



**QUEENSLAND
GOVERNMENT**

Transport and Main Roads

Report to Government February 2013

**Taxi Subsidy Scheme
Eligibility and Entitlements Review**

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1. Executive Summary

The Taxi Subsidy Scheme Review Panel welcomes the TSS Review and the opportunity to provide input and feedback to the Queensland Government about the sustainability of the scheme and the needs of its members.

The Panel considered a range of options about the TSS in regard to changes to eligibility, entitlements under the scheme, duplication of Government benefits and assistance through other schemes, and funding for the TSS program. Twenty-three recommendations have been identified by the Panel and are submitted in this report for the consideration of the Queensland Government in moving forward with the TSS.

The recommendations put forward by the Panel seek to support the Government's priorities of reducing red tape, integrating services and schemes, and contributing to the well being and economic activities of Queensland.

The Panel is in unilateral agreement and of the strong view that any decisions to change the eligibility, entitlements and funding of the TSS should be deferred and considered as part of the negotiations between the State and Federal Governments as part of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

The application of an annual index to the maximum subsidy per trip under the TSS is made as another key recommendation of the Panel. An annual index will halt the long-term and on-going deterioration of the TSS maximum subsidy by ensuring parity with increases in taxi fares and inflation costs.

The only eligibility criteria identified as requiring consideration for change by government is to Category 4 (Epilepsy) to address the inequity between medical conditions for access to the scheme by allowing a person with epilepsy who does not qualify for a driver licence to be eligible for membership.

In order to support future decisions about the TSS and the integration of the transport system, the Panel recommends that Government undertake research to identify more detailed demographics and usage patterns to understand the needs and access of the TSS members and disability groups of the scheme. The survey results will also assist in the development of education materials to better inform members and the community of the available transport options and to encourage shared and/or better usage of the TSS.

Opportunities to reduce red tape and to improve integration between government schemes and services exist through the adoption of the Panel's recommendations for the improvement of coordination between programs and service provision to realise savings and efficiencies for Government, streamline application processes and requirements.

The Panel acknowledges the financial challenges faced by Government in delivering services to all Queenslanders. However, the importance of the continued delivery of the TSS to those members of the community most in need, and most disadvantaged, must continue to remain a high priority for the Queensland Government. In comparison to other subsidised transport services, the funding provided to support the TSS is insignificant when compared to the whole Department of Transport and Main Roads budget, and in

comparison to the subsidy cost per person when compared to other transport modes, such as long distance rail, air or bus services.

It is also important to take into consideration the savings, or potential on-costs if the current subsidy is reduced in any way (either through eligibility criteria or entitlements), to other Government departments and services – such as Queensland Health and the Queensland Ambulance Service.

The Panel appreciates the opportunity to provide recommendations about the future of the TSS to the Queensland Government.

2. Background

2.1 Taxi Subsidy Scheme

The Taxi Subsidy Scheme (TSS) was introduced in Queensland in 1987 to provide an affordable and accessible transport option for people with a disability who experience profound difficulties using other modes of public passenger transport. The scheme is administered by the Department of Transport and Main Roads (TMR).

The state government subsidy funds 50% of the taxi fare for each trip to a maximum subsidy of \$25. Membership is not means tested and the number of taxi trips able to be undertaken and the amount of subsidies paid per member are unlimited. Members are issued with an electronic membership smartcard and are also entitled to a maximum of 20 interstate travel vouchers each 12 month period, for use with any taxi service in other jurisdictions.

There have been a number of reviews of the scheme, including TMR Internal Audits in 2005, 2007, 2008 and 2011, as well as a TMR Evaluation in 2011. An Inter-Agency Review of the TSS was also completed in 2008.

2.2 TSS Performance and Funding

As at 30 June 2012, the TSS had 51,626 members. In the 2011-12 financial year, more than 1.9 million trips were undertaken by members at an average subsidy of approximately \$8.17 (GST included). Approximately \$14.2 million in subsidies (excluding GST) was paid out of a total expenditure of approximately \$15.5 million in 2011-12.

Administration of the TSS cost \$562,286 in the 2011-12 financial year. This included costs for six staff, printing, postage, courier services and other administrative expenses.

Since 2004-05 and up to 2010-11, TMR received an annual allocation of \$6 million to support the TSS. This includes an annual contribution from the joint Commonwealth and State funding under the Home and Community Care (HACC) program. In 2011-12, this amount totalled \$698,365 (\$440,669 from the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing for members 65 years of age and over, and \$257,696 from the Queensland Department of Community, Child Safety and Disability Services for members under 65 years of age).

Up until 2009-10, the quantum of funding provided was insufficient to cover the annual TSS expenditure costs which ranged between \$14 million and \$15 million. Consequently there was a recurring annual shortfall requiring repeated and significant supplementation from government and from internal TMR allocations.

In 2010-11 TMR was funded at \$16 million per annum ongoing for the TSS with escalation of 4.5% to be applied from 2011-12 onwards.

On 11 September 2012, following the release of the Queensland State Budget 2012-13, which provided that savings of \$42 million would be made over four years from transport schemes, the Minister for Transport and Main Roads issued a Ministerial Statement outlining the key initiatives and changes to funding for the transport portfolio. The

Ministerial Statement included that "*Discounted taxi trips taken under the taxi subsidy scheme will be capped at \$400 per person per year to ensure it continues to provide an accessible form of transport for those most in need.*" The proposed cap was to be introduced from 1 July 2013 and was expected to achieve savings of \$7.5 million annually from the TSS.

The current budget allocation for the TSS in 2013-14 has been reduced by \$7.5 million. This is subject to change following the recommendations made by the TSS Review Panel and the outcomes of the review.

2.3 Current Review of Entitlements and Eligibility

As the TSS membership continues to grow in Queensland, the economic and financial constraints faced by government present the challenge of balancing a limited budget with the increasing demand for accessible and affordable public transport services.

The Newman Government established the TSS Review Panel to inform government on the future of the scheme to ensure the TSS continues to provide access to those who need it most and is sustainable.

The panel, chaired by Neil Scales, Acting Director-General, comprised the following representatives from community and disability groups, the taxi industry, and key government stakeholders.

Black and White Cabs	John Tighe, General Manager
Blind Citizens of Australia	Cheryl Pascual, National President
Carers Queensland	Amber O'Connor, Board Director
Cerebral Palsy League	Peter Mewett, General Manager Services
Council on the Ageing Queensland	Mark Tucker-Evans, Chief Executive
Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services	Clare O'Connor, Executive Director, Disability Services, Strategic Policy and Programs
Endeavour Foundation	Nagadeva Higgins, Senior Advisor
Epilepsy Queensland	Yvette McMurtrie, Client Services Co-ordinator
MS Australia Qld	Lincoln Hopper, Chief Executive Officer
National Disability Services	Jane Geltch, State Manager
Older People Speak Out	Val French, President
Queensland Blind Association	Stella Haralampou, Manager
Queensland Health	Associate Professor Cameron Bennett, Executive Director, Sub-acute and Ambulatory Services
Queenslanders with Disabilities Network	Fran Vicary, Chief Executive Officer
Spina Bifida Hydrocephalus Queensland	Bill Shead, Manager

Spinal Injuries Association	John Mayo, General Manager, Community Development
Sporting Wheelies and Disabled Association	Ray Epstein, Chief Executive Officer
Taxi Council Queensland	Benjamin Wash, Chief Executive Officer
Yellow Cabs (Qld) Pty Ltd	Bill Parker, General Manager
Vision Australia	Karen Knight, State Manager

The TSS Review Panel was tasked with providing recommendations to government on four principle questions about the TSS in regard to changes to eligibility, entitlements, duplication of government benefits and assistance, and funding for the program.

The panel met twice, on 8 November 2012 and 24 January 2013, to discuss the TSS and to finalise recommendations and its (this) report to government. To assist the panel, TMR officers provided a briefing and information pack about the TSS to panel members at its initial meeting (refer Attachment 1). TMR also provided additional information to panel members that they considered necessary to inform their deliberations and requested.

Panel members were encouraged to consult with their clients and within their organisations during the consideration period 9 November 2012 – 4 January 2013 and in preparing their recommendations to government to ensure the views and diverse needs of users were captured. Panel members were required to send their submissions to TMR by 4 January 2013 so that a draft report could be prepared.

The panel members' approach to their recommendations to government against the Terms of Reference for the review was limited by the project timeframe, the four principle questions presented to the panel by government, and the use of existing data and materials about the TSS.

All panel members provided a response to government about the TSS Review, with some members presenting joint submissions, resulting in a total of 17 submissions. Generally, the responses were comparable in their nature and recommendations. For some panel members, recommendations in their submissions were challenging for them to make, particularly those recommendations focused on cost containment of the scheme, but were made reflective of the real prospect of significant reductions to the TSS.

TMR prepared a draft report which was sent to panel members on 21 January 2013 to provide sufficient time for panel members to consider the views of others and their support for final recommendations prior to the 24 January 2013 meeting. At the 24 January 2013 meeting, the Panel deliberated on all recommendations put forward by its members, as well as a tabled submission received by TMR from National Seniors Australia, and agreed on the final recommendations to be submitted to government based on the merits of each recommendation. All Panel members have endorsed this report to government.

This report provides the recommendations of the Review Panel to government based on the four principle questions facing the future of the TSS Scheme.

3. Sustainability of the Scheme

The Terms of Reference for the review of the TSS state the review objectives are to develop an eligibility and entitlements platform for TSS that:

- is economically sustainable;
- continues to provide support for the most transport disadvantaged members of the community; and
- manages future growth of the scheme.

Aside from these objectives, the review report may also comment about efficiency and effectiveness of the TSS and its application observed during the review.

The Panel has identified a number of key areas of the TSS that warrant further discussion to ensure the sustainability of the scheme.

3.1 Recognition of Rights and Responsibilities

As a statement of the rights of people with a disability, a number of Panel members take this opportunity to remind the government of its inherit legislative responsibilities and obligations given its signatory to various agreements and the requirements of state and federal legislation.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Through Australia's ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (refer Appendix 2) on 17 July 2008, the Queensland Government is committed to promote, protect and fulfil the human rights of people with a disability and ensure policies and programs facilitate participation in all aspects of community life.

Article 9 of the Convention, which relates to accessibility, requires recognition that people with a disability have a right to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life. Governments therefore have a responsibility to take appropriate measures to ensure access to people with a disability on an equal basis with others to: the physical environment; transportation; information and communication; information and communication technologies and systems; and to other facilities and services open, or provided, to the public.

The Convention recognises the importance for government to ensure mainstream services are provided in a way that does not directly or indirectly discriminate against people with a disability being able to fully participate in the community, along with other people.

Legislative frameworks and Agreements

The Commonwealth and State legislative frameworks relevant to the people with a disability accessing transport services include:

- the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA) which provides protection for people with disability against discrimination and promotes the principle that people with disability have the same fundamental rights as all members of the community;

- the Commonwealth Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002 (Transport Standards) which establishes the minimum accessibility requirements that must be met by providers and operators of public transport conveyances, infrastructure and premises.
- the Anti-Discrimination Act 1991 (Qld) which promotes equality of opportunity for everyone by protecting them from unfair discrimination in certain areas of activity and also recognises the rights of people with disability;
- the Disability Services Act 2006 (Qld) which enshrines important human rights principles such as that people with disability have the same human rights as other members of society and should be empowered to exercise their rights.

The Commonwealth and State agreements that Queensland is subject to include:

- the National Health Reform Agreement, where the Australian Government has full funding responsibility for aged care and disability services for people 65 years and over and 50 years and over for Indigenous Australians;
- the National Disability Agreement, a national framework with key areas of reform for the provision of government support to services for people with a disability;
- the National Disability Strategy outlines a 10-year national policy framework.

The Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services comments that the Queensland Government has a statutory requirement and a commitment to continue to meet the needs of people with a disability. The TSS plays an important part in the Queensland Government's obligation to support people with a disability to access work, education and appointments for medical, dental and other purposes. At times it is the only means of transport for many people with a disability to travel for paid and unpaid work, access to health services and to meet their needs.

The Spinal Injuries Association advises that if the Queensland government, as a signatory to the CRPD, imposes a cap on the current scheme, it will be in breach of the Convention which clearly says that member States who are signatories are not allowed to impose regressive policies on people with a disability. The proposed cap would be clearly seen as regressive.

The Endeavour Foundation points out that Australian Governments, as signatories to the CRPD are bound to the progressive realisation of the rights of people with a disability and not to undertake retrograde action in respect of those rights.

The view of the Endeavour Foundation follows the axiom of the CRPD as an open class of persons, and on that basis, believes that all people with a disability who are unable to access public transport options have a right to assistance from the TSS. Whilst acknowledging Government's concerns with the sustainability of the TSS, the Endeavour Foundation notes that many people with a disability with transport needs targeted by the scheme have not accessed it.

The Endeavour Foundation also points out TMR's commitment to the human rights of people with a disability in its endorsement in the Department of Transport and Main Roads

*Disability Service Plan 2011-2014*¹ of the whole of government Disability Action Plan “*Absolutely Everybody*”² which includes with respect to *Priority One – ‘Rights & Responsibilities, Indicators of Success*: “Human Rights and fundamental freedoms are promoted, protected and fulfilled.”³

The Endeavour Foundation puts forward the view that the lack of access to transport significantly curtails the ability of people with disabilities to participate fully in community life. For most, the inaccessibility of public transport leaves them reliant on family or friends or on a taxi system which is expensive to use even with State run taxi subsidy systems such as the TSS.⁴ The difficulties confronting people with disabilities in accessing transport are clearly compounded in rural and regional areas. There are even fewer alternatives in non-metropolitan areas, and this severely curtails the independence of people with disabilities and compromises their quality of life. Ironically, transport is even more critical in these areas to counter social isolation.⁵ This leaves people with disabilities and their families with no other option but to meet all additional costs of transport that are not covered by service funding or other government payments.⁶ Access to reliable and affordable transport is a fundamental piece of the puzzle when it comes to promoting independence and facilitating participation in such activities as education, employment, leisure and health care.

The transport system needs to change so that existing infrastructure investment is linked up and can be utilised by people with a disability in the most efficient and effective manner.⁷

The TSS undoubtedly plays an important role to support Queenslanders with a disability who are not able to use public transport. In some cases the scheme provides a lifeline to access vital services and supports.

The Endeavour Foundation states that any fundamental changes to the scheme which reduces its ability to support TSS members will have a devastating effect on their ability to participate in community life. This would be a significant retrograde step as far as realising the rights of these vulnerable Queenslanders and would be a breach of the CRPD.

Vision Australia and the Blind Citizens of Australia suggest the costs of the TSS may be reduced by the Queensland Government improving accessibility to public transport infrastructure within timelines stated in the Disability Standards and lowering fare costs to support people to reduce reliance on taxi transport.

¹ TMR Disability Service Development Plan 2011-2014

² *Absolutely Everybody – enabling Queenslanders with a Disability – Whole of Government Action Plan 2011-2014*, Department of Communities, Disability & Community Care Services

³ *Ibid* p.4

⁴ *Shut Out: the experience of people with Disabilities and their Families in Australia*, National Disability Strategy Consultation Report, prepared by the National People with Disabilities and Carer Council; Commonwealth of Australia 2009

⁵ *ibid*

⁶ *ibid*

⁷ *Disability expectations: Investing in a better life, a stronger Australia: Achieving better outcomes for people with a disability and their families*, Price Waterhouse Coopers, November 2011

Vision Australia and the Blind Citizens of Australia nominate that fiscal management is a responsibility of government, as is the responsibility to protect the rights of people with disability to equal participation in the community under Australia and International law. These associations request the Queensland Government to honour its commitment to protect the rights of people with a disability enshrined in national and international law, to fully participate in community life through the adequate funding of the TSS Scheme and other forms of community transport.

3.2 National Disability Strategy and the National Disability Insurance Scheme

National Disability Strategy (NDS)

The National Disability Strategy 2010-2020 sets a national vision for an inclusive Australian society that enables people with a disability to fulfil their potential as equal citizens, through improving access to and performance of mainstream services. The NDS was endorsed by COAG on 13 February 2011. In November 2012, the Queensland Government re-affirmed its commitment to the NDS.

The NDS sets out six key outcome areas – inclusive and accessible communities; rights protection, justice and legislation; economic security; personal and community support; learning and skills; health and well being. Under Outcome 1 (Inclusive and accessible communities), Policy Direction 4 identifies the importance of a public, private and community transport system that is accessible for the whole community.

National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)

In July 2011, the Australian Government released the Productivity Commission Inquiry Report 6 which proposed the establishment of two schemes, the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and the National Injury Insurance Scheme (NIIS).

An NDIS would represent the most significant reform Australia-wide to the way in which people with disability and their families access long-term care and support.

The Queensland Government supports an NDIS as recommended by the Productivity Commission, and has committed to working with other jurisdictions and stakeholders to ensure this scheme is properly designed and adequately funded. This includes consideration of governance models, funding shares, funding sources, funding pools and the legislative approach.

An NIIS would support people who sustain catastrophic injuries, after the commencement of the scheme. The implementation and governance of an NIIS is being progressed through the Standing Council on Federal Financial Relations as well as the Heads of Treasuries. This is being managed in Queensland by Queensland Treasury and Trade and the Motor Accident Insurance Commission.

A future NDIS may contribute to further discussions on improving access to transport for people with a disability. This includes access to mainstream public transport, private transport and through specific subsidies or provision of taxis and community buses. While improving public transport is a broader transport issue, access to public transport for people with a disability, who are eligible for supports under an NDIS, is likely to be a key area of interest for a future NDIS.

The scope, design, structure, and financial and governance arrangements for an NDIS and NIIS are the subject of ongoing national negotiations.

The Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services points out that the funding linked to the disability component of the TSS is an important component of the whole of government funding counted towards NDIS total funding. Therefore, any reduction in future funding to the TSS for people with disability could affect future negotiations on the NDIS.

Disability Services provides specialist disability services to 25,000 people with a disability. It is noted that the TSS membership of people with a disability (12,961 members, representing 25.2% of the total TSS membership) equates to around 50% of the total number of Disability Services clients, although they would not necessarily be the same cohort. With the implementation of a NDIS in 2018-19, it is anticipated there will be 91,000 people with a disability receiving a service. Based on present TSS usage (50% of Disability Services current client numbers) 45,500 people with a disability will be purchasing taxi services as part of their funded support package.

The Queensland Government's expenditure on Disability Services has increased from \$403.8 million in 2004-05 to an estimated \$753.5 million in 2011-12. Of this funding, the Commonwealth Government contributed \$139.5 million in 2004-05, increasing to \$237.2 million in 2011-12. The Queensland Government also recently announced a plan to increase disability funding ahead of a full rollout of the NDIS in 2018. The plan provides for additional funding totalling \$868 million over a five year period from 2014-15 to 2018-19.

National Disability Services considers that the Newman government's recent announcement regarding the implementation of a NDIS in Queensland over the next five years has changed the landscape considerably, and given that transport is likely to be included in this national scheme, recommends that no changes be made to eligibility or entitlements until the parameters of the NDIS become clear. Social and economic participation is central to the NDIS and to the wellbeing of communities. Any changes at this stage to eligibility and entitlement will have a serious negative impact on this participation for users of the TSS, with no alternative yet available.

National Disability Services also recommends that the significant investment made by the Queensland Government in the TSS be recognised and included in the negotiations with the Federal Government regarding contributions to the cost of the implementation of the NDIS. It advises that community transport will continue to be an issue of concern to all governments, as some consumers will not be eligible for the NDIS and demand will continue to grow across all community and public transport systems due to demographic and economic drivers. The NDIS will also be seeking efficient and effective solutions to eligible consumers' transport needs. National Disability Services recognises that efficiencies and new solutions, including the unlocking of under-utilised capacity and resources in current systems, must be sought.

National Disability Services suggests that with the coming of an NDIS, the Newman government's drive to reduce costs and increase efficiencies, and the challenges of Queensland's geography and demographics, this state is ideally placed to pilot innovation in the area of community and public transport. National Disability Services is aware that

technology that would support an integrated approach to community and public transport is available and in use in Queensland, and welcomes a discussion with the Queensland government and an approach to the Australian government to explore the scope and funding of such a project.

The Endeavour Foundation comments that the NDIS will change the shape of disability service provision radically between now and 2018. It is estimated that the scheme will provide long term care and support to 441,000 people across Australia and cost \$22 billion a year.⁸ Premier Newman announced that under Queensland's plan to fund the NDIS Queensland will increase its funding for disability services and will spend up to \$1.77 billion on disability and related support services in 2018-19.

Concurrently, an initiative from the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services to pilot self-directed funding was passed through parliament in December 2012. The "Your Life Your Choice" programme will provide 1300 people with a disability and families with choices in how their funds are spent. This represents a significant change in direction for the Department as part of NDIS preparation and indicates the speed with which change is occurring within the sector in Queensland.⁹

The Endeavour Foundation contends that the NDIS funding will provide for transport to access services and the principles behind the scheme are to give more control of funding to the consumer, thus stimulating a more cost effective disability service system. A consequence of the increase in funding levels will be an opening of the disability sector to other providers both from home and overseas. In a future environment where companies will compete for consumer transport dollars, the subsidy for the use of taxi may become at the least anachronistic and at worst unfair to other specialist and community transport providers. There are examples overseas of cheaper and more efficient specialist and community transport solutions which better address lack of continuity in the travel chain for people with a disability. This assumes that public transport continues to be increasingly more accessible to a larger range of people with a disability.¹⁰ Flexible transport systems will be highly valued by consumers of disability and age care service needing specialist transport features. Innovative universal design solutions could increase availability and affordability of these systems and information technology is making it possible to optimise routes and assign passengers to specific vehicles in 'real-time' while vehicles are on the road. This allows services to be provided on demand, at about half the cost of a taxi and with greater flexibility in reservation times, availability, and routes.¹¹

The Endeavour Foundation suggests the potential growth in specialist transport solutions stimulated by increased funding and consumer choice within the disability sector may lead to age care providers entering the market for transport. Community and specialist transport schemes as part of broader 'care in the community' initiatives have had some success in the United Kingdom in supporting people to age in place as opposed to medium to long term residential age care options.¹² It is noted that in the TMR Disability Service Development Plan that the Department has identified the need to analyse and improve

⁸ Deloitte Access Economics, Choice and certainty for people with disabilities, The Federal Government's National Disability Insurance Scheme, 2012

⁹ Department of Communities, Child Safety & Disability Services, "Your Life Your Choice –Self Directed Support", Information for Service Providers, Developed December 2012

¹⁰ World Health Organisation, World Report on Disability, 2011

¹¹ Nelson J, Masson B. *Flexible friends*. Swanley, ITS International, 2009 (<http://www.itsinternational.com>, accessed 28 July 2009)

¹² Productivity Commission 2011, *Caring for Older Australians*, Draft Inquiry Report Canberra

access to transport options in the community care sector especially in regional Queensland.¹³

The Endeavour Foundation notes the NDIS will pay for itself by reducing the 30% point gap in workforce participation rates by people with a disability. Reducing this gap by a third will increase Australia's GDP by \$43 billion over the next decade.¹⁴ Access to affordable transport for Queenslanders with a disability will play an essential role in reaching this with important economic benefits for all levels of Government.

The dominant utilisation of the TSS by the over 64 age group with mobility issues presents a challenge in how the TSS positions itself in the next six years or indeed whether it is the most appropriate way of providing support to a wide range of Queenslanders with a disability. The potential impact of substantial growth and membership on the budget of the TSS requires some clever thinking about how the TSS adapts to these changing circumstances so it remains a sustainable program.

The Endeavour Foundation suggests however, the question needing most attention is not the immediate future of the TSS but rather how people with a disability can be supported to access services and employment to support economic growth and promote their rights to an ordinary life.

The Endeavour Foundation contends that it may well be that in a few years time the premise on which the TSS operates may no longer be relevant or applicable in meeting its objectives for people with a disability. Without doubt, community expectation is high that the Queensland Government will, after a doubtful start, take a leadership role in implementing the NDIS. In this context, short term budget rigour with regard to disability issues may not be understood or tolerated by the Queensland community.

It is the Endeavour Foundation's opinion that the TSS will continue to have an important role to play in supporting people to access community services, but that in ten years' time the 'playing field' in which it operates may be almost unrecognisable. It suggests that the Queensland Government must see the TSS as a subsidy for specialist transport options rather than necessarily for taxi services. Consumers want choice in how they spend their subsidy.

The current transport options for people with a disability, particularly those with an intellectual disability are close to crisis point, and any substantial change to the system which involves fewer resources being available, will in the short term, be simply catastrophic for many, many, people across the State.

Such a retrograde step would be contrary to the principles of the CRPD but also be out of step with the huge changes in disability social policy and funding. The Endeavour Foundation asks the Government to heed the warnings coming from a desperate but increasingly empowered disability and carers group that there will be a considerable backlash if the TSS is reduced from its current form.

¹³ 3.3 TMR Disability Service Development Plan 2011-2014

¹⁴ Deloitte Access Economics, Choice and certainty for people with disabilities, The Federal Government's National Disability Insurance Scheme, 2012

Within this scenario, Endeavour Foundation believes the questions regarding budgetary sustainability for the TSS need to be addressed to ensure that the scheme continues more or less as it currently does, to bring a level of certainty to TSS members and their families until such time as the larger questions posed within this submission have been addressed. Endeavour Foundation believes that sustainability of the scheme over the long term must look beyond budgets for the next year or so.

National Health reforms

Under the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) national health reforms, the Commonwealth Government has assumed full funding responsibility for aged care and disability services for people 65 years and over and 50 years and over for Indigenous Australians, effective from 1 July 2012. States and Territories now have full responsibility for disability services for people with a disability under 65 years of age and under 50 years of age for Indigenous Australians.

The details of these changes are outlined in the National Health Reform Agreement which is being implemented through the National Partnership Agreement on Transitioning Responsibilities for Aged care and Disability Services. These changes include the separation of funding, policy, and operational responsibilities for the previously joint-funded HACC Program of 25 years.

3.3 Limiting the Subsidy

The Newman Government's announcement in 2012 of the introduction of a annual cap of \$400 per member under the TSS caused significant distress and fear among TSS members and their families about how their lives would become limited and uncertain with the introduction of a cap.

The Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services recommends that, given the maximum subsidy per trip in Queensland is amongst the lowest in Australia, the addition of an annual subsidy cap would further disadvantage Queensland TSS users, compared to other jurisdictions, and impact on their ability to use the scheme and access the community.

The Queenslanders with Disabilities Network strongly holds the belief that a cap in any form is a denial of rights for people with a disability, and therefore should not be introduced and advises that the previously proposed cap of \$400 does not even subsidise one trip per week and therefore would be a retrograde step in the advancement in the lives of people with a disability.

The Spinal Injuries Association points out that if a cap of \$400 or any amount went ahead, whatever small saving might have occurred would have been rapidly taken over by cost shifting to other state government departments and to the Commonwealth and local governments. Queensland Health, the department that can least afford increases in demand, would be hammered by people with a disability using ambulances and hospitals and community health services instead of GPs and private health services.

The Cerebral Palsy League advises that the use of taxis is the only option for many of their clientele, who as a result already incur much higher transport costs to simply participate in

work and community life than their peers without mobility restrictions. Further, the relative cost of their transport is already rising each year because the existing subsidy cap for each taxi trip has not been indexed since its introduction. Any initiatives which increase further the out-of-pocket costs of using taxis will, most likely, result in members becoming more isolated from work and community activities than any time in the past decade and a half. This will work counter to the NDIS and the direction and efforts of all levels of government in improving the lives of Australians with a disability. The impact of availability and cost of transport would be compounded in an environment where the scheme was capped, considering the increasing number of members accessing the scheme under eligibility criteria that has broadened since its establishment in 1987, placing increased demands on a limited funding resource.

There is a strong shared view amongst Panel members that the flow-on impacts for government of restricting access to the TSS, whether through a cap or other mechanism, will create a flow-on impact to stated funded disability services, whose funding generally excludes meeting transport costs to and from service sites. Cerebral Palsy League comments that the rising costs of transport will mean that accessing centre-based and site-based service delivery will move out of the financial reach of members. It argues that if transport was to be included in the Queensland Government's disability funding equation, it would significantly increase the cost of each service output and significantly reduce the amount of support purchased by government through its existing funding allocations. Either outcome will mean that individuals and families who currently receive funded disability support may well incur a double disadvantage of reduced mobility in and about their community and reduced access to services. This will carry both a social and economic cost to the individual, their families and ultimately secondary budgetary impacts for the Queensland Government and taxpayers – as there will be a greater call for home-based community and health services and for emergency/crisis support.

The Endeavour Foundation suggests if the TSS were to be capped this would have a catastrophic effect upon people with intellectual disability being able to access work or day services. If the TSS subsidy were reduced there would also be a substantial risk to the viability of providing these transport options for people to access services and employment. The increase in costs would have to be passed on to service users and supported employees and their families. In some cases, particularly in regional Queensland where there are few affordable transport options, it would be possible that some people's employment and day service access would be in put in jeopardy.

The Endeavour Foundation warns there would be significant public backlash to negative changes in the scheme and that work needs to be undertaken to expand access to the scheme especially where there are few or no public transport options.

3.4 Indexing the Subsidy

The state government subsidy funds 50% of the taxi fare for each trip to a maximum subsidy of \$25. The maximum journey subsidy has not been increased since its introduction despite regular increases in taxi fares and tariffs.

The Spinal Injuries Association submits that their members were seeking leadership from the Newman Government to finally apply indexation to increase the TSS subsidy to help

families deal with the cost of living, which was a strong feature of the Coalition campaign platform.

Vision Australia and the Blind Citizens of Australia suggest that as a minimum the subsidy per taxi trip should be increased to \$35 and thereafter maintain parity with CPI and/or the negotiated rate between TMR and taxi companies for taxi fare increase. This view is shared by the Queensland Blind Association, however with a nominated increase of the maximum subsidy per trip to \$50. The Queenslanders with Disabilities Network also suggests an increase in the maximum per trip subsidy from \$25 to \$50.

The Cerebral Palsy League raises the issue that the value of the current TSS cap per trip has been eroded by more than half since the current cap was introduced. Between 1998 and 2012 the cost of taxi fares has increased by 100.23% (calculations sourced from TMR). Based on this increase, the current subsidy cap amount of \$25 would have needed to increase to \$50.06 to enable TSS members to receive the same level of subsidy support as when the subsidy cap was first introduced. While the cost of taxi fares and tariffs have increased steadily since 1998, the consequence of the \$25 subsidy cap remaining unchanged due to no increments or indexation being applied, has seen the value of the subsidy relevant to the actual cost of taxi fares being significantly eroded to now be equivalent to less than 50% of the original subsidy value – it now purchases \$12.49 in 1998 dollars.

The Cerebral Palsy League suggests that TSS members have already made a major contribution towards cost containment for the past 14 years, via the erosion in real value of the taxi subsidy cap of \$25. If the subsidy cap had been linked to fare increases, expenditure under the TSS would be now double its current level. It is requested that government consider the ongoing indexation of the current per trip TSS cap, linked to the annual inflation rate and resourced by being built in as an indexation factor to the Queensland State Budget Appropriation for the TSS.

The cost to government, across portfolios, of not taking action to ensure that people with significant mobility restrictions have reasonable access to affordable accessible transport is likely to be much greater than the costs associated with the TSS itself.

The Queenslanders with Disabilities Network points out that indexation of the TSS maximum subsidy per trip has not occurred and consequently the subsidy has become inadequate for many trips. When the TSS was created, the \$25 maximum subsidy would have been seldom exceeded, whereas regular trips such as a fare to the airport for many people in Brisbane easily exceeds the \$25 maximum. The Queenslanders with Disabilities Network believes that a \$50 maximum per-journey subsidy would best reflect the original intention of the TSS and be more aligned with the current transport requirements of its members. This would also require annual indexation to account for inflationary pressures. Needless to say a \$400 cap does not even subsidise one trip per week and therefore would be a retrograde step in the advancement in the lives of people with a disability.

The Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services states that due to increases in taxi fares since 1987, there has been a gradual erosion of the maximum number of kilometres, travelled in any one trip, which is covered by the subsidy. In 1987 this was 47 kilometres per trip, which reduced to 24 kilometres in 2009. For TSS members

who need to travel longer distances, for example people living in outer metropolitan, regional and rural areas of Queensland, the real financial benefits of the scheme have halved in the 25 years from 1987 to 2012.

On a related point to the base subsidy of the TSS, Black and White Cabs has raised the introduction of a Passenger Assistance Fee (PAF) for TSS members who use a wheelchair, to improve the day to day lives of a wheelchair bound TSS members. A contrasting view is put forward by the Queenslanders with Disabilities Network who does not support the introduction of any PAF.

3.5 Sustainability of the Scheme

The Spinal Injuries Association suggests that the TSS scheme is currently very economically sustainable as there has been no real growth in the scheme in the last three years according to TMR's Annual Report figures. In comparison to the average subsidy per passenger on government-contracted services, such as the Traveltrain services at \$356.06 per passenger, it is difficult to comprehend the perceived lack of future sustainability of the TSS. There is a similar argument for two other categories of public transport subsidy: regional air services (\$25.06 per person) and regional long-distance bus services (\$25.04 per person). It is also clear from the total amount of subsidies paid for other public transport modes that the Queensland budget in its current parlous state would be able to absorb a TSS increase of 5% much easier than a 5% increase in the other subsidised services.

The Spinal Injuries Association notes the stated government's plan was to reduce the TSS budget by \$7.5 million in 2013-14. The public has reacted badly to it given:

- (a) it is a budget cut targeting Queensland's most vulnerable users;
- (b) it is a budget cut of over 50%; and
- (c) there has been no mention of a similar budget cut (over 50%) in any other public transport budget.

It could be expected that there would be an enormous public outcry if a similar budget cut occurred to TransLink or Traveltrain services.

The Cerebral Palsy League notes the TSS has a current total membership of 51,626 and of this membership 36,846 are active members. It is important to recognise that under the scheme's current eligibility criteria, a conservative estimate of the potential membership could reach as high as 114,600 - if all Queenslanders with a disability with severe and profound restrictions who need assistance with transport were to actively engage in the scheme. While past and current TSS membership trends do not predict the full cohort of eligible people will take up membership under the scheme, it can be argued that current membership levels will continue to grow, at a minimum, parallel with Queensland's population growth trends (2.3%). This growth in membership has seen and will continue to see increased demand on the limited funding resources available within the scheme, which has a direct impact of adding to costs and lifestyle impacts for members.

The Cerebral Palsy League suggests that by better integrating transport options available to all people with severe mobility restrictions the government will achieve a more cost-

effective outcome for both consumers and the public purse (across portfolios), compared to simply attempting to cap subsidised usage (and therefore costs) in one part of the system.

The Cerebral Palsy League also suggests that the State Government needs to be prepared for a continuing increase in TSS membership. Attempts to cap numbers by increasing the already high eligibility bar may well be in conflict with anti-discrimination considerations and determinations in Australia, given that the Queensland public transport system is unlikely to meet the minimum coverage requirements for accessibility under Disability Standards timeframes.

4. Review of Eligibility and Entitlements

Four principle areas have been addressed by the panel in providing recommendations to government about the TSS and its future.

- (1) To ensure the scheme remains within budget, what changes should be made to eligibility?
- (2) To ensure the scheme remains within budget, what changes should be made to the scheme entitlements?
- (3) What changes can be made to ensure that the TSS does not duplicate other government benefits and assistance?
- (4) If additional funding is to be allocated to the program, where should it come from?

4.1 Eligibility of the Scheme

The eligibility criteria for the TSS are prescribed in the *Transport Operations (Passenger Transport) Regulation 2005* (TOPTR). To be eligible for membership of the TSS, a person must be a permanent resident of Queensland and fully meet at least one of the specified eligibility criteria (refer Appendix 1 – TSS Eligibility Criteria).

4.1.1 Suggestions for change

Means Testing

A variety of options have been identified by panel members in regard to TSS eligibility and its impact on the scheme's budget.

Five panel members offer commentary on the possibility of means testing. Carers Queensland, MS Queensland and Spina Bifida Hydrocephalus Queensland suggest that means testing may ensure that people who need the financial assistance most will still receive it, noting that means testing is part of the assessment processes in Victoria and Tasmania.

Endeavour Foundation is strong in its view that means testing should not be introduced as people who are high end users of the scheme may rely on the scheme to access employment and a means test may put their employment at risk.

Queensland Health suggests that means testing should be avoided because the scheme is available to severely disabled people who are unable to manage public transport independently, including self funded retirees who need to attend hospital and other medical appointments with increasing regularity as they age. Queensland Health suggests if means testing for the TSS is to be considered, the Medical Aids Subsidy Scheme (MASS) approved concession cards, which include the Seniors Card should be required.

A tiered system

MS Queensland suggests that as the transport needs of TSS members vary significantly across the spectrum of their disability, these differences may be used to assign the level of subsidy required. A “bronze, silver, gold” system with increasing subsidy values and members stepping up to increasing subsidy levels in line with the level of their disability was suggested to be a targeted, fair and equitable way to allocate the level of subsidy a member receives.

Members’ fees

Carers Queensland suggests the introduction of a non-refundable fee at the initial application and renewal stages and for the replacement of damaged, stolen or lost TSS smartcards or for the re-issue of a TSS smartcard in another name. Carer’s Queensland suggests that this fee should be the same as the Australian Disability Parking Permit application fee of \$14.35.

The Taxi Council of Queensland suggests that consideration could be given to introducing a fee similar to that currently provided for a driver licence as both require a number of criteria to be met, both can be issued for varying periods of time, neither are used simply by virtue of their issuance yet both provide a level of transport access to the holder. It is estimated that applying the existing driver licence fee structure to the 2011-12 TSS membership would deliver funds of over \$1.5 million annually to offset the costs of administration of the scheme.

The Endeavour Foundation does not support an application fee but concedes that if a fee is to be introduced in order to obtain additional funding for the scheme, as an interim measure only, a membership fee could be applied to all who join the scheme for the first time or at the five year renewal stage and an annual renewal fee of \$10 or \$15 could be levied on members. It is recommended for members to have the option to offset the fees through their entitlements and that this may be possible through the use of member smartcards. The Endeavour Foundation believes that this interim measure would ensure the scheme will stay in budget guidelines for an interim period until a full review of the scheme in the wider context of the development of an NDIS Implementation Disability Transport Plan.

The Spinal Injuries Association caution that an application fee for the TSS would impact on a sector of the community that can least afford it, citing the level of poverty within the

disability sector as 45% living in or near poverty – 2.5 times the rate of poverty in the general population and more than double the OECD average of 22%¹⁵.

Federal funding

MS Queensland notes that the level of federal funding has not kept pace with the year on year growth of the TSS and that while about 75% of TSS members are aged 65 years or over, the proportion of federal funding is not representative of these numbers.

Eligibility Criteria

Seven panel members (Black and White Cabs, Vision Australia, Blind Citizens of Australia and Queensland Blind Association, Council on the Ageing Queensland, Older People Speak Out, Cerebral Palsy League) voiced their support for the current eligibility criteria as being fair and equitable, and in line with the community needs, and recommend that they should remain as they are.

The Endeavour Foundation and National Disability Services both strongly argue that no changes should be made to the current TSS eligibility, or entitlements, until the parameters of the NDIS become clear.

The Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services' submission which includes the views of the Queensland Disability Advisory Council advised that people with a disability need to be quarantined from any TSS changes, including changes to eligibility that result in a reduced number of people being able to access the scheme or changes that increase taxi costs, to ensure they are able to continue to access services, participate in the community and achieve social inclusion.

Council on the Ageing Queensland's submission includes views of TransitCare which suggests that TSS applicants in receipt of funding from another agency or scheme to assist with transport should be ineligible for the TSS. It was suggested that the TSS should be tailored mostly to younger people with disabilities, as older people are catered for by other types of services such as Home and Community Care. Additionally, Council on the Ageing Queensland proposes that an additional eligibility criteria should be introduced requiring future TSS applicants to also hold either a Pensioner Concession Card or Health Care Card issued by the Commonwealth Government.

Queensland Health is strong in its view that assessment for eligibility should remain based on clinical grounds with supportive clinical information and makes a number of suggestions about specific categories:

Category 1 – Dependent on a wheelchair: This category should only include those applicants who have severe permanent disability requiring the use of a wheelchair for all mobility outside the home.

Category 2 – Severe mobility problems: This category requires careful consideration before amending eligibility.

Category 3 – Severe visual impairment: Young people with severe visual impairment are taught to use public transport safely and are provided free use of public transport. The

¹⁵ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development OECD (2010) – "Sickness, Disability and Work: Breaking the Barriers Report"

current automatic approval process for all applicants with the Disability Support Pension (Blind) card should be reviewed.

Category 4 – Uncontrolled epilepsy: Written confirmation of uncontrolled epilepsy from a neurologist should be provided with category 4 applications.

Category 5 – Intellectual impairment: Specific travel training may enable a proportion of intellectually impaired people to manage public transport safely.

Queensland Health also suggests that clinical conditions of a temporary nature could be excluded from the scheme and that assessment within all categories should consider eligibility of applicants who are currently driving.

Epilepsy Queensland was strong in its view that a person with epilepsy who does not qualify for a driver licence should be able to access the TSS to provide them with a level of independence by allowing a safe means of transport when public transport is not available or appropriate.

MS Queensland suggests that as TSS applications are completed by a specified health professional before submission, ceasing Queensland Health's clinical assessment of membership applications would reduce current costs of the Scheme

Usage of the scheme

Endeavour Foundation notes that the take up rate across the six categories of the scheme is very uneven and suggests that the eligibility of the scheme needs to be reviewed in the face of the skewed access across the member groups of the scheme to address concerns related to TSS growth. It is suggested that a research project be implemented to identify issues in limited uptake of the scheme across disability groups and to identify more detailed demographics and usage patterns.

Recommendations about eligibility of the TSS:

- *No changes to be made to eligibility criteria*
- *Consider allowing a person with epilepsy who does not qualify for a driver licence membership of the TSS*
- *Undertake research to identify more detailed demographics and usage patterns to understand access of the member and groups of the scheme to transport networks.*

4.2 Entitlements under the Scheme

TSS members are entitled to a 50% subsidy of the taxi fare for each trip to a maximum subsidy of \$25. There is no limit on the number of trips that a member can take.

TSS members are also entitled to a maximum of 20 interstate travel vouchers each 12 month period, for use with any taxi service in other Australian jurisdictions. With a

maximum subsidy of \$25 per voucher, the total TSS subsidy for interstate travel is a maximum of \$500 per member per 12 months.

4.2.1 Suggestions for change

The majority of options identified by the panel in regard to the entitlements under the TSS to ensure the scheme remains within budget, centre on retaining the existing entitlements, increasing the maximum cap per trip and improving public awareness of the alternate transport options.

Entitlements

Panel members are strongly opposed to any reduction in entitlements, citing the already strained financial circumstances of disabled persons, the rising costs in taxi fares, and that the level of subsidy provided in Queensland is already at the lower end of the taxi subsidies provided in other states.

Spina Bifida Hydrocephalus Queensland, Black and White Cabs, Epilepsy Queensland, Endeavour Foundation, Sporting Wheelies and Disabled Association and the Taxi Council of Queensland voiced their support for the retention of the existing entitlements under the scheme, with Epilepsy Queensland advising that any attempt to reduce the level of entitlements provides a risk of taxi travel being beyond the reach of TSS users, many of whom are disadvantaged socioeconomically.

The majority of panel members are also very strongly opposed to any cap on the annual subsidy of the scheme entitlements, arguing this will affect the most severely disabled group of employed applicants who use a wheelchair and further disadvantage Queensland TSS users, compared to other jurisdictions, impacting on their ability to use the scheme to access the community.

Carers Queensland suggests the introduction of an annual cost cap only when the level of a member's annual subsidy reaches \$1,000.

While the Queenslanders with Disabilities Network opposes the introduction of cap, it suggests that if a cap was to be imposed, a \$5,000 cap minimum that is indexed annually to cater for the increasing costs of taxi transport would be required.

The Spinal Injuries Association suggests that a cap, if applied, should include all eligible users as this would be the most equitable and publically accepted approach.

The Cerebral Palsy League proposes the introduction of a cap for TSS members who have an active Driver Licence and own their own private modified vehicle. These members would have limited access to the TSS to provide a safety-net for subsidised taxi travel in extraordinary circumstances where the member is unable to driver their own car.

Subsidy per trip

MS Queensland proposes a cut-in threshold for subsidy entitlement per trip. This would set a minimum payment to be made by TSS members before the subsidy applied. For example, applying a cut-in threshold of \$9.00 (based on the average TSS trip subsidy of \$8.17) would save the scheme, on average, \$1 per trip (\$16 trip = \$7 subsidy + \$9 member contribution). MS Queensland also suggests the development of different

subsidy rates and thresholds to take account of the differences between metropolitan and non-metropolitan travel costs and the longer distances to be travelled, and therefore high costs incurred, in non-metropolitan areas.

Queensland Health suggests the subsidy per trip could be reduced from the current 50% of the taxi fare, and that there could be consideration given to a specific arrangement for members with a disability who were employed.

In contrast, Vision Australia and the Blind Citizens of Australia have suggested the maximum subsidy per trip be increased to \$35, while the Queensland Blind Association has proposed an increase to \$50 and that the maximum subsidy amount maintain parity with the CPI increases and/or be reflective of changes to the taxi fares in Queensland. The Queenslanders with Disabilities Network suggests an increase in the maximum per trip subsidy from \$25 to \$50.

The Spinal Injuries Association also suggests that maximum subsidy cap per trip should reflect increases in the CPI.

Other suggestions

Other suggestions about TSS eligibility put forward by the panel include:

- The inclusion of the TSS smartcard within the TransLink Access Pass to deliver administrative and cost efficiencies as well as an incentive for people to seamlessly access bus, train, and ferry services where available and appropriate (MS Queensland);
- The automatic expiry of TSS membership after 12 months inactivity, resulting in reduced administrative costs and a more accurate costing of the scheme (MS Queensland);
- The objection to the automatic expiry of TSS membership to avoid any disadvantage to members who may need to use the TSS after a period of inactivity, without having incurred delays and to reapply and be reassessed. This would incur additional costs, administration and resources to both the individual and government.

Recommendations about entitlements under the TSS:

- *Retain the existing TSS entitlements*
- *Give consideration to the maximum subsidy amount maintaining parity with CPI increases and/or is reflective of changes to taxi fares*

4.3 Benefits and assistance under other government programs

There are a number of other benefits and assistance programs for transport available for people with a disability from government and not-for-profit organisations.

Transport programs for people with a disability generally operate independently of each other with little evidence of co-ordination between government entities. Generally, these programs require separate applications, have different application assessments methodologies, and are administered by different agencies.

It is acknowledged by the Panel that there may appear to be duplication between schemes, however this is not the case. Rather, a person may be eligible for and entitled to benefits in more than one scheme. For example, TSS members could receive a mobility allowance from Centrelink and be eligible for subsidised TSS taxi travel.

Suggestions for change

Overall, the majority of options identified by the panel in regard to the benefits and assistance under government programs and the potential for duplication of the entitlements under the TSS primarily suggest that there is no duplication between schemes, however better coordination between programs and service provision may realise savings and efficiencies for government.

Importantly, it is noted that while some other schemes provide transport assistance, such as the Mobility Allowance, those schemes are for specific purposes (such as travel to employment) whereas the TSS supports people to travel to work, medical appointments, school and to participate as community members.

Panel members also express concern that without the TSS, or if the scheme was capped to a yearly limit, it is likely that use of other transport schemes or systems (QAS patient transport and/or ambulances) will increase and/or members lives will be affected through the lack of access to medical appointments, etc.

Duplication between schemes

Epilepsy Queensland and Carers Queensland do not perceive any duplication between the subsidised transport funding options. Carers Queensland acknowledges that many people with disabilities and their carers may be reliant on multiple forms of subsidised and specialist transport to meet their transport needs.

Spina Bifida Hydrocephalus Queensland points out that if there is duplication between transport schemes the subsidies available under the other schemes are more generous, often 100%, so the TSS is unlikely to be used where people have a choice of schemes.

MS Qld suggests that TSS members in receipt of the Federal Government's Mobility Allowance for employment related trips be restricted from accessing the TSS for those employment related trips. However, the Endeavour Foundation contends that because the Mobility Allowance is given as a component of income, it has great flexibility in being able to be used to access employment and training programs utilised as part of a fee structure for many day service and training organisations and given the need for other forms of community access by this group of people, it should not be considered as a duplication of the TSS.

Vision Australia, Blind Citizens of Australia and the Queensland Blind Association comment that the only other government assistance for a blind person is the Mobility Allowance and as close to 90% of blind people are unemployed, there is very little overlap with transport assistance.

The Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services continues to support the findings of the 2008 Inter-Agency TSS Review which identified the Mobility Allowance as being one area of potential duplication. However, it suggests that the administration costs and other regulatory complexities required to reduce duplication would be high in relation to the benefits gained, and any changes to access to TSS members who receive the Mobility Allowance would significantly disadvantage Queenslanders with a disability and leave Queensland at odds with other jurisdictions.

Cerebral Palsy League suggests the introduction of a cap for TSS usage for eligible TSS members who receive assistance under the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services' Vehicle Options Subsidy Scheme, with members having limited access to the TSS to provide a safety-net for subsidised taxi travel in extraordinary circumstances where a TSS member is unable to drive their own car.

Queensland Health proposes that TSS applicants should be required to declare the receipt of other government benefits and transport assistance, and an inter-departmental database developed for those receiving transport benefits and assistance from within the Queensland Government.

Black and White Cabs suggests it would be prudent for a complete review of all streams of government funding and programs to identify savings or improved benefits to be gained at a state level, and in turn, at the federal level. The development of a 'single desk' to deliver the best appropriate level of subsidised transport services to people with a disability and/or disadvantaged community members should achieve this.

Funding and service co-ordination

A common theme from panel members identified the potential for efficiencies in services through the better co-ordination of funding streams and services, for example, HACC funding.

Black and White Cabs points out the variety of business models used by organisations funded to deliver Commonwealth HACC services and Queensland Community Care services, all of them heavy on internal administration that consumes much of their budgets. It suggests that these agencies should assess the community needs and allocate resources to provide transport services deemed appropriate, including their own transport services for community members who have a high level of dependency or external transport providers such as taxis and small buses for the great majority of their clients.

The Council on the Ageing suggests that government works with local government and the Queensland Community Transport Industry Association to develop the TSS into a Transport Subsidy Scheme, drawing on a large range of providers, including not-for-profit

agencies, to provide transport for people with mobility challenges. TransitCare suggests that a single access point such as a Mobility Centre would be able to assess funding and ensure there are no duplications, while ensuring clients' needs are met. It is also suggested the other types of funding available to transport disadvantaged persons need to be assessed and the TSS tailored to mostly younger people with disabilities, as older persons are catered for by other types of funding, such as through the Commonwealth HACC program.

The TCQ proposes that the most efficient way to ensure that TSS does not duplicate other government schemes is to establish a single working group to identify all forms of benefit, both state and federal, that have embodied within them an element that deals with transport, including budget appropriations that deal with transport support and infrastructure upgrades. A number of significant benefits may be realised including a reduction in administrative expenses by consolidating the management of funds and benefits to a single entity, alignment of eligibility and entitlement criteria across the gamut of benefits available and improved services delivered to participants.

The Endeavour Foundation suggests a full review of subsidies, benefits and assistance for specialised disability transport use be undertaken by the Queensland government and the Commonwealth, as part of the NDIS Implementation Transport Plan, to determine the best use of funding while ensuring that consumer outcomes and market development in disability transport is paramount.

Promotion of transport services

Vision Australia, Blind Citizens of Australia and the Queensland Blind Association suggest the government could increase funding to and advertise the other alternative forms of transport available in the community and consider initiatives to encourage all users to share taxis which would result in a decreased cost to both the passenger and the TSS.

The Cerebral Palsy League recommends TMR increases TSS members' knowledge and patronage of accessible public bus, train and ferry services, and improve integration of, and between, accessible public, community and taxi transport options, including coordinated connection points at public transport hubs, providing a door-to-door blended transport option for TSS members (and other transport users who have a mobility restriction). This will both improve user outcomes and reduce TSS outlays by decreasing members' reliance on taxis for a full journey.

The Endeavour Foundation suggests the development and distribution of an Easy English Guide to the TSS in order to ensure people with an intellectual disability have equal access to the scheme.

Recommendations about the potential duplication of other government benefits and assistance with the TSS:

- *Improve coordination between programs and service provision to realise savings and efficiencies for government*
- *Acknowledge that TSS members may be eligible for, and entitled to benefits under other schemes and that the administration costs and other regulatory complexities required to reduce any perceived duplication would be high in relation to the benefits gained.*
- *Undertake a complete review of all streams of government funding and programs to identify savings or improved benefits to be gained at a state level, and in turn, at the federal level.*
- *Undertake a full review of subsidies, benefits and assistance for specialised disability transport use provided by the Queensland and Commonwealth Governments, as part of the development of a future NDIS Implementation Transport Plan*
- *Increase funding to and advertise the other alternative forms of transport available in the community*
- *Consider initiatives to encourage users to share taxis*

4.4 Funding the TSS

In 2010-11, TMR was funded at \$16 million per annum ongoing for the TSS with escalation of 4.5% to be applied from 2011-12 onwards.

On 11 September 2012, following the release of the Queensland State Budget 2012-13, which provided that savings of \$42 million would be made over four years from transport schemes, the Minister for Transport and Main Roads issues a Ministerial Statement outlining the key initiatives and changes to funding for the transport portfolio. The Ministerial Statement included that “Discounted taxi trips taken under the taxi subsidy scheme will be capped at \$400 per person per year to ensure it continues to provide an accessible form of transport for those most in need.” The proposed cap was to be introduced from 1 July 2013 and was expected to achieve savings of \$7.5 million annually from the TSS.

The current budget allocation for the TSS in 2013-14 has been reduced by \$7.5 million. This is subject to change following the recommendations made by the TSS Review Panel and the outcome of the review.

4.4.1 Suggestions for change

Queensland Government funding

Spina Bifida Hydrocephalus Queensland suggests that given the level of funding applied to the TSS is insignificant when compared with the TMR budget and given the scheme reduces the costs to other departments, particularly Queensland Health and Queensland Ambulance Service, Queensland Treasury should fund the extra cost of the TSS.

A number of panel members suggest that fiscal management is a responsibility of government and the Queensland Government should ensure the allocation of an appropriate level of funding for the TSS. Vision Australia and the Blind Citizens of Australia request the Queensland Government to honour its commitment to protect the rights of people with a disability enshrined in national and international law, to fully participate in community life through the adequate funding of the TSS and other forms of community transport.

Black and White Cabs suggests the current number of sources for funding of transport programs, such as HACC and TransLink may need to be re-directed to TSS that is based on providing more service for less cost.

The Queensland Blind Association, Vision Australia and Blind Citizens of Australia propose that funding from the heavily subsidised public transport system be channelled into the TSS budget to benefit the Queenslanders who are limited in their use of the public transport. Further, it is suggested that the overall percentage of the TSS budget has actually decreased when compared with the total Queensland state budget and the proposed increase by the Queensland Blind Association to the maximum subsidy is a fair and reasonable recommendation.

Carers Queensland recommends the desired savings should be sought from the administration costs of the scheme, through the abolition of the Queensland Health Taxi Subsidy Clinical Assessment Unit for the assessment of applications and renewals to the scheme. An alternative process could include the direction of a limited amount of the budget resources into the establishment of an audit process of medical certificates by a Queensland Health officer for a pre-determined fee at the initial application and on renewal applications for short term approvals. Any changes to the eligibility and entitlements of the scheme should not result in any additional cost imposts to the carer.

The Council on the Ageing Queensland suggests the sustainability of the TSS can be enhanced by increasing the range, and coordination, of accessible transport options for people who face mobility challenges, thereby reducing the demand on the TSS. Efficiencies can be obtained by coordinating the assessment of Queensland Government transport related schemes, with the confirmation of eligibility (such as medical assessments) for these schemes centralised rather than applicants required to reconfirm their disability, age or long term medical conditions.

Federal Government funding

A number of panel members suggest additional funding should be sought from the Federal Government HACC program given the high number of TSS membership in Category 2 and over 65 years of age.

MS Queensland proposes that a more equitable allocation of funding should be provided by the Federal Government, under the HACC program, commensurate with the 74.8% of users of TSS aged over 65 years of age.

The Cerebral Palsy League suggests TMR explore funding contributions from the Federal Department of Health and Ageing under the HACC program for over 65's and the Health budget (State and Commonwealth) for health related travel.

Similarly, the Endeavour Foundation suggests negotiations with the Commonwealth Government occur for an increase in HACC funding due to the profile and growth in the over 65 age group of Category 2 membership.

Other funding options

Other suggestions about options for additional funding for the TSS include:

- The introduction of a TSS application fee, including a replacement fee for lost cards (Queensland Health);
- As an interim measure, membership and renewal fee to be charged to all members across the five-year cycle with a surcharge for high subsidy users. Members can offset the charges against their use during the year (Endeavour Foundation);
- As an interim measure, scope a separation in the scheme between under 65 and over 65 years as an interim measure to identify the growth and funding requirements from the Commonwealth for members over 65 years (Endeavour Foundation);
- Contributions to be made by local governments as they are responsible for the transport of constituents in their local authority (Epilepsy Queensland);
- Contribution to be made by taxi companies (Epilepsy Queensland);
- The State Government build in an indexation factor to increase the TSS journey cap from 1 July annually by the annual CPI rate, with the indexation to be built into the State Budget Appropriation for the TSS. This will cease the erosion of the value of the current TSS journey cap of \$25, which has not been increased since the cap was set, despite taxi fares and tariffs increasingly steadily (Cerebral Palsy League).
- Improve the accessibility to infrastructure supporting the public transport options, partnering with the local government authorities, as well as lowering the cost of public transport to take some pressure off the TSS to support people who could

otherwise, with the appropriate accessibility in place, be able to utilise public transport options as an alternative (Spinal Injuries Association);

- Consolidating and eliminating the multiple administrative regimes from the numerous funding programs across government delivering transport services will likely result in sufficient funds released to operational outputs without the need to seek additional funding (Taxi Council of Queensland).

Recommendations about the options for additional funding allocation to the TSS:

- *Acknowledge that the funding provided to the TSS is insignificant when compared to the whole TMR budget*
- *Recognise that the TSS reduces the costs to other departments, particularly Queensland Health and Queensland Ambulance Service*
- *Acknowledge that payment for taxi services is for the service itself and not the additional cost factors like downtime (as is the case for buses)*
- *Re-direct savings made for other transport schemes to the TSS*
- *Request additional funding from the Federal Government for TSS members over 65 years of age*
- *Increase the range, and coordination, of other accessible transport options*
- *Coordinate the assessment of Queensland Government transport related schemes and centralise the eligibility processes*
- *Accelerate the improvement and integration of accessibility to infrastructure supporting public transport options, to enable the use of public transport options as an alternative*
- *Consolidate and eliminate the multiple administrative regimes from the numerous funding programs across government delivering transport services*

4.5 Other Recommendations

In considering the issues identified in the review of the TSS, three strategic themes emerged that highlight the importance of better integration of the transport system, the reduction of red tape associated with the application and assessment process of the Scheme, and the critical links to the broader benefits of social inclusion and better economic outcomes for Queensland.

It is recommended that Government take these principles into consideration for any future changes to the TSS.

Other recommendations:

- *Where possible, reduce red tape in the application, assessment and renewal for TSS membership*
- *Where possible, include the options for integrating services and schemes for TSS members in order to deliver the best possible transport outcomes*
- *Consider the benefits associated with the TSS and their contribution to the well being and economic activities of Queensland.*

4.6 Recommendations to Government

After consideration of all the information made available and the views put forward by the Panel members, the Panel makes the following recommendations to Government about the TSS in regard to changes to eligibility, entitlements under the scheme, duplication of government benefits and assistance through other schemes, and funding.

Eligibility of the TSS

1. No changes to be made to eligibility criteria
2. Consider allowing a person with epilepsy who does not qualify for a driver licence membership of the TSS
3. Undertake research to identify more detailed demographics and usage patterns to understand access of the member and groups of the scheme to transport networks.

Entitlements under the TSS

4. Retain the existing TSS entitlements
5. Give consideration to the maximum subsidy amount maintaining parity with CPI increases and/or is reflective of changes to taxi fares

Potential duplication of other government benefits and assistance with the TSS

6. Improve coordination between programs and service provision to realise savings and efficiencies for government
7. Acknowledge that TSS members may be eligible for, and entitled to benefits under other schemes and that the administration costs and other regulatory complexities required to reduce any perceived duplication would be high in relation to the benefits gained
8. Undertake a complete review of all streams of government funding and programs to identify savings or improved benefits to be gained at a state level, and in turn, at the federal level.
9. Undertake a full review of subsidies, benefits and assistance for specialised disability transport use provided by the Queensland and Commonwealth

Governments, as part of the development of a future NDIS Implementation Transport Plan

10. Increase funding to and advertise the other alternative forms of transport available in the community
11. Consider initiatives to encourage users to share taxis

Options for additional funding allocation to the TSS

12. Acknowledge that the funding provided to the TSS is insignificant when compared to the whole TMR budget
13. Recognise that the TSS reduces the costs to other departments, particularly Queensland Health and Queensland Ambulance Service
14. Acknowledge that payment for taxi services is for the service itself and not the additional cost factors like downtime (as is the case for buses)
15. Re-direct savings made for other transport schemes to the TSS
16. Request additional funding from the Federal Government for TSS members over 65 years of age
17. Increase the range, and coordination, of other accessible transport options
18. Coordinate the assessment of Queensland Government transport related schemes and centralise the eligibility processes
19. Accelerate the improvement and integration of accessibility to infrastructure supporting public transport options, to enable the use of public transport options as an alternative.
20. Consolidate and eliminate the multiple administrative regimes from the numerous funding programs across government delivering transport services

Other recommendations

21. Where possible, reduce red tape in the application, assessment and renewal for TSS membership
22. Where possible, include the options for integrating services and schemes for TSS members in order to deliver the best possible transport outcomes
23. Consider the benefits associated with the TSS and their contribution to the well being and economic activities of Queensland.

Appendix 1 - TSS Eligibility Criteria

The eligibility criteria for the TSS are prescribed in section 94 of the *Transport Operations (Passenger Transport) Regulation 2005 (TOPTR)*. (Attachment 1 – Division 5, TOPTR)

To be eligible for membership of the TSS, a person must be a permanent resident of Queensland and fully meet at least one of the eligibility criteria listed below:

1. Physical disability requiring dependence on a wheelchair for all mobility outside the home.

Category 1 applies to applicants who are unable to stand or walk due to physical disability, requiring a wheelchair for all mobility, or dependent on a wheelchair for all mobility outside the home.

2. Severe ambulatory problem that cannot functionally be improved and restricts walking to an extremely limited distance.

Category 2 applies to applicants who have a condition which limits independent walking to 50 metres or less without rest, and which results in one or more of the following:

- *necessity for use of a walking aid for all mobility*
- *inability to ascend or descend three or more steps*
- *frequent falls, severe dystonia or ataxia*
- *severe pain limiting ambulation*
- *severe muscle weakness, frail aged*
- *severe dyspnoea at rest or on minimal exertion*
- *requirement for constant assistance of another person for all mobility*
- *requirement for use and transport of treatment equipment (such as oxygen cylinder, suction pump or sitting frame) while travelling*

3. Total loss of vision or severe visual impairment (both eyes).

Category 3 applies to applicants who have severe visual impairment which entitles them to eligibility for the Aged Pension (Blind) or the Disability Support Pension (Blind), or a visual disability close to the level of disability required for the Aged Pension (Blind) or the Disability Support Pension (Blind).

4. Severe and uncontrollable epilepsy with seizures involving loss of consciousness.

Category 4 applies to applicants who have experienced generalised seizures or complex, partial seizures involving loss or impairment of consciousness which have occurred on one or more occasions within the three months prior to the application.

5. Intellectual impairment or dementia resulting in the need to be accompanied by another person at all times for travel on public transport.

Category 5 applies to applicants who have severe intellectual disability with cognitive and/or memory impairment, as a result of which they are incapable of travelling on public transport without the constant assistance of another person.

6. Severe emotional and/or behaviour disorders with a level of disorganisation resulting in the need to be accompanied by another person at all times for travel on public transport.

Category 6 applies to applicants with severe psychiatric disorders and gross disorganisation in relation to day to day activities. This category also applies to applicants who have severe developmental disorders or organic brain syndrome.

Appendix 2 – Extract of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)

The CRPD Article 9 ‘Accessibility’, Article 19 ‘Living Independently and Being Included in the Community’, and Article 20 ‘Personal Mobility’, set out the civil and political obligations of States that must be immediately realised upon ratification to ensure that the universal, inherent and indivisible human rights of people with disability are being met.

In particular, Article 9 states that:

“...States 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, including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and in rural areas....”

Article 9 ‘Accessibility’ states:

State Parties will...“enable persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life.”

In Article 3 General Principles the Convention obliges States to apply:

- *respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one’s own choices, and independence of persons;*
- *non-discrimination;*
- *full and effective participation and inclusion in society;*
- *respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity;*
- *equality of opportunity;*
- *accessibility;*
- *equality between men and women;*
- *respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities and respect for the right of children with disabilities to preserve their identities.* 16

¹⁶ Final Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on a Comprehensive and Integral International Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities, United Nations General Assembly 2006.

Appendix 3 - Acronyms

ACT	Australian Capital Territory
DETE	Department of Education, Training and Employment
DVA	Department of Veterans' Affairs, Australian Federal Government
GPS	Global Positioning System
HACC	Home and Community Care, Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
LGA	Local government authority
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
QH	Queensland Health
RTS	Repatriation Transport Scheme, Department of Veterans' Affairs, Australian Federal Government
RUS	Restricted Use Statements
SAP	Systems Application Product, a whole of Government financial system
TMR	Department of Transport and Main Roads
TOPTR	Transport Operations (Passenger Transport) Regulation 2005
TSS	Taxi Subsidy Scheme
TSS Unit	Taxi Subsidy Scheme Unit, Department of Transport and Main Roads
TSCAU	Taxi Subsidy Clinical Assessment Unit, Queensland Health

