



ACT Government

BUDGET 2006-2007

MEDIA RELEASE

No. 61

A BETTER WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE TAXI SYSTEM

The Stanhope Government has reaffirmed its commitment to improving Canberra's taxi industry with \$814,000 funding over the next four years to improve taxi services for people in wheelchairs who are unable to use standard taxis.

Minister for the Territory and Municipal Services, John Hargreaves, said the funding was a strong response to the recommendations of the Wheelchair Accessible Taxi (WAT) Reference Group.

"I convened the Reference Group in 2005 to address concerns regarding the operation of WATs in Canberra and agreed to all 39 recommendations of the Group's report," Mr Hargreaves said.

"This funding will improve the reliability and viability of WAT services through the extension of the Government's payment of one lift fee for unloading and loading a wheelchair to all WAT bookings. The \$10 lift fee will be in addition to the rate charged for the trip and makes it more attractive for WAT drivers to ensure a responsive service for people in wheelchairs.

"The initiative will also subsidise the majority of the cost incurred by Canberra Cabs to micro-manage the WAT fleet to improve its efficiency and timeliness. Micro-managing WAT wheelchair pick-ups will link hirings, improve response times and minimise empty running without a paying passenger, making WAT businesses more viable."

Mr Hargreaves said these changes are designed to have a positive impact on the reliability and timeliness of WAT hirings for people with a disability, whose need for a safe and efficient taxi system is critical.

"This initiative is another sign of the Government's commitment to improve taxi services in the ACT. Earlier this year we released 10 new general taxi licences. In the coming months will hold a ballot for another 10. Ultimately we expect 40 new licences to be issued within the next two years, improving service delivery and timelines and assisting in meeting Canberrans increasing demand for public transport," he said.

"The Government looks forward to having the new licence holders on board and serving Canberrans as soon as possible."

6 June 2006

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