



MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT

# **TAXI INDUSTRY SAFETY AND SECURITY TASKFORCE**

## **INTERIM REPORT**

**July 2007**

**Interim Report by the  
Taxi Industry Safety and Security Taskforce  
Chaired by Mr David Madden**

## 1.0 Executive Summary

The Taxi Industry Safety and Security Taskforce was announced in June 2006 by the Premier, Morris Iemma, and the Deputy Premier and Minister for Transport, John Watkins to assess the risks faced by taxi drivers, research and review existing safety initiatives, and to develop new strategies.

In its work to date, the Taskforce has found that, through better coordination, cooperation and targeted initiatives taxi industry safety can be improved and enhanced. This Interim Report proposes options for updating the current taxi driver safety and security framework and a range of possible initiatives to ensure safety issues are addressed in an informed, coordinated and comprehensive manner.

Current NSW requirements for taxi driver security equipment and technology are set out under sections 12, 13 and 14 of the Passenger Transport (Taxi-cab Services) Regulation 2001, and associated Orders published in the NSW Government Gazette. These are:

- Taxi emergency radio alarm (“M13”) systems
- Boot lock release device enabling the boot compartment to be released from inside
- Driver protection screens
- Surveillance cameras
- Driver training course curriculum

Even with these current requirements, the Taskforce found that opportunities exist to improve safety through implementing complementary measures grouped under six general headings.

### **Promoting greater awareness and respect**

Better communication between drivers and clients and a better general awareness of how certain behaviours can either trigger or avert incidents will help reduce violence. In regard to **promoting greater awareness and respect** the Taskforce found:

- There appears to be a lack of acknowledgement of the problem of taxi related crime within the broader community, including law enforcement and regulating agencies – unless there is a serious and sometimes deadly result.
- Taxi drivers must consider how to promote the best possible image, as mutual respect is a starting point for reducing the possibility of incidents.
- Good communication is fundamental to good customer service, and can help avoid confrontation and potentially dangerous situations arising or escalating. In this context, it needs to be acknowledged that at least 60% of Sydney taxi

drivers are from non-English speaking backgrounds. For these drivers in particular, the ability to communicate simply and directly is all the more valuable.

- There are clear benefits in the promotion of initiatives such as the NSW Taxi Council Driver of the Year Awards as means of positively raising the profile of the industry and promoting respect for drivers and the essential work they do across the community.

In brief options for consideration to **promote greater awareness and respect** are:

- Establish regular meetings between Police Local Area Commanders and representative taxi drivers
- Strengthen the current taxi driver educational curriculum to ensure all practical safety issues are addressed (safety, customer service and communication)
- Run promotional initiatives such as a media campaign promoting taxi driver safety, as well as respect and responsibility, to run ahead of the peak periods and in conjunction with targeted enforcement activity.

#### **Information and Data**

The Taskforce could not establish a thorough, current risk profile or data-map of taxi-related crime in NSW. There were many reasons for this, including under-reporting of incidents, variations in the way the information is recorded, collated and analysed. In terms of information and data the Taskforce identified the following issues:

- The NSW Police Computerised Operational Policing (COPS) database captures taxi related crime, but would benefit from greater detail and scope.
- Under-reporting of incidents was common in the taxi industry with drivers frequently opting not to report 'minor' crimes and fare evasion, due to:
  - Disruption of driver's shift and their earning time.
  - Police not always adopting a standard approach to reports by drivers of crimes against them.
  - Some drivers' poor level of spoken English making incident reporting difficult.
  - Many Police apparently being unaware of how to correctly process and store the video images taken from taxi security cameras.
- Significant gains could be made if the Police Assistance Line (PAL) database were adapted to record taxi crime. The PAL is a service whereby victims of non-emergency offences can report crime by telephone, rather than attend a Police Station.

- Initiatives, such as that adopted in Tamworth, where reporting procedures are standardised and streamlined, would enable drivers to report crime without unreasonably interrupting their shift and earnings potential.
- Alcohol, drug use by passengers and the ethnicity of taxi drivers have been identified as major risk factors associated with violence against taxi drivers.

Options for consideration regarding **information and data** are:

- Up to date research on taxi related crime in NSW is needed to effectively pursue taxi safety improvements.
- Incident reporting through the PAL should be promoted to increase reporting rates and better managed to ensure correct use of data.
- The Taskforce endorses current Government initiatives aimed at reducing the impact of alcohol abuse in the community, including efforts to curb under-age and binge drinking and to place greater responsibility and accountability on owners of licensed venues for the safety and welfare of their patrons after they leave the premises.

### **Enforcement**

The imbalance in the rate of occurrence between what are perceived as 'minor' crimes (frequent) and 'major' crimes relating to taxis means NSW Police are not able to give certain areas of crime an appropriate level of attention. Simple reforms would identify at Police local command level the significance of taxi-related crime and enable a more effective response. Enforcement issues identified by the Taskforce include:

- There are four basic charges for offences against taxi drivers: assault, robbery, malicious damage and fare evasion.
- A gap exists between what are perceived to be 'serious' and 'minor' issues. Incidents of assault are prioritised and acted upon as 'mainstream' criminal matters. By contrast, for the more frequent incidence of fare evasion, a range of different approaches are currently taken by different police officers, with some defining it as a 'civil matter' or disregarding it as a crime.
- Possible means of addressing the enforcement issue include:
  - Creation of a Police Standard Operating Procedures document or intranet based set of procedures for police officers.
  - A campaign raising awareness in the broader community and the Police service that fare evasion is a criminal offence and offenders can be prosecuted.
  - Increasing the penalty for fare evasion.
- The Taskforce considered that a recent initiative in parts of the USA could have merit in NSW: Police in vehicles or stationary traffic operations (such as random breath testing stations) randomly stop taxi vehicles to check the

safety of passenger and driver. Under this scheme taxi operators register their vehicle and have their drivers sign consent forms. Eligible cabs would display a visible decal both inside and outside the cab indicating a taxi can be stopped without establishing need or probable cause.

In brief **options for consideration** regarding enforcement are:

- A community awareness campaign to highlight the crime of fare evasion and increased penalty for this offence.
- A 'Police Stop' campaign, similar to those run in the USA, should be considered for trial.

### **Technology and Equipment**

The Taskforce discussed the role of technology in taxi safety initiatives and consulted Australian technology manufacturers on the opportunities, limitations (within the taxi industry) and general issues affecting the provision of security technology.

In terms of technology and equipment the Taskforce concluded or supported the following:

- The Taskforce strongly supports the announcement by the Minister for Transport in 2006 that security cameras would become mandatory safety equipment in all NSW taxis. The placement of a screen, or alteration to the dispatch screens, to include an image of what is being recorded by the camera should also be assessed.
- A dual M13 switch placement (only one switch is now required) could offer practical benefit to drivers.
- The use of GPS is universally accepted as a vital part of the taxi safety framework and strongly endorsed by the Taskforce.
- It is possible that the value of screens in promoting safety for taxi drivers has not yet been fully realised in NSW, given the current limitations of available products, and that consideration should be given to a re-examination of industry attitudes to security screens, particularly the attitudes of drivers. The current Victorian government trial on driver screens should be closely monitored in NSW.
- Optional self-locking doors are designed to complement a security screen. They enable a driver to be fully enclosed and safe from an external attacker. The general application of these devices to those taxis fitted with screens and cameras should be explored both for new fittings and retrofitted door locks.
- Regulatory requirements and standards for safety and security devices in NSW taxis should be reviewed every 5 years in line with the mandatory

regulatory review process. An additional review could be undertaken as needed to address significant new technology.

- The Taskforce did not support the use of external alarm lights that can be activated at the time of an incident as they could possibly attract unwanted attention from passers-by, increasing the risk of confrontation and incident.

In brief, options for consideration regarding **technology and equipment** are:

- Console and floor emergency switches should be considered for fitting to all NSW taxis.
- Drivers' door-locking technology should be considered for fitting to all taxis with security screens fitted
- Fitted security cameras should be mandatory in every NSW. Consideration should be given to funding provisions for hardship cases.
- The Ministry of Transport should consider undertaking a review of all current equipment standards with particular emphasis on camera capacity, image recording and retention. The Ministry could also review regulatory requirements and standards relating to taxi driver safety every 5 years.

#### **Point of pick-up improvements**

Experience has shown that where the identity of the passenger is known prior to their entry into the taxi, there is a much less chance of violence occurring. Cooperative schemes between taxi networks and venues can be very effective in reducing the elements of risk which threaten safety in and around taxis. The issues regarding point of pick-up identified by the Taskforce include:

- The encouragement of cooperative initiatives such as Liquor Accords provide an opportunity to reduce offences against taxi drivers on any given night but particularly on the busier times of Friday and Saturday nights.
- The Taskforce strongly supports the concept of secure taxi ranks as a valuable part of the broader cooperative approach to removing potential threats to taxi drivers and passengers. A secure taxi rank is a rank patrolled by trained security staff late at night at locations busy with patrons from popular entertainment precincts.
- Taxi voucher schemes require a patron seeking a taxi from a venue such as a pub or club to produce photo identification, the venue then records the patron's details and books a taxi for them. The benefit of the scheme is that passengers' identities are recorded and drivers feel more confident of their safety.
- The Taskforce endorses efforts to continue the move towards cashless technologies while acknowledging a need to retain a capacity for cash payment.

- Legislation to enable drivers to require payment or part-payment of the fare by passengers prior to a journey should be considered. There are obvious benefits for a driver, though there is also concern that this suggestion may be provocative to some passengers.

In brief, options for consideration regarding **point of pick-up improvements** are:

- Endorse the continuation of the secure ranks program.
- Liquor Accords to be carefully reviewed by Government to ensure the involvement of representatives of the transport industry - in particular taxi operators and drivers.
- Taxi voucher schemes and other similar schemes are promoted through the taxi industry and hotels and clubs.
- Consideration be given to enabling taxi drivers to require payment or part-payment of the fare, prior to the hiring.
- Current legislation prohibiting the demand by the taxi driver for the fare to be paid upfront should be reviewed.

### **Governance**

The Taskforce agreed on the importance of a representative and expert advisory group to ensure taxi safety initiatives are properly implemented and monitored.

In brief, options for consideration regarding **governance** are:

- A government/industry advisory body including taxi driver representation should formally address taxi driver safety initiatives as a standing agenda item. It should oversee current initiatives, monitor technological advancements and provide regular advice regarding taxi industry safety issues.

### **Next Steps**

The Taskforce identified a number of key issues, with a range of complementary strategies for consideration as outlined above.

A further significant area of work for the Taskforce in the second stage is a comprehensive survey of taxi drivers and other relevant industry stakeholders to better gauge their views of safety concerns, possible solutions and on the interim recommendations proposed in this Report.

It is anticipated that following the analysis of the survey results and completion of other areas of work, the Taskforce will be in a position to submit a Final Report to Government during 2007.