

Communities Committee	
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13 November 2018

MEMORANDUM

TO: ACTING CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

FROM: CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER (ARTS, SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT DEPARTMENT)

RE: CITY HEART CABS PROGRAM

INTRODUCTION:

This is a report by the Chief Operating Officer (Arts, Social Development and Community Engagement Department) dated 13 November 2018 concerning the City Heart Cabs Program.

BACKGROUND:

The City Heart Cabs Program (**the Program**) was launched as a subsidised travel program for Ipswich residents in January 2011.

The premise behind the Program was to allow eligible members of the community to travel by taxi from their home to a local shopping centre for only \$2.00 per person each way.

To be eligible for the Program participants must reside in one of the participating suburbs, as articulated in Attachment A.

Furthermore, Council's website states the following:

To use the services:

"People must meet the eligibility criteria by being in receipt of an age pension, disability support pension or carer's payment/allowance and residing in one of the participating suburbs.

Call Yellow Cabs on 3363 2373 before midday on the day before travel.

The next morning at about 9am, passengers will be picked up and taken to the respective shopping centre.

At 12.30pm, passengers will then be collected from a designated pick-up area at that shopping centre and taken home.”

The program commenced with two destination points: Riverlink Shopping Centre and Ipswich City Square. From that point, shopping centres at Redbank Plaza, Brassall, Booval Fair and Orion Town Centre joined the program in partnership with Council, with funding provided by the shopping centres and marketing support provided by Council. Redbank Plains has since ceased operation of the program.

Riverlink Shopping Centre and Ipswich City Square are the only destination points in the program that are funded by Council.

Financial Impact

The Program costs Council approximately \$15,000.00 each year. Yellow Cabs invoices Council on a monthly basis for the fares they have incurred that month (that is, the difference between the full fare and the \$2.00 rate for participants).

Program/Contract Management and Practice

There is currently no contract in place with Yellow Cabs for the delivery of the Program, with the last contract having expired in 30 June 2013.

Yellow Cabs provides to Council information regarding the service usage, including names of service users, pick up point, destination point and full fare.

At the point of booking, the user is asked to confirm their eligibility, however privacy legislation prevents the verification of eligibility. As such, the program operates under an ‘honour system’ for user eligibility.

PARTICIPANT ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

The intent of the broader Program is to ensure that vulnerable members of the community have access to services located within their local shopping centre. To be eligible, users must receive an age pension or disabilities support pension from Centrelink. Users can be accompanied by carers. It could be argued, however, that the issue of social disadvantage (and requirement for equitable access to services) is significantly more complex than this model suggests.

The Program is also significantly constrained in terms of the geographic eligibility.

Therefore, there are likely to be residents outside of the eligibility criteria who are impacted by barriers to services (e.g. migrants not eligible for a government pension, or pensioners residing in Rosewood).

RESPONSIBILITIES OF GOVERNMENT

Subsidised transport is not a legislated function of Local Government, however some Councils do offer a subsidised taxi service with significantly broader reach and varying eligibility criteria. These programs appear to be motivated by social drivers.

Translink offers a Taxi Subsidy Scheme for people with extreme disabilities and FlexiLink Taxi services for residents in some areas of Ipswich, however the State Government is also currently reviewing its model for taxi subsidisation. A trial run by Translink for demand responsive transport is currently underway in Logan, which may influence future strategies of the State Government.

The National Disability Insurance Scheme also offers transport funding for eligible participants.

OPTIONS:

Option 1

On the basis that the eligibility criteria of this program are significantly constrained and that subsidised transport is not a legislated function of local government, under this option, Council would cease funding of the Program. This can occur in two ways: cessation of the program itself for the Riverlink and City Heart destination points, or transfer of the financial responsibility to a third party.


Under this option, it is recommended that Council's funding exit take effect as of 1 March 2019. Up until this date of cessation, the following will occur:

- Liaison with Riverlink Shopping Centre Management to discuss the option of transferring the cost of the existing program to the shopping centre, thereby exiting Council altogether;
- Engagement with Government stakeholders to determine whether there is any cross-over with existing transport subsidy so that Council's exit strategy can incorporate a referral mechanism for existing users;
- Provision of notice of the cessation of the Program to Yellow Cabs;
- Where possible, contact details of users of the Program will be obtained to notify them of the cessation date and advise them of alternative providers. (It should be noted, however, that this may not be possible.)

Option 2

If Council wishes to continue its financial support of subsidised travel, it is recommended that a significant review of the program be conducted in the next financial year to explore the program's purpose, benchmark against other Local Government Areas, consider equity of access, and to increase efficiency.

ATTACHMENT:

Name of Attachment	Attachment
Attachment A – Participating Suburbs	 Attachment A

RECOMMENDATION:

Amended Communities Committee No. 2018(02) of 27 November 2018

A. That Council approve Options 1 and 2, as detailed outlined in the report be discussed by the Chief Operating Officer (Arts, Social Development and Community Engagement) dated 13 November 2018, to conduct a significant review of the City Hearts Cab program in the next financial year to explore the program's purpose, benchmark against other Local Government Areas, consider equity of access and to increase efficiency.

B. That a further report providing a high level review of the program including a comparison between Toowoomba and Brisbane on what they are trying to achieve with their programs, be submitted to the Communities Committee in February/March 2019.

The Interim Management Committee and the Interim Administrator commented that this matter was not part of council's core responsibilities. Concern was also raised around probity given that the program is an honour system.

Caroline McMahon

CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER (ARTS, SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT)