



Brisbane's Nightlife Transportation Strategy

Late-night Taxi Ranks and Night Links

Prior to 2005, high demand for taxis in the late-night hours was not being met with adequate supply in the nightclub precinct of Brisbane, Queensland, Australia. Existing taxi ranks ("taxi stands") were sub-optimal in organization, and drivers were reluctant to pick-up late-night passengers due to fears for safety and vehicle cleanliness. At the mayor's request, a public-private partnership between city government and the taxi industry was established to develop a new late-night transportation strategy. Secure taxi ranks (a.k.a. taxi stands) were developed as a result. Each secure taxi rank was staffed by a queue supervisor and security officers to manage crowds and advise passengers on how to pay. Supplementing the secure taxi ranks was an additional and innovative nighttime transportation service called "NightLink" taxis. This hybrid taxi/bus service offered a shared ride arrangement, with service from the taxi rank to the passenger's residence, with fares paid upfront on a zonal, flat fee basis. The NightLink taxi service is augmented by extended operating hours for select bus and train services that are marketed respectively as NightLink buses and NightLink trains.

Problem Statement

Limited access to safe and expedient late-night transportation resulted in mass loitering by nightlife patrons after bar and club closing times (3am-5am) in the Brisbane, Queensland entertainment district. Buses and trains did not run after midnight – so taxis were the only available option aside from personal automobile. Responsible individuals who chose not to drive while impaired were frustrated with the inadequate supply in taxis and other public transport options. Slow and sluggish egress from the district led to an increased propensity for aggression by or victimization of intoxicated and non-intoxicated individuals. Their lingering presence also generated increased noise and quality of life impacts such as public urination and vandalism, which negatively affected residents and retailers in the area.

Despite the market demand for taxicabs in the late-night hours, many taxi drivers chose not to provide service to nightclub patrons due to concerns for their safety. Drivers carry cash, making them a potential victim of crimes such as robbery. Unruly, intoxicated passengers were perceived to present multiple risks:

- Language abuse

- Physical assault
- Robbery
- Misbehavior in the form of vomiting, urination and/or defecation – any of which would force a driver to have to take their vehicle out of commission for sanitation and cleaning.
- Many did not feel the risks were worth the gain.

In November 2004, the mayor of Brisbane approached the taxi industry to develop a new strategy to improve late-night transit service delivery. Representatives of the taxi industry perceived this as an opportunity to harness a mutual benefit for themselves and the city by both contributing to increased public safety and helping taxi drivers take advantage of a missed revenue potential via the nighttime passenger market.

Public and private stakeholders partnered to develop a new, strategic approach to late-night transportation.

Stakeholders

The taxi secure rank program was originally developed in late 2004 as a public-private partnership between the Brisbane City Council, the Taxi Council of Queensland, and Brisbane's two taxi fleets (Black & White Cabs and Yellow Cabs).

Midway through 2005, the State Government took over funding responsibility for the secure rank program from the Brisbane City Council and provided initial seed funding and marketing support for the Taxi Council of Queensland's new NightLink FlatFare service.

Process

Secure Taxi Ranks ("Taxi Stands")

In November 2004, Brisbane rebranded ten key taxi ranks as "secure ranks" in their hospitality zone to coordinate transportation from nightlife venues at the end of the night. These particular ranks were chosen for their convenient proximity to large nightlife establishments.

Ranks, which operate from approximately 11pm-12am until 5-6am, may take up two or three city blocks, with the city block behind the rank serving as a taxi feeder. The ranks are designed to be fast moving, so that a taxicab can join the queue and quickly access passengers instead of cruising the district in search of passengers. The taxi ranks are managed by a taxi rank supervisor and one to two security guards.

A taxi rank supervisor (who is required to have a minimum of 4-5 years of experience as a taxi driver) educates patrons about pricing and gives advice on how to pay. The supervisor screens patrons and determines whether they are too aggressive or intoxicated to ride, and has a two-way radio to contact the police dispatch in case a patron's inappropriate behavior escalates. The supervisor is also able to contact the taxi fleet's call centers to request additional taxicabs.

One to two security guards are also present at each secured rank. Security guards' first priority is to protect the rank supervisor, while their second priority is crowd management. Crowd control is also assisted by extra lighting for the ranks, CCTV camera coverage of the ranks, and physical barriers positioned to prevent queue jumping.

A marketing campaign proved critical in helping to raise awareness of these secure taxi ranks among nighttime passengers. The Taxi Council of Queensland encouraged taxi drivers to prefer these particular ranks to street hails or other (non-staffed) ranks in the city to encourage increased patronage on the part of drivers and passengers.

The Queensland Government and the Taxi Council of Queensland also provide an additional late night transportation option – the FlatFare taxi service in Brisbane. The flat rate usually works out cheaper than using a regular taxi. The service operates on Friday and Saturday nights (Saturday and Sunday mornings) between 11pm to 5am at three designated taxi ranks.

NightLink Service: Late-night Taxi, Bus & Rail Services

The NightLink taxi service is an additional and innovative late-night transportation option developed to supplement the conventional secure taxi ranks. They offer a hybridization of a taxi and bus service, and are located at designated taxi ranks featuring security for passenger safety.

Patrons pay a fee up front, like a bus fare, for a shared ride arrangement. The service costs between a regular bus and taxi fare, and passengers are transported rank-to-door.

The NightLink buses provide extended operational hours of transport along 20 popular routes. Bus drivers will drop off passengers anywhere along the route that is convenient for passengers and where it is safe to stop. Along with NightLink trains, these mass transit options have proved to be a tremendous success because people returning from clubs are able to socialize in a safe, comfortable setting as they are driven home.

Outcomes

Taxi ranks and the NightLink taxi, bus and train services have made a significant impact on streamlining transportation and increasing public safety in the hospitality zone. Outcomes include:

- Expedited egress from the hospitality zone
- Reduction in loitering around nightlife venues
- Decreased incidence of patrons becoming perpetrators or victims of nightlife crime
- Nightlife patrons now have safe, inexpensive and convenient options to return home from the hospitality zone
- The guiding philosophy and support for these initiatives is that quick and efficient egress from the city's hospitality zone augments public safety, a government responsibility, in lieu of providing additional police officers to

manage crowds. Further, efficient and satisfactory transportation service tends to produce better behaving individuals, while slow, inefficient service tends to increase volatility and aggression, resulting in increased public safety risk. Transportation and public safety are thereby inextricably linked in the nighttime economy.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

When a trial program was launched in early 2004, taxi rank supervisors staffed ranks with support and protection being supplied by nearby nightclub security officers. However, after a supervisor was assaulted by an individual from the taxicab queue, the presence of dedicated rank security personnel was deemed necessary for their safety and to help maintain order.

During the trial program it was also recognized that additional lighting was often needed for a rank to remove dark spots and thereby promote better patron behavior while queuing. Similarly, the installation of physical barriers or fencing to separate the passenger queue from taxis waiting to move to the head of the rank for loading of passengers was necessary to prevent or at least actively discourage "queue jumping."

CCTV (Closed-Circuit Television) cameras are utilized, however their effectiveness is questionable in the deterrence of anti-social behavior. Taxi rank supervisors and guards have observed that intoxicated individuals tend not to be inhibited or constrained by the presence of CCTV cameras.

Taxi rank supervisors are frequently forced to interact with over-intoxicated and/or belligerent individuals. The standard approach is to politely request that individuals sit or stand outside the line for about 20 minutes until they either display better behavior or are deemed physically fit for travel, upon which time they are moved to the front of the queue to access a taxicab. Most people accept this approach, however when customers prove unruly, the taxi rank supervisor can either call for police assistance via their two-way radio or is assisted by the taxi rank security staff.

Jurisdiction

City of Brisbane's hospitality zone (i.e. entertainment district).

Funding

Secure Taxi Ranks ("Stands") & NightLink Taxi Service

Funding for the nighttime secure taxi ranks program originally came from the Brisbane City Council and now comes from the Queensland Government. The State Government also provided initial seed funding and marketing support for the Taxi Council of Queensland's new NightLink FlatFare service. It is perceived that representatives of the Queensland government consider these transportation programs a more cost effective solution than funding additional police officers.

The State Government imposed a \$300 levy on the renewal fees applicable for taxi medallions to help fund the secure ranks program and NightLink taxi service. Industry was in turn compensated for the medallion renewal fee increase by an additional \$2 fee on the meter flagfall between midnight and 5am.

Each secure taxi rank costs approximately \$50,000 Australian dollars per annum. The total cost for the secure taxi rank program and NightLink taxi service in Brisbane as of November 2010 was approximately \$800,000 Australian dollars.

Start Date: 2004 - Now

Contact

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