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## CEO'S WELCOME

As has been reported in various industry forums the VTA is reinvigorating its relationship with the broader industry. Of recent times we have added new staff to assist with this, held industry wide consultations with drivers and operators and are in the process of redesigning our website.

One of the clear messages we received from various stakeholder consultations is that you, the industry on the ground, don't know what we do. This newsletter, in conjunction with the other communications initiatives, is an attempt by the VTA to ensure that taxi drivers and operators know what we are doing and why we are doing it.

I would encourage all drivers and operators to work with the VTA because I firmly believe that we can achieve a lot more united than we can divided. If you have any issues or concerns please do not hesitate to contact the VTA on 03 9676 2635 or by email at [las@victaxi.com.au](mailto:las@victaxi.com.au)

**Neil Sach**  
VTA- Chief Executive Officer

## *Recent Media Attention*

On Friday 3 July Melbourne's taxi industry was yet again in the media for all the wrong reasons. Age reporter Clay Lucas wrote a piece on alleged credit card fraud and unlicensed drivers in the taxi industry. Lucas quoted VTA CEO Neil Sach in his article. The quote used by Lucas had in fact been retracted by Mr. Sach after discussions with the VTD revealed the problem of subleasing was not as widespread as first thought. Later the same day The Age ran another article leveling all sorts of accusations against the Victorian taxi industry – some more accurate than others. In an attempt to try and restore some balance to the debate I agreed to do two radio interviews on the Friday morning, with ABC 774, and Friday afternoon, with Derryn Hinch on 3AW.

The key message we wanted to get across was that the vast majority of drivers and operators do the right thing and it is only a few bad apples that spoil the bunch. This is exemplified by the fact that the VTD have only received 99 unsubstantiated complaints regarding credit card fraud this year against hundreds of thousands of taxi trips taken. In regards to the subleasing of vehicles, this practice is clearly illegal and must be stamped out. It endangers the safety of passengers and destroys the creditability of the taxi industry. If you have information or evidence of this practice occurring it should be passed onto the VTD for action. Any illegal activity by anyone in the taxi industry must be taken seriously and reported to the appropriate authorities; however, as an industry we must try and ensure it is the perpetrators that are punished and not the hard working majority.

These sentiments were echoed by numerous drivers and I on the Channel 7 News on Sunday 16 August 2009, after the Herald Sun published a number of damning articles that day. The articles were once again presented out of context and reported that there were on average 50 complaints a week registered with the VTD. What the reporter forgot to add was that there is hundreds of thousands of trips taken across the State every week. While we should always strive to reduce the number of complaints, the ratio of complaints versus trips taken should also be considered as it provides an all important context.

**David Samuel**  
VTA-Policy & Strategy

## *Drivers Beware*

Police are targeting speeding drivers in local hot spots and at major events as the state's road safety camera network expands. Works began on Monday 13 July to install digital speed and red light cameras at 53 intersections across Victoria, including six in rural areas. Roads Minister Tim Pallas said that the increased use of road safety cameras will provide continuous coverage at a large number of sites across the state. Victorians can be sure that people who put others at risk by speeding or running red lights will

be caught. The roll out also includes a 3000 hour boost to mobile speed camera hours, with Victoria Police announcing 1000 of these hours will be dedicated to specialist operations to tackle known hotspots, particularly in rural and regional Victoria, or specific high-risk periods.

For full list of fixed camera locations, log on to [www.justice.vic.gov.au/camerascut-crashes](http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/camerascut-crashes)

## Updates on Melbourne ranks

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In an effort to supplement "Safe City Taxi Ranks", Melbourne City Council aims to introduce eight "Enhanced" ranks over the next four years. The ranks will operate between the hours of 1am and 6am Saturday and Sunday and it is hoped that they will compliment the Safe City program by providing better access to transport for patrons.

After consultation with industry stakeholders which included City of Melbourne, VTD, VTA, Victorian Taxi Drivers Association (VTDA) and Cabbies Activity and Recreation Association (CARA) two sites have been chosen to implement the program.

It is envisaged that two new sites will be added every year over the next four years. Signage and lighting for these ranks is still to be decided but it is hoped that if they prove to be successful additional infrastructure and possibly furthers will be added.

The VTA in conjunction with drivers has been providing feedback to the City of Melbourne in regards to issues with existing ranks. I would like to thank Hosni Samaan from CARA for his work on this.

Most of the problems as the drivers see it are insufficient spaces and in some cases the need for new ranks to service the public. The City of Melbourne has been open to these suggestions and in several meetings options have been discussed as to possible solutions.

The VTDA have also compiled a dossier on issues with city ranks which has been submitted to industry stakeholders. The City of Stonington hopes to have a pilot taxi rank operational in the next couple of months as part of their program to increase rank size and spaces available. It is planned that the rank will be situated outside "Strike Bowling Bar" on Chapel Street. It will be operational late night through to early morning.

Enhancements will include increased lighting at operational times and additional signage to make the rank more visible to patrons and drivers. If this site is successful it is envisaged more will follow to increase the late night capacity of ranks fourfold.

**Paul Theobald**  
**VTA- Liaison and Support**

## Licence Assignments

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An issue that appears to be dominating the industry is the licence assignment process. After receiving calls from a number of extremely angry taxi operators regarding the loss of assignments the VTA agreed to host a meeting and get the issues out on the table.

The key issue related to operators losing their assignments to less scrupulous industry participants who use the existing licence assignment processes to maximize the returns to them.

A key outcome of the meeting held at the VTA on 11 June was that the VTA would facilitate a meeting with the Department of Transport (DOT), operators and drivers to articulate the industry's concerns with the existing system and suggest some of the areas and topics most in need of review. These areas included:

- Separating the sale of vehicles from the licence assignment process
- The issuing of taxi permits by the Government where a licence assignor withdraws an assignment unreasonably
- Review of licence broker arrangements

- Greater scrutiny of licence holders to ensure they conduct their business in an honest and fair manner
- Some sought of mechanism to ensure proper pricing of assignments; for example, a capping system or blind trading mechanism.

I am pleased to be able to report that a productive meeting was held on 23 July 2009 where drivers and operators were able to clearly explain the dire consequences that exorbitant licence assignment rents have on their bottom line, and importantly, on the service that is offered to the community.

Government representatives in attendance expressed genuine concern regarding the situation as it stands. They committed to continuing to try and address the issues raised through their broader review of the licence trading system. In the short term, the Government stands ready to deal firmly with any licence assignor or assignee who does not meet the requirements set out as part of taxi industry accreditation scheme.

**David Samuel**  
**VTA - Policy and Strategy**

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