.

Reminder on the new road rules

Mobile Phones

Using a mobile phone while driving is prohibited, except to make or receive a phone call and the mobile phone:

- is secured in a commercially designed holder fixed to the vehicle, or
- can be operated by the driver without touching any part of the body of the phone.

Using a phone as a GPS navigation aid while driving is prohibited unless it is secured in a commercially designed holder fixed to the vehicle.

Holding the phone (whether or not engaged in a phone call) is also prohibited. Holding includes resting the mobile on the driver's lap.

Visual display units

A driver can use a driver's aid such as a navigation device (GPS) but it must be an integrated part of the vehicle design, or secured in a commercially designed holder, which is fixed to the vehicle.

Tram Lanes

A driver may make a U turn across a tram lane, provided there isn't a solid centre line between the two sets of tram tracks.

Peak Service Taxis and 2009/10 Cruise Ship Season

Metropolitan peak service taxis are authorised to operate between 7 am and 12 noon from the Station Pier precinct. This precinct covers the Station Pier; Waterfront Place; and Beach Street, Port Melbourne between Bay Street and Swallow Street. Drivers should note that peak service taxis are not authorised to undertake any street hire (rank/hail) or radio bookings during these extended hours other than for trips commencing from Station Pier.

The Cruise Ship season is on the following dates:

Tuesday, 29 December 2009
Monday, 11 January 2010
Sunday, 24 January 2010
Saturday, 6 February 2010
Friday, 19 February 2010
Thursday, 4 March 2010

Centre dividing line

A driver will not be able to overtake, or do a U-turn across a single continuous centre line, or a single continuous line to the left of a broken line.

However a driver can cross over a centre dividing line (except a double continuous centre dividing line) when entering or leaving the road.

The driver can cross over a broken line to overtake or do a U-turn.

Lane lines

A driver must not change lanes over a single continuous lane line.

Painted islands

A driver must not drive over a painted island that is surrounded by a single continuous line. However a driver can drive over the island if they are entering or leaving the road, or entering a turning lane that begins immediately after the painted island.

The driver must not drive over a painted island at a freeway on-ramp. It is also illegal to drive on a painted island that is surrounded by a double line.

What you have to do

Remember that you can only cross a single continuous centre line if you are entering or leaving the road or to avoid an obstruction. You can't overtake or do a U-turn over a single continuous line or a double continuous line.

Working during the 2010 Australian Open

From 18 January to 31 January the 2010 Australian Open will provide work for those drivers prepared to service the event. Check daily papers for session conclusion times.

The taxi rank is located on the northern side of Swan Street (Olympic Boulevard), between the Rod Laver and Hisense Arenas, with its head close to Hisense Arena.

The 'feeder' for the rank is on the south side of Swan Street, in the U-turn lane. It is not to extend through the intersection to Batman Avenue and drivers are warned that they must 'drop off' only at the rear of the rank and not on Batman Avenue.



Next Generation Taxi Safety Cameras

During this year the Victorian Taxi Directorate released the specifications for the next generation of taxi safety cameras for use in Victoria.

It was intended that the new specification be the standard for all safety cameras supplied to the Victorian taxi industry from 1 February 2010, and that cameras that do not meet the specifications cannot be fitted to a taxi on or after this date. It was also intended that older safety cameras will be phased out and cameras that do not meet the new specifications would be replaced when the taxi they are fitted to is replaced, or sooner if the camera is unrepairable.

The VTA sees problems with both these intentions. Firstly, there might not be an approved camera by 1 February, secondly there might not be competition in the market by 1 February, and thirdly new cameras not meeting the new specification have been installed in taxis over the last 12 months or so and will be a long way off being obsolete.

The Victorian Taxi Directorate has recently released approval specifications that advise manufacturers on how tests will be undertaken for type approval. It has also been suggested that recently installed cameras might be able to be upgraded or some form of rebate made available. More details on these are being sought.

Taxis in regional areas serviced by 10 or more taxis (such as Traralgon, Morwell, Wangaratta, Wodonga, Warrnambool and Mildura) must have a safety camera that meets the new specifications fitted by 31 December 2010. Taxis operating in areas that are serviced by less than 10 taxis will not be required to have safety cameras, but taxi operators will have the option to fit cameras that meet the new specifications if they choose. The increased memory capacity of new cameras will not only assist police investigations but will enable taxis to resume working after an incident because the images of the incident will be locked in a portion of the memory awaiting download at a later time.

Early this year the VTA flagged with Government that the cost of the cameras has to be provided for either by a grant to operators or by an adjustment in fares. The point has been made to Government that the allowance in the 2000 fare review is now irrelevant because not only has the cost structure of the industry changed since 2000, but the cost of cameras was not taken into account when the ESC undertook the 2008 review of the fare structure. The VTA is continuing to pursue this matter with Government.

NYE Traffic Closure and Event Details

As with previous years, the City of Melbourne will be closing off many of the CBD roads during NYE celebrations. Additional public transport services will operate for the event, with public transport planned to run all night.

Below is a list of intended road closures that have been published. For more information visit: <http://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/ParkingTransportandRoads/Roads/RoadClosures> closer to the event.

street / road	between	from	to
Swanston / St Kilda Rd	Lonsdale and Linlithgow	18:30 . . .	02:00
Flinders St	William and Exhibition.	18:30 . . .	02:00
Flinders St (westbound only)	Exhibition and Spring (effectively closed by Wellington Pde closure)	18:30 . . .	23:00
Queensbridge St	Flinders and Power.	21:30 . . .	02:00
Swan St (eastbound lane).	Bridge only	20:00 . . .	02:00
Boathouse Drive	All	12:00 . . .	01:00
Brunton Ave / Jolimont Rd	Punt Rd and Wellington Pde.	17:00 . . .	23:00
Wellington Pde South	Wellington Pde and Flinders St	18:30 . . .	23:00
Wellington Pde (westbound only)	Punt Rd and Flinders St	18:30 . . .	23:00

Illegal Taxi Services

At the recent meeting of VTA North West region, Taxi Directorate officers spoke at length about what is required if NSPs and operators have issues with illegal taxi services (including Hire Cars standing on taxi ranks) within their region.

Anecdotal evidence makes it difficult for the Taxi Directorate to organise covert operations to catch and prosecute rogue operations. However, they are keen to act against illegal operations and advise that by collating as much information as possible, such as registration numbers, vehicle descriptions and even locations where these illegal operations occur, their job will be made all that more efficient.

Once all relevant information collated please contact Ron Grumble at the Taxi Directorate and pass on all the details.

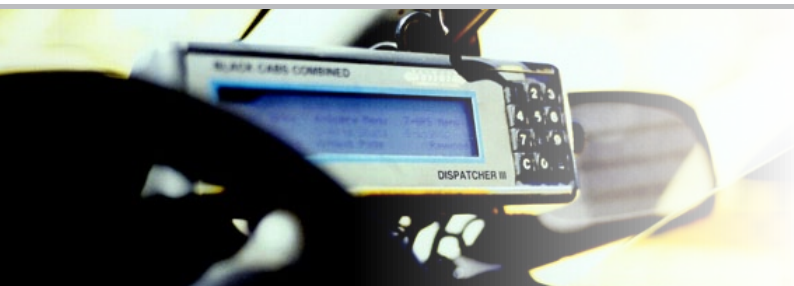
Please be patient with your expectations as operations to catch rogue operators may take time to run their full course. This may mean several trips to the area where these illegal practices are taking place.

Please Take Note: Lost Taxi Plates

If you lose one or both of your new green Safe Taxi Audit number plates you will be required to re-register the vehicle to get new plates.

This new process is in response to the VTD recently discovering that some rogue operators were using multiple copies of the same plate on a number of different vehicles. Effectively these individuals were using one licence to operate multiple vehicles.

The VTA understand that the Directorate's action creates an additional burden for honest taxi operators. However, it is necessary to stamp out this fraudulent and dishonest behaviour.



Victorian Taxi Association Inc.

Suite 2/85 Salmon Street, Port Melbourne
 Phone: 9676 2635 | Fax: 9676 2643
 Email: las@victaxi.com.au | www.victaxi.com.au