

NSW TAXI TRANSPORT SUBSIDY SCHEME
Spinal Cord Injuries Australia's Position Statement
Greg Killeen - SCI Australia Policy and Advocacy Officer
July 1, 2009

Spinal Cord Injuries Australia (SCI Australia) supports access, equity and universal design for all private and public transport services, facilities and infrastructure and for such transport to be affordable for people with a spinal cord injury or similar condition to enable them to participate in society as active citizens.

SCI Australia also supports and encourages concessions and subsidies to assist people with a spinal cord injury or similar condition to access transport to meet their needs in consideration to the extra unavoidable costs associated with having a disability. For many people with a spinal cord injury or similar condition the Wheelchair Accessible Taxi (WAT) service is their only option for accessible transport.

The NSW Taxi Transport Subsidy Scheme (TTSS) [www.transport.nsw.gov.au/ttss] is available to eligible people to assist with the cost of WATs by providing a 50% subsidy of the metered taxi fare up to a maximum \$30 subsidy of a \$60 taxi fare. To qualify for the TTSS, an applicant's disability must be permanent. The eligibility of an applicant depends on the extent or severity of the disability or mobility limitation, and must fall strictly within one of the following categories of Ambulatory Problems, Vision Impairment, Epilepsy, Intellectual Disability or other Functional Disabilities in relation to communication difficulties.

For people with ambulatory problems to be eligible for the TTSS they must:

1. Be unable to walk or stand. Mobile only in a wheelchair due to physical disability; or
2. Be mobile outside of home only with a wheelchair due to physical disability; or
3. Have a severe and permanent ambulatory problem that cannot functionally be improved which limits walking to an extremely limited distance.

The NSW TTSS subsidy was last increased by \$5 to the current maximum \$30 (50% of a \$60 taxi fare) in 1997, however, NSW taxi fares have increased by 44% since then resulting in taxi transport becoming increasingly unaffordable for many people with a disability, particularly those on a pension, low income and/or who live in rural and regional areas with long distances to travel. (There are some rural or regional areas that do not have any form of accessible public transport or WATs.)

It should also be noted that WAT drivers are legally permitted to engage the taxi meter when they start assisting the wheelchair passenger into the vehicle and applying the wheelchair restraints and passenger seatbelt. Depending on the type of vehicle (and its conversion), plus the WAT driver's experience, the time taken to assist a wheelchair passenger prior to starting the journey can add up to \$5.00 (\$.83cents* per minute) to the cost of the taxi fare on top of the \$3.20* flagfall and \$2.10* radio booking fee. This can add up to \$10 to the taxi meter prior to the journey commencing. [*Note: Sydney metropolitan taxi fares as of July 2009].

The NSW Ministry of Transport reports the average WAT fare is \$30 (\$15 TTSS subsidy) when transporting a passenger with the disability and that the NSW TTSS is the most flexible and generous government funded taxi transport subsidy scheme in Australia because there is no restriction or limit on the use of the TTSS docketts.

Considering the NSW TTSS subsidy was last increased in 1997, SCI Australia believes there is an urgent need for the TTSS to be reviewed with the aim of increasing the subsidy percentage from 50% to 75% and increasing the upper limit of the subsidised taxi fare from \$60 to \$100. These positive changes will result in a maximum \$75 subsidy of a \$100 taxi fare, plus the average \$30 taxi fare for a passenger with a disability will result in a \$22.50 taxi fare subsidy saving the passenger \$7.50 per trip. But longer journeys, particularly for those people living in rural areas, would be much more affordable.

Furthermore, as the use of the NSW TTSS docketts is unlimited (only limited by a passenger's ability to pay for the unsubsidised taxi fare), SCI Australia would also like to propose that the TTSS subsidise the first 75% of taxi fares (maximum \$75 of a \$100 taxi fare). If this was implemented, in conjunction with a compulsory passenger payment of \$5 per trip, it would also certainly improve the cost of taxi transport affordability for people with a disability and increase their opportunities for social participation, education and employment.