



VTA TRANSMISSION

EDITION 11, DECEMBER 2010

CEO's Welcome

Welcome to the final edition of *Transmission* for 2010, unless of course something outstanding happens that you need to know about or react to.

Whilst the objective of *Transmission* is to focus on operational matters, the result of the State election cannot slip by without comment.

The election to Government of the Liberal Nationals Coalition is likely to see major changes to transport policy and administration in Victoria. What this means for the taxi industry is yet to be seen, but my feeling is that it could bring about a shift in focus, and in the ways things are done.

A good old commonsense approach would be a great starting point where sensible and fair regulation and compliance are means to an end, not an end in themselves.

Having said this, it would be silly to think that important changes will happen overnight. The momentum of government administration is massive, so to change pace, direction and structure takes time and a lot of effort.

The VTA will continue its efforts to work with the Government on regulatory reform and justice for taxi operators and drivers.

In the meantime, I wish everyone a safe and happy festive season.

Neil Sach | VTA CEO

A sign of things to come

During November VTA staff David Samuel and Marike Knight travelled to Lindenow to launch the first official contracted service in Victoria since the introduction of the packs earlier this year.

The service is an initiative of our Bairnsdale members 'Riviera Taxis' who have been great supporters of contracted services since its infancy, realising the benefits of such services for both the community as well as the drivers, operators and the NSP.

The VTA is positive that the Lindenow launch is just the beginning, with trial contracted services now being conducted on the Bellarine Peninsula and numerous discussions with councils about the viability of such services throughout Victoria (including Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong and Melbourne).

For more information on Contracted Services please contact Marike Knight.



ATTENTION ALL TAXI DRIVERS!!

The Victorian Taxi Association invites any driver who has recently had their Driver Licence reinstated by VicRoads after suspension but have not yet had their taxi driver accreditation reinstated by the VTD to contact us on 9676 2635.



WAT Expo a huge success

The Wheelchair Accessible Taxi (WAT) Expo held by the VTA on Thursday 28 October was a huge success.

The response from vehicle conversion companies was overwhelming, with several travelling from New South Wales and Queensland to participate in the event.

The Victorian Taxi Directorate (VTD) and VicRoads were on hand to assist with a multitude of inquiries regarding vehicle standards and the MPTP.

13CABS organised the barbecue and Silver Top provided refreshments on the day. The VTA provided the sausages, hamburgers and bread.

It was a great opportunity for existing and new WAT operators to be able to view firsthand what products are available to them.

Exhibitors were very pleased to meet with prospective customers and to discuss potential needs.

For the VTA, it was great to be able to provide an opportunity for suppliers and customers to meet, and we feel it is the best interests of the industry to be fully acquainted not only with the products available but also with expert advice from the VTD and VicRoads.

Overall the day was hugely successful and the VTA looks forward to hosting future events to assist the industry.

The next event will be a Taxi Safety Camera Expo to be held early next year where manufactures, distributors and installers of approved cameras will be invited to exhibit their products.

Paul Theobald | VTA Stakeholder Engagement and Projects

Christmas Advertising Keep a lid on it!

The VTA will be running an advertising campaign in The Herald Sun over the Christmas New Years period.

The campaign is focused on public education around alcohol consumption in taxis and will aim to alert the customer of the large fines involved in having an open alcohol container in a taxi.

Along with the advertisement the VTA will be distributing stickers of the campaign to all of our members in the week before Christmas.

Melbourne Airport Update

Melbourne airport continues to be problematical when it comes to driver behaviour. Airport management has instigated some improved processes to try and alleviate driver angst.

Many drivers believe that nothing is being done to combat a lot of problem areas associated with movement of vehicles in and around the airport. The VTA contacted management to discuss exactly what is being done. The following are some of the areas that have been addressed.

Process for Drivers Tailgating

Melbourne Airport takes tailgating very seriously as it is a form of stealing. Drivers can be charged with 'Theft by deception' and the penalty can be loss of drivers licence. Melbourne Airport also issue infringement notices to drivers for tailgating under the 'On Airports Act' which incurs a \$66.00 penalty. Any driver found not using their own Airport PC (Parking Card) will be asked to leave the premises and banned for a period of time. As this is private property the ban for a driver tailgating can be for life if the behaviour continues. The airport uses Closed Circuit Television Cameras (CCTV) to capture offenders and while it may seem a driver is getting away with tailgating be assured they will have action taken against them.

New Parking Area for Taxi Drivers

Pre Booked taxis are no longer permitted to park in Premium Parking. All taxis must park in the Short Term Car Park (STCP) and walk to the terminal to pick up their passengers. This will be formally addressed in the coming weeks with the relocation of Premium Parking to the Short Term car park. While this is not ideal; continued pressure for space at the airport has driven this relocation of the Premium Parking area for taxis.

General Information of Note

Melbourne Airport has a "banned driver" database which all Governing Bodies and the Airport have access to. Drivers doing the wrong thing and not following the operating Terms and Conditions are formally notified via a legal letter and can be charged with Trespassing; which is a criminal offence.

The VTA will continue to push for improvements of facilities and infrastructure at the airport and we are hopeful that upgrades to the Melrose Drive Holding Area are just around the corner.

As a driver if you have any issues regarding operations at the airport or any other concerns you can contact Tanya Cleary Ground Transport Manager on 9297 1084.



Negative media and its effect

Given that the VTA started Transmission to update the industry on operational developments, one might ask why recent media coverage is being discussed here. The answer lies in the fact that media coverage is a vital dynamic in explaining how the public perceive our industry (personal experience is also a crucial factor in this equation).

In turn, public perception has a very tangible affect on the taxi industry's financial viability. If the public, as consumers, don't feel we don't provide a safe, reliable and affordable form of transport they will look elsewhere. Sensationalist, politically opportunistic and incorrect media reporting (and comments in the media) can have a far reaching affect on our industry.

Recent stories in the Sunday papers, on A Current Affair (ACA) and on ABC are good examples of unbalanced, incorrect and unaccountable reporting.

On Friday 19 November 2010, ACA ran a story on the apparently poor state of Victoria's taxis and the apparently poor attitude of our drivers. In the introduction and conclusion to the story, host Tracy Grimshaw stated (in so many words) that while some taxi drivers did a good job most did not. The most elementary research demonstrates how absurd these comments were. The VTD only receive approximately 3500 complaints per year against a backdrop of some 30 million taxi trips.

On Monday 22 November 2010, ABC 774 afternoon show host Richard Stubbs, repeatedly asserted that the service our industry delivers is substandard. Once again, Mr Stubbs continually ignored the fact that the VTD only receive approximately 3500 complaints per year out of some 30 million taxi trips per year - this fact was pointed out to him continually during the story by VTD spokesperson Jo Baird.

The great irony is that the people who are accusing taxi drivers of not doing their job properly, are actually more unprofessional in the way they conduct themselves. Surely a fundamental aspect of being a journalist, or a reporter, is to compile and understand the facts before presenting an opinion (an opinion which is usually presented in an aggressive and one dimensional fashion).

The VTA does not discourage media comment on our industry, in fact we encourage it. However, it must be done in a way that reflects reality and focuses on the facts. Distorting information and sensationalising random events, belittles and berates an industry that provides a vital service to the community. This has very real and tangible affect on our industry's financial viability, and more importantly, those who constitute it.

Country Meters

This article is being prepared on 6 December 2010. Around about a year ago the VTD and the VTA discussed the issue of country meters not being able to process the late night and public holiday surcharges.

At that time nothing could be done, and country drivers were left to decide whether or not to risk their own safety late at night by asking the passenger(s) for a payment additional to the metered fare. It appears most chose not to, and as a result did not receive the income they were entitled to for working those shifts.

12 months on and nothing appears to have changed, drivers will once again be put in this unreasonable position. The VTD have apparently conducted a review of all meters to determine which can process the late night and public holiday surcharges. From what the VTA understand, one meter that is currently in use does not meet the requirements.

The VTA have made our views on the matter clear. In absence of a fare increase (another matter altogether), the Government should subsidise country operators to have their meters updated so all the applicable surcharges go on the meter.

To date nothing official has been released by the VTD on the matter. From what the VTA can ascertain, less than 20 days from Christmas, and the country taxi industry is none the wiser as to how they are to deal with the issue of charging the late night and public holiday surcharge!

Peak Service Taxis and 2010/11 Cruise Ship Season

Metropolitan peak service taxis are authorised to operate between 7 am and 12 noon from the Station Pier precinct*, Port Melbourne, during the 2010/11 Cruise Ship season on the following dates:

- Tuesday, 21 December 2010
- Monday, 3 January 2011
- Sunday, 16 January 2011
- Saturday, 29 January 2011
- Thursday, 24 February 2011
- Wednesday, 9 March 2011.

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.

* Station Pier precinct covers the Station Pier; Waterfront Place; and Beach Street, Port Melbourne between Bay Street and Swallow Street, Port Melbourne.

How dark are your windows?

It is important to ensure that your vehicle is operating in line with all regulations and specifications. This includes checking that the tinting on your windows is an approved shade. Dark window tinting can make driving under certain conditions dangerous for you and your passengers. Want to know more about window tinting specifications? You'll find all you need to know by visiting the VicRoads website: www.vicroads.vic.gov.au. Refer to Vehicle Standards Information sheets #2 and #31. Failure to comply with window tinting specifications may render your vehicle unroadworthy.

Working during the 2011 Australian Open

It is nearly time again for Melbourne's major activity in January.

From 17 January to 30 January the 2011 Australian Tennis Open at Melbourne Park will provide excellent work for those drivers prepared to service the event. Check daily papers for session commencement and conclusion times.

Also look out for information on the operation of the taxi ranks.

This event is yet another opportunity for Melbourne's taxi drivers to develop, exercise and fine tune their skills in customer service and tourism.

Road closures for New Years Eve

The festive season is just around the corner and with it comes the need for drivers to plan in advance so they can maximise takings and be confident of navigating their way around road closures on NYE.

This year again sees many road closures throughout the city and with this there are potential hassles for drivers trying to navigate into and away from the city.

The VTA understands that the closures will be similar to last year, with the addition of Batman Ave being close from 8:30pm to 1:00am.

It is suggested that drivers look for the full list of road closure information in the newspaper. If more detailed information comes to hand in time the VTA will make it known as best it can.

City of Melbourne introduce three new night time taxi ranks

As part of the City of Melbourne and State Government's commitment to improving late night transport in the Central City, three new night time Taxi Zones have been launched in the CBD.

These new night time ranks will service some of the busier entertainment precinct within the CBD.

Drivers should only park in the bays designated and note that the times of operation for all ranks although very similar do vary slightly.

The locations are:

1. King St, east side, Flinders Lane to Flinders St.
2. Collins St, north side, just west of Russell St.
3. Queen St, east side, just south of Lonsdale St.

Driver Shortage

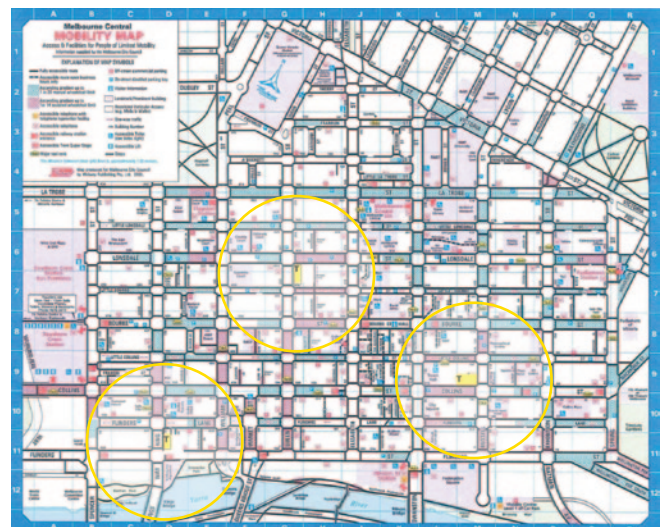
The Victorian taxi industry is facing a significant and potentially financially devastating issue – a dramatic drop off in the number of available taxi drivers. Within the normal operating context this is a significant issue, but it has obviously been amplified by the release of an additional 530 new taxi licences in metropolitan and outer suburban Melbourne.

Assuming that the 530 new taxis attached the new licences are double shifted, 1600 additional drivers are required at a time when the recent demographic of new drivers (students from the Sub-Continent) has almost completely dried up. On top of this, Victoria's taxi drivers are earning under \$10 an hour.

The VTA is trying to ease some of the short term pressure on operators by working on ways to find new drivers quickly. Identifying new driver markets and trying to get in touch with people who hold a Driver Accreditation but are not currently active drivers are just a couple of the things the VTA are trying to do.

There is no easy fix to this problem, but the VTA hope to be able to work with the industry and Government (not just the VTD) to identify new drivers, and ensure people wishing to become taxi drivers are provided with encouragement and assistance. It goes without saying that a united approach by the industry in this area is vital.

Finally, while the VTA recognise that a large oversupply of drivers may not be ideal, neither is a dramatic shortage. Operators make a significant investment when they purchase a licence or have one assigned to them. Given many of the costs they face are distorted and grow exponentially, getting the cars and vans in the road is vital to their financial viability.



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

