

## **Assessing the framework for training drivers of Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles Carers Victoria Submission, October 2019**

Carers Victoria welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Commercial Passenger Vehicles Victoria “Assessing the framework for training drivers of Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles” Issues paper.

Carers Victoria is the state-wide peak organisation representing people who provide unpaid care. We represent more than 736,600 family carers across Victoria – people caring for someone with a disability, mental illness, chronic health issue or an age-related condition. People receiving care could be a parent, child, spouse/partner, grandparent, other relative or friend. Carers Victoria is a member of the National Network of Carers Associations, and the Victorian Carer Services Network. Carers Victoria is a non-profit association which relies on public and private sector support to fulfil its mission with and on behalf of carers. Carers Victoria is a membership-based organisation. Our members are primarily family carers, who play an important role in informing our work, contributing to advocacy and strategic aims, and distributing information more widely to other carers.

Introduction: Commercial passenger vehicles are tremendously important for people with disability and their carers. Carers and the people they care for have specific needs in relation to commercial passenger vehicles and they regularly list access to safe, reliable and affordable transport as a major problem.

Care relationships can significantly reduce people’s income-earning capacity. Only 42 per cent of primary carers participate in the workforce. Consequently 47 per cent of primary carers in Victoria have a gross household income in the two lowest quintile levels, compared to only 25 per cent of non-carers.<sup>i</sup> The cost of necessary point-to-point transport is a major impost on their household budgets. Carers Victoria experiences a significant level of demand for taxi vouchers from its service users in the western metropolitan region of Melbourne usually for transport to medical appointments.

Given the ad hoc nature of accessible public transport across Victoria, families, carers and people with disability have fewer transport options than the general public. Many people with disability, including those using wheelchairs, are dependent on suitable vehicles and drivers so a well-functioning transport market is essential.

### **What experiences have you had as a passenger or carer that you would like to share to help us understand driver training needs? How could this experience be improved?**

While families and carers regularly accompany a person with disability in a commercial passenger vehicle, it is not often known a significant portion of carers have a disability themselves. In Victoria, 31 per cent report living with a disability.<sup>ii</sup>

Often individuals identifying as a person with disability OR a carer will report only one person being engaged and the other person being ignored by a service provider. This situation can depend on the age of each person, whether the person has an intellectual disability, exhibits behaviours of concern, their gender or cultural or linguistic background.

Like other disability services families and carers engage with, service users often report drivers operating WAVs are variable at best – delivering services in a professional, punctual and courteous manner OR conducting themselves in an unprofessional manner, arriving late, neglecting to adequately anchor the wheelchair or mobility scooter to the vehicle and refusing immediate feedback on the service.

At a more systemic level, the following are common themes families and carers commonly report as passengers of WAVs:

### **Taking advantage of individuals**

Drivers sometimes taking a longer and more costly route.

### **Complaints**

Due to historic violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with disability, their families and carers, passengers of WAVs often feel uncomfortable in raising their concerns at the time of an incident or making a formal complaint with the management of a service provider. Another reason for low numbers of complaints are 'thin markets' in disability services; thin markets occur when only one or two service providers are available; this problem commonly occurs in regional and rural areas. Families and carers are concerned if they make a complaint, the service provider will withdraw their service. A driver avoiding a passenger's patronage severely affects the passengers' capacity to live a regular life. Consequences can include more reliance on families and carers to provide transport or people with disability curtailing their participation in their community and economic life. Drivers in areas with few WAVs are in a powerful market position.

### **A new driver regularly appearing**

Difficulty in establishing a rapport with the driver and educating them in appropriate practices. Families and carers report better experiences when they have a relationship with a regular driver whom they book directly through a personal exchange of phone numbers rather than contacting the Booking Service Provider who will simply send the first available driver.

### **Assistance animals**

It is frequently reported to Carers Victoria and in the media some drivers refuse to accept assistance animals leaving passengers stranded with few options to arrive at their destination at the time they intended.

### **Damage to the wheelchair**

Notwithstanding the safety aspect of an improperly anchored wheelchair, the chair is often very valuable. It is easy to do \$4,000 damage to a wheelchair. A \$35,000 wheelchair may be worth more than the vehicle transporting it.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Explore WAV insurance for damage to passenger goods
2. Regularly assess the viability of the WAV market and adjust payments as required
3. Appoint an economist skilled in thin markets to report on optimising the WAV market

### **Do you believe the current W endorsement model is effective in assisting industry to meet safety duties related to passengers who travel in a wheelchair or mobility scooter? Why, or why not?**

The response to this question can be found in CPVV's State of the Industry Report which found while 81 per cent of passengers report satisfaction with equipment operation<sup>iii</sup>, a disturbing 19 per cent don't. With nearly one in five being unsatisfied with safety equipment, the risk to passengers is high.

The current model of endorsement appears to be more focused on technical aspects of safety for wheelchair and mobility scooter passengers such as correct anchoring of equipment to the vehicle. However, the current model is less effective if we have a broader

understanding of safety to include the passengers' comfort and ability to communicate with the driver about their role including tethering the wheelchair, determining the route taken and being understood and respected. To be able to address these aspects of passenger safety, the current W endorsement model should be revised to include a reporting system penalising drivers who do not adhere to safety guidelines.

**Who do you believe is best placed to deliver service specific training and assess competencies for WAV drivers?**

An answer to this question can depend on whether learning is considered to occur in a finite context such as classroom which is then applied in specific contexts or whether it is ongoing and can be built upon through practice and experience via peer models or consumer experience.

It is also a powerful learning tool to hear from people with lived experience of caring and disability. This can occur in face-face training sessions or via video. The case study on 13 cabs in the Issue Paper (page 7) is a good model for refining driver training across a range of other disabilities.

Like other professional development, training and assessment should be carried out by agents independent of employers who are themselves certified in training and assessment and can offer authentic assessments to reflect drivers' range of competencies.

**Does TLIC2040 - Provide wheelchair accessible taxi services to passengers with disabilities remain an appropriate assessment framework for Victorian WAV drivers? If not, is there a more appropriate framework available?**

The Issues Paper states assessment to achieve W endorsement is broadly based on TLIC2040 – Provide wheelchair accessible taxi services to passengers with disabilities. Importantly this training module requires drivers to 'apply ethical behaviour' to "ensure any form of sexual harassment, physical or mental abuse, intimidation towards passengers with disabilities or fraudulent behaviour does not occur". However, the Issues Paper states training is not compulsory.

The unit TLIC2040 is an appropriate assessment framework for WAV drivers in Victoria if indeed drivers are required to undertake it. As a national qualification, all states and territories can use it, making it an Australian standard for all drivers.

Moreover, drivers in Victoria should be required to undertake some theoretical training similar to that undertaken in Queensland such as training in disability awareness and antidiscrimination, including sexual harassment.

**Recommendations:**

1. Phase "TLIC2040 - Provide wheelchair accessible taxi services to passengers with disabilities" in as the basis of training for all drivers of WAVs in Victoria
2. Drivers receive regular update training to ensure their WAV skills are current

**How can CPVV and industry ensure that the skills associated with providing WAV services remain current without imposing undue regulatory burden on industry?**

The CPVV Issues Paper concern about the potential for regulation as onerous is misguided. Regulation is a necessary part of a functioning complex modern society and determinations of whether regulation should be reformed to be increased or decreased should be based on how effective regulations are in ensuring the safety of WAV passengers. The safety and

wellbeing of all passengers in WAVs should be the goal of CPVV and industry's determination of whether the skills of drivers are current, satisfactory and acceptable.

As an example the booking service provider 13cabs has a two-day training session for drivers wanting to enter the WAV sector. However, without knowing the content of the training, it is difficult to unilaterally commend the training solely based on the length of the training session.

**Do you agree that broader disability awareness training should be introduced for all commercial passenger vehicle drivers? Why, or why not?**

It will be beneficial if broader disability awareness training is introduced for all commercial passenger vehicle drivers in Victoria. Australia is in a significant period of reform regarding the civil rights of people with disability, their families and carers and the services they utilise in their everyday lives. There are many poor outcomes Australians with disability, their families and carers experience, not least their low participation in community activities and economic life. Accessible and affordable transport is a crucial means of achieving higher levels of participation in community and economic life. Understanding this can assist drivers to improve their service delivery and encourage others in the sector to seek W endorsement thereby increasing the numbers of WAVs and creating a more sustainable industry into the future.

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<sup>i</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2015) *Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers*, Australia, Victoria, Catalogue # 4430.0

<sup>ii</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2015) *Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers*, Australia, Victoria, Catalogue # 4430.0

<sup>iii</sup> Commercial Passenger Vehicles Victoria *Assessing the framework for training drivers of Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles* Oct 2019