



Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

THE NEED TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF RESTRICTED TAXI (MULTICAB) PLATES

Report No.28 of the Standing Committee on Urban Services

AUGUST 1999

Resolution of appointment of the Standing Committee on Urban Services

On 28 April 1998 the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory resolved to establish a general purpose standing committee, called the Standing Committee on Urban Services, to inquire into and report on:

planning and lease management, road and transport services, housing and housing assistance, government purchasing and public utilities purchasing, electricity industry and regulation, construction industry policy, parks and forests, private sector employment inspectorate, building services, environment, heritage and municipal services and any other matter under the responsibility of the portfolio minister.

Committee Membership

Mr Harold Hird MLA (Chair)

Mr Dave Rugendyke MLA (Deputy)

Mr Simon Corbell MLA (appointed on 25 June 1998, replacing Mr Wayne Berry MLA who was discharged on the same day)

Secretary: Mr Rod Power

Terms of reference for this inquiry

That the Standing Committee on Urban Services inquire into and report by the last sitting day in 1998 on the need to increase the number of restricted taxi (multicab) plates.*

And the committee, during its inquiry:

(a) give specific consideration to and report on:

(i) the provisions of transport services for students attending special schools, patients attending rehabilitation programs at the Canberra Hospital and older citizens attending day care programs at the Belconnen and Tuggeranong Health Centres;

(ii) the general operation of transport services for residents with disabilities; and

(iii) the government's community service obligation in this area; and

(b) review any cost comparison of the current provision of bus and taxi services in this area with that of the proposed changed service for rehabilitation patient transport.

Resolution of the Legislative Assembly, 24 September 1998

* This reporting deadline was deleted by the Assembly on 8 December 1998

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (INCLUDING RECOMMENDATIONS)

The existing situation in relation to taxi services for the disabled is described in the second chapter of this report. It is followed by a chapter outlining changes suggested by Aerial Taxi Cabs Co-Operative Society Limited and Mr Wassell (the operator of the current multicabs). The balance of the report addresses 12 key questions arising out of the inquiry. These questions, and the committee's answers, are as follows:

What is the appropriate standard to aim for?—the committee concludes that the appropriate standard is to remove discrimination in transport services and, in particular, to ensure that the waiting time for people with disabilities is the same as for people with no disabilities (chapter 4);

How many people in Canberra require wheelchair-accessible transport?—the committee concludes that the answer to this question is not known (chapter 5);

How long do those requesting a wheelchair-accessible cab wait?—the committee concludes that they wait longer than other people for a taxi (chapter 6);

Does the ACT have the right sort of drivers?—the committee concludes that, in the case of multicab drivers, the answer is yes (chapter 7);

Does the ACT have the right sort of taxis for the disabled?—the committee concludes that it does not (chapter 8);

What is the right sort of vehicle?—the committee concludes that the right sort of vehicle incorporates a hoist, preferably internally mounted, and is one capable of carrying two wheelchairs at a time; further, that it should be painted in the same colours as any other taxi and be called a 'maxi-taxi'; and that it should meet minimum standards such as those of the Toyota Commuter (chapter 9);

Who should choose the vehicle?—the committee concludes that the government should not prescribe a particular vehicle (chapter 10);

Does the ACT have the right system for dispatching wheelchair-accessible taxis?—the committee concludes that the present micro-managed dispatch system for the multicabs is not optimal and that wheelchair-accessible cabs should utilise the same dispatch system as that used for other cabs [chapter 11];

Does the ACT have the right system for issuing taxi plates for wheelchair-accessible cabs?—the committee concludes that, in order to quickly provide an equivalent standard of service to the disabled as that currently given to ordinary passengers, the government – for the foreseeable future – release taxi plates only by way of non-transferable short-term licences to apply for six years; and that these licences be issued, by ballot, to individuals who satisfy certain criteria (chapter 12);

Are disabled people taking part in key decisions about transport for the disabled?—the committee concludes that they are, though there is room for improvement (chapter 13);

What is the extent of the community service obligation, and how adequate are the government's existing schemes to assist transport by the disabled?—the committee concludes that the government certainly has a community service obligation; that - in relation to the taxi subsidy scheme – the value of vouchers should be raised to a more appropriate level and that the government should encourage reciprocity between states and territories; and further that – in relation to transport services for students – the government ensure that an attendant is retained on all ACTION Special Needs services for the disabled (chapter 14);

In light of the foregoing, how many wheelchair-accessible taxis are needed?—the committee concludes that ten wheelchair-accessible plates are needed immediately, with the objective of moving over a defined period to having 10% of the taxi fleet wheelchair-accessible (chapter 15).

In the process of reaching these conclusions, the committee makes 26 recommendations, which are (with page numbers shown):

1. ♦ that an independent needs analysis be done as soon as possible to identify the number of wheelchair-bound people living in (and visiting) the ACT, and their likely use of wheelchair-accessible transport (both now and into the foreseeable future)..... 18
2. ♦ that the record of requested booking time, agreed booking time and actual arrival time be added to the set of 'benchmark standards' used by the taxi industry and the government regulator (DUS) in relation to wheelchair-accessible taxis.

	This will provide an accurate record of the length of time between a request for a wheelchair-accessible taxi and its arrival.	20
3. ♦	that the needs analysis of the number of wheelchair-bound people in the ACT and the performance benchmarks of the wheelchair-accessible taxi service incorporate measures of a <u>qualitative</u> kind, especially incorporating personal comment by wheelchair-bound passengers and their carers.....	25
4. ♦	that the ACT government require the drivers of wheelchair-accessible taxis to be trained for one or two days in the specific skills associated with handling wheelchair-bound passengers; and that, for a limited period of time, the government facilitate this training by subsidising its cost.....	26
5. ♦	that the ACT government promote and encourage efforts to design and develop a generic wheelchair-capable taxi for use throughout Australia.....	30
6. ♦	that wheelchair-accessible taxis incorporate a hoist, preferably internally mounted, to facilitate access by the disabled and to reduce the physical demands on drivers who otherwise have to man-handle wheelchairs into and out of vehicles.....	36
7. ♦	that new wheelchair-accessible taxis have the capacity to carry two wheelchairs at the one time.....	37
8. ♦	that the new wheelchair-accessible taxis have sufficient headroom and visibility to ensure wheelchair-bound passengers can travel comfortably—this means that the specifications of a vehicle such as the Toyota Commuter should be the minimum acceptable standard.....	38
9. ♦	that taxis able to carry five or more passengers be permitted to multi-hire. .	38
10. ♦	that the wheelchair-accessible taxis be required to give first priority to transport by the disabled—but when not required for this purpose, they be available for group bookings and for multi-hiring.....	38
11. ♦	that wheelchair-accessible taxis utilise the same external colour scheme as used on all other taxis.	39
12. ♦	that wheelchair-accessible taxis be known as maxi taxis.	39

13. ♦	that the dispatch system used to control wheelchair-accessible taxis be the same as that used to dispatch all other taxis.	42
14. ♦	that, in order to quickly provide an equivalent standard of service to the disabled as that currently provided to able-bodied passengers, the government issue non-transferable short-term licences to apply for six years.....	46
15. ♦	that the licence fee be initially determined by the government, taking account of the expected operational life of the vehicle and the cost of finance over that period; that it be payable in equal amounts each year; and that, in the longer term, the fee be determined by an independent body such as the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Commission.....	46
16. ♦	that the new taxi licences be made available to individuals able to satisfy certain criteria, and by way of a ballot conducted by the Registrar of Motor Vehicles.....	47
17. ♦	that the taxi cooperative levy membership charges on the new operators that are no higher than those currently levied on existing members.	47
18. ♦	that the government carefully consider whether the holders of short-term licences can be given any assurance about renewal of their licences, subject to satisfactory performance.....	48
19. ♦	that, for the foreseeable future, taxi plates in the ACT be issued only by way of short-term, non-transferable licences for wheelchair-accessible taxis.....	48
20. ♦	that the forum facilitating discussion amongst the taxi industry, the disabled community and the government regulator (DUS) be serviced by DUS staff and meet regularly to monitor developments affecting transport by the disabled. At an early stage, it should consider and prepare suitable material to be placed in cabs about the requirements—and expectations—of both passengers and drivers in relation to matters such as the charging policy (when should the meter be turned on and off), the telephone policy (including when should disabled people be advised of the imminent arrival of a taxi), the policy on what to do if the taxi arrives at its destination but the disabled customer is not waiting on the footpath (such as phoning back to base to see if a further message has been left, and to knock on the door to check if the customer is inside) and the policy on handling	

	complaints (by either driver or passenger). Of course, information about the forum and how to contact it should be prominently displayed in taxis carrying disabled passengers. Further, the forum should consider how best to improve the current reporting regime whereby the industry regulator [DUS] monitors the standard of taxi service to the disabled.....	51
21. ♦	that the ACT Treasurer pressure the Commonwealth Treasurer to take action to remove Commonwealth sales tax on the purchase of vehicles intended, and used, for transporting wheelchair-bound taxi passengers.....	55
22. ♦	that the value of taxi subsidy scheme vouchers be raised to a more appropriate level.....	56
23. ♦	that the Minister for Urban Services encourage his colleagues on the Australian Transport Council (comprising all transport ministers) to speedily implement measures that recognise each other's taxi vouchers, so that disabled persons are able to use their particular state's vouchers anywhere in Australia—and particularly so that visitors to Canberra can utilise their taxi vouchers in the nation's capital.	57
24. ♦	that the ACT government investigate the introduction of smart card technology to replace the existing taxi vouchers.	57
25. ♦	that the government ensure that an attendant is available on all ACTION Special Needs services for the disabled.	59
26. ♦	that the government immediately release ten wheelchair-accessible taxi plates, with the objective of moving over a defined period to having 10% of the taxi fleet wheelchair-accessible—these further plates to be released following assessment of the level of service, in particular, assessment of whether the disabled have equivalent access to taxi services in terms of waiting time (as agreed by Australian Transport Ministers).	62

1. INTRODUCTION

Conduct of the inquiry

1.1. On 24 September 1998 the Legislative Assembly directed the Standing Committee on Urban Services to inquire into and report on the need to increase the number of restricted taxi plates (*see full copy of the Assembly's resolution at the front of this report*). The committee placed advertisements—inviting public comment on the terms of reference—in the local media in October 1998. Submissions were subsequently received from the following persons and organisations (arranged in alphabetical order):

- ACROD, ACT Division
- ACT Disability, Aged & Carer Advocacy Service [ADACAS]
- ACT Government
- Aerial Taxi Cabs Co-Operative Society Limited
- Ms Barrbour
- Mr Bradley AM
- Council on the Ageing
- Disabled People's Initiative ACT Inc.
- Koomarri School Board
- Multiple Sclerosis Society of the ACT Inc. [MS Society]
- Physical Disability Council of Australia Ltd
- Ms Richards
- Ms Theden
- Mr Wassell.

1.2. All submissions were authorised for publication and are available on request from the Committee Office of the Legislative Assembly. An additional submission was treated confidentially at the request of its author.

1.3. On 12 and 19 February 1999, and on 26 March 1999, the committee held public hearings at which the following persons and organisations appeared:

12 February 1999

- ❖ *Aerial Taxi Cabs Co-Operative Society Ltd*—Mr Muir (chief executive) and Mr O'Brien (vice chairman)
- ❖ *ACROD ACT Division*— Mr Bray AM (chair), Mr Trewhella (vice-chair of the Access & Mobility committee, and past chair of the ACT Disability Services Advisory committee), Mrs Whitehead (chair, Access & Mobility committee) and Ms Marcar (past chair of the Access & Mobility committee)
- ❖ Ms Gordon, Mrs Wright and Mrs Moreno
- ❖ *Multiple Sclerosis Society of the ACT Inc*—Ms Watson (chief executive officer)
- ❖ Ms Theden

19 February 1999

- ❖ *ACT Disability, Aged & Carer Advocacy Service (ADACAS)*—Ms Phillips, Ms Russet-Silk and Mrs Klason
- ❖ *Aerial Taxi Cabs Co-Operative Society Ltd*—Mr Muir (chief executive)
- ❖ Ms Barrbour
- ❖ *ACT government officials*: Mr MacDonald and Mr Handley (Transport&Housing Policy Branch of *DUS*), Ms Blue (Student Participation area of the *Department of Education and Community Care*) and Mr Tench (*Department of Health and Community Services*)
- ❖ *Disabled Peoples' Initiative (DPI) ACT Inc*—Mr Stubbs
- ❖ Koomarri School Board— Mr Kirk (chair)

26 March 1999

- ❖ *Aerial Taxi Cabs Co-Operative Society Ltd*—Mr Muir (chief executive) and Mr O'Brien (vice chairman)

4. The public hearings were recorded by Hansard and quotations from Hansard's *transcript of proceedings* are used throughout this report. Each quotation is identified

by way of a footnote listing the person who made the statement and the date of the public hearing.

1.5. On 19-20 May 1999 the committee visited Sydney to obtain further information from the following people and organisations:

- ◆ *Workman Industries Pty Ltd* (at Taren Point) – Mr Page (managing director), Mr Stapleton (sales manager) and Mr Laughton (operations manager)
- ◆ *Taxis Combined Services Pty.Limited* – Mr Kermode (chief executive), Mr Bugani (fleet manager), Mr Ullman (operations supervisor zero 200), Mr Bolt and Mr Barukh (director, corporate finance, Cabcharge Australia Pty.Ltd)
- ◆ *NSW Department of Transport: Transport Services Division* – Ms Sayers (executive director), Mr Noakes and Mr Langereis (senior operational policy officers) and Ms Aldred (regional manager, Central Sydney)
- ◆ *NSW Disability Council* – Mr Moxon (president), Mr Bryne and others
- ◆ *Cumberland Cabs* – Ms Chesteron (general manager) and Mr Pollett.

Layout of the report

1.6. This report has 15 chapters. The following chapter (chapter 2) describes the existing situation in relation to providing transport services to people with disabilities in the ACT. Chapter 3 summarises the changes suggested by existing taxi operators: Aerial Taxi Cabs Co-Operative Society Limited, and Mr Wassell (the operator of the existing multicab fleet of six taxis, and also the operator of ten standard taxis). Chapters 4-15 pose a number of questions that, in the committee's view, are fundamental in addressing the inquiry's terms of reference. These questions, in order, are:

- what is the appropriate standard to aim for?
- how many Canberra people require wheelchair-accessible transport?
- how long do those requesting a wheelchair-accessible taxi wait?
- does the ACT have the right sort of drivers?
- does the ACT have the right sort of taxis?
- what is the right sort of vehicle?

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- who should choose the vehicle?
- does the ACT have the right system for issuing taxi plates for wheelchair-accessible cabs?
- are disabled people (or their representatives) taking part in key decisions about transport for the disabled?
- what is the extent of the community service obligation and how adequate are the government's existing schemes to assist transport by the disabled? and
- in light of the foregoing, how many wheelchair-accessible taxis are needed?

1.7. In the process of answering each of these questions the committee came to a number of specific recommendations, which are italicised in bold print within each chapter.

Appreciation

1.8. The committee is deeply grateful for the contribution and assistance of all the individuals and organisations listed above, many of whom went out of their way to facilitate the inquiry. It is a measure of the importance of the issue that so many people willingly participated in the committee's activity.

2. THE EXISTING SITUATION

Provision of transport services for students attending special schools

2.1. Transport services for students attending special schools are provided by three organisations. The first is the Special Needs Transport Division of ACTION, which 'provides transport for approximately 275 students attending special schools under a Memorandum of Understanding... due for renewal on 1 January 1999 and costing \$1.125m in 1997/98'.¹

2.2. The second provider is Keir's (Canberra Charter Coaches), which is contracted to provide school transport, 'other than wheelchair accessible vehicles, primarily from Canberra suburbs to the Woden Special School for approximately 110 school students'. This service cost \$0.343m in 1997-98.²

2.3. The third provider is *Canberra Cabs*, which 'provides taxis for up to 80 students on a pre-booked basis'. Less than one third of these bookings 'are for students confined to wheelchairs who require multicabs'. To 'be eligible for a multicab a student must have a permanent or temporary mobility disability'. The multicabs 'are shared wherever possible'. The cost of this service was \$0.363m in 1997-98.³

2.4. The total number of students involved in these arrangements is 465; and the total cost is \$1.831m.

Provision of transport services for people attending rehabilitation programs at the Canberra Hospital

2.5. The transport arrangements for patients attending rehabilitation programs at Canberra Hospital were individually revised in 1998 and now comprise the following. 'Ten patients use scheduled ACTION bus services; 24 patients are provided with a standard taxi service; and two patients are provided with a multicab service'. Under the new bus network that commenced on 18 January 1999, ACTION also operates 'a half hourly wheelchair accessible (midi bus) service... between the Belconnen, City

¹ Government submission dated 7/12/98 p4

² *ibid*

³ *ibid*

and Woden interchanges and stopping at Calvary, John James and the Canberra Hospitals. This service... [assists] wheelchair patients who can access bus interchanges'.⁴

Provision of transport services for older citizens attending day care at the Belconnen and Tuggeranong Health Centres

2.6. The Department of Health & Community Care operates the Community Care program for older people at four day-care centres (Belconnen, Tuggeranong, Dickson and Narrabundah). The department 'is responsible for providing transport services to this client group'. Transport to Belconnen, Tuggeranong and Dickson is purchased by the Health Department 'from the ACTION Special Needs Transport Division at a total contracted annual cost of \$0.493m for 1998/99'. Transport to Narrabundah 'is purchased under the Home and Community Care program [HACC] at a contracted annual cost of \$36,000 for 1998/99'.⁵

2.7. The HACC program is jointly funded by the ACT and the Commonwealth, and encourages people to 'continue living in the community,' thus preventing 'premature or inappropriate entry to residential care'. In 1998/99 HACC purchased 'transport services at a total cost of \$0.693m... from ACT Community Care and from the Belconnen, Gungahlin, Northside, Southside, Tuggeranong, Weston Creek and Woden Community Services... [including] special transport (where the community service provides a car and driver) and volunteer transport (where it coordinates the provision of transport by volunteer drivers and reimburses mileage costs)'.⁶

2.8. The HACC program provides transport services for approximately 1,060 people at a cost to the government of about \$0.889m in 1998-99.⁷

Recent measures by ACTION to improve the general operation of transport services for residents with disabilities

2.9. The government submitted that 'ACTION has improved services to people with disabilities through the introduction of accessible buses to the fleet and the development of accessible routes, incorporating fully accessible bus stops and

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ *ibid* p5

⁶ *ibid*

pathways'. Nearly 10% (32 buses) of ACTION's bus fleet 'are fully accessible with low floors and automatic ramps'. Further, tactile tiles are being laid at the Woden interchange 'to assist people who are vision impaired'.⁸

Taxis and the provision of transport services for residents with disabilities

2.10. The ACT has 223 taxis of which six are wheelchair accessible multicabs. The number of multicabs went from three to six in 1994.⁹

2.11. Multicab licences are non-transferable and are issued to Canberra Cabs at no cost. [Under the *Motor Traffic Act 1936*, the Registrar of Motor Vehicles may grant a licence 'to operate a specified vehicle as a restricted taxi if satisfied that the use of the vehicle will meet a community need and on payment of the determined fee (presently set at zero)'.] 'The government requires multicabs to give priority to disabled persons above all other passengers'.¹⁰

2.12. The government submits that 'Canberra Cabs provide special needs transport services through the use of both multicabs (for wheelchair customers) and the standard taxi fleet, for the frail aged, rehabilitation patients, students attending special and other schools, and people with disabilities who cannot generally use other forms of public transport. All of these groups are provided with subsidised travel through Taxi Subsidy Scheme [TSS] vouchers'.¹¹

2.13. The TSS is administered by the Department of Health & Community Care. It 'has approximately 2,600 members... [and a] budget of \$0.369m [in] 1998/99'. It gives eligible people 'a basic entitlement of 116 vouchers per year (approximately 9-10 vouchers per month). Each voucher has a value of \$2 and up to six vouchers can be used to subsidise any one trip'. Members 'who can demonstrate a need can obtain as many additional vouchers as they require'.¹²

2.14. The Department of Urban Services and Canberra Cabs 'entered into a Service Level Agreement for the provision of taxi services in the ACT' on 1 July 1997. This Agreement 'sets out maximum waiting times applicable to all taxis': for Monday-

⁷ ibid p3

⁸ ibid p6

⁹ ibid p7

¹⁰ ibid pp6-7

¹¹ ibid p6

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Friday between 1500 and 1800 hours, 85% of waiting times to be less than 18 minutes, and 90% of waiting times to be less than 30 minutes; and at all other times, 85% of waiting times to be less than 10 minutes with 95% to be less than 20 minutes.¹³

2.15. The Agreement is independently audited (based on telephone booking statistics). These audits show that the Service Level Agreement is being met—‘for example, the most recent report indicates that 94% of hirers requesting wheelchair accessible taxis in peak period wait 18 minutes or less (required standard is 85%) and, at all other times, 98% of such hirers wait 20 minutes or less (standard is 95%)’. However, it also appears ‘that a higher percentage of multicab hirers than persons requesting standard taxis have to wait more than 15 minutes for a taxi’.¹⁴

The Government’s community service obligations for special needs transport

2.16. The government submitted that its community service obligations for special needs transport in 1998/99 totalled \$5.077m, made up of the following¹⁵:

Health & Community Care

- rehabilitation clients	\$0.050m
- day care programs	\$0.493m
- Home & Community Care programs	\$0.346 (estimate)
- Taxi Subsidy Scheme	\$0.369m

Education & Community Services

- students attending special schools programs	\$1.9m
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ACTION

- special needs transport	\$1.919m
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Comparison of current provision of bus and taxi services with former arrangements

2.17. The government’s submission stated that, until October 1998, ‘transport services for patients attending remedial gymnasium and hydrotherapy at the Canberra Hospital were provided by ACTION Special Needs Transport Division... at a cost of \$0.300m per annum. Five buses travelled to the hospital each day, and seven buses

¹² ibid pp-6

¹³ ibid p7

¹⁴ ibid

¹⁵ ibid p9

made return trips at the end of the day. These services were provided free of charge for about 30 patients'. Now, 'patients either use taxis (standard and multicab services) or scheduled bus services' with the cost being met by the Canberra Hospital - estimated to be \$20,000 to \$50,000 per annum.¹⁶

2.18. The justification for this change was as follows: 'The services that were previously provided were not specifically tailored to meet the needs of individuals. Following the review..., the government has significantly reduced costs and improved efficiency, while providing greatly improved services that more closely meet the needs of individual patients'.¹⁷

Involvement of disabled people in transport planning

2.19. The government submitted that a sub-group of a body advising the Minister for Urban Services on public transport 'is identifying major barriers to disabled users' access to public transport and is formulating a plan defining goals, targets and solutions'.¹⁸ This includes examining 'the number of accessible taxis needed to provide an appropriate level of service for people with disabilities'. Its report should be completed in mid-1999 and will be considered in 'the development of an accessible public transport strategy, which forms part of the Department of Urban Services budget outputs for 1998-99'.¹⁹

2.20. This strategy 'will address the requirements of the Commonwealth *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* Draft Standards', implementation of which may cause 'public transport operators, including ACTION,... significant capital and operating costs in meeting the [Act's] access requirements'.²⁰

¹⁶ *ibid* p9

¹⁷ *ibid* p10

¹⁸ The sub-group is the Accessible Public Transport Sub-group of the Transport Reform Advisory Group.

¹⁹ *ibid* p8

²⁰ *ibid*

3. CHANGES SUGGESTED BY CURRENT TAXI OPERATORS

Aerial Taxi Cabs Co-Operative Society Limited

3.1. Aerial Taxis (also known as Canberra Cabs) submitted that all benchmark standards are 'met comfortably' by the network, for both wheelchair accessible taxis and standard taxis. 'This is a reflection of the down-turn in taxi hirings over a two year period in the order of 12%'. It indicates 'that additional taxi plates are not required'.²¹

3.2. Aerial stated that 'the government originally issued wheelchair accessible taxi plates as MO plates' to Aerial, which was responsible for arranging the service to wheelchair clients. 'In its infancy, the service was provided by an operator who was contracted by Aerial to provide a priority service to the disabled community'. Clients phoned the operator direct. This arrangement 'saw a number of contractors fail to make a return on investment [leading to] their subsequent demise'.

3.3. From 1995, a new contractor was engaged and the six wheelchair accessible taxis were plated as Restricted Taxis (RTX): 'the restriction associated with these plates was to ensure that wheelchair accessible hirings had priority over standard hirings. At the same time, Aerial became more involved with the distribution of hirings to these six vehicles by having all hiring directed to Aerial's base network. Each day the network shift supervisor provides the wheelchair accessible fleet contractor with the day's pre-booked hirings. The contractor then allocates these hirings in a way that most efficiently uses each taxi... It is through the micro-management of the RTX fleet that Aerial is able to cover the geographical area and demand as required. When immediate hirings are received throughout the day, contact is made by Aerial's shift supervisor directly with the nominated controlling RTX plate and the hiring assigned to the geographically efficiently placed RTX or free RTX whichever is able to respond. At times, especially during peak periods (normally 1500 to 1700 hours) this may necessitate the passenger accepting an alteration to the

²¹ Submission dated 23/10/98 p1

required pick-up time. This is normally no more than a 20-30 minute alteration and during peak is within benchmark standards'.²²

3.4. Aerial identifies three key parameters in providing a wheelchair-accessible service. These are:

- 'the need for a response time... equivalent to that of standard taxis and compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act';
- the need for the service 'to be commercially viable'; and
- the need 'for the cost of the service to be equitably distributed'.²³

3.5. In relation to the first, Aerial noted that, if every taxi was wheelchair-accessible, there would be no need to distinguish between fleet type and response times. However, 'the financial burden on taxi operators of such a concept would be counter productive'. Aerial does not favour a percentage figure (of wheelchair-accessible taxis to total taxi fleet), pointing out that 'the release of taxi plates based on a ratio of vehicle to population was discarded by government in relation to standard plates, in July 1997. Government considered that response times were a better indicator of whether public demand was being met'.²⁴

3.6. Aerial has opted for 'the concept of a surplus of wheelchair-accessible taxis as being the requirement' (the surplus being 'any number of taxis above which benchmark standards are being met').²⁵

3.7. In relation to the second need (above), Aerial submitted that the 'commercial viability of RTX plates is totally reliant on the amount of standard taxi work undertaken by the RTX. Presently the six RTX plates conduct 75% of their total work as standard taxis and without this income the RTX would not be viable'.²⁶

3.8. In relation to the third need, Aerial stated: 'It is the taxi industry's belief that the provision of a wheelchair accessible transport service is a community service obligation', because it costs considerably more to operate a wheelchair-accessible taxi. This reflects the 'additional capital cost of vehicle and lifting equipment,

²² *ibid*

²³ *ibid* p2

²⁴ Supplementary submission dated 8/3/99 p7

²⁵ Submission dated 23/10/98 p2

additional time per hiring loading and unloading, [and the] additional vehicle maintenance due to vehicle type and abnormal wear and tear'. Though the RTX plate is supplied 'at no cost to the operator', the standard taxi industry loses out on the standard work that the RTX cab does—meaning that the provision of taxi services for the disabled 'is a direct cost to standard taxi operators who are otherwise deprived of that work'.²⁷

3.9. Aerial notes that one option is to make all taxis wheelchair-accessible and increase fares to cover the additional cost of providing a taxi service; but this means that taxi users, as distinct to the entire community, bear the cost. On this basis, Aerial opposes an increase in fares to cover the cost of providing wheelchair-accessible taxis.²⁸

3.10. The solution, in Aerial's view, is as follows: that 'all future taxi plate issue [should] be conducted by public auction in a manner similar to that presently used. [The] government [should] place a caveat on all future release of plates requiring that each new plate auctioned provide a wheelchair-accessible taxi for the first four years of that plate's operation. After four years the operator would be free to continue to provide a wheelchair accessible vehicle or a standard vehicle as the operator saw fit'. Such a policy could see 'a fleet of up to 20-plus wheelchair accessible vehicles within a five year period to service the wheelchair accessible market'. It would improve response times, be commercially viable, and provide for the government to bear the community service obligation—along with 'the community at large through a reduced income from auctioned taxi plates'.²⁹

3.11. In relation to concern about whether the new operators would cease to provide a wheelchair-accessible service after four years, Aerial points out that 'historically, taxi plates have been released annually at the rate of four to five [so that] in four years' time this could represent an additional 16 plates. If four were to convert to standard plates at the end of their caveat and in the fifth year no additional plates were released, then we would be talking about a decrease in the surplus of plates and not in the marginal number of demand-related plates.... Should the system need, at any

²⁶ *ibid* p2

²⁷ *ibid* p3

²⁸ *ibid*

time, to be adjusted, then government could make a special release to cater for such demand'.³⁰

3.12. Aerial envisages that, for the first five years of operation of its proposal, the present fleet of RTX plated vehicles would remain. An assessment of the need for a micro-managed fleet beyond the first five years would be made annually as the effect of the additional auctioned plates was assessed'.³¹

Mr Wassell

3.13. Mr Wassell considers that 'there is no argument about the fact we need more wheelchair-accessible taxis', based on 'evidence available from other taxi drivers, taxi owners, community groups, disability organisations, population comparisons, previous hire statistics and future projections'.³²

3.14. He states that 'the solution is not to saturate the market with wheelchair accessible vehicles [for] this would result in a greater number of uncoordinated, untrained and probably uncaring taxi drivers... To incorporate the operation of wheelchair-accessible taxis as part of Aerial's standard taxi fleet and procedures would require approximately 25% (50 to 60 vehicles) of Aerial's existing taxis to become wheelchair-accessible. Any less than this number of unmanaged accessible vehicles would simply not be able to cover the ACT area on general call.'³³

3.15. The problem that Mr Wassell sees with this course of action is that it would 'increase the overall operating costs of accessible services, ultimately leading to a reduction in the quality provided. Because of the increased costs, ownership of plates would become prohibitive, a greater number of taxi plates would fall into the ownership of investors who are usually not interested in the industry, only their financial returns. Further, it would adversely affect the viability and ultimate service levels of the entire standard taxi industry and would greatly contribute to the justification of increased taxi fares in general.'³⁴

²⁹ ibid p4

³⁰ Supplementary submission dated 8/3/99 pp5-6

³¹ Submission dated 23/10/98 p5

³² Submission dated 8/11/98 p2

³³ ibid

³⁴ ibid

3.16. Mr Wassell considers that ‘the solution is to (a) economically achieve effective management over an adequate number of vehicles, (b) have sufficient reserves to accommodate general needs and the reasonably unexpected, and (c) have a predetermined strategy in place to cater for future requirements.’ He notes that ‘the cost responsibilities for providing the current multicab service lies with the government and the service provider, [and] for a number of reasons it is not reasonable to expect one or the other to carry the entire load, the current cost arrangement is fair and reasonable’.³⁵

3.17. Mr Wassell considers that ‘Canberra requires ten efficiently managed wheelchair-accessible vehicles to provide an adequate base for the multicab service. This number takes into account the current demand and allows for an expected increase by those people who are not using the existing service due to the current lack of vehicles. This number also provides flexibility to cater for the occasional community group meeting or conference experienced over previous years. This would provide one service vehicle for approximately each 30,000 of population in the ACT.’ He suggests that is the appropriate formula to apply as Canberra’s population increases.³⁶

³⁵ *ibid*

³⁶ *ibid* p3

4. WHAT IS THE APPROPRIATE STANDARD TO AIM FOR?

4.1. Government officials told the committee that the Commonwealth's *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* 'makes it unlawful for discrimination to occur in a range of services including transport'.³⁷ The Department of Urban Services [DUS] stated that 'the industry did not quite know how to respond to the legislation' – but a Commonwealth-state working group (reporting to the Australian Transport Council, comprising all Transport Ministers) is examining the issue. The Transport Council has developed draft standards, which are now being examined by the Commonwealth Attorney-General by way of 'a regulation impact statement' that considers their practicality, cost and fairness.³⁸ A recent meeting of Australian Transport Ministers has further considered the draft standards.

4.2. The draft Standards require that within five years 'the waiting time for people with disabilities [should be] the same as [for] people with no disabilities'. In relation to buses, they require 'that over 20 years the full fleet will be accessible' (moving by stages, for example, within five years 25% of the fleet to be fully accessible; within 10 years, 60%). At present, the ACT has 25 mid-buses and about five other buses which are accessible which is around 10% of the fleet. In relation to physical infrastructure, the standards require that bus interchanges, bus stops and footpaths also be made accessible.³⁹

4.3. DUS is consulting consumers and the industry 'to develop an action plan for accessible transport in the ACT'. It then will be considered by the government and put out for community input.⁴⁰ DUS considers that the objective 'should be to ensure that the whole fleet is accessible at the end of the day'.⁴¹

4.4. *The committee considers that it is wholly appropriate to aim to eliminate discrimination in transport services. In the case of the disabled, this should mean that the same standard of service delivery is realised for disabled persons as for any one*

³⁷ Mr MacDonald DUS 19/2/99

³⁸ *ibid*

³⁹ *ibid*

⁴⁰ *ibid*

⁴¹ Mr Handley 19/2/99

The need to increase the number of restricted taxi (multicab) plates

else in the community. This extends to the provision of appropriate vehicles and the achievement of equivalent waiting times.

5. HOW MANY PEOPLE IN CANBERRA REQUIRE WHEELCHAIR-ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORT?

5.1. Aerial Taxis suggested the demand for wheelchair-accessible taxis is not great, given that ‘statistical information available to the industry shows that wheelchair-accessible taxis are in the main poorly patronised by the disabled community to the extent that the six cars presently in operation conduct up to 75% of their hirings as non-wheelchair accessible hirings’.⁴²

5.2. Government officials and representatives of the disabled community pointed out that no analysis has been done of the need for wheelchair-accessible transport in the ACT.⁴³ ACROD called for an ‘independent needs analysis.. to identify the community needs’. This analysis should ‘be an ACT every-household survey’.⁴⁴ The Disabled People’s Initiative ACT also called for an analysis of ‘how much demand there is on the multicabs’.⁴⁵

5.3. ADACAS suggested that a figure of 1,000 wheelchair-bound residents is conservative. This view is based on two factors: ‘an anecdotal report from a multicab driver’, and the number of people in Canberra who are in aged care facilities, nursing homes and hostels or who have cerebral palsy, brain injury, quadriplegia, or MS.⁴⁶

5.4. The MS Society said that ‘many of our members are actually house-bound **as a result of not being able to use the current transport arrangements**’.⁴⁷ This reflects the fact that ‘transport is one of the most challenging issues’ for ‘people with a disability, older people in nursing homes and hostels or living in the community, and the carers of such people’.⁴⁸

5.5. Both government officials and ACROD pointed out that, if the taxi service for disabled people was improved, people who are not using it now might decide to utilise it.⁴⁹

⁴² Mr Muir 12/2/99

⁴³ ADACAS 19/2/99; government officials 19/2/99; and ACROD 12/2/99

⁴⁴ Mrs Whitehead and Mr Trehwella 12/2/99

⁴⁵ Mr Stubbs 19/2/99

⁴⁶ Ms Philips 19/2/99

⁴⁷ Ms Watson 12/2/99 (emphasis added)

⁴⁸ ADACAS submission dated 19/11/98 p1

⁴⁹ Mr MacDonald [DUS] 19/2/99; and ACROD [Mrs Whitehead] 12/2/99

5.6. Also, ‘the gradual introduction of accessible buses on a route by route basis **may** marginally reduce the call on accessible taxis, however ACROD ACT considers this reduction would be taken up by increased travel by others who must use accessible taxis’ - and there will remain many people who need door-to-door transport. Further, ‘the accessible midi-buses being introduced are not designed to take motorised scooters, an increasingly common form of personal mobility for people with disabilities; [and] the midi-bus design does not allow for securing wheelchairs in the buses’.⁵⁰

5.7. The committee concludes that there is only **anecdotal** evidence about the number of Canberra residents who need wheelchair-accessible transport. Further, there appears to be little, or no, evidence about the need for such transport **by visitors to Canberra**. These visitors include members of parliament and members of the diplomatic corps. The visitors may come to use Canberra’s national attractions (such as Parliament House, the National Gallery and the Australian War Memorial), to use our regional facilities (such as the Canberra Hospital, shopping centres and educational institutions) and to use our sporting facilities. In the latter regard, the committee notes Canberra’s role in the forthcoming Olympic and Para-Olympic events. Also, the committee notes the possible demand for wheelchair-accessible vehicles arising out of such major international meetings as the CHOGM conference of Commonwealth leaders.

5.8. *The committee concludes that the short answer to the question: how many Canberra people require wheelchair-accessible transport?’ is that we don’t know. It is highly desirable that better information be obtained on this matter.*

5.9. The committee recommends:

- ◆ ***that an independent needs analysis be done as soon as possible to identify the number of wheelchair-bound people living in (and visiting) the ACT, and their likely use of wheelchair-accessible transport (both now and into the foreseeable future).***

⁵⁰ ACROD submission dated 20/11/98 p3

6. HOW LONG DO THOSE REQUESTING A WHEELCHAIR-ACCESSIBLE TAXI WAIT?

6.1. In order to answer this question it is necessary to understand the existing process used by Aerial Taxis to handle requests for a wheelchair-accessible taxi.

6.2. Aerial stated: 'if you rang now and asked for a multicab, then the telephonist would probably pass that to the supervisor who would contact whoever was the control car [in] the multicab fleet... and ask that control car... [about any] fixed work... [in the area, then] the car that was operating in this area with that fixed work around this time would be allocated your immediate hiring...' Aerial stated that: 'Because there are only the six RTX plates... [they] are deliberately spread around Canberra in the areas where we have got the pre-booked hirings'. Information about these pre-booked hirings is conveyed by Aerial to the contractor around 6am or 7am each day.⁵¹

6.3. Aerial continued: 'If the hiring cannot be met immediately [after Aerial has checked with the control car, then the aerial telephonist says to you] 'I'm sorry, I can't get that car to you at 10.15, I can get it there at 10.30, is that OK?' If it is not, Aerial tries to 'come to some arrangement so we can meet your need'. Aerial tries to be certain about its arrival time for wheelchair-accessible vehicles, so that disabled people are not anxiously waiting.⁵²

6.4. Aerial stated that 'instances of long waiting times have occurred... [but] the perception that this was the norm was incorrect'.⁵³ Aerial considers that it provides an additional service to disabled passengers over what it provides for ordinary commuters, by way of the 'requested versus agreed booking times'. Aerial states that 'the need to agree a time is infrequent and response times reported by Aerial are not distorted by the agreed times'. Aerial points out that, even if it recorded the requested time, the delay in a taxi arriving would likely be within the benchmark figures.⁵⁴

6.5. Aerial has directed that, in future, both the requested time and the agreed time be recorded.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Mr Muir 12/2/99

⁵² Mr Muir 12/2/99

⁵³ Mr Muir 19/2/99 and 12/2/99

⁵⁴ Mr Muir 26/3/99

⁵⁵ Mr Muir 19/2/99

6.6. *The committee appreciates this initiative by Aerial Taxis. The committee regards such a record as imperative, as it will greatly assist a better understanding of the time taken to respond to requests for wheelchair-accessible vehicles.*

6.7. The committee recommends:

♦ *that the record of requested booking time, agreed booking time and actual arrival time be added to the set of ‘benchmark standards’ used by the taxi industry and the government regulator (DUS) in relation to wheelchair-accessible taxis. This will provide an accurate record of the length of time between a request for a wheelchair-accessible taxi and its arrival.*

6.8. *In discussing waiting times, the committee was provided by Aerial with personal information about the taxi bookings made by three individuals who appeared before the committee. Members were seriously concerned about this invasion of privacy. The committee promptly resolved that the information be treated confidentially. The committee expects that such information will not be disclosed by Aerial Taxis in the future—where there is a need to analyse the record of taxi bookings, the names of individuals should be blacked out.*

6.9. ACROD stated that ‘anyone who uses multicabs can testify to the fact that they are not available at peak times’. Further, ‘people in wheelchairs do not have any other options’ for their transport, as ordinary people do (such as buses or car transport by a friend). Also, the existing multicabs often break down and hence are unavailable.⁵⁶

6.10. The MS Society said ‘people with disabilities are effectively without transport during [the following] periods’—8am to 9.30am and 3pm to 4.30pm. Further, ‘bookings made well in advance do not necessarily guarantee availability of the cab’. This is sometimes due to ‘communication problems between Canberra cabs and the operator of multicabs’.⁵⁷ In relation to waiting times, the MS Society consider that ‘the maximum waiting time for a multicab [should] be reduced to no more than 20

⁵⁶ Mrs Whitehead 12/2/99

⁵⁷ Ms Watson 12/2/99

minutes, which is about the average time that you have to wait for an ordinary cab during busy periods'.⁵⁸

6.11. Mr Trewhella said that disabled people often have to wait over half an hour for a taxi even if it is in the local area. One reason is that 'it is a significant amount of time to pull up, open the door, pull out the ramps from the boot, set them up, put the person in, strap the person down, take the ramps out. You can waste ten to 15 minutes very easily and that is on the front and reverse of your journey'.⁵⁹

6.12. Koomarri School stated that its students sometimes have to wait for a considerable time.

6.13. The Department of Education and Community Services acknowledged that it 'probably ties up at least about four and a half of the cabs morning and afternoon'.⁶⁰ The department stated that 'there are often difficulties' in arranging transport of a disabled child 'when we have an emergency with a child who needs a multicab at school and has to leave school early'.⁶¹

6.14. Ms Barrbour states that Aerial has frequently 'changed my booking times because the times I wanted were not convenient or available to them [especially] as I am a teacher [who finds it is] often impossible to get a cab at the time I desired because all the cabs were taking children to and from school'. She cited several specific cases of prolonged waiting times, including a request for pick up at 3.05pm which was negotiated to 3.30pm but the cab arrived at 3.50pm; a booking for 1.00pm with the cab arriving at 1.35pm. She pointed out how useful it is for the taxi company to phone through an altered arrival time, so that she need not have to wait outside with considerable uncertainty about whether a taxi would turn up at all.⁶²

6.15. Mrs Wright said: 'I have never ever been picked up on time. I mean, it depends on what you classify as being picked up on time because if you made a booking at 2 o'clock and you get told that you cannot be picked up until 3.15 and this is when his time starts, are we an hour and 15 minutes late for the time we have asked

⁵⁸ Ms Watson 12/2/99

⁵⁹ 12/2/99

⁶⁰ Ms Blue 19/2/99

⁶¹ ibid

⁶² 19/2/99

for the booking or is 3.15 the appropriate time for you to start ticking the clock over?’⁶³

6.16. Ms Moreno said that her son experiences long waits ‘once or twice a month’.⁶⁴

6.17. Mrs Gordon gave examples of occasions when she had to agree to pick-up times very different to those she asked. For example, she regularly travels to Woden Hospital for hydrotherapy at 4.30pm but ‘I was only able to have a taxi at 2 or 2.30pm... [meaning] that I would sit at the hospital for an hour to sometimes two hours waiting for my appointment because that was the only time I could actually go to the hospital’.⁶⁵

6.18. The Disabled People’s Initiative ACT stated that there are ‘long waiting times’.⁶⁶

6.19. ADACAS says that its clients find that ‘appointments have to be made outside of school hours and this is often problematic [and] sometimes people cannot get to [appointments] because there are no cabs’.⁶⁷ ADACAS adds that multicabs ‘often run late’. The manager of ADACAS submitted: ‘I have waited with a person for over an hour, at 6pm in mid-winter, on the footpath in the wind and rain, for a pre-arranged cab. I have waited at ADACAS after a committee meeting for a cab which has been up to 45 minutes late. On another occasion the cab was 30 minutes early, and the person had to leave a crucial meeting early’.⁶⁸

6.20. The Physical Disability Council of Australia submitted that, despite the best endeavours of Aerial Taxis, it no longer feels confident that multicabs can meet the booking times requested by Council members when they hold national meetings in Canberra. The Council believes ‘this is not the fault of the company or a bad booking system, but rather it is brought about by many bookings and not enough accessible cabs available’. As a result of these problems, the ACT is ‘no longer the destination of choice’ by the Council for its national meetings.⁶⁹

⁶³ 12/2/99

⁶⁴ 12/2/99

⁶⁵ 12/2/99

⁶⁶ Mr Stubbs 19/2/99

⁶⁷ Ms Phillips 19/2/99

⁶⁸ Submission dated 19/11/98 p2

⁶⁹ Submission dated 13/11/98

6.21. *The committee concludes, from the evidence presented to it, that people waiting for wheelchair-accessible taxis are waiting longer than other people for a taxi. The committee considers that prompt action needs to be taken to reduce the waiting time for wheelchair-accessible vehicles. The nature of this action is outlined in the following chapters.*

7. DOES THE ACT HAVE THE RIGHT SORT OF DRIVERS?

7.1. Nearly all witnesses praised the multicab drivers. Ms Klason stated that she finds the drivers of ordinary cabs to be ‘very good... very thoughtful’.⁷⁰ ACROD considers ‘that the drivers are very perceptive and considerate to the needs of people with disabilities’.⁷¹ Koomarri School stated that it ‘has experienced the highest level of professionalism, understanding of the needs of the disabled and common courtesy from multicab drivers. This at times is not always the case with standard Canberra Cabs... [who do not display] the same level of empathy’.⁷² Ms Barrbour said that ‘multicabs do a terrific job’.⁷³ The Department of Education and Community Services said the multicabs try very hard to respond to requests for urgent transport of a disabled school-child.⁷⁴ Mr Trehwella said that the drivers ‘are well-trained to a point but I think there is room for improvement’.⁷⁵ The MS Society said: ‘we had very positive feedback from our members about the current operator and... the drivers... [who] are very understanding and very considerate’.⁷⁶ Mrs Gordon said that ‘the driver and the operator [of multicabs] have always been wonderful’.⁷⁷

7.2. *The committee commends the operator and drivers of the current multicab fleet.*

7.3. *The committee considers that, in relation both to the needs analysis of wheelchair-bound people in the ACT and the benchmark standards used by the government regulator, some way should be found to incorporate assessment of the **quality** of the service provided, in a manner that would pick up comments of the type provided to the committee (and outlined in the preceding chapter).*

⁷⁰ 19/2/99

⁷¹ Mrs Whitehead 12/2/99

⁷² Mr Kirk 19/2/99

⁷³ 19/2/99

⁷⁴ Ms Blue 19/2/99

⁷⁵ 12/2/99

⁷⁶ Ms Watson 12/2/99

⁷⁷ 12/2/99

7.4. The committee recommends:

♦ *that the needs analysis of the number of wheelchair-bound people in the ACT and the performance benchmarks of the wheelchair-accessible taxi service incorporate measures of a qualitative kind, especially incorporating personal comment by wheelchair-bound passengers and their carers.*

7.5. In commenting on Aerial's proposal for more wheelchair-accessible taxis, Ms Wright expressed concern that it was likely the drivers of the new vehicles would not understand the situation of the disabled and 'would not take the time to do the things that the current operator [does]'.⁷⁸ ACROD stated that 'training in lifting and handling is essential'.⁷⁹

7.6. When visiting Sydney, the committee was told that the drivers of wheelchair-accessible taxis were required to undergo special training in the handling of wheelchair-bound passengers. The training is provided by a representative of the disabled community in combination with a representative of the taxi fleet. The training can be done in one or two days and costs about \$450. It is estimated that 300-400 of Sydney's 15,000 licensed cab drivers have received such training. The training can be provided outside of Sydney, as shown by a recent training session in Queanbeyan.⁸⁰

7.7. The committee considers that the drivers of wheelchair-accessible vehicles should be trained in the handling of wheelchair-bound passengers. It is desirable that as many cab drivers as possible receive such training, as this widens the pool of drivers available to operate wheelchair-accessible taxis. It also widens the understanding of what wheelchair-bound patients go through. In the committee's view, the training should not extend beyond two days (at most) because of the detrimental effect this would have on the industry's cost structure. The committee considers it reasonable for the government to encourage such training by subsidising its cost for a limited period of time, in order to encourage drivers (and operators) to acquire the particular skills.

⁷⁸ 12/2/99

⁷⁹ Mrs Whitehead 12/2/99

⁸⁰ Discussions with Combined Taxis on 20/5/99

7.8. *The committee recommends:*

- ◆ *that the ACT government require the drivers of wheelchair-accessible taxis to be trained for one or two days in the specific skills associated with handling wheelchair-bound passengers; and that, for a limited period of time, the government facilitate this training by subsidising its cost.*

8. DOES THE ACT HAVE THE RIGHT SORT OF TAXIS FOR THE DISABLED?

8.1. Aerial Taxis told the committee that, while the multicabs were criticised by many witnesses, they were chosen by the present contractor ‘in light of previous disabled community feed-back that vans were not the disabled community’s preferred option’. Aerial added that it does not expect the contractor to replace the multicabs with like vehicles because of ‘mechanical and operating cost reasons’.⁸¹

8.2. Aerial noted that only two serious accidents involving multicabs had occurred.⁸²

8.4. DUS told the committee that multicabs are inspected at least three times a year for their road-worthiness.⁸⁴

8.5. ADACAS expressed concern about the safety aspects of using metal ramps and the lack of adequate restraint whilst travelling in the taxi. ADACAS considers that the existing vehicles endanger, not just the well-being of the passenger, but of the driver—who is required to handle steel ramps and man-handle wheelchairs up and down the ramps as well as within the cab. ADACAS is concerned about ‘the pressure on the multicab drivers who, because of workload, are often rushing from one job to another and rushing whilst they are loading and unloading their wheelchair passengers’. ADACAS adds: ‘The weight of some of the wheelchairs with the passengers would exceed any recommended safety lifting levels’.⁸⁵

8.6. Aerial acknowledged that multicab drivers would have problems with the ramps ‘if they are not used correctly, not secured properly and [if] the right sort of person is not perhaps pushing the chair’.⁸⁶

8.7. ADACAS added that one client ‘had his leg crushed whilst sharing a multicab with another wheelchair bound passenger’; and that it is not uncommon for wheelchair wheels to come off the ramp when they are half up.⁸⁷

⁸¹ Supplementary submission dated 8/3/99

⁸² Mr Muir 19/2/99

⁸³ Mr Muir 26/3/99

⁸⁴ Mr Handley (DUS) 19/2/99

⁸⁵ Ms Phillips 19/2/99

⁸⁶ Mr Muir 26/3/99

8.8. Ms Klason described her own 'very bad accident in a multicab' due to sudden braking when her wheelchair was not strapped in [she went over the passenger seat and hit her head on the windscreen. Her right arm 'has become completely useless' as a result of that accident]. She stated that she will not use a multicab any more but, instead, uses ordinary cabs and folds her wheelchair up.⁸⁸

8.9. ADCROD considers that 'part of the reason why [multicabs are poorly patronised] is because the service is not what people require. It does not meet their needs... If we had a good modern fleet, you would find there would be more people using the multicabs than there are now. There are people out there who just will not use them, because of safety and comfort issues'.⁸⁹

8.10. Mr Trewhella said: 'I will not use the current stretch Holden because I have difficulty sitting up and by the time I get to my destination, all I want to do is lay down and go to sleep, I am so tired from hanging on, literally hanging on'.⁹⁰

8.11. Ms Theden said: 'the currently used modified sedans do not meet the needs of the driver and the passenger in a wheelchair. For the driver, a lot of hard physical work is necessary to fit the heavy metal ramps into place. He then has to push up the manual wheelchair or has to assist a very heavy electric wheelchair up the ramps into the car. He also has to put the restrainers and the seatbelt on in an extremely confined space. And for the person in a wheelchair, it is an unpleasant and stressful experience to be pushed up the wobbly and unstable ramps and to be pushed and lifted around to bring the wheelchair in position to get it restrained.' She added: 'the windows are much too high. I, for example, cannot look out the front window at all, which means that I can only see the sky and trees through the window, resulting in me losing all sense of direction while the multicab drives'.⁹¹

8.12. In relation to buses, Mrs Gordon said that in Los Angeles she could readily access all buses, because their steps could fold out to make a ramp which would lower down to provide convenient access. Once inside the bus, she could be strapped in where chairs would normally be (the chairs having been folded to the side of the bus).

⁸⁷ *ibid*

⁸⁸ Ms Klason 19/2/99

⁸⁹ Mrs Whitehead 12/2/99

⁹⁰ 12/2/99

⁹¹ 12/2/99

8.13. *The committee concludes that the current vehicles are **not** the most appropriate vehicles for transporting wheelchair-bound passengers. The committee accepts that the vehicles appeared appropriate when introduced—and that the current operator and drivers are doing all they can to ease some of the vehicle’s deficiencies.*

9. WHAT IS THE RIGHT SORT OF VEHICLE?

9.1. ACROD submitted: ‘There has been considerable discussion nationwide for the design and introduction of a generic accessible taxi (as has occurred in London) that would gradually replace **all** taxis used by the general public and also those currently used by people with disabilities, thus creating equality of service for all. ACROD urges the ACT government to pursue this option and the issue of safe restraints for wheel chairs and occupants of multicabs at a national level with the Federal Office of Road Safety, the Taxi Industry Association and others’.⁹²

9.2. *The committee understands that taxis in London were given 12 years’ notice of the need to be wheelchair-capable. While 90% of existing taxis satisfy this requirement, all taxis will have to do so in the next year or two. The committee understands that, some years ago, a London taxi was brought out to Australia to be used as a prototype for a generic wheelchair-accessible Australian taxi—but efforts to refine and produce such a vehicle have so far been unsuccessful.*

9.3. ACROD submitted that ‘the British government has developed standards [for accessible taxi design] which would be an excellent model for developing standards for the Australian industry’.⁹³

9.4. The committee considers that the ACT government should do all that it can to promote and assist efforts to design a generic accessible taxi. The widespread use of such a vehicle would mean that all taxis would be wheelchair-accessible, and hence there would be no need for special arrangements to cater for the needs of the disabled.

9.5. *The committee recommends:*

♦ that the ACT government promote and encourage efforts to design and develop a generic wheelchair-capable taxi for use throughout Australia.

9.6. The Council on the Ageing submitted that, in the absence of Australian design rules for multicabs, then ‘the ACT should set minimum standards for new multicabs which address safety issues’.⁹⁴

⁹² ACROD submission dated 20/11/98 p2 (emphasis in original)

⁹³ Supplementary submission dated 23/2/99 p4

⁹⁴ Submission dated 2/2/99 p2

9.7. ADACAS considers that ‘multicab passengers should be provided with the same safety in boarding and in travelling in a car that any other taxi passenger expects’.⁹⁵ *As indicated in chapter 4, the committee concurs with this view.*

9.8. Ms Theden says that taxis should have an electric lift.⁹⁶ The Council on the Ageing also considers that ‘new multicabs should utilise an electric hoist to lift the wheelchair level with the cab for entry of passengers’.⁹⁷

9.9. Mrs Gordon told the committee that, in Los Angeles, she found that ‘all their cabs... are made for disabled people’.⁹⁸ This was achieved mostly by the use of a plate at the rear of the taxi which, at the press of a button, ‘would unfold twice and fall down and you would just go zooming up into it’. The result was that the provision for disabled access did not interfere with the capacity to do normal taxi work.

9.10. ACROD considers that more suitable vehicles than the existing multicabs ‘are readily available... [and that it can cost] as low as \$11,000 to convert one of those [standard vehicles] to [a wheelchair-accessible vehicle]’.⁹⁹ The committee’s attention was drawn to the fact that several vehicles are able to be converted to carry wheelchair passengers, including the Chrysler Voyager, Mercedes Benz (Vito and Sprinter), Volkswagon (Transporter and Caravelle), Suzuki (Wagon R+), Diahatsu (Move) and Holden (Combo).¹⁰⁰

9.11. In May 1999 the committee inspected an Australian-designed hydraulic vertical lift for front-wheel drive vehicles. The lift is designed by Workman Industries Pty Ltd at Taren Point in Sydney. It is floor-mounted, and enables a person in a wheelchair to drive onto the hoist which then lifts to the floor level of the vehicle. It costs about \$11,000 to install. *Workman Industries kindly permitted the committee to reproduce a diagram and photos of the lift in operation in a wheelchair-accessible taxi (see following pages).*

⁹⁵ Ms Phillips 19/2/99

⁹⁶ 12/2/99

⁹⁷ Submission dated 2/2/99 p3

⁹⁸ 19/2/99

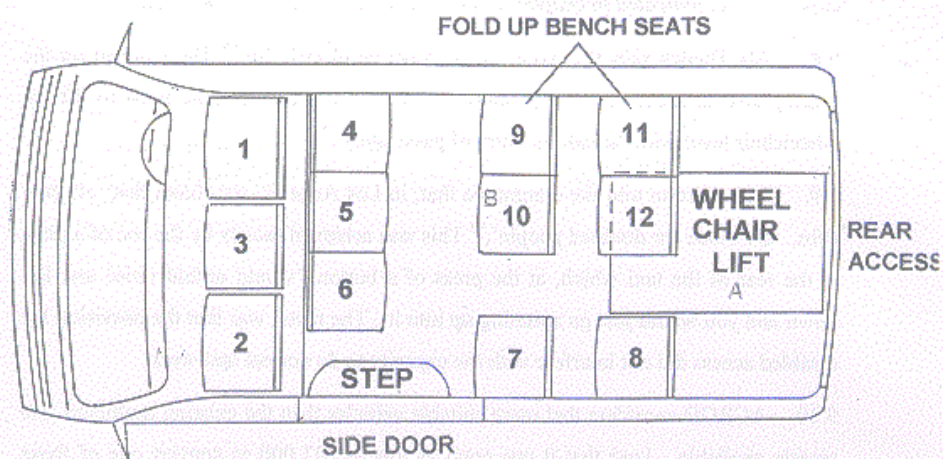
⁹⁹ Mr Trehwella 12/2/99

¹⁰⁰ Supplementary information from Mr Trehwella (ACROD) dated 25/2/99; and discussions with taxi operators in Sydney

The need to increase the number of restricted taxi (multicab) plates

Workman's complete wheelchair access system carries an Australian Automotive & Structural Engineers certification, and the seating configuration is built to Australian Design Rules requirements.

Typical Bus Configuration: (2 Wheelchair Capacity)



Wheelchair Location :

Position (A) One wheelchair passenger -seats 11 & 12 fold up.

Position (B) Second wheelchair passenger - seats 9 & 10 fold up.



Mr Hird MLA
(chair of the Urban
Services committee)
on the Workman lift,
as installed in a new
Sydney taxi.

MOTOR VEHICLES

Wheelchair Access Vehicles



MOTOR VEHICLES

Wheelchair Access



MOTOR VEHICLES

Wheelchair Access Vehicles



9.12. When installed in a vehicle such as a Toyota Commuter or Mercedes Sprinter, the lift enables the vehicle to carry two wheelchairs and seven ordinary passengers (as well as the driver). If only one wheelchair is carried, then nine ordinary passengers can be seated. If no wheelchair is aboard, then the vehicle can carry 11 ordinary passengers. The vehicle inspected by the committee at Workman Industries was a Toyota Commuter, which subsequently was accepted into service with Combined Cabs in Sydney.

9.13. The committee was told, when visiting Sydney, that one problem experienced by taxi drivers is that taxis with an **external** hoist tended to be avoided by ordinary passengers, who regarded them as specialist vehicles for the disabled only. An internal hoist that rises to floor level overcomes this problem, because the vehicle appears to be just another taxi. Further, an internal hoist -does not impede access to the rear of a vehicle for baggage or goods.

9.14. The committee appreciates that many wheelchair-bound people do not like riding over, or beyond, the rear axle of a taxi. It appears to be extremely difficult to design a way to place a wheelchair **beside** the driver, where some disabled people would prefer to sit. The Toyota Commuter inspected by the committee could position a wheelchair in the middle of the vehicle, with a second wheelchair behind. The committee was impressed by this feature. (If this space was not needed by wheelchairs, then it could be used by ordinary passengers using fold-down seats.)

9.15. *The committee strongly favours the use of hoists in taxis carrying wheelchair-dependent passengers.*

9.16. The committee recommends:

♦ that wheelchair-accessible taxis incorporate a hoist, preferably internally mounted, to facilitate access by the disabled and to reduce the physical demands on drivers who otherwise have to man-handle wheelchairs into and out of vehicles.

9.17. The committee learnt, when visiting Sydney, that NSW requires new wheelchair-accessible taxis to be capable of transporting at least two wheelchairs. Also, the committee understands that both Queensland and Victoria favour the use of

vehicles with a two-wheelchair capacity. The committee was told by representatives of the NSW Disability Council that they too prefer a two-wheelchair capacity.

9.18. However, several witnesses who addressed the committee stated that a two-wheelchair capacity was not essential. For example, Mrs Gordon stated that people in wheelchairs want ‘some dignity and some privacy’ and this is not always possible if two wheelchair passengers are carried in the one vehicle (for example, some wheelchair-bound passengers are sick while travelling).

9.19. Aerial says that RTX plates ‘should continue to provide two-wheelchair capacity’ but that the new plates [under Aerial’s proposal] should utilise any type of wheelchair accessible vehicle.¹⁰¹

9.20. *The committee considers that it is desirable for all new wheelchair-accessible taxis to have the capacity to carry two wheelchairs at the one time. This not only will benefit the disabled but will make the vehicles more useful for group bookings (see more below).*

9.21. The committee recommends:

♦ ***that new wheelchair-accessible taxis have the capacity to carry two wheelchairs at the one time.***

9.22. *Further on this point, the committee would be very disturbed if the new two-wheelchair taxis in any way resembled the existing stretched limousine-type of vehicle. In the committee’s view, the new taxis—as well as meeting all the requirements for certification by road transport authorities—should have minimum specifications along the lines of those for the Toyota Commuter. Such specifications would ensure that disabled passengers have sufficient headroom and visibility to travel comfortably—in particular, that they are able to see out the windows. Unless there is sufficient headroom and visibility, wheelchair-bound passengers will only be able to see the interior roof or passing gutters and, in the committee’s view, this is not acceptable.*

¹⁰¹ Mr Muir 12/2/99

9.23. The committee recommends:

- ◆ *that the new wheelchair-accessible taxis have sufficient headroom and visibility to ensure wheelchair-bound passengers can travel comfortably—this means that the specifications of a vehicle such as the Toyota Commuter should be the minimum acceptable standard.*

9.24. The committee is aware that vehicles with a two-wheelchair capacity may be able to carry more than five able-bodied passengers. The introduction of such vehicles would alleviate some of the existing problems at Canberra Airport when a large number of incoming aircraft passengers queue for taxis. This same problem exists on a larger scale at Mascot Airport in Sydney, where the state government permits large taxis [those able to carry five or more passengers] to jump the normal taxi queue and, since early this year, to utilise multi-hirings.

9.25. This is not the practise at Canberra Airport.

9.26. In order to alleviate queuing problems at Canberra Airport—and to facilitate the use of the new wheelchair-accessible taxis—the committee considers that multi-hiring should be permitted in Canberra. This also is likely to improve the range of transport services available to the tourism industry in Canberra.

9.27. The committee recommends:

- ◆ *that taxis able to carry five or more passengers be permitted to multi-hire.*

9.28. The use of the new taxis for group bookings and for multi-hirings should not detract from their primary purpose, which is to provide an improved taxi service for the disabled. The committee wishes to emphasise this point.

9.29. The committee recommends:

- ◆ *that the wheelchair-accessible taxis be required to give first priority to transport by the disabled—but when not required for this purpose, they be available for group bookings and for multi-hiring.*

9.30. The NSW Disability Council drew the committee's attention to the wish of most wheelchair-bound people to ride in a vehicle that was not clearly distinguishable from an ordinary taxi. The Council noted that some taxi fleets were painting their new two-wheelchair taxis a very different colour scheme to that used on ordinary cabs.

However well-intentioned, this meant that wheelchair-accessible vehicles were likely to be stigmatised by ordinary taxi passengers, some of whom would probably bypass the vehicles out of concern that they either were only for the use of disabled people or that they themselves might be thought of as disabled if they travelled in the vehicle. The Disability Council considers that wheelchair-accessible taxis should carry the same livery as ordinary cabs. *The committee agrees.*

9.31. The committee recommends:

♦ ***that wheelchair-accessible taxis utilise the same external colour scheme as used on all other taxis.***

9.32. The NSW Disability Council also drew the committee's attention to the possible stigma associated with a commonly used expression like 'disabled taxi'. The Council noted that this expression, apart from being factually incorrect (in the sense that it was not being used to describe a broken-down vehicle), conveyed the impression of a vehicle intended solely (or mainly) for the use of disabled people. The committee considers that this is not an adequate description of the type of vehicle being recommended in this report. A more suitable term—and one that carries no connotation of disabled usage—is 'maxi taxi'.

9.33. The committee recommends:

♦ ***that wheelchair-accessible taxis be known as maxi taxis.***

10. WHO SHOULD CHOOSE THE VEHICLE?

10.1. Aerial stated that it does not influence the choice of vehicle by the contractor, though it would like to see a vehicle able to carry two wheelchairs.¹⁰² This is because ‘two wheelchairs in the micro-managed multi fleet allows for multiple hirings and a pre-booked school-run service to be operated most efficiently’.¹⁰³

10.2. However, Aerial distinguishes between the RTX fleet and the new taxis in its proposal. Aerial proposes ‘that the auctioned caveated plate not be restricted to a two-wheelchair vehicle [but] instead the operator should be able to choose from the full range of vehicles from van to Flashcab’. In short, ‘vehicle choice must be an operator consideration and not directed by the regulator’.¹⁰⁴

10.3. DUS stated that ‘the cab company is the provider at the end of the day and [it is] their responsibility to ensure that the vehicle... is suited for their needs’.¹⁰⁵

10.4. *The committee concludes that there is no need for the government regulator to prescribe a particular vehicle at this stage, provided that it has a two-wheelchair capacity, incorporates a hoist (preferably internally mounted) and has minimum specifications along the lines of the Toyota Commuter.*

¹⁰² Mr Muir 26/3/99

¹⁰³ Supplementary submission dated 8/3/99 p2

¹⁰⁴ *ibid*

¹⁰⁵ Mr Handley 19/2/99

11. DOES THE ACT HAVE THE RIGHT SYSTEM FOR DISPATCHING WHEELCHAIR-ACCESSIBLE TAXIS?

11.1. The present arrangement for dispatching multicabs is set out in chapter 3. It involves use of the Aerial dispatch system in conjunction with micro-management of multicabs.

11.2. When visiting Sydney, the committee heard an estimate from taxi sources that probably 50-70% of calls for a wheelchair-accessible taxi are made direct to the drivers, rather than through the principal radio dispatch system which utilises the Sydney-wide 0200 phone number. This is said to be because wheelchair-bound people—even more than ordinary taxi passengers—want to feel confident that a cab will arrive on time and that they will be handled sensitively by a driver they know.

11.3. There is some evidence that this is happening in the ACT. The committee was told by Ms Theden that she always ‘calls multicab straight and never [through] Aerial because I had some bad experiences with going through Aerial because they give their list early in the morning to the special operator of the multicabs. And it happened to me that some things were lost on the way and so the direct line to multicabs works much better for myself’.¹⁰⁶

11.4. It appears that one reason why disabled people prefer to phone a driver or operator direct is that, being personally known to the driver, they can be confident that they will be phoned shortly before he arrives. This means that they do not have to wait on the footpath for a worrying period.

11.5. The committee understands why some disabled people would prefer to contact the operator of the multicabs directly rather than go through Aerial’s switchboard. However, it appears to the committee that this is not a desirable arrangement in the long-term. In a sense, it is discriminatory—in that the disabled may be encouraged to make a direct call to the multicab operator simply because of deficiencies in the principal dispatch system. The committee considers that these deficiencies should be addressed in order to deliver the same level of service to the disabled as to other

¹⁰⁶ 12/2/99

passengers. The committee adds that it is extremely difficult to monitor the adequacy of overall service levels when part of the taxi fleet is micro-managed.

11.6. The committee recommends:

- ◆ *that the dispatch system used to control wheelchair-accessible taxis be the same as that used to dispatch all other taxis.*

12. DOES THE ACT HAVE THE RIGHT SYSTEM FOR ISSUING TAXI PLATES FOR WHEELCHAIR-ACCESSIBLE CABS?

12.1. DUS told the committee that the options for issuing wheelchair-accessible plates include free issue to the taxi network; auction; short-term licences (where ‘you do not own the licence forever, and the government gets a fee every year for those licences’); and conversion of existing licences to multicab vehicles.¹⁰⁷

12.2. The system of **free issue to the network** means that the plates are not transferable and have to be managed by the network which, however, may ‘micro-manage’ the network (as happens at present in the ACT). Whichever route is taken involves a cost to the network, which also must find the right sort of drivers. The networks also are concerned that the free plates ‘compete directly with existing licences in the network’.¹⁰⁸

12.4. The **auction process** is characterised by a high cost of entry—over \$200,000 for a licence at auction, plus \$50,000-80,000 to acquire a multicab, plus \$20,000 to join the network, plus the normal on-costs of registration, insurance, running costs, driver’s cost, et cetera.¹¹⁰

12.5. Aerial’s proposal is that standard taxi plates continue to be released under the auction system ‘with a caveat that operators must provide a wheelchair-accessible taxi under the new plate for its first four years of operation... [after which] it would be optional for the operator... to continue with a wheelchair-accessible vehicle’. Aerial adds: ‘The introduction of wheelchair accessible plates in this proposal is in addition to the present six RTX plates... [which] would continue to be micro-managed’.¹¹¹

12.6. Aerial ‘is not in favour of additional RTX plates. Apart from the vehicle cost, an RTX operator has no inherent commitment to the business... [and] RTX plates represent an imposition on standard taxi operators and they are an opportunity cost to

¹⁰⁷ Mr Handley 19/2/99

¹⁰⁸ Mr Handley 19/2/99

¹⁰⁹ Mr Stubbs 19/2/99

¹¹⁰ Mr Handley 19/2/99

¹¹¹ Mr Muir 12/2/99

government'.¹¹² Aerial observes that, since multicabs operate for 75% of the time as a standard taxi, then the 'six RTX plates equate to four standard plates in the fleet'.¹¹³

12.7. **Short-term licences** are issued at an annual fee and for up to six years in NSW. There is a discount for the operation of a disabled cab, resulting in a lower cost of entry to the market place than the auction system.¹¹⁴

12.8. The committee learnt during its visit to Sydney that NSW no longer issues tradeable plates but relies wholly on short-term licences. The government is seeking to release 400 new wheelchair-accessible plates in Sydney, using two methods. One is to release plates to taxi fleets with a good record of handling wheelchair-accessible passengers; the fleets then are responsible for finding individual operators. The other is to ballot them out to individual drivers who can satisfy certain criteria. The take-up rate to date has been slow.¹¹⁵

12.9. The NSW plates are for six years and cost \$6,000 pa in Sydney and the central coast, and \$3,000 in Newcastle. The full amount is not payable up front but is payable each year. The committee understands that these fees are calculated taking into account the expected operational life of the vehicle and the cost of finance over that period.

12.10. The new NSW plates are non-transferable and non-renewable. They are issued subject to conditions that include successful completion of a course, approved by the Director-General of Transport, on dealing with people with disabilities. The wheelchair-accessible vehicles must be capable of carrying two wheelchairs and must operate seven days a week for 20 hours per day. An additional requirement imposed on the taxi fleets is that they must not charge higher fees on the operators of these vehicles than they do on ordinary taxis.

12.11. Further, the new NSW plates do not allow the drivers to do contract school work, reflecting the view of government regulators that the plates are to meet a demand for wheelchair-accessible vehicles **beyond that existing at present.**

¹¹² *ibid*

¹¹³ *ibid*

¹¹⁴ Mr Handley 19/2/99

¹¹⁵ Discussions with officials of the NSW Department of Transport, 20/5/99

12.12. **The option of converting existing licences** would likely lead the taxi industry to seek some sort of financial support to cover the cost of the disabled vehicle. If it remains possible to convert the licences back to an ordinary licence (perhaps after a specified number of years, as suggested by Aerial), then this option does not guarantee the operation of disabled taxis.¹¹⁶

12.13. It is possible that a further option is for the government to issue RTX plates solely for the purpose of wheelchair pick-ups. Aerial noted that, whilst this is an option, it 'is not a logical one simply because... [the operator] would go broke'¹¹⁷—unless the government fully subsidised the operation.

12.14. DUS told the committee that it was about to initiate a review of the legislation 'that underpins the issue of licenses and the operation of taxis... [which] will be a full public process'. This action is part of the competition review process.¹¹⁸ In May 1999, the Minister for Urban Services formally announced a 'review of the legislation for taxi and hire car industries in the ACT... [to be] conducted pursuant to the ACT government's commitments to improve taxi and hire car service accessibility to the public and its obligations under National Competition Policy. The review is expected to start in July 1999 and be completed in December 1999'.¹¹⁹

12.15. *The committee has carefully considered the options for releasing plates for wheelchair-accessible cabs. Given that the key issue is how best to provide an equivalent standard of service to the disabled as that currently applying to ordinary passengers—and to achieve this as quickly as possible—the committee favours the use of non-transferable short-term licences. Some reasons follow:*

- ◆ *the cost of entry to the taxi industry is significantly reduced over what it is under the auction system;*
- ◆ *more people may consider entering the industry because of the lower entry cost, and these people may be particularly interested in providing a service to wheelchair-bound people*

¹¹⁶ Mr Handley 19/2/99

¹¹⁷ Mr Muir 12/2/99

¹¹⁸ Mr Handley 19/2/99

¹¹⁹ Tender notice placed by the ACT government in the media on 29 May 1999

- ◆ *the industry regulator can monitor the take-up rate and standard of service provision, and make adjustments (if needed) so as to ensure taxis are used for the intended purpose.*

12.16. The committee understands that use of the short-term licence system in NSW has not made the traditional auctioned plate any less marketable. That is, existing operators have not suffered as a result of the new system.

12.17. The committee recommends:

- ◆ ***that, in order to quickly provide an equivalent standard of service to the disabled as that currently provided to able-bodied passengers, the government issue non-transferable short-term licences to apply for six years.***

12.18. The committee considers that the licence fee should take into account the expected operational life of the vehicle and the cost of finance over that period (as in NSW). From the information made available to the committee, it is likely that a fee similar to that in Sydney [\$6,000 pa in each of six years] may be appropriate. A fee of this magnitude is far less than the cost of a taxi plate at auction, and hence may encourage new operators keen to provide a commercial service to the disabled.

12.19. In the long-term, the calculation of the fee should be done by an independent body such as the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Commission. It would be useful for that person to consult the NSW authorities in relation to their experience of setting an appropriate fee.

12.20. The committee recommends:

- ◆ ***that the licence fee be initially determined by the government, taking account of the expected operational life of the vehicle and the cost of finance over that period; that it be payable in equal amounts each year; and that, in the longer term, the fee be determined by an independent body such as the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Commission.***

12.21. The committee considers that—at least for a trial period—the new licences should be made available to individuals by way of a ballot conducted by the Registrar of Motor Vehicles. The applicants should satisfy certain criteria (as in NSW); and each individual should be permitted to hold just one licence.

12.22. The use of the ballot system may open up the taxi market to persons who would otherwise not have the financial resources to buy a plate, yet who may be keenly interested in providing a service to the disabled. If the number of applications is found to be disappointingly low, then it would be open to the government to release the plates to the taxi cooperative who would then be responsible for finding individual operators. In this regard, the committee is conscious that the existing RTX plates were provided by the government to Aerial Taxis.

12.23. The committee recommends:

◆ ***that the new taxi licences be made available to individuals able to satisfy certain criteria, and by way of a ballot conducted by the Registrar of Motor Vehicles.***

12.24. While the license fee should be paid annually, the committee considers that the first instalment should not be required until the person who is successful at the ballot has his or her vehicle ready for operation – that is, until it has been properly outfitted and the necessary certification has been obtained. The committee is conscious that this process may take some time and that it would be unjust to require the payment before the vehicle is ready for the road. (Of course, if payment is not made at that time, then this would be grounds for forfeiture of the license.)

12.25. The committee would be disturbed if the taxi cooperative was to levy higher charges on the new operators than those currently levied on existing members. It appears to the committee that the manner of obtaining a taxi plate—whether by way of auction (as traditionally done) or by way of individual ballot—should not determine the level of membership fee of the cooperative.

12.26. The committee recommends:

◆ ***that the taxi cooperative levy membership charges on the new operators that are no higher than those currently levied on existing members.***

12.27. *The committee has carefully considered the nature of conditions imposed by the NSW government on the short-term licences. In particular, the committee sees no need at all for the ACT to impose a requirement that new plates be used for 20 hours a day, seven days a week. The purpose of this requirement in NSW apparently is to ensure the additional cabs are on the road for the maximum time possible; but it imposes significant costs on operators (who must utilise two drivers each day) and*

appears unnecessary in Canberra. The committee considers that it is up to the individual operator to determine his or her hours of operation.

12.28. *The committee appreciates that short-term licence holders will have a concern about their future as the six-year term comes to a close. If their performance has been satisfactory in terms of meeting the licence conditions and in providing a good service, then it is reasonable to expect that the interests of the operator, the passengers, the industry and government will be that a further licence be issued. The committee appreciates that this is a delicate area and one that the government would always want to keep under review.*

12.29. The committee recommends:

- ◆ ***that the government carefully consider whether the holders of short-term licences can be given any assurance about renewal of their licences, subject to satisfactory performance.***

12.30. The committee considers that the release of new taxi plates for wheelchair-accessible cabs (on the basis set out above) will meet the market need for taxi services. It is also the fastest way to significantly increase the number of wheelchair-accessible taxis in the ACT. Hence, there is no need for the release of plates for ordinary taxis by the traditional auction process. In other words, for the foreseeable future, the only release of taxi plates should be by way of short-term, non-transferable licences for wheelchair-accessible taxis.

12.31. The committee recommends:

- ◆ ***that, for the foreseeable future, taxi plates in the ACT be issued only by way of short-term, non-transferable licences for wheelchair-accessible taxis.***

13. ARE DISABLED PEOPLE (OR THEIR REPRESENTATIVES) TAKING PART IN KEY DECISIONS ABOUT TRANSPORT FOR THE DISABLED?

13.1. The committee is aware that DUS is developing ‘an action plan for accessible transport in the ACT’ and is consulting ‘a range of groups including DPI, ACROD, the Bus and Coach Association, ACTION and Aerial’.¹²⁰ Apart from this sub-group of the Transport Reform Advisory Group, the other way that disabled people can input into taxi arrangements is via Aerials’ complaints system, which applies to all taxi users.¹²¹

13.2. Aerial informed the committee that it thought the ‘representatives of the disabled community on the Transport Reform Advisory Group (TRAG) were in constant dialogue with other representative groups’. However, as a result of material raised in the current inquiry, Aerial realises this is not the case. It therefore recommends that ‘the representatives on TRAG develop a network with all representative groups of the disabled community to disseminate information and to receive comment’.¹²²

13.3. The Disabled People’s Initiative ACT – which ‘is working closely’ with DUS to facilitate the introduction of ‘a fully accessible bus system’ over the next 20 years - is not aware of ‘any formal consultative mechanisms available’ in relation to Aerial and the multicab operator. The DPI noted that disabled people are often ‘doubly disadvantaged’ because they ‘are on a limited income and have a disability’ [the income is often the disability support pension which is about \$9,000 pa]. Further, it is an unpleasant fact that the need for disabled children to get to school ‘is more and more at the cost of adults with disabilities getting to university [or] dental appointments [or to a] friend’s place... [or] whatever’.¹²³

13.4. ACROD ‘would like to see more involvement with Canberra Cabs by people with disabilities in their complaints resolution procedures and perhaps having input,

¹²⁰ Mr MacDonald 19/2/99

¹²¹ Mr Muir 26/3/99

¹²² Supplementary submission dated 8/3/99 p2

¹²³ Mr Stubbs 19/2/99

or being available to comment, at times when they are thinking of purchasing new vehicles.’¹²⁴

13.5. The MS Society says that ‘there needs to be mechanisms where consumers can have a role in providing input in actually setting the safety standards and reviewing what actually happens when the cabs come out to pick people up’. It is particularly important that ‘people with neurological disorders’ contribute to such safety standards. The Society said that ‘some of our members have spoken to Canberra Cabs about their concerns [about the multicab service] but nothing ever seems to come of it. There is no sort of formal process, they do not get feedback... [and so things] need to be formalised a little more’. The MS Society added that ‘a lot more stress is placed on the driver of a multicab than on the driver of an ordinary cab’ and they should be trained’ in correct lifting and transfer procedures’. Also, it considers that ‘manuals [should] be provided and kept in the cab at all times for reference when emergency situations come up or first aid or whatever’.¹²⁵

13.6. ADACAS suggested that multicabs should ‘display their safety policies or their standards on a poster in a cab with some sort of contact number for people to make any comments or suggestions’.¹²⁶

13.7. The committee commends those currently preparing an action plan for accessible transport in the ACT. The committee notes the involvement of representatives of disabled people in this activity. However, there appears to be a case (especially in light of Aerial’s concern about the dissemination of information, see above) to improve the process whereby input from the disabled community is obtained.

13.8. In particular, the committee considers that a number of important matters should be decided by a forum comprising taxi operators, drivers, the disabled community and the government regulator (DUS).

¹²⁴ Mrs Whitehead 12/2/99

¹²⁵ Ms Watson 12/2/99

¹²⁶ Ms Phillips 19/2/99

13.9. The committee recommends:

- ◆ *that the forum facilitating discussion amongst the taxi industry, the disabled community and the government regulator (DUS) be serviced by DUS staff and meet regularly to monitor developments affecting transport by the disabled. At an early stage, it should consider and prepare suitable material to be placed in cabs about the requirements—and expectations—of both passengers and drivers in relation to matters such as the charging policy (when should the meter be turned on and off), the telephone policy (including when should disabled people be advised of the imminent arrival of a taxi), the policy on what to do if the taxi arrives at its destination but the disabled customer is not waiting on the footpath (such as phoning back to base to see if a further message has been left, and to knock on the door to check if the customer is inside) and the policy on handling complaints (by either driver or passenger). Of course, information about the forum and how to contact it should be prominently displayed in taxis carrying disabled passengers.*

Further, the forum should consider how best to improve the current reporting regime whereby the industry regulator [DUS] monitors the standard of taxi service to the disabled.

14. WHAT IS THE EXTENT OF THE COMMUNITY SERVICE OBLIGATION, AND HOW ADEQUATE ARE THE GOVERNMENT'S EXISTING SCHEMES TO ASSIST TRANSPORT BY THE DISABLED?

14.1. *The committee accepts the point made by Ms Theden that 'the cost of taxis is... a factor that prevents people with a disability from using their community, especially as other public transport is not accessible'.¹²⁷ The committee acknowledges that **government does have a community service obligation**, for reasons described by Ms Richards (the mother of a child who is profoundly intellectually disabled). Ms Richards submitted that a government-assisted transport scheme is 'a vital service for families of children with a disability. With all the other stresses and strains that having a child with a disability imposes on the family, this is one small way that governments can assist in alleviating one of those stresses... I think the government **does** have a community service obligation in this area... [because] the financial and practical cost of caring for [a] damaged child or adult should be shared by the community'.¹²⁸*

14.2. The key issue is how the cost of the community service obligation should be apportioned.

14.3. Aerial considers that 'at present a disproportionate amount of the community service obligation is borne by the taxi industry. Aerial presently subsidises the wheelchair-accessible fleet by approximately \$30,000 pa.¹²⁹ Aerial further subsidises the Taxi Subsidy Scheme by a figure in excess of \$17,000 pa. This is provided by a 6.5% reduction in the invoiced amount to government for taxi subsidy scheme dockets processed by Aerial. Aerial submits that 'the obligation should be a community obligation and not a taxi service provider or taxi user obligation... [Under Aerial's proposal] the potential reduction in auction sale price of a caveated plate would represent the community contribution to its obligation, through government, to

¹²⁷ Submission dated 27/11/98

¹²⁸ Submission dated 15/12/98 (emphasis in original)

¹²⁹ Aerial notes: 'Mr Wassell is contracted by Aerial to provide a service using the plates provided to Aerial by the government. Not only does Mr Wassell **not** pay for the lease of the plates, but all of his up-front costs such as registration and workers compensation are paid for by Aerial in advance. Aerial does this to assist the operator financially and recovers these costs by monthly repayments, interest free. This is an indication of the extent that Aerial needed to subsidise the service to attract a contractor'. [Supplementary submission dated 8/3/99 p6, emphasis in original]

provide a taxi service'.¹³⁰ Aerial concludes that that its proposal 'equitably distributes the costs of the community service obligation'.¹³¹

14.4. Aerial added: if the RTX fleet grows any larger 'it starts to have a considerable impact on the standard taxi fleet... [who would then] bear the community service obligation... in the foregone salaries of those people involved in standard plates'. Aerial expects that its proposal would lower the auction price for a plate which would enable the new operator to spend money on the more expensive disabled vehicle. The period of four years 'gives the person the opportunity to, in large part, amortise the cost of the vehicle' over that time.¹³²

14.5. A different way of encouraging taxi operators to acquire wheelchair-accessible vehicles is to permit them to carry more than the usual number of passengers and to allow them to charge those passengers a higher flag fall and/or portion of the fare. Taxis that are capable of transporting two wheelchairs are easily able to carry more than five ordinary passengers, making them almost mini-buses. The NSW government legislated earlier this year to permit multi-hiring, which is allowing the operators of maxi-cabs to develop profitable uses for their wheelchair-accessible vehicles. There may be considerable demand for this type of vehicle by nursing homes and retirement homes, as well as for group bookings. This is especially the case if well-targeted promotions are used to influence an attitudinal change in the community to better appreciate the utility of taxis able to carry more than five passengers.¹³³ Brisbane is said to be particularly good at this.

14.6. ACROD stated that, while 'it is generally agreed that the cost for accessible transport should be shared by the government, provider and user... the users of accessible taxis are often those in society who are least able to pay. Many multicab users feel they should not have to pay more than a bus fare'.¹³⁴ ACROD submits that 'the cost of regular multicab travel is the greatest discriminatory factor but [this] cost should not be borne by either the customer or the taxi customer. While public

¹³⁰ Supplementary submission dated 8/3/99 p4

¹³¹ Mr Muir 12/2/99

¹³² *ibid*

¹³³ Discussions with Sydney taxi fleets

¹³⁴ Supplementary submission dated 23/2/99

transport is not fully accessible, [government] transport departments should subsidise alternatives'.¹³⁵

14.7. This was also the view of the MS Society, which submitted that 'on a disability support pension, a short taxi ride to the local shops can cost 20% or more of a fortnightly pension'.¹³⁶ Because disabled people do not have the option of using public transport at the present time, the MS Society considers that 'where accessible buses are not available, people should not have to pay more than the equivalent of an ACTION bus fare to travel on a multicab'.¹³⁷

14.8. *The committee became aware during the inquiry that one option for the ACT government is to purchase wheelchair-accessible vehicles itself and then lease them out to taxi operators. This avoids payment of Commonwealth sales tax on the vehicles. The committee understands that, some years ago, the South Australian government tried this approach—but without success. It is possible that a taxi operator who acquires his vehicle in this way may be more likely than his colleagues (who have paid more for their vehicle) to walk away from the industry if things get difficult, leaving the disabled community in the lurch.*

14.9. *Whatever the merits of this approach, it does raise the issue of sales tax on vehicles. The committee understands that, while sales tax is payable on a vehicle that is purchased for the commercial transport of wheelchair-bound passengers, it is not payable on the purchase by an individual of, for example, a wheelchair for his or her own use. It appears anomalous to the committee that the sales tax exemption does not extend to the purchase of a taxi intended, and used, to transport wheelchair passengers. Such exemption would significantly lower the cost of providing wheelchair-accessible vehicles and, in the committee's view, encourage the more widespread use of wheelchair-accessible taxis.*

14.10. *It is the view of the committee that removal of Commonwealth sales tax on wheelchair-accessible vehicles used as taxis would be the single most important step that could be taken by any government to improve the availability of transport*

¹³⁵ ACROD submission dated 20/11/98 p1

¹³⁶ Submission dated 20/11/98 p2

¹³⁷ Ms Watson 12/2/99

services for the disabled. The committee notes that both the taxi industry and the disabled community have argued for years for this initiative.

14.11. The committee recommends:

♦ ***that the ACT Treasurer pressure the Commonwealth Treasurer to take action to remove Commonwealth sales tax on the purchase of vehicles intended, and used, for transporting wheelchair-bound taxi passengers.***

14.12. Against this background, the committee turns its attention to the adequacy of the government's existing schemes to assist transport by the disabled.

Taxi subsidy scheme

14.13. The taxi subsidy scheme run by the ACT's Department Health and Community Care is being reviewed by a consultant, in part because the department has 'some concerns about the [scheme's] effectiveness'. The review should conclude by July. It is likely that the eligibility criteria will be tightened up to focus 'upon those with higher needs than others'.¹³⁸

14.14. The committee notes the comment by Aerial that it supplements the voucher scheme by rebating the 1997 fare increase of 6 1/2% when the vouchers are presented, thus 'providing the government with funds to theoretically provide 6 1/2% more taxi subsidy scheme dockets to those users'.¹³⁹

14.15. Two comments on the adequacy of the voucher scheme came from Mrs Gordon, who said that: 'I go from Ngunnawal to the Canberra Hospital for hydrotherapy three times a week which can cost up \$47 to \$50 depending on the cab driver and I am only allowed to use six [vouchers] which is only \$12 and the rest of that money comes out of my pocket'.¹⁴⁰ And: 'I have got a bus stop right in front of my house and when I could walk I could take the bus for \$2.50 to the Belconnen Mall, whereas now if I want to go to Belconnen Mall it costs \$22 in taxi fare and I get subsidised by \$10 and the rest of the money comes out of my pocket...'¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Mr Tench (manager of Aged and Disability Policy) 19/2/99

¹³⁹ Mr Muir 12/2/99

¹⁴⁰ 12/2/99

¹⁴¹ *ibid*

14.16. ACROD considers that the government does ‘not meet its community service obligation’ through the taxi subsidy scheme. This is because nearly half the money ‘goes to daycare programs, which would be a very small percentage of people compared to the taxi subsidy scheme, which is the only assistance given to people in wheelchairs living in the community, all adults, all children going to school’.¹⁴² Also, ‘the number of vouchers per person is really... very inadequate... It basically is to a value of \$20 a month... [which] for someone who depends entirely for their travel on using multicab is just insignificant...’¹⁴³

14.17. Another problem ‘is the lack of reciprocity between the state taxi subsidy schemes. This disadvantages people who travel interstate for work, for recreation, for whatever reason’.¹⁴⁴

14.18. In summary, ACROD recommends ‘that the ACT government increase funding for the taxi subsidy scheme and provides funding to ensure that the ACT action plan for accessible transport can be implemented under the disability transport standards timetable’.¹⁴⁵

14.19. The committee considers that the time has certainly come to review the adequacy of the taxi voucher scheme. Members of the committee will be very interested to read the report of the consultant when it becomes available shortly.

14.20. The committee recommends:

♦ ***that the value of taxi subsidy scheme vouchers be raised to a more appropriate level.***

14.21. The committee was dismayed by the lack of reciprocity between the taxi voucher schemes of the states. This means that a Canberra resident is unable to use his or taxi vouchers in Sydney or elsewhere in Australia; and likewise, a Sydney resident visiting Canberra cannot use his or her vouchers here. It appears to the committee that there is no reason to persist with this discrepancy which, anyway, may be contrary to the spirit of national competition policies.

¹⁴² Mrs Whitehead 12/2/99

¹⁴³ *ibid*

¹⁴⁴ *ibid*

¹⁴⁵ *ibid*

14.22. The committee recommends:

- ◆ *that the Minister for Urban Services encourage his colleagues on the Australian Transport Council (comprising all transport ministers) to speedily implement measures that recognise each other's taxi vouchers, so that disabled persons are able to use their particular state's vouchers anywhere in Australia—and particularly so that visitors to Canberra can utilise their taxi vouchers in the nation's capital.*

14.23. When visiting Sydney, the committee saw first-hand the measures being taken to refine and expand the use of smart-card technology in relation to the existing Cabcharge scheme. The committee was told that the Victorian government has commissioned the use of smart cards for its taxi voucher scheme, and that there was no reason why such technology could not be introduced into the ACT. The smart card would be of great benefit to the disabled, especially blind passengers.

14.24. The committee recommends:

- ◆ *that the ACT government investigate the introduction of smart card technology to replace the existing taxi vouchers.*

Home and Community Care program [HACC]

14.25. The HACC transport scheme (which provides for volunteer drivers to transport people who live in the community to go to doctors' appointments et cetera) does not cover transport once people enter a nursing home or hostel (when they are covered by residential aged care). ADACAS considers that the scheme should 'be extended to cover residents of nursing homes and hostels, until such time as they can use taxis for the equivalent cost of using public transport'.¹⁴⁶ The committee recognises understands that this involves issues of Commonwealth/state responsibility, and the committee does not comment further on this suggestion.

¹⁴⁶ Ms Phillips 19/2/99 and the ADACAS submission dated 19/11/98 p5

Transport services for students

14.26. The special needs transport organised by the department of education and community services involves ACTION special needs buses (for 264 students), private buses (for 55 students) and multicabs (for 16 students). Attendants are on all buses but not on the privately operated buses (unless a problem arises).¹⁴⁷

14.27. Koomarri School told the committee that ‘the quality of the service provided [to Koomarri’s children] by ACTION Special Needs Transport is of a very high standard and appropriate level’. The school considers ‘the number of buses is adequate but there needs to be further fine tuning of the arrangements’. For example, the number of wheelchair students has increased over the years but ‘the bus fleet profile has not changed to meet that need’.¹⁴⁸

14.28. Koomarri identified five specific concerns. The first is possible loss of the attendant on ACTION Special Needs services: “[There is] currently an attendant on all such services... [but] the withdrawal of the attendant would not only place our students’ health in danger but that of the driver and other road users.”¹⁴⁹

14.29. The second is ‘the duration of travel for some students which can be as much as one hour to and from school, so that is an hour each way. For students with behavioural and medical conditions this can place them under quite high levels of stress and aggravate their conditions... Further work needs to be undertaken to develop strategies at reducing travel time for these students’.¹⁵⁰

14.30. The third issue is the pressure on the school ‘to make some students available for return home as early as 2.30pm’ despite the school day not finishing till 3pm.¹⁵¹

14.31. The fourth concerns students who attend respite services at Narrabundah or Charnwood, who ‘often experience delays of an hour after school whilst waiting for the multicab to return from the first journey... [resulting in] considerable distress’. And the fifth is the design of the multicabs and the requirement to use side access

¹⁴⁷ Ms Blue 19/2/99

¹⁴⁸ Mr Kirk (chairman of Koomarri School Board) 19/2/99

¹⁴⁹ *ibid*

¹⁵⁰ *ibid*

¹⁵¹ *ibid*

ramps, which 'are often placed by necessity on uneven ground causing the wheelchair and its occupant to enter and exit at a discomforting and possible unsafe angle'.¹⁵²

14.32. Cranleigh School stated that the 'current [bus] services are appreciated and necessary... [and] it is impossible to imagine how all the school's programs could continue to operate if the service were to be reduced'. The service 'is responsive to parental concerns and honest endeavours are made by ACTION and the Department of Education to resolve... problems when they occur'. Some parents are concerned about 'the amount of time the children spend on the bus each trip and each day' and 'the growing numbers of people in Gungahlin will mean more children travelling greater distance signature, unless more buses are to be added'.¹⁵³

14.33. *The committee considers that some of the recommendations in this report, if implemented, will address some of the concerns listed above. This particularly applies to the introduction of improved vehicles to lessen the existing problems in accessing taxis, and the requirement for specific training for drivers of wheelchair-accessible cabs. The committee wishes to make the following specific recommendation.*

14.34. The committee recommends:

♦ ***that the government ensure that an attendant is available on all ACTION Special Needs services for the disabled.***

¹⁵² *ibid*

¹⁵³ Submission dated 10/3/99 pp-3

15. IN LIGHT OF THE FOREGOING, HOW MANY WHEELCHAIR-ACCESSIBLE TAXIS ARE NEEDED?

15.1. Taking everything into account, Aerial considers that an additional three disabled taxis ‘would bring us into surplus immediately’ - though Aerial does not know the exact number of additional vehicles required.¹⁵⁴ ‘Identifying the point where a surplus exists is not a simple matter and relies heavily on anecdotal evidence concerning latent demand’. Aerial noted that the RTX vehicles ‘have to [operate as standard cabs] to survive’.¹⁵⁵

15.2. Aerial wants the three additional vehicles to address problems in existing response times—and submits that the addition of three vehicles would not jeopardise the incomes of standard cab operators if introduced in the manner proposed.¹⁵⁶ In noting that it has been customary to release 3-5 plates at any one time, Aerial said that this indicates the ‘very marginal operation for a taxi... it takes very, very few cars to tip the balance’ from viability to non-viability.¹⁵⁷

15.3. ACROD says ‘there needs to be more multicabs’ based on anecdotal evidence, including from the present contractor for multicabs. ACROD does not agree to Aerial’s proposal because it does not ensure sufficient disabled taxis are available at the end of four years.¹⁵⁸

15.4. ADACAS considers that the existing six disabled cabs is insufficient and ‘the number of restricted taxi plates [should] be at least doubled’.¹⁵⁹

15.5. The Disabled People’s Initiative ACT considers that ‘there is a need for three to four extra vehicles on the road right now to avoid the current delays and lack of service’.¹⁶⁰ This is based on anecdotal comment by members.

15.6. The MS Society considers that a further ten multicabs are required.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁴ Mr Muir 19/2/99

¹⁵⁵ Mr Muir 12/2/99

¹⁵⁶ Mr Muir 26/3/99

¹⁵⁷ Mr Muir 12/2/99

¹⁵⁸ Mrs Whitehead and Mr Trewhella 12/2/99

¹⁵⁹ Ms Phillips 19/2/99

¹⁶⁰ Submission dated 26/11/98 p2

¹⁶¹ Ms Watson 12/2/99

15.7. Ms Barrbour considers that Canberra has a disproportionately low ratio of disabled cabs per population compared to other cities; Canberra has one disabled cab for 50,000 people, Sydney has one per 16,000, Melbourne has one per 30,000, Perth one per 32,500, Hobart one per 18,000, Adelaide one per 13,000, Darwin one per 11,000, Albury one per 14,000, and Wagga Wagga has 'the same number of disabled cabs as Canberra'.¹⁶²

15.8. The Council on the Ageing (ACT) pointed out that South Australia is releasing an additional 15 general taxi licences with 'special, accessible conditions' each year over the next five years. The equivalent number for the ACT (taking account of population differences) would see 'three new multicab licences... issued each year'. However, if account is taken of the greater ageing of the ACT's population and the higher population growth, then the Council on the Ageing suggests that 'about seven multicab licences per year' would be appropriate. On balance, the Council recommends that 'four new multicab licences be released each year until demand is being adequately met'.¹⁶³

15.9. DUS considers 'there is a need for further cabs to be in the fleet'.¹⁶⁴

15.10. The committee is aware that NSW transport authorities are moving to have 10% of Sydney's taxi fleet wheelchair-accessible, over a three year period. A similar ratio in Canberra would see 23 wheelchair-accessible taxis. Though Aerial pointed out that the government moved away from a percentage calculation (of wheelchair-accessible taxis to the total number of taxis) some years ago, the committee has come to the view that such a percentage figure is a useful target to aim for. It helps to identify a 'critical mass' of wheelchair-accessible vehicles that might form the basis for natural growth at a later time.

15.11. Further, the committee considers that such a target will facilitate the achievement, in the ACT, of the undertaking by all Australian Transport Ministers to ensure the disabled have equivalent access to taxi services in terms of standard of service, especially waiting times.

¹⁶² 19/2/99. ACROD also stated: 'Canberra has 3% of its fleet as accessible taxis, 8% is the figure for Darwin, 6.6% for Adelaide and Sydney will have greater than 12% of its fleet in the near future' (Mrs Whitehead, 12/2/99)

¹⁶³ Submission dated 2/2/99

¹⁶⁴ Mr MacDonald 19/2/99

15.12. However, the committee accepts that it would be detrimental to the local industry to license 23 further plates in one move. It appears to the committee that a more manageable number of plates to be issued promptly is ten, with the government moving to release further plates depending on assessment of the levels of service.

15.13. The committee recommends:

- ◆ ***that the government immediately release ten wheelchair-accessible taxi plates, with the objective of moving over a defined period to having 10% of the taxi fleet wheelchair-accessible—these further plates to be released following assessment of the level of service, in particular, assessment of whether the disabled have equivalent access to taxi services in terms of waiting time (as agreed by Australian Transport Ministers).***

Harold Hird

Chair

3 August 1999