

FROM THE CEO

It's the last day of January and the temperature outside is 38 degrees C (100 degrees in the old money). The wind is gusting and the poor old cat from next door doesn't know where to put himself.

Why is this worth thinking about, after all it is summer in Victoria and we expect such days? The worth is that days like this bring back memories of Black Saturday, the first anniversary of which is just one week away. Even the Sunday Herald Sun ran an expose today on what has happened to the fire ravished areas 12 months on.

Black Saturday brought death and destruction to so many and for many others it brought psychological trauma and scars. The taxi industry itself was scathed with loss of life and property destroyed.

So yes, it is worth remembering Black Saturday and those who perished and those still suffering. It is also worth wondering whether something so horrific could happen again.

Fast forward two weeks

It is now mid February and the anniversary of Black Saturday has been and gone, thankfully without a repeat of 2009. Let's hope that the remainder of the 2009/10 fire season is as trouble free.

Moving on to another matter, the City of Melbourne proposal to revamp Swanston Street to exclude all taxis is not acceptable to the VTA.

The VTA's position over the last 18 months or so has been to recognize that standard taxis could be excluded but only if taxi ranks and taxi drop off/pick up areas are created in the crossing streets (including the "Little" streets) near Swanston Street.

Importantly, the VTA's position in regard to WATs is that these taxis must be allowed access at any time for the purpose of picking up or dropping off a wheelchair bound customer.

It is quite outrageous that the Melbourne City Council plan for Swanston Street discriminates against wheelchair bound people.

The VTA hopes that the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC) and the Victorian Council of Social Services (VCOSS) take the Council on regarding this.

The VTA also hopes that the Victorian Government will refuse any application for funding of the Swanston Street proposal (including cross street usage) until a discrimination impact statement (including taxi users) has been prepared and accepted.

The Melbourne City Council needs to respond to the reality that wheelchair users are people and if Swanston Street is to be made into a "people place" then wheelchair bound people have to be properly catered for.

Neil Sach
VTA CEO

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