

## TAXI USER SUBSIDY SCHEME

### *Statement*

**HON SIMON O'BRIEN (South Metropolitan — Minister for Transport)** [5.32 pm]: I want to speak to a matter that was introduced into the house in my absence yesterday evening by Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich. However, just before I do that, I compliment Hon Phil Edman who is a relatively new member of this place and who has taken to the role with great gusto and energy. He is doing a lot for the community and getting things done and I think that needs to be acknowledged.

Yesterday Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich raised, during members' statements, the question of a taxidriver who had had some problems with some paperwork, so I will briefly respond to that. It specifically relates to the Taxi User Subsidy Scheme vouchers. By way of background, the Taxi User Subsidy Scheme provides taxi travel at a reduced rate for people who have a severe disability that will always prevent them from using a conventional public transport bus service. The TUSS has 16 290 current members for whom the subsidy is a key component in ensuring access to essential services and maintaining a level of independence. The current TUSS payment system is based on paper vouchers, manual processing and a member identification card. At the time of the trip, users present their voucher book and a valid membership card to the driver who, in lieu of part of the taxi fare—it is either 50 per cent or 75 per cent dependent on certain criteria—will prepare a voucher. In doing so, the driver will assume responsibility for completing the details on the voucher. The driver is meant to do so only if the member presents his identification card along with his voucher book. The driver then submits the voucher for processing to the contracted processing agent, which is Swan Taxis. Swan Taxis enters the details into the TUSS system, which either rejects or accepts the voucher, dependent on the information provided by the driver. Rejected vouchers must be resubmitted. I think that the situation that was described yesterday by Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich was that of a taxidriver who was frustrated because something was wrong with the form he had submitted and it had been rejected.

**Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich:** The client hadn't given him the right client number.

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** Yes. I have some notes, and I am more than happy to talk about these things behind the chair, in the interests of sorting out any individual constituent issues. We can do that, and that is an offer that is available to all members, obviously, if ever they feel a need to approach me on behalf of a constituent. Therefore, I will speak only in general terms. Approximately 46 800 vouchers are processed each month, with an approximate rejection rate of 380 a month, which is a rate of about 0.81 per cent. The acceptance of the vouchers or otherwise relies largely on the accuracy of the information that has been input. The only other thing that it could be is if a voucher has been reported lost or stolen in the system.

**Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich:** What would happen if a driver drives somebody from point A to point B, gets there and the client says, "Sorry, but I've left my identification number at home"? What does the driver do in that case?

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** That is the sort of problem that happens and confronts taxidrivers all the time.

**Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich:** Yes, but I want a solution.

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** I do not know what the —

**Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich:** You're the minister.

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** I will tell Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich what the answer to that is. If passengers cannot provide their voucher book and their valid identification card at the time that they are claiming a concession or a part payment of their fare, they are not entitled to it. That is the official answer.

**Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich:** Yes, but the taxidriver has made the trip.

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** The onus is on the passenger to pay the full fare if he has not demonstrated that he is qualified for the concession. Having said that, there is also a real world in which we find that some people who are perhaps known to the individual driver to be on the TUSS scheme may have trouble finding their identity card, and human nature takes over. Sometimes we find, for example, that a taxidriver may not sight an identity card but instead just says, "What's your number, love, if you can't find the card?" and he will jot it down. If the number is wrong, there will be a rejection, and that will cause the taxidriver to have to run around. The complaint, as Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich put it, as relayed by the taxidriver—I can understand his frustration—is, "Heck, this is a \$12 fare." I think that is the example that the member might have used.

**Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich:** It was a \$6 fare.

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** "It was a 50 per cent TUSS member, so there's six bucks, and what am I doing? I'm running around all over town for \$6. It's not worth it." They are the frustrations that happen, to which the answer is to make sure that the recording of information is accurate, the onus for which is on the taxidriver.

This then raises the question: rather than a manual voucher-based system, why can we not come up with something more modern? I would like to see that happen. I advise the member that this is a subject for discussion. We have done a few things with TUSS recently. We have increased the wheelchair rate. It is the first time since 1998 that that has been raised, and I announced that the other day. However, I will deal with the electronic smart card answer. There are some available. For example, in Queensland there is a statewide smart card system. It was a move that cost about \$2.1 million, and the system development and set-up took 18 months. It staggers me that such things need to be so difficult, but it just shows that it is easier said than done. However, I take on board the several points that the member raised, and I share the sentiments. I understand the frustrations that the drivers sometimes have as they are trying to work their way through the things that sometimes go wrong in a well-intentioned system.