



Blind Citizens Australia

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Response to Draft Decision – Re Unbooked Taxi Review

About Blind Citizens Australia

Blind Citizens Australia (BCA) is the national representative organisation of people who are blind or vision impaired. Our mission is to inform, connect, and empower Australians who are blind or vision impaired and the broader community.

Agreement with Decision

BCA welcomes the decision not to raise prices for unbooked taxi fares, particularly given the COVID-19 restrictions and the complications they have caused for so many, from an economic perspective. While it is probable that the majority of people who are blind or vision impaired book a taxi directly through a driver, a call centre or a telephone app, there are times when it is not practical or efficient to book a taxi. Instances include, when travelling from an airport or another location where a taxi rank is easily accessed by a person who is blind or vision impaired. Hence, this decision remains beneficial and considers the financial barriers, which many people who are blind or vision impaired face, in these uncertain times.

Impact of Means Tested Multi-Purpose Taxi Program

While the Multi-Purpose Taxi Program (MPTP) is not the subject of the draft decision, or indeed this submission, it is important to note that the fact that the MPTP is means tested, still has a significant impact on people who are blind or vision impaired, who do not meet the financial criteria and cannot receive the taxi subsidy. Victoria is the only state in which this means test is applied. Hence, people who are blind or vision impaired, who cannot access the MPTP in Victoria, are at greater disadvantage than their counterparts in any other state. This is yet, another reason why BCA supports the decision not to raise unbooked taxi fares.

Ineligibility for Transport Assistance

It should be noted that some people do not have access to transport funding through the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), due to ineligibility for this scheme. Still others may not be eligible for the mobility allowance administered by Centrelink. Hence the raising of unbooked taxi fares would be an additional burden for these individuals. This is a national issue which will affect some Victorian residents who are blind or vision impaired. People over age 65, are the ones most likely to be affected by these circumstances if prices of unbooked taxi fares were to rise in the future.

Ride Share Competition

In the case of the examples given above, a person has the option of hailing a taxi, but it is equally an option to book an Uber or one of the other ride share services. This is especially true for Uber, whose app is very accessible for a person who is blind or vision impaired and provides comprehensive information about the location of the driver. The ability to call or message the driver is also quite beneficial for a person who is blind or vision impaired. Ubers often arrive very quickly and coupled with the ease with which an Uber can be booked, a level of certainty is present that attempting to hail a taxi does not provide. At present, the apps for booking taxis are not as accessible as the Uber app is, thus making it more unlikely that a person who is blind or vision impaired will book a taxi in these circumstances. COVID-19 has caused a major downturn to the taxi industry. Raising unbooked taxi fares at this stage, may cause a further negative impact on an already ailing industry. Bearing these factors in mind, BCA agrees that in order to keep the taxi industry competitive, the decision not to raise unbooked taxi fares is the right one.

Conclusion

People who are blind or vision impaired rely more heavily than most on taxi and ride share services for transportation that is reliable, and which takes them from door to door. There are instances where using an unbooked taxi is convenient and necessary. At this stage, the taxi industry is facing a significant downturn. Raising fares for unbooked rides may cause a further reduction in usage of taxis. BCA therefore supports the decision not to raise the price of unbooked fares.