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Small Passenger Services Review Submissions
Ministry of Transport
PO Box 3175
Wellington 6140

Dear Sir/Madam

Environment Canterbury Submission on the Small Passenger Services Review

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Small Passenger Services Review. We support the Ministry's review of these services to encourage innovation in this sector and respond to recent changes. These services play an important and increasing role in our region by improving access and mobility for the whole community, particularly through the Total Mobility scheme.

We support the Ministry's preferred option 4 as an approach to open up the market and encourage technological advancements that will support this sector in the future. As a Regional Council, we are responsible for the provision of Total Mobility services so our comments below focus primarily on ensuring that these services are not compromised through these changes. Total Mobility is a critical scheme for disabled people in our community and we would like any changes to ensure it continues to offer safe, reliable and affordable accessibility.

Key Points:

- **Total Mobility operations:**
  Regional Councils can currently set higher standards for Total Mobility operators through our contracts and we assume this will continue. Further consideration is required regarding what this can include. For example, could councils require all Total Mobility operators to register their fares or use meters even though it may not be required in the national rules? There is no mention of safety standards for vehicles with wheelchair hoists or requirements for Total Mobility card readers, so will these rules be set by each individual council in their contracts? Although the contracts could offer some level of protection for Total Mobility passengers, each region could end up with different requirements so there will be a lack of consistency across the country.
- **Security:**
  The safety of all passengers and drivers is paramount. We therefore support retaining the requirement of in-vehicle security cameras. We also recommend that a clear, independent complaints process is established that allows passengers to easily register a complaint directly to an independent body, such as NZTA. (As an example, the

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electricity industry has a separate Electricity and Gas Complaints Commission to address complaints). This will ensure that all complaints are properly recorded and dealt with fairly. NZTA needs to ensure they have the resources to respond to all complaints in a timely manner and maintain the safety and confidence of passengers. Resources for compliance are critical to the success of this sector but do not appear to have been considered in the review document.

- **Fares:**
  We are concerned with the proposal to remove the requirement to register fares or have meters in taxis. It will be difficult for passengers to know what to expect to pay and negotiate a fair rate with the driver, especially if they do not use these services regularly or are unfamiliar with the system (e.g. tourists). This could become more difficult if drivers are not required to pass an English test. Total Mobility customers will be particularly vulnerable and open to exploitation as they may lack the ability to negotiate with the driver. This will increase the chance of fraud and have an impact on councils' Total Mobility budgets, making it harder to predict or control. We encourage the Ministry to review how fares are managed in other countries, what issues have emerged and how they were addressed.
- **Language:**
  We have received negative feedback about drivers who are not able to understand English in previous Total Mobility customer surveys. This can be a barrier for some Total Mobility customers who have difficulties with communication. It is more concerning if fares no longer have to be registered and meters are not required as it will limit the ability for drivers and customers to agree a fare before the trip commences.
- **Hours of operation:**
  We recognise that the requirement for taxis to operate 24/7 in large cities may be a barrier to entry for smaller firms, but have concerns about removing this requirement. There are likely to be low levels of demand late at night and early in the morning on weekdays so companies may decide not to operate at these times. This could mean that some people have no travel options at particular times which will reduce accessibility and safety for the community. It may also put pressure on councils to provide a public transport service to meet these demands, which will not support the government's cost recovery targets.
- **Area knowledge:**
  We agree that technology is reducing the need for drivers to pass an area knowledge test, but there is no guarantee that all drivers will have access to this technology. We recommend that if the requirement for area knowledge is removed, it should be replaced with a requirement for GPS technology or similar in the vehicle.
- **Infrastructure:**
  The review does not appear to have considered what happens with existing taxi infrastructure when the distinction between taxis and other small passenger vehicles is removed. For example, some bus lanes can currently be used by taxis but it will be very difficult to enforce this if there is no definition of a taxi or branding on those vehicles. If all small passenger service vehicles were able to use these lanes, they could become congested and delay public transport services which would undermine their effectiveness. It is then likely that the lanes would have to be restricted to buses only which would disadvantage taxis that currently use them. Similar issues could emerge for taxi stands so this needs further consideration.

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- **Future technology and innovation:**
  We encourage the Ministry to ensure this review provides a regulatory environment that has enough flexibility to accommodate new approaches or technologies in the future. For example, driverless vehicles are already being used in some cities so we need to consider how these could fit in the small passenger service sector. The review is currently defining services based on their business model, rather than the type of service that is being provided. Carpooling and ridesharing offer very similar services, but carpooling is excluded under the proposed rules and drivers are not allowed to receive any incentives. This could restrict the growth of this sector which is playing an increasingly important role in other countries.
- **Overseas examples:**
  We recommend that the Ministry conduct a review of similar regulations in other countries across the world to ensure we learn from their experiences. We invite the Ministry to look at existing cities or states which have recently implemented similar regulatory changes (e.g. Australian Capital Territory).

We appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this review. We strongly recommend that the Ministry discusses these issues directly with existing Total Mobility agencies and disability groups as part of this process. This is critical to ensure that the proposed changes support innovation without adversely impacting the existing Total Mobility scheme.

Yours sincerely

Rex Williams
Environment Canterbury Commissioner

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