

TAXI AMENDMENT REGULATIONS (NO. 3) 2011 — DISALLOWANCE

Motion

MRS M.H. ROBERTS (Midland) [1.10 pm]: I move —

That the Taxi Amendment Regulations (No. 3) 2011 under the Taxi Act 1994, a copy of which was laid upon the table of the Legislative Assembly on 10 August 2011, are hereby disallowed.

I note that in question time yesterday and in the media the Minister for Transport criticised the Labor Party for using the disallowance mechanism for bringing on for debate the problems in the taxi industry. Criticising the Labor Party for doing that is somewhat hypocritical of the minister because prior to the Liberal Party's amendments to the Taxi Act, there was no capacity to move this form of disallowance and bring on this issue for debate. When in opposition, the Liberal Party thought it was only right that the Parliament should scrutinise any increase in the number of taxi plates. The Minister for Transport no longer believes that it is good to do what the Liberal Party thought was great to do when in opposition, when it moved that amendment. The minister does not think that the Labor Party should have put this disallowance motion on notice, which it did in both houses, to bring on this matter for debate in order for him to answer a few questions and outline his plans for the taxi industry. We are doing this because we are very concerned about what has occurred in the taxi industry over the past three years.

The Liberal Party, of which the minister is a member, was very critical of us when we were in government and of our handling of the taxi industry. The then opposition promised a lot. It promised that things would be different if it were in government and that a lot of changes would be made for the better. However, after three years in office, we can see that the government has delivered very little. The minister said his priority areas are the service and availability of taxis, and the safety of both passengers and taxidriviers. However, we have seen very little delivered by the minister in any of those three regards. The minister is great at talking the talk but he simply does not walk the walk. He always has a glib answer in Parliament or on the radio and he often promises a lot but delivers little. One of the things that seems to me to be somewhat hypocritical is that he even criticises the opposition for wanting to talk about the issue. We are supposed to take a "trust me" approach and trust the minister to deliver for the taxi industry. That might have been alright two and a half years ago, but given the lack of progress and delivery on the minister's word, I believe it is only right that the Labor Party raises this issue by way of a disallowance motion so that we can bring on these issues for debate and get some commitments from the minister on the parliamentary record.

Last December, in an opinion piece, the minister confirmed that there had been quite a dramatic increase in the number of complaints and he said that that was all going to change. Well, it has not. He also said on radio that he had a taxi action plan. Where is that plan? I do not think that the minister has brought forward a taxi action plan. He says that he is a man of action but when it comes to delivering, it just does not happen. I think that the minister needs to place on the record his plans for the industry. He has been very slow to act because in April this year he said in *The Sunday Times* that he would increase the number of taxi plates by 300, yet the notice for that was not placed on the table of the Legislative Assembly until 10 August. I note for the record that I gave notice of this motion in this house on 27 September. I wonder why it has taken the minister this long to attempt to bring this process to a conclusion.

Mr T.R. Buswell: One of the reasons for that is that I do not know what happens in the upper house, but there was a disallowance motion up there that was dealt with only last week. We could not proceed while that disallowance was in the upper house. This is the first opportunity we have had.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: I understand that Hon Ken Travers put his notice of motion on notice either simultaneously with mine on 27 September or, if anything else, prior to 27 September. I just point out that there would have been an option for Hon Simon O'Brien, or whoever is responsible for transport matters in the other place, to bring on the matter for debate.

Mr T.R. Buswell: Do you think so?

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: There is the capacity under the standing orders for him to do that.

Mr T.R. Buswell: Maybe in this place.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: The capacity is there in the standing orders. I gather that the minister is talking about the unwillingness of his own members in the upper house to bring it on for debate. Hopefully, it is not the case that a clash of personalities between members of the Liberal Party has delayed this matter for two months.

Mr T.R. Buswell: We have not had a leadership challenge for a long time.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: I know there are some issues between the Minister for Transport, the Leader of the House and certain members in the upper house —

Mr R.F. Johnson: Not at all. We are very good friends. We work very closely together.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: If Liberal Party members work so closely together and the Minister for Transport says that this matter is so important to the government and the community in the lead-up to Christmas, we have to wonder why this motion languished in the upper house for some two months. I think it was the minister's colleagues in the upper house who, a number of years ago, made the amendments to the Taxi Act—my recollection might be incorrect—that requires Parliament to deal with every stage of the process for increasing the number of taxi plates and puts a cap on the number of taxi plates that can be issued. They put the process in place, which is why this motion needs to be moved. I do not even know whether the Minister for Transport was aware that the legislation required the disallowance process to be completed in both houses before he could release the plates. Was the minister aware of it?

Mr T.R. Buswell: I am aware of it.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: The minister is aware of it now, but was he aware of it when the motion was moved?

Mr T.R. Buswell: I cannot recall when I was made aware of it, but I am aware of it and we are dealing with it.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: I think that the minister is gilding the lily somewhat when he attempts to blame the Labor Party for any delays in him bringing extra plates onto the market because it was the Liberal Party that put this mechanism in the legislation, put a cap on the number of plates and moved the amendment that requires all stages to be processed by Parliament before extra plates can be added into the system. The minister said that he would move on the process in April, yet nothing occurred for several months. It was not until August that the required regulations were brought into Parliament. That is a delay of some months between the minister talking the talk and actually tabling the notice of the regulations in both houses of Parliament. If he was on top of his portfolio, and understood and knew the legislation, he would have known those matters need to be brought on for debate in both houses and dealt with so that he could get the taxi plates issued, if that was his priority. If the minister had been on the ball, if he knew his job and actually progressed things promptly, that would have happened. When the minister talks about the Labor Party delaying the issuance of taxi plates, he is really being incredibly hypocritical. If anyone has delayed the issuance of additional taxi plates, it is the Minister for Transport himself. He waited until April to come up with the idea and then delayed until August putting the required regulation before the Parliament. The Labor Party moved a disallowance motion in September so that we could bring these issues on for debate, but the Liberal Party, which has the numbers in both houses, did not actually bring the disallowance motion forward until the end of November. If the minister has any difficulty issuing additional plates before Christmas, he will have no-one to blame but himself! Of course the minister has other options available to him. I think the minister well knows what I would like him to outline because I am relatively confident that he has read the comments made by Hon Ken Travers in the upper house. Hon Ken Travers, on behalf of the Labor Party, said that the Labor Party supports the orderly release of taxi plates but that the release needs to be based on sound statistical data. Indeed, Hon Ken Travers asked the minister to release that data. He has highlighted some of the issues with the data that the minister seems to base his claims on.

I also note for the record that the minister has some other options to provide more taxis at peak times. For example, he could issue more multipurpose taxi plates and he could also issue more peak-period plates. The disallowance motion we have placed on the agenda for debate does not affect the issuance of either multipurpose taxi plates or peak-period plates. The minister has had these options at his disposal for some time. The Minister for Transport likes to create a little controversy. He likes to talk the talk. He likes to make a few glib comments and he likes to try to blame the Labor Party for nearly everything. He is entertaining when he does it—he gets a laugh. What I want to turn the Parliament's attention to is the substance. Where is the substance? On what statistics has the minister actually based the need for 300 new plates? How does he intend to roll out 300 plates? I am not interested—I do not think the Parliament should be interested—in his theatrics about blaming the Labor Party for what is really his responsibility. In April, the minister said that we needed extra taxi plates. He came up with a figure of 300. We want that figure explained. He then delayed until August before he put the required regulations to both houses of Parliament, as required by law. We then gave notice of disallowance motions in both houses so that we could bring the matter on for debate to get this minister on record on the issue of the need for an increased number of plates. We did that because of this minister's record on taxis. He has not actually delivered on taxis because he promised that passengers and taxidrivers would be safer. He has not delivered on that either.

I understand that one of my colleagues will also comment on the minister's mismanagement of the taxi industry. Unfortunately, we are seeing too many examples of women being attacked in cabs. There is a sense in the community, particularly amongst young women, that they may not be safe. We need to know what this minister is actually doing. Some of the things that this government has done so far may have been detrimental to progressing the issues that the minister claims he wants to advance. For example, he got rid of psychological testing of taxidrivers. That no longer happens. I do not know what basis he really had for doing that, but I do

know that it would appear that some of the drivers who have not been subjected to psychological testing have been the ones involved in some of the incidents with young women. The minister talks the talk and says this is a priority, that he wants people to be safe catching cabs, yet he has not put a safe system in place. In response to this motion, we would like the Minister for Transport to go on record in this house to explain the statistical basis for the requirement for an additional 300 cabs. He may like to explain why he has been so tardy in progressing this, if it is, as he claims, such a high priority.

MR C.J. TALLENTIRE (Gosnells) [1.26 pm]: I rise to support the motion before the house. What a time of year for us to be discussing the issue of taxis. There is no doubt about it: the government faces a challenge to make sure that on one hand we have a viable industry, one in which people are happy to invest money into a commercially viable profession and enjoy a taxi career, and, on the other hand, the industry provides a valuable community service. There is a community expectation that the quality of our taxi service is one that we can have total confidence in. The community expects that, and rightly so. The community expects that anybody getting into a taxi, male or female, of any age, can safely travel home and reach their destination without any form of discomfort or aggression, unlike the reports we have heard lately involving young women. Indeed, I think in one case a taxidriver attempted to kiss a nine-year-old girl. Those sorts of things, obviously, are totally unacceptable. The taxi industry provides an important service, but if we are not careful, we could attract the wrong sorts of people into the industry and put our community at grave risk. That is just not good enough.

We need to ensure that not only the industry attracts new people but also those people are properly tested, and there is a system in place that looks at probation periods and a demerit system. These are all ideas that the Minister for Transport has talked about. The minister has acknowledged the problem in the industry for some time. There are media reports going back to 31 December 2010 of the minister acknowledging that the quality of this service has to be improved. The minister released a media statement on 10 April this year saying that he wanted to change the industry regulations to allow for the release of up to 300 additional taxi plates to meet demand. It was obviously a worthy idea and one that needed to be acted on then and there, along with all the necessary measures being put in place to ensure that we do not flood the industry with people who could put our community at risk or who could be the wrong sorts of people entering the industry. That is the danger: we put the call out, almost in desperation, for more people to come forward to be taxidrivers, and we end up with the wrong sorts of people. We have to take a very careful line on how we go about increasing the number of taxis.

At this time of year in the lead-up to Christmas there is, of course, a very strong need for taxis. People want to do the right thing, and they are avoiding driving when they have had too much alcohol. That is obviously a sensible thing for them to do. They then, though, have to face the challenges of getting a taxi. They have to queue for long periods of time. They often have to suffer the unsavoury atmosphere that surrounds some of the taxi ranks. I understand that earlier today the minister launched a new taxi rank in Northbridge.

Mr T.R. Buswell: According to the member for Midland, I have done nothing, so perhaps I was hallucinating.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Given that the Northbridge rank upgrade was something that was proposed by former minister Alannah MacTiernan, it is something that has long been in the pipeline. It is welcome and it is timely, but it has taken a very long time. The idea of the upgrade originated more than three years ago when Alannah MacTiernan was minister.

The actions that are being taken are necessary, but they are long overdue. That is really the crux of the problem. The minister made announcements back in April. He has then reinforced those announcements along the way and talked about the release of a taxi action plan. It is something that we have not seen in its entirety. We have not seen that whole document. We have had little glimmers of it.

Mr T.R. Buswell: Can I just tell the member that there is no document.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: There is no taxi action plan?

Mr T.R. Buswell: There is an action plan—it is just not in a document. There is a whole lot of stuff happening.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: On an important issue like this, where there are potentially competing interests of community need and industry viability, we need to have a consolidated action plan—something that navigates the course through the potential conflicts and outlines what safeguards will be in place so the community is not put at risk. That is absolutely critical. The document should appear in a consolidated form. That is entirely reasonable. That is what the community needs to have so that it can be reassured.

Mr T.R. Buswell: How many people have come up to you in the street and said, “I haven’t got a copy of the taxi action plan”?

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: It is about those members of Parliament, those people who are interested in this issue, which is everyone —

Mr T.R. Buswell: How many people have come up and said they can’t get a cab?

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: You are right, minister. Constituents complain to me about not being able to get a taxi or about the viability of the industry. When I catch a taxi occasionally, the first five minutes of conversation are always about the stress that taxidrivers are facing because of the poor viability of the industry. The other thing that I always hear from constituents as well is the insecurity people feel when they get into a taxi. There is a need for a consolidated document that we can all refer to. It is absolutely necessary. As with action plans in a whole range of domains, people do not necessarily want to go to a library and consult the document.

Mr T.R. Buswell: Do you know what they want? They want action.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: They want it documented in a coherent fashion. Releasing a few pages or releasing an idea here and there is not a consolidated plan. We need that consolidated plan. If the minister has been leading us to believe there is an action plan but there is not actually one, I think the minister needs to change that position. He needs to produce a consolidated taxi action plan. This goes back to April as well. I refer to a media report that appeared in *The Sunday Times* on 10 April. The report says, and the minister did not challenge, that a taxi action plan will be released in coming weeks. The minister has had since 10 April to put forward his view on the presentation of an action plan, and he has not done so. Yet here in this Parliament he is telling us that he does not intend to release one consolidated document. That is a shame, because this is such a crucial issue. People who have an active interest in this issue deserve the opportunity to be able to refer to a consolidated document.

I want to turn, though, to some of the statistics that emphasise the problem we are facing here. I begin by looking at the “Taxi Industry Service Standards Quarterly Report”, April to June quarter, 2011, which was published in August. I understand this is the latest document available. From the available statistics in this document, there is a constant downward trend in the quality and standards of service that is being provided. That is very worrying, especially as we come into this peak time.

The number of jobs that are not covered—when people phone for a taxi, wait for a taxi, and then after 15 minutes they are still waiting and actually give up or move on; the number of cases in which people are finding that they cannot get into a taxi that they have called for—is trending upwards. For a long time we had seen a downward trend. Since 2004 to 2008, there was a strong downward trend in the cases of taxi journeys not covered, but we are seeing this trend upwards, and it is especially apparent at this time of year. That is of grave concern.

The issue of jobs not being covered is one thing, but there is a more concerning trend relating to complaints about standards. Since 2008, the number of complaints has gone up. While there is an upward trend in the number of calls for which the taxidriver has failed to show, we are also seeing an upward trend in the number of complaints. In 2008–09 there were 334 complaints; in the following year there were 333; in the next year 453; and in 2010–11 there were 460 complaints.

Complaints about overcharging have increased dramatically over the last three years. Four years ago there were only 46 complaints about overcharging. In the next year there were 44. Now we are up to 109 complaints about overcharging—a dramatic increase. Likewise, complaints about a lack of geographic knowledge have increased. We all know that there is nothing more irritating for people than getting into a taxi and having the taxidriver ask, “Which way should I go?” Sometimes it is done in a sensible context. It is done because the taxidriver wants to know whether the passenger has a preference for which way to go. All too often, taxidrivers are asking that question because they do not know how to get to a destination or they are too lazy to use their satellite navigation device. We have seen an increase in the failure of geographic knowledge. Complaints in recent years have gone up to 21 complaints when previously they were half that number.

There is a disturbing side to these complaints. We have seen a strong increase in the number of complaints around inappropriate language and especially in the amount of inappropriate behaviour. The figures for 2008–09 show there were 80 reports of inappropriate behaviour. That has now risen to 164 complaints of inappropriate behaviour. That is why we have to have action. That is why it is absolutely extraordinary that the minister has taken so long to introduce the changes to the regulations to allow for the increase in the number of plates. We have had to wait since the minister’s initial announcement back in April. We then had to wait for the minister to present those regulation changes in August. This is the earliest we have been able to debate this issue. Notice of the disallowance motion was given in September, and now here we are debating the disallowance. The time line is purely of the minister’s making. He made announcements in April and waited until August for the presentation of the changes to regulations.

Mr T.R. Buswell: Do you think we’ve released any additional plates this year?

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I believe 30 plates.

Mr T.R. Buswell: No, 140.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I have some information on that. The minister is claiming 140, but there have been some changes there as well. The minister has released 130 peak-period plates.

Mr T.R. Buswell interjected.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: And 58 restricted-area plates. The minister could argue that he has released 218 plates but then —

Mr T.R. Buswell: I can tell you that there are 141 more cabs on the road now than there were at the end of December last year. But we're conked out, so we need to get this dealt with.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: The fact is, minister, that 50 plates are currently not operational. The Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations asked some questions on this issue on 17 October. Looking at the answers, it is apparent that taxis are currently running with 50 plates not operational.

Mr T.R. Buswell: Member, what happened is there is a churn as well of plates.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Sure.

Mr T.R. Buswell: People hand them back in for a range of reasons and they try to run a pool of applicants, which we currently have. But it is a bit like the Department of Housing: at any one time you're going to have a house that's between homes, if I could put it that way.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: So, 10 were returned in the time but I think it still leaves 50-odd unaccounted for. The minister can account for those and we will await his advice on that. However, there are some problems as well with the off-peak statistics the minister is using. At the moment he is using the time between 4.00 am and 9.00 am to define whether taxis are active. He says that the off-peak time for taxi availability is between 4.00 am and 9.00 am. I think that is confusing the statistics on the availability of taxis. There are many things the minister could be doing.

Mr T.R. Buswell: Have you ever tried to get a cab to the airport early in the morning?

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: It is funny that the minister should talk about taxis at Perth Airport. Sometimes there are amazingly long taxi queues at the airport. One of the things that the minister could be looking at is a system that would enable those taxis to be freed up and deployed to those areas where there is peak activity. On a Friday and Saturday night and early on a Sunday morning, huge queues of people are waiting for a taxi in Northbridge and Fremantle; meanwhile loads of empty taxis are waiting out at the airport. There are therefore ways in which the minister could address this problem; one would be by improving the fluidity with which taxis move from one area to the next. How will the minister go about doing that? That is the sort of thing we need to see documented and presented in a taxi action plan. However, it is ultimately about making sure that we have a viable industry that meets community needs.

Other matters that need to be addressed relate to the probation periods and the demerit point system that the minister talked about. We have no details on those matters. How will they address unacceptable behaviour? The minister and the member for Midland touched on the issue of psychological testing. Strangely, the minister got rid of psychological testing without real evidence that it was not working or was not helpful. That is another serious problem we have to face. We have this sudden need for additional drivers but they are not going through psychological testing because for some reason the minister got rid of that program. I think I heard the minister say on radio that he was not convinced that psychological testing was really helpful. The minister must have evidence for that.

Mr T.R. Buswell: No, what I said was that was the department's advice. I have asked the Taxi Industry Board to provide me with its views on that matter; and if that view is that it will help, I am very happy to reintroduce it. It was removed at some stage late in 2009—I think it was before I came to the portfolio. The advice would have been the same, but I have asked the Taxi Industry Board, which is reviewing standards and training, to look at that as part of that.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: So the minister is prepared to admit that it was a mistake to cancel a useful program without having the evidence.

Mr T.R. Buswell: No, I didn't say it was a mistake.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: No. I am asking the minister, though, is he prepared to admit that?

Mr T.R. Buswell: I've got to wait until I get the advice from the Taxi Industry Board.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: So the minister is waiting for advice; nevertheless, he thinks it was reasonable that the program was cancelled without the advice.

Mr T.R. Buswell: What are you talking about?

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: The minister is saying that the program was cancelled. He is waiting for taxi industry advice.

Mr T.R. Buswell: No, no.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: The minister is waiting for that advice but he is happy to support the notion that the whole psychological testing program was cancelled before he had that advice.

Mr T.R. Buswell: No; don't worry about it.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I think it would be reasonable that the minister admits that a serious error was committed there—perhaps not on his part but perhaps on the part of his colleague the previous Minister for Transport.

Mr T.R. Buswell: I didn't say it was an error. You can't actually make things up and say that people said them. That's like your embracing of controlled burning.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: The minister has to have good evidence when he cancels important programs such as psychological tests for taxidrivers and he has also received advice that some of the perpetrators of antisocial or unacceptable behaviour are people who have come into the industry without that potential screening device of psychological testing.

Mr T.R. Buswell: And a number of them have passed through the screening. A number of them have had the screening.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Perhaps the truth of it is, minister, that we need to improve the quality of that psychological testing; but to cancel it without any other alternative seems to have been a huge mistake.

I will conclude my remarks there. Clearly the government has failed to act in time to meet this peak-demand period of December when many of us need to use a taxi. We need to be sure that we are going to have a safe and happy journey, we need to be confident in the quality of our industry and we need to be sure that taxidrivers go into the industry knowing that they can make a reasonable living out of that industry.

MS A.R. MITCHELL (Kingsley) [1.46 pm]: I rise to support the state government's actions to improve availability and safety standards in the taxi industry. We all agree that things have to be done and at this stage the government actually has some actions coming on. We have all heard time and again about the problems people experience when they try to get or use a taxi. I certainly have a few stories of my own that I will bring in today. I have been very fortunate—if that is the right expression—to have had the opportunity to use taxis all around the world and I have a lot of experiences that I can compare with, but some of my greatest concerns are about my experiences here in WA. Today I particularly want to talk about the release of additional taxi plates because I believe there is a real case for it. The important thing is that there will be a gradual release of additional taxi plates; we are not going to flood the market with the sudden addition of 300 taxi plates. I support this release, as it will ensure the availability of taxis that are needed to service the demand both now and in the future. Let us face it: we need to do some planning for the future, not just deal with the situation as it is presently.

There are a number of taxidrivers in my electorate and they have spoken to me on a number of occasions, particularly about all these concerns going on at this time in the taxi industry. They do care about the taxi industry, they are part of it, they see themselves as the quality part of it and they do not like the negativity that surrounds it. They have obviously expressed concern about how the release of additional plates will be managed. When they understand how it will be managed, they will be fine with it. In particular they are very keen to let us know that the release, together with the other components, which is security for drivers and passengers and monitoring through cameras and surveillance, will make a big difference to owners and drivers in the taxi industry. The additional plates are not a concern. The high quality of the taxi industry will mean that more people will use the taxi service and therefore the demand will go up again. At the moment demand is down because of the quality of other standards in the service that are of concern. The number of taxi plates will be required as the demand for the taxi service goes up once those other situations are also addressed.

Although this may not be appropriate at this stage, I ask the minister, when he is looking at the standards and monitoring of taxidrivers, to include something about personal hygiene. Some passengers would really appreciate that, if the minister does not mind.

We all know that Perth is a growing city. The population is increasing and it will continue to increase. There is a much greater need for taxis from the business clientele. It is not always late-night taxis that are required; many members of the business clientele want to use our taxi service as well. Many people choose to use taxis rather

than public transport at times. Another group of people are being a little disenfranchised at the moment because they cannot get that service when they require it.

I believe we need to increase the number of taxis in Perth, and I want to explain a few of my reasons for that view. I am sorry that the member for Gosnells has left the chamber. He said that there was not a problem with getting taxis between 2004 and 2008. I was working in an environment in which I needed to fly around Western Australia quite a bit on those early morning flights, as the minister referred to them. It was not uncommon for the taxi not to arrive to get me to the airport for that six o'clock morning flight. When I had to travel over east, it was not uncommon for me to still be waiting for a taxi at 10 o'clock on a Sunday morning, and I was not in places where taxis were not available. If people in Sydney and Melbourne do not get to the airport for a flight, there is another flight an hour later, but if people in Western Australia do not get the first flight in the morning, the next flight does not leave until later that night. So those people miss their meetings and cannot do their work. There is a critical time frame in the early morning. I am sure we all know fly in, fly out workers who do not use taxi services for that reason. I believe there is a great clientele who have gone off the taxi service because of the unreliability factor. It was bad when I needed to use it. We certainly need it now because a lot more people need that service at the moment.

I am not sure whether it is in the minister's current planning processes, but I think the process of booking a taxi needs to be looked at and changed. I am very happy to book a cab, and I always did, but I find it very frustrating that when I book a cab, it means that 10 minutes before I want it, a call is put out to see whether a driver is in the area. That is not my idea of booking a taxi. We also would find that the demand for the taxi service would improve if people knew that when they booked a cab, they would get the cab. I know that might change how things operate, but that is the way of the future. People want to know that when they book a taxi, it will come—that is, a taxi is allocated to them there and then and it is not just that an all-points bulletin is put out 10 minutes before they want the taxi to pull up in the driveway. I know that the taxi dispatch service asks people to allow additional time. That is not what people are looking for; they are looking for reliability of service and a quality service. I ask that the minister consider that in his future considerations for the industry.

I return to the people who can demonstrate that taxi reliability, the service and the number of vehicles on the road are not good. Many of my friends have sons and daughters who go out at night, and they will wait for a phone call at one or two o'clock in the morning for them to pick up their sons and daughters and their friends to make sure that they get home safely. Once again, they would be happy to give their sons and daughters the cab fare, but quite often the cabs are not around or the situation is not conducive to hanging around a taxi rank. I have to be honest; I would not want to do that either. I know that many parents are doing exactly that; they are waiting for the call from their sons and daughters before they drive into the city to pick them up because they cannot rely on a quality taxi service. That is another reason to have additional taxi plates.

I was at a concert last Saturday night and the people I was with were going to catch a cab. We ended up taking them home because there were nowhere near enough taxis available after the concert to get people safely away from a fairly isolated location back to where they needed to be late at night. Many different people in that situation would benefit from a better and more reliable taxi service. I will say it again: if we can get a reliable and quality taxi service, more and more people will go back to using taxis. I stopped using taxis. I used private companies to make sure that I could get to the airport.

Mr T.R. Buswell: Very posh.

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: I had to, minister. I paid the extra amount over the government rate. I had to give up the stress that I was going through, wondering whether the taxi would arrive and whether I would get to the airport in time. I just said that I could not do it any more.

Mr T.R. Buswell: The member for North West is very interested in this debate.

Mr V.A. Catania: I am going through that currently!

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: I gave up using the taxi service. I will be honest; I do not intend to go back to it. When I fly back to Perth, I will pick up a taxi at the airport to go home, as long as I do not have to wait too long. I do not tend to book taxis at the moment because I just cannot rely on them. As I have said, I am not the only one; people want a reliable, comfortable and quality taxi service. I know that many taxidrivers are very supportive of the changes that the minister is making because they know that if we can address the basics and the quality of the service, we will have greater demand for an industry that is very important to the success of Western Australia. I believe we need to consider that in great detail.

MS L.L. BAKER (Maylands) [1.55 pm]: I would like to make a brief contribution to the debate about the Taxi Amendment Regulations (No. 3) 2011. One of my constituents comes into my office on a regular basis to talk to me about the problems he has getting taxis. He is blind and he has a guide dog. He is a very hardworking

individual; he has a full-time job in the city. He has to catch a taxi from Maylands to work and back again. He has told me that once when he got a taxi home from work about a year ago, the taxidriver stopped in the middle of a major intersection in West Perth and asked him whether he would mind getting out with his guide dog. It was a busy intersection in peak-hour traffic, so it was probably not the best action for someone who is blind. Damien contacted the Taxi Industry Board and complained. Since that time, he has been made aware that Swan Taxis has a new policy for booking taxis. Swan Taxis has tried to get people who are visually impaired and have a guide dog to register with the company. On the surface that is a really good idea, because it means that Damien can ring up and say, “Hi. It’s Damien. You’ve got all my details. I’m visually impaired and I have a guide dog.” That policy automatically enables a driver who has no cultural problems with having a dog in the car to accept his booking. The indirect consequence of this policy, which the company has introduced in good faith, is that Damien now spends a long time waiting for taxis as drivers do not accept his job because they see that he has a dog. I hope that in his work on the taxi industry, the minister looks at the various requirements and training for taxidrivers. I am aware of and sympathetic to drivers having cultural problems with dogs, but I do not accept that taxidrivers in Western Australia do not pick up someone who has a guide dog. I can see that the minister agrees with me, so I merely ask him to ensure that the cultural training given to new drivers in WA is sensitive to the needs of visually impaired and hearing-impaired people and other people with impairments who use guide dogs to get from place to place.

MR T.R. BUSWELL (Vasse — Minister for Transport) [1.58 pm]: I see that time is rapidly moving towards two o’clock. I will start my remarks and then conclude them after question time. I will start with some reflections on what the member for Maylands has just shared with the house. I can only imagine that the intent of the policy for sight-impaired people was good, but the outcome has probably been not so good. There is a wonderful lady in Busselton by the name of Monica Volpi who is sight impaired. She has a guide dog called Johnny. He, like her, is a tall, leggy blond; I think he is a labradoodle. She came to see me recently after she was refused service in a local restaurant because she had her guide dog. That is just not acceptable. We live in the twenty-first century. I will definitely follow that matter up with whomever I need to follow it up with, whether that be the department or the taxi dispatch services, because clearly that matter needs to be addressed. I am sure we will canvass the other issues that have been raised more broadly post-two o’clock but, suffice to say, I think there are some important issues more broadly around taxis. I will canvass all the different things that we are doing in government.

Debate interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.

[Continued on page 10189.]