

SURVIVING THE GFC

THE NSW TAXI COUNCIL'S RECENT SURVEY OF NEW SOUTH WALES TAXI DRIVERS HAS REVEALED HIGH LEVELS OF CONCERN ABOUT THE IMPACT OF THE GLOBAL FINANCIAL CRISIS.

90% of drivers surveyed indicated that they had seen a downturn in work, with 55% reporting a substantial drop-off of 20% or more.

And at a time when other business surveys are reporting increased economic confidence, many drivers remain pessimistic, with more than a third believing that the worst is yet to come.

It has long been a popular belief that taxi drivers are a good economic barometer, and demand for taxis is an indicator of the health of other industries, including air travel, restaurants and bars, and general tourism. This is confirmed by the substantial majority who indicated slow business at the airport, licensed venues and sporting events, and slightly under half of the survey's participants who noted a reduction in work from regular private passengers.

55% of drivers also noted that sharing of cabs has increased in recent months, which also indicates that consumers are becoming more focused on the bottom line.

But drivers believe the loss of custom is due to factors other than the global financial crisis. Creeping (and often illegal) competition from hire cars and TV plate operators, and even touting by public transport drivers is eating into the taxi base.

At the same time, around two-thirds of drivers believe there is an oversupply of vehicles, and that fares have increased beyond what passengers regard as good value.

This is a complex environment for operators, drivers and regulators. And it emphasises the importance of not just planning taxi numbers and other transport services for the boom times. Taxis are an integrated part of business and tourism, and a group which quickly shows up the true health of the economy.

So what can be done about the downturn in work?

The simple things we always emphasise, such as a friendly attitude, a clean car, and quick response to customer expectations will limit drop-off, even when money is tight. On top of that the NSW Taxi Council is undertaking a range of initiatives including advertising, exploring opportunities in new fields such as community transport, and generally providing information about where passengers are likely to be and when.

It is pleasing to see that a majority of drivers are using METER to plan their shift – 21% said they do this 'often' or 'always'. This includes the guide to flights, races and other sports, shipping and theatre events. Use of such information, whether from METER, your Network or other sources is another important initiative to ensure you have access to the most reliable work in these trying economic times.

For the moment, we're all hoping that things will pick up quickly, and that broader business confidence will translate back into more taxi use. But nobody knows what that means, so in the meantime, don't forget to do your bit to strengthen our Industry.

HAVEN'T COMPLETED OUR SURVEY YET?

See pages 7 and 8 of this edition or go to the survey section on www.nswtaxi.org.au

HOW YOU CAN HELP

1. Every fare is important – do not let any passengers slip through to other modes of transport. Make passengers feel good about their taxi ride – treat them with respect and make the journey positive and calming.
2. Smile and be friendly – it goes a long way to making people want to come back.

GOT IDEAS?

Email good ideas to teamtaxi@nswtaxi.org.au and the Taxi Council will see what it can do to help you build your business.

HOW THE NSW TAXI COUNCIL IS SECURING MORE WORK...

HEAR OUR ADS?

The NSW Taxi Council ran an advertising campaign on radio 2UE during August and September to remind people that taxis have been providing a quick, convenient door-to-door service in Sydney for 100 years.

During periods when people become more value-conscious, it is important to remind them of the benefits that taxis can offer and the reasons why they value taxi services.

The advertisements were also used to tell people they can call the customer feedback line to pass on a compliment about their driver and put them in the running for the Taxi Driver of the Year Awards.

The NSW Taxi Council will be closely monitoring the affect of such Industry advertising and if early indications continue in a positive manner, more intense advertising will be considered.

COMMUNITY TRANSPORT

The NSW Taxi Council has been working with the NSW Transport and Infrastructure and the Department of Aging Disability & Home Care to obtain \$65,000 in funding over two years for Southern Sydney Community Transport Organisation (SSCTO) to use taxi services to provide transport for their clients.

The project originated through the Taxi Council's involvement with a committee established to improve transport services in the Redfern/Waterloo area.

To participate in the trial, taxi networks will form an agreement with the SSCTO to arrange services to be provided by taxi drivers who have agreed to complete some self-paced training about the special needs of CTO clients.

If you are interested in learning more about the training materials and how to become involved in accessing work for Community Transport Organisation clients in this or other areas, please contact your authorised network.

SOUTH WESTERN SYDNEY AREA HEALTH SERVICES WORK

Following an approach from the NSW Taxi Council, the Area Manager Transport Services for SWSAHS has agreed to look at ways that taxis can help meet their needs for flexible non-emergency health related transport services.

It is early days yet, but the Taxi Council hopes to be able to establish a range of work for taxi drivers in a similar manner to the arrangements in place for the Department of Veterans Affairs and Community Transport Organisations.

Reliability will always be the key to increased customer satisfaction. This is particularly relevant for CTO clients. Like all markets that are available to our Industry, the CTO market will not grow unless the Industry works together to ensure passengers' needs are met on time, every time.