

Empowering people with a disability to live connected, productive, and fulfilling lives by providing Safe and Reliable Wheelchair Accessible Transportation

The Community Transport Organisation is the peak body for community transport operators within NSW. As an organisation, we advocate for the sustenance of an industry that works to elevate the discourse about the vital role that transport plays in our society, not only as a social and economic mobiliser, but also as a quality-of-life indicator. We know that transport insecurity changes behaviour, reduces wellbeing due to loss of independence and self-determination and increases isolation and feelings of hopelessness.

Transport is an important enabler for people living with a disability to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life. The Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities states that 'parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure to persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications,'. Article 9 establishes a vision for a community wide capability of accessibility and inclusion. Within this vision the role of transport is clear. People living with a disability need to have choice within a transport market that provides supported, individualised, affordable, reliable and accessible transport. There is work to be done.

Currently in NSW, we are experiencing a severe reduction in the number of available wheelchair modified vehicles within the point to point industry. We hear from community transport operators across NSW that the shortage is affecting our industry ability to utilise the taxi network to accommodate scale but is also severely impacting choice and availability for passengers who are not eligible for subsidised community transport. This impact is felt within the metro and regional areas, but is most acute in rural and remote areas where thin markets exist and alternate public transport services are sporadic or sparse.

Community transport can be a valuable partner in the solution to this crippling deficit of available services.

It is time for Transport for New South Wales to implement recommendations from the Point-to-Point Independent Review (2020). *The Review* called out the foreseeable market response to the reduced value of the taxi licence and heralded the crisis that the community is currently experiencing. *The Review* lays out several recommendations that counteract the market response and it is time to revisit these recommendations with serious and solution orientated focus.

Inherent within Recommendation 7.3 'A level playing field for services for the transport disadvantaged', is the idea that the TTSS be made provider neutral across time, but that *the TTSS be immediately made available for use with all authorised service providers in regional locations without a taxi service (including community transport)*. The CTO assert that time has passed, and inaction must make room for innovation and progress.

CTO calls for not only the TTSS but also the WAT Driver Incentive Scheme (WATDIS) to be immediately made available for use by community transport operators throughout NSW. We believe that community transport operators provide the right mix of resources to be able to respond with immediacy to this challenge.

The Community Transport industry is established throughout NSW, regulated by TfNSW and in many cases already accredited under the Point-to-Point Commission. Known and trusted within community, the industry is able to be relied upon to respond appropriately to need. The industry has established training practises in wheelchair accessible vehicles, manual handling, work health and safety as well as many of the soft skills used to enhance the passenger experience, like person centred care, knowing and understanding clients and dealing with difficult situations.

The CTO would like to encourage the Department to be aspirational about how the current resource mix can respond to the presenting challenges within the wheelchair taxi industry. Developing a new approach, that re-

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imagines the role that community transport plays within an accessible transportation system is at the heart of expanding choice and empowering people with a disability to live connected, productive, and fulfilling lives.

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