



Official journal of the Victorian Taxi Association

Print Post Approved number PP328444/0004 Issue Number 541

APRIL 2013



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OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE VICTORIAN TAXI ASSOCIATION

MAGAZINE EDITOR Toni F. Peters
VTA EDITOR David Samuel
FOUNDER Stanley F. White
PUBLISHER Trade Promotions Pty Ltd

ADVERTISING ENQUIRIES

Trade Promotions Pty Ltd
42 Grenfell Road, Mt Waverley VIC 3149
PO Box 2345, Mt Waverley VIC 3149

Phone: 03 9807 0237

Fax: 03 9807 3401

Email: info@taxitalk.com.au

Website: www.taxitalk.com.au

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Phone: 03 9676 2635 Fax: 03 9676 2643

PRESIDENT Kevin Gange

VICE PRESIDENT Stephen Armstrong

CHIEF EXECUTIVE David Samuel

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Over the next 12 months I hope to establish my imprint on the VTA and the way it works with the community, government and the industry.

“It feels a little strange to introduce myself as the new CEO of the Victorian Taxi Association (VTA) - largely because I have been involved with the VTA, and the industry more broadly, for some time now.”

At the outset I would like to pay tribute to the tremendous contribution of former CEO Neil Sach. 19 years is a long time to dedicate oneself to such a role. I have very much enjoyed getting to know Neil and working with him.

Even in the relatively short time I have been working at the VTA many things have changed. Nothing, however, compares to what we have seen over the last two years with regard to the Victorian Taxi Industry Inquiry and its numerous recommendations. The VTA's substantive view on the key issues will not change as a result of Neil's departure and my arrival.

Our concerns remain the same, as do the aspects of the report we believe show merit. All of what we have had to say can be easily accessed via our website - I won't bore you by going into greater details here.

Inquiry outcomes aside, there are other areas I would like to focus on over the next 12 months.

Some are straight forward operational issues, like the need for a long overdue fare increase, and others relate to less tangible factors like trying to reinvigorate and balance the community's perception of our industry.

Importantly, the industry also

needs to be more involved in shaping the service that customers receive and expectations about the level of service we provide. The customer must remain the central focus.

It was pleasing to note at the end of 2012 that overall customer satisfaction with Victoria's taxi service sat at nearly 70 per cent. This is the highest level in six years and up from around 55 per cent at the beginning of the Taxi Industry Inquiry almost two years ago. Unfortunately our critics weren't as quick to congratulate us for this achievement as they're to condemn us for perceived shortcomings in the past.

As an industry we must continue to work to raise these standards even higher. Through service delivery improvements the industry will not only gain a much needed lift in short term revenue, but also greater credibility and confidence that will stand it in better stead to be offered, and seize, new opportunities.

Over the next 12 months I hope to establish my imprint on the VTA and the way it works with the community, government and the industry. I will have to spend some time over the coming weeks and months bedding down my staff structure and the direction I want to take. I am confident I can hit the ground running given my experience within the industry.

I also hope to be able to announce new initiatives and processes that will allow the VTA to better communicate with the industry at all levels. This will not be limited to metropolitan Melbourne, but also extend to our regional colleagues. Taxis are not limited to Melbourne and the great service regional taxi services provide should not be overlooked or forgotten.

Let me also state my commitment to building a strong and productive relationship with the government, particularly the soon to be established Taxi Services Commission.

While we must retain our ability to think and act independently in the interest of our industry and its customers, we must also recognise that we are a heavily regulated industry and meaningful dialogue between our industry and our regulators is vital to ensure an environment conducive to running a successful business.

Let me finish by saying what an honour it is to take on this responsibility. If you would like to provide feedback or just ask a question please do not hesitate to get in touch with me via admin@victaxi.com or 03 9676 2635.

David Samuel
VTA CEO 🍀



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VTA engaging in Regional Victoria

Regional taxi companies are a vital part of the VTA's membership. While the last couple of years have been challenging, particularly given the uncertainty surrounding the Taxi Industry Inquiry, the hard work and dedication regional members have shown to their businesses and the industry more broadly is outstanding.

By engaging with the VTA and its representatives, VTA members have been able to develop and deliver a common message.

As a result, the majority of regional members of the Victorian Parliament now have a much better understanding of the taxi industry and the potential effects that the recommendations will have on taxi businesses in country Victoria.

While the VTA has been working tirelessly, engaging with the Government to achieve the best outcome possible from this Inquiry, the efforts of the members has complimented and strengthened this.

One of the key focuses of the incoming CEO is enhancing engagement with regional members and ensure their voice is heard.

By attending meetings and bringing lively and relevant discussion to these forums, the challenges that arise in the future can be faced together. ❖

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DAVID SAMUEL

vta chief executive officer

The new CEO of the Victorian Taxi Association from 11 March 2013 is David Samuel.

David is married with a daughter. He has been with the Victorian Taxi Association (VTA) for five years and, in that time, has developed a passion for the taxi industry and the people that work within it.

Before joining the VTA, Da-

vid held a number of positions in and around Government. He has worked for state government and as an advisor to a federal member of parliament. David also spent some time working at the Parliament of Victoria, where amongst other things he worked as an advisor to the President of the Legislative Council.

Prior to obtaining a university de-

gree at the Australian National University in Canberra, David worked for Telecom/Telstra as a linesman installing and repairing phone lines.

David is an unapologetic Carlton and Parramatta Eels supporter and tries to spend as much time as possible (outside of work) riding bikes and playing golf. ♣



First round of VTA region meetings

During March, the VTA held its first round of region meetings for 2013. The four meetings were held at Moe, Shepparton, Hamilton and Bendigo. The meetings provided an opportunity for Neil Sach to bade farewell to country members as the VTA CEO of 19 years. The opportunity was taken for David Samuel to reintroduce himself as the new CEO. Unfortunately, David was unable to attend the Bendigo meeting, but he intends to make this up in the next round of region meetings.

The meetings provided an opportunity for members to be brought up to date on outcomes of the Taxi Industry Inquiry and changes at the VTA, and discussion on matters of regional interest. David has made it clear he regards region meetings and communication with regional members as a high priority going forward. ❀

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CHANGES TO TAXI HOLDING AREA ENTRY AND EXIT

The exit point at Melbourne Airport's Taxi Holding Area is moving.

From **Midday on Thursday 4 April 2013**, taxis will exit the Taxi Holding Area onto the new Francis Briggs Road extension.

Please see the map below and for more information about the Francis Briggs Road extension project visit www.melbourneairport.com.au/francis-briggs





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Judge slams cabbie sex attacks

An Indian taxi driver who sexually assaulted two Melbourne women while driving them home in separate incidents, believed Australian women are sexually available, a court heard.

Gurjit Singh, 28, did not appreciate the illegality of inappropriately touching intoxicated young female passengers, including one while he was contesting criminal charges over the other, County Court Judge Gabriele Cannon said.

"It's important for you, Mr Singh, to appreciate the very real consequences of your horrendous actions," Judge Cannon said as she jailed him for at least six months.

She said he had breached the women's trust "in a most despicable way".

Around 1.30am on December 2, 2011 - less than a

month after he appeared in court over an earlier incident - he inappropriately touched a drunk 22-year-old woman and asked her to touch his genitals.

In May 2010, he began asking a 31-year-old woman he was driving home, personal questions, including whether she enjoyed sex. While stopped at a red light, Singh learnt over and squeezed the woman's breast hard and grabbed her inside thigh before she jumped out of the cab.

Singh denied the allegation, but later pleaded guilty to two counts of indecent assault. A rape charge was dropped.

Psychologist Jeffrey Cummins found Singh became frustrated when he had no sexual partner, compounded by his parents enforcing strict Sikh rules. The Indian national moved to Australia in 2006.

Mr Cummins said cultural factors played a part in the offending because Singh believed Australian women were more sexually assertive than Indian women.

Singh was jailed for a maximum of one year.


Emily Portelli ❖



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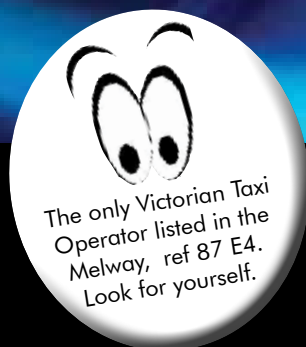
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Featuring improbable duos guaranteed to make you laugh twice as much as you could ever imagine, a 30 piece choir, Irish 'hip-hop' chart-toppers, an organ, a cello, two ukuleles and more jokes

than you can shake a stick at, the 2013 Festival is set to be the biggest yet.

Melbourne Comedy Festival Director Susan Provan said, "We may be in the longest election campaign ever but we have the largest Melbourne Comedy Festival ever, offering distractions, diversions and opinions on everything. Our 2013 program is filled with treats and I urge every person who already loves comedy or who thinks that they could, to investigate it thoroughly."

Australia's finest home-grown talent will take to the many stages of the Festival, among them Tom Gleeson, Rod Quantock, Sean Choolburra, Denise Scott, Judith

Lucy, Asher Treleavan, Josh Thomas, Wil Anderson, Kitty Flanagan and more.

Comedy royalty and Festival guests from the greater globe include Ruby Wax, Loretta Maine, The Rubberbandits, Rich Fulcher, Mike Birbiglia, Jack Dee, Pajama Men, Nina Conti and many more.

Alongside a hysterical line-up of special events including The (Very) Big Laugh Out, the Festival's free outdoor program funded by the Victorian Government, it will take over Fed Square once again with its all embracing, family friendly program of entertainment for the entire Festival season.

Other special events include Up-front, Comedy Club For Kids, Raw Comedy, Class Clowns National Grand Final and new in 2013, Australia, You're Standing In It!, Web Comedy: The New Joke? and Red Hot Shorts to name just a few.

First launched by the late, great Peter Cook in 1987 with just over 50 shows in 33 venues, the Melbourne Comedy Festival has grown into one of Australia's most well-known and loved annual events, now a launching pad for major local and international comedians. ❀

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Melbourne Airport Rail Link

The Victorian Coalition Government has confirmed a route for development of a rail link to Melbourne Airport after assessing 80 alternatives, with findings from the \$6.5 million Melbourne Airport Rail Link Study now available.

Speaking at the release of the study's findings and technical report, Minister for Public Transport Terry Mulder said the confirmation of the route was an essential step in providing a Melbourne Airport rail link.

"The Coalition Government has invested \$6.5 million in the essential pre-work for a rail link to Melbourne Airport," Mr Mulder said.

"We committed to ensuring that the best route was secured through a comprehensive investigation of rail link options.

"Public Transport Victoria has completed this work and found that a route known as the 'Albion East route' outperforms more than 80 alternative routes considered by the Melbourne Airport Rail Link Study.

The recommended Albion East route builds on the foundations of previous planning by using land reserved in 2001 for a new section of track. However, the study has



found that the 2001 design is no longer feasible as it cannot provide the capacity for rail services to the airport as well as increased services to cater for the unprecedented patronage growth occurring in this corridor.

"A new Albion East design follows the 2001 route from the airport boundary via new tracks through reserved land and a freight corridor, but will use the existing rail tracks from Sunbury within the Sunshine corridor and connect with the Government's planned Melbourne Metro rail tunnel," Mr Mulder said.

"This new design will unlock airport access for people in Melbourne's south-east and CBD, with the connection via Melbourne Metro enabling people to use the

planned Dandenong-Sunshine rail corridor to travel straight to Melbourne Airport.

"The Melbourne Airport Rail Link Study has taken into account previous planning for an airport connection and significant changes in our transport network over the last 10 years, including current and planned projects.

"Melbourne Metro will help to untangle our rail network, providing a generational improvement in rail services across the city.

"The recommended route for development of a Melbourne Airport rail link will tap into this transformation of Melbourne's rail network and achieve cost efficiencies by utilising significant infrastructure already being planned," Mr Mulder said.

Mr Mulder said Public Transport Victoria (PTV) would continue planning for a Melbourne Airport rail link and that the link would be included in plans for the expansion of Melbourne's rail network.

The Victorian Coalition Government is advocating for Commonwealth support for ongoing joint planning of this High-Speed Rail route linking the other east coast states with the CBD via Melbourne Airport. The Melbourne Airport Rail Study will continue to co-ordinate with the Commonwealth on this work.

The findings of the Melbourne Airport Rail Link Study are now available at www.ptv.vic.gov.au/projects. ❖

SERVICE DATABASE UPGRADE

VTD

Customer Service Centre closed 8 April

Victorian Taxi Directorate (VTD) Customer Service Centre (CSC) will be closed on Monday 8 April. It will reopen on Tuesday 9 April with reduced services:

- Applications for driver accreditation can be accepted
- MPTP driver log in Personal Identification Number (PIN) codes can be changed and
- Industry Accreditation and Licensing documentation can be accepted.

The VTD are migrating all current driver accreditation data from the VicRoads system, to a new VTD system, the Victorian Taxi Management System (VTMS). Data will be migrated from the existing system on Saturday 6 and Sunday 7 April. On Monday 8 April, the system will undergo testing with external third parties including Victoria Police and card manufacturers.

How do I contact Accreditation and Licensing during this period?

- During this period we encourage you to email your requests to the following email addresses; you will receive a response by the end of the week:



Marnie Williams
VTD GM

- Licensing – licensing.taxi@transport.vic.gov.au
- Industry Accreditation – vtdia@transport.vic.gov.au
- Driver Accreditation – driveraccreditation@transport.vic.gov.au
- Phone services on Monday 8 April and Tuesday 9 April 2013 will be heavily reduced; however requests can be taken and will be actioned by the end of the week.

The VTD apologises for any inconvenience caused. This is a vital upgrade and we appreciate your patience during this time. ❀

Stakeholder survey

Taxi industry participants who have provided their email address to the VTD will soon receive our annual Stakeholder Survey.

The VTD conducts a stakeholder survey each year to ensure we keep improving the service we provide to you, the taxi industry.

We had a terrific response to

last year's survey and we hope we will again this year.

If you haven't yet provided your e-details (email and phone number), unfortunately, you've missed your chance to be a part of this year's survey.

However, it's still worth registering them as the VTD sends out a range of important and interesting information electroni-

cally, including our new eNewsletters. Plus, you'll be first in line for next year's survey.

So don't wait! Visit www.taxi.vic.gov.au and fill out our online form.

It only takes five minutes but it will mean you keep up to date critical information about your industry. ❀



Interstate MPTP taxi vouchers

When Multi Purpose Taxi Program (MPTP) members travel interstate they can apply to the VTD for Interstate Vouchers.

These Interstate Vouchers ensure MPTP members still receive half price taxi travel wherever they are in Australia.

This is a reciprocal arrangement. When people visit Victoria with Interstate Vouchers issued in their home state or territory they must also be accepted by Victorian taxi drivers.

Yet feedback from some interstate visitors shows that this is not always the case – some Victorian drivers have refused to accept them.

Drivers are reminded that as part of licence conditions they are required to always accept Interstate Vouchers as part of the fare.

Interstate Vouchers do not cover the payment of the lifting fee to the driver/operator. Drivers are reminded that people who travel in WATs never pay this fee themselves, including passengers from interstate..

When a passenger does not have a MPTP (Wheelchair/Scooter) Taxi Card (M31 card) the lifting fee is not paid. On these occasions, drivers are permitted to turn the meter on while loading/unloading passengers. This includes when carrying WAT passengers from interstate. ❖





Mobility aids in taxis

Wheelchair Accessible Taxis (WATs) have an important role in providing transport for passengers who use wheelchairs, scooters and other forms of mobility aids.

However, not all mobility aids can safely carry passengers in taxis. Scooters, princess, and other 'high care' type chairs are not suitable to be transported in WATs if the passenger is seated in them.

Passengers who use these forms of mobility aids may still be carried in WATs provided that:

- the taxi driver can safely restrain the mobility aid to prevent movement; and
- the passenger can transfer off the mobility aid into a fixed seat in the vehicle and use the seat belt provided.

Under no circumstances should a driver allow a passenger to travel while seated in a scooter, princess chair or other 'high-care' type mobility aid.

Passengers may travel while seated in wheelchairs provided that:

- the wheelchair is securely restrained by applying restraints to the floor from two points on the

front and two points on the rear of the wheelchair frame;

- the passenger is secured by a seat belt fitted to the taxi and which has been properly adjusted and fastened in the manner in which the seat belt is designed to be worn; and
- the wheelchair is positioned with the occupant facing towards the front of the taxi and with the wheelchair located between the appropriate restraint attachment tracks/points on the floor.

To help drivers and passengers understand the requirements regarding the safe carriage of mobility aids in taxis, the VTD has refreshed its Carriage of mobility aids in wheelchair accessible taxis information sheet.

For a copy of the revised information sheet, or to view the VTD's WAT educational video, visit www.taxi.vic.gov.au. ❀

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Thank you

In 2010, Niamh Kellegher joined the staff of the VTA in an administrative support role. It didn't take long for her talent and enthusiasm to break through and for her to take on a more challenging role.



Unfortunately however, Niamh's time at the VTA has come to an end.

The VTA was fortunate to have Niamh as part of its team, and she will be greatly missed.

Thank you Niamh for your contribution to the VTA. ❀

VTD update

accreditation renewals

Industry accreditation renewals have now been sent to all operators, licence holders and network service providers whose accreditation is due to expire at the end of July 2013.

If yours is due to expire on

or before 31 July 2013 and you have not yet received your renewal notice please contact the VTD on 1800 638 802.

August and September renewals are planned to be posted in April 2013.

When completing your industry accreditation renewal, please ensure you read it carefully and complete all documentation, including all components of the statutory declaration. ♣

Protection Screens

For safety and peace of mind, all drivers should use protection screens.

The only screen currently approved by the Victorian Taxi Directorate (VTD) for the Ford Falcon FG, is the Martin Bodyguard II MBGFG-CA taxi driver protection screen, supplied by Martin Meters of Tullamarine (ph 9335 1552).

Screens designed for BA or BF Falcons are not approved for fitting into Falcon FGs.

Authorised officers of the VTD will be conducting audits of accredited operators to ensure that all regulatory requirements are being complied with, including the requirement to purchase and make available an approved screen for each vehicle. ♣



ASIC searches

If you are supplying an Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC) extract to the VTD it is critical that the extract lists all the current company directors. ASIC extracts that are out of date or have incomplete information, will not be accepted. ♣

Customer Service Centre

The VTD is currently experiencing a high volume of work in its Customer Service Centre (CSC) and advises that delays may be experienced for all counter transactions. The VTD CSC opening hours are 9.30am to 4.30pm. Waiting times are lower in the morning, so visit as early as you can. ♣

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TAXI

\$319,250

transfers

average metro licence transfer
value for the month of
February 2013

All data on this page
is provided by the
Victorian Taxi
Directorate
and is for the
month of
February
2013

Number of Taxi Licences

METROPOLITAN 4,239

(including 491 WAT vehicles)

COUNTRY 512

(including 113 WAT vehicles)

OUTER SUBURBAN 159

(including 33 WAT vehicles)

URBAN 255

(Ballarat - Bendigo - Geelong)

(including 35 WAT vehicles)

TOTAL 5,165

(including 672 WAT vehicles)

NUMBER OF DRIVERS

Active drivers 16,000 APPROX

Accredited drivers 24,000 APPROX

ASSIGNMENTS

metro taxis 65

average metro licence

assignment price \$2511

LICENCE TRANSFERS

metro taxis 3

urban 0

country taxis 1

hire car licences 4

special licences 3

LICENCES ISSUED

taxi licences 0

hire car licences 0

special vehicles 2

RH vehicles 6

HIRE CAR LICENCE VALUE

\$52,238

average metro hire car licence
transfer value for the month of
February 2013

Compliance outcomes

Taxi Inspections 1,854

Rectification Notices 331

Infringement Notices 97

Notices of Unroadworthiness 9

Official Warnings 26

Number of Victorian Hire Vehicle Licences

Metropolitan Hire Cars 926

Country Hire Cars 66

Special Purpose Vehicles 830

Restricted Hire Cars 639

TOTAL 2,641

Have you had a serious
health incident?



Don't risk depression
and anxiety.

At-risk people to get more information about protecting themselves

Just a fraction of people who have heart attacks receive mental health advice as they recuperate, despite the experience leaving them much more likely than the general community to develop depression or anxiety.

It comes as beyondblue and the Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association release a new pamphlet, the first of its kind in Australia, to raise awareness about the increased mental health risks people face after a serious health issue has landed them in hospital.

beyondblue CEO Kate Carnell AO said factors associated with serious health scares such as shock, emotional trauma, lifestyle changes and lingering ill-health all contribute to the increased risk people face.

beyondblue-funded research that shows up to 50% of people who survive a heart attack or coronary artery disease then develop an anxiety condition, compared with 26% of the general population who will experience one over a lifetime.

But Ms Carnell said despite this,

only between 31% and 37% heart attack or coronary artery disease survivors receive information about how to cope emotionally as they recover.

"A recent analysis of people in a large Victorian town shows only about a third of people who've had a non-fatal heart attack or coronary disease get the mental health information they need, and this is not uncommon across the rest of Australia," she said. "This means thousands of Australians who urgently need guidance on how to protect themselves from mental illness miss out, despite being almost twice as likely to develop an anxiety condition when compared to the general population. They are also more likely to become depressed.

"In fact, anyone who is struck by a sudden serious illness is at increased risk. People need to know that a sudden health event can leave them emotionally vulnerable and this pamphlet shows the simple steps they can take to ensure they don't develop depression or anxiety. These pamphlets meet

the urgent need to educate hospital patients about how they can protect themselves. People often make a full recovery from a physical illness, but their mental health suffers because they're not aware of the risks they face."

People who have had a health scare, their family and friends can order the pamphlet or download it from www.beyondblue.org.au

Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association CEO, Prue Power AM, said the pamphlet will help teach people about typical emotional reactions, how to identify the signs and symptoms of depression and anxiety and how to tackle these conditions.

"This pamphlet contains simple and straightforward mental health advice that will be used by thousands of people," she said. "We are proud to be involved in the production of this pamphlet because it has the potential to help significantly in raising awareness of depression and anxiety." ❀





The waiting game

The last two years have been challenging for the taxi industry and it is important we all remember that there are taxi services that exist outside of Metropolitan Melbourne that face the same pressures as those within it. While many of the issues are the same, some differ.

Prices faced by country operators tend to fluctuate a great deal. For example, LPG and fuel costs, more generally, are often higher than Melbourne and tend to stay higher for longer. Even painting a taxi can be a vastly more expensive process. As I found recently.

The range of work taxis do in country areas also tends to vary a great deal. It is important to remember that in some country towns taxis are the only reliable form of non-personal transport. This means the taxis have to do a wide range of work to service the community. In turn the community becomes extremely reliant on the local taxi service.

Many often overlook these issues and fail to recognise that country taxis operate services that extend well beyond the traditional definition of what a taxi service is.

Country taxi people are proud of this fact, and it perhaps helps

to explain why we get somewhat upset when people quite unfairly criticise the role we play and our performance without bothering to properly understand it.

Despite these operational differences many of the issues and concerns that exist in Melbourne are the same as those in the country. Licence value will always be a contentious issue as will the level of fares and the number of taxis. At the moment many have, quite understandably, been focused on the Taxi Industry Inquiry and the Government's response to it. The problem in this respect is that there are a number of operational issues that are starting to impact on the sustainability of local taxi services just as harshly as the uncertainty surrounding the Taxi Inquiry recommendations.

Fare levels in Victoria remain stagnant. It is coming up to five years since we last saw an adjustment. This is obviously becoming an increasingly pressing issue and one that needs to be resolved as soon as possible. The VTD has had to delay decisions because it simply cannot commit to a position at this time of uncertainty. Just as concerning is their inability to re-

cruit and fill vacancies which has seen an increase in waiting times for things like Driver Accreditation approval in country.

We understand that the Government want to take their time to ensure they make the right decisions reading the Inquiry recommendations and it is hard not to agree with this approach. However, some of the operational issues need to be addressed now, to ensure that country taxi services can continue to provide the great service that they do. Further, it is also important to help the industry in Melbourne retain and build on the latest customer satisfaction survey results of 69% - up from 50 odd per cent two years ago.

I urge readers not to forget about us out in the country. We face many of the same challenges faced by those in the city, and do a great job in this context. While we respect the Minister's desire to get this reform package right, we would also urge him not to forget about us. There are operational realities that really need to be addressed now.

Jan Uebergang
Hamilton Taxis ❀

It's not just illegal drugs that are dangerous to drivers

Driving under the influence of a range of prescription medications can affect your driving ability.

Research conducted for insurance company AAMI has suggested as many as 21 per cent of Australian drivers have driven after taking prescription or over-the-counter medicines, despite the label warning them not to.

Cold and flu medications, paracetamol, nasal sprays and painkillers are among many prescribed or over-the-counter medications that have the potential to affect your ability to drive safely.

With side effects such as slower reaction times, distorted perceptions of speed and distance, reduced concentration and co-

ordination, why would you risk it? Motorists need to consider the following when taking medication:

- ▲ Always check warning labels, even if you have taken that drug before.

- ▲ Always ask your doctor or pharmacist if the medication you are going to use could impair your driving ability. There may be an alternative medication that does not impair your ability to drive safely;

- ▲ Don't drive if you are unsure of the effect of the drug on your ability to drive safely; and.

- ▲ Don't mix medication with other medication or alcohol, as this can seriously affect your health and your ability to drive safely. You may not feel intoxicated or impaired, but you could, in fact, be over the blood alcohol limit or in an unfit state to drive. ❀





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Get back to work

it's a healthy goal

WorkSafe Victoria has launched a major campaign to highlight the physical, mental and social benefits of injured workers getting back to work as soon as it is safe for them to do so.

The public awareness campaign highlights that injured workers who are off work for three months or longer face significant health risks. They include:

- Up to 10 times more episodes of anxiety and depression
- Greatly reduced life expectancy
- A higher risk of suicide

On average, more than 28,000 Victorians are injured at work every year.

Of these about 6000 are still off work after three months and 3000 are off work for more than six months.

WorkSafe Victoria chief executive Denise Cosgrove said the health and wellbeing of injured workers declined dramatically after more than 12 weeks off work.

"International research and our own data tells us the chances of someone returning to work drops off around the three-month mark and, after six months, the chances of the worker ever returning to work are halved," Ms Cosgrove said.

"This alarming trend exposes them and their families to a range of increased health, financial and social risks.

"Getting back to work when it is safe and appropriate to do so is usually the best medicine for an injured worker, with research indicating that work is beneficial to their short and long-term mental and physical health."

Ms Cosgrove said the role played by an injured person's family and friends, employer, doctor and other medical professionals all played an important part in getting a person back to work.

"While an injured person's own determination to get back to work goes a long way, the support and encouragement of the people around them is vital. It's a team effort, but the benefits for injured workers and their families are enormous," she said.

WorkSafe's new Return to Work Ambassador, Paralympian Jack Swift, said he understood better than most the benefits of returning to work after injury.

He was just 21 and working as a plumber's labourer on an inner Melbourne construction site when a 14-tonne excavator ran over his right leg, crushing it below the knee. Conscious throughout the ordeal, Jack was rushed to hospital and his leg was amputated the next day.



Jack said the accident "absolutely turned my life upside down" and described the 13 months he was off work as the worst time of his life.

"I thought losing a leg was like being paralysed," Jack said. "I didn't think I'd be able to hang around my mates, play football, let alone return to work—I couldn't comprehend where my life was going.

"Now, I can do as much as, probably more, than many able-bodied people can do."

Jack said returning to work after a workplace accident could be difficult but, with the help of family and the correct medical support, it made him who he was today.

"I wouldn't be where I am today without the support I received from my employer, medical professionals, my family and my girlfriend Jenna. They were there every step of the way," Jack said.

"I've been in the shoes of an injured person returning to work after a workplace accident and I know the benefits – it's not just about financial benefits but also the physical, social and mental benefits." ❀

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TAXI DRIVER RETURNS \$60k TO PASSENGER

A taxi driver returned 400,000 Chinese Yuan cash (\$60,944 AUD) to the passenger who lost it in his cab, in northwest China's Shaanxi Province recently.

Zhong Long, a local taxi driver in Xi'an found a bag of money left on his backseat Sunday morning, according to ksdk.com.

"A passenger this morning told me there was a bag on my backseat. I asked him to check whether it was something important, and if so I should call the superior. Then we found it was a bag of money, 40,000 yuan," Mr Long told ksdk.com.

The driver quickly turned in the money to the taxi company and called the local police.

The owner of the money also called the police and rushed to the office building of the taxi company with the help of the local police in Xi'an.

The owner said the money was to pay the salary of the migrant workers in his construction company, however he forgot to take the money with him when getting out of the taxi while he was busy talking on the phone. ❀



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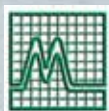
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