

Taxi user survey



The taxi and Small Charter Vehicle (SCV) industry is an integral element of Western Australia's transport system, providing flexible point to point services. The industry allows those who would otherwise be isolated without viable transport options to remain mobile and stay connected with their community. A well-functioning taxi industry is also an important part of the wider tourism and recreation sectors in WA, contributing to the community's economic and social well-being.

The taxi industry is critical to keeping Western Australians on the move – recording more than 13 million trips in 2013. However, a number of key concerns have been raised by users about the operation of taxis and there

A two-tier structure currently applies to the WA taxi industry. Taxis provide both rank and hail services and pre-booked services, while Small Charter Vehicle and country Private Taxi (PT) operators are restricted to pre-booked services. A little over one-half of taxi trips are pre-booked, but the proportion of rank and hail jobs is higher at peak times.

are indications that negative perceptions are having an impact on demand for taxis, with some users shifting to SCVs where satisfaction levels are higher. In 2012, there were 13.4 million taxi trips recorded by the two main taxi dispatch companies, declining to 12.9 million in 2013. This decline in trips continued in 2014.

In March 2014, to ensure improved mobility options for its members and the broader Western Australian community, RAC initiated an independent Review into aspects of the Taxi Industry in Western Australia (WA). RAC is seeking to ensure that high quality services are readily available for users at affordable prices. RAC aligns its mobility agenda to

the three themes of safety, accessibility and sustainability. Improving the safety, accessibility (encompassing the availability and affordability of taxis) and sustainability of the services provided by the taxi industry are key elements of the Review.

The RAC, as an input to the Review, commissioned an independent survey to understand the views of Western Australians when it comes to using taxis in WA. The online survey of 885 individuals (683 in the Perth metropolitan area and 202 in regional areas) was conducted by Painted Dog Research in August 2014. A broad cross section of the population¹ participated in the survey; around two-thirds of respondents were RAC members.

¹Weighted by age, gender and location to reflect 2011 Australian Bureau of Statistics population data.

Taxi usage

The RAC Taxi User Survey has revealed that most people (80%) catch a taxi at least once a year and nearly 1 in 3 (29%) are doing so 'at least monthly'. However, there is still a sizable proportion (20%) of people who catch a taxi less than once a year or never (Figure 1).

Males and Gen Y are heavier users of taxis. Living close to the CBD and having a higher income are also key drivers of more regular taxi use and these people are more likely to use a taxi at least once a month – possibly because it is more affordable.

Taxi usage is highest on the weekends during the evening, although 32% of respondents do catch a taxi during the week. The reasons for catching

a taxi vary by time of day. Travelling to or from the airport is a predominant journey purpose during daytime hours, while attending social outings is the main reason during evenings.

The traditional method of phoning a taxi dispatch service remains the most common way for catching a taxi across all customer types. Nearly 7 in 10 (69%) taxi users typically call a dispatch service,

and many people rely on catching a taxi while 'out and about' (Figure 2). Younger generations are more likely to wait at a taxi stand or hail a taxi on the street, while older segments are more likely to book in advance.

More than one in two (55%) taxi users usually pay their fare by cash. Eftpos is the second most favoured method of payment (41%) and only 4% pay using cab charge.

Figure 1 » Frequency of taxi usage

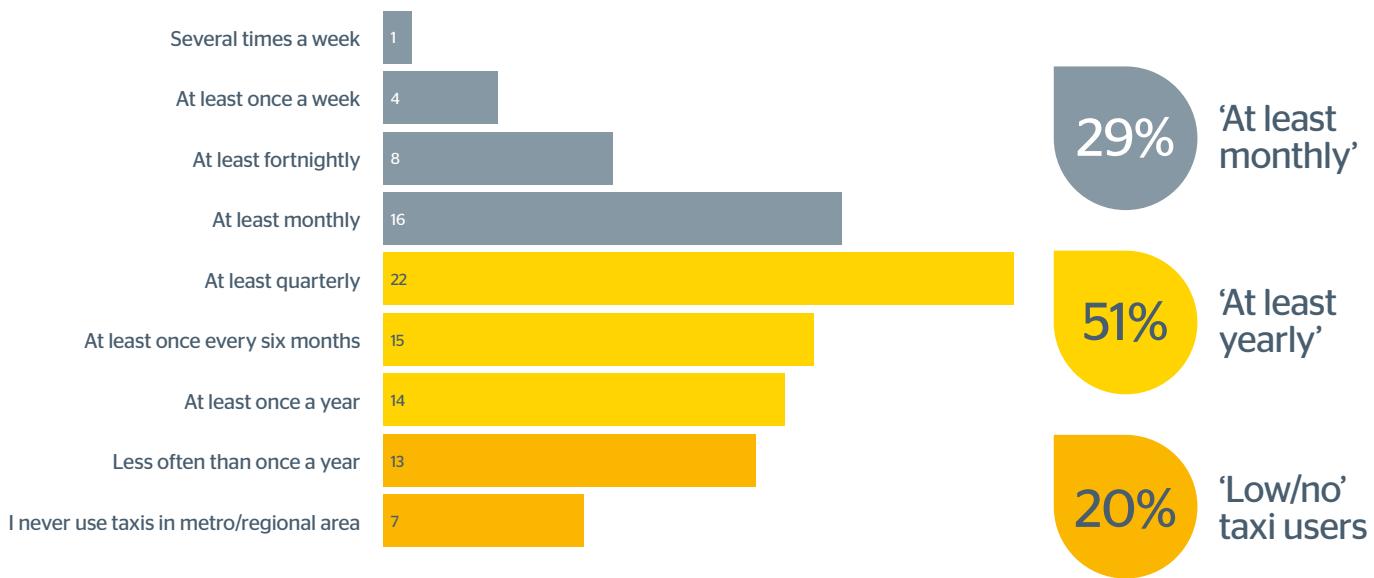
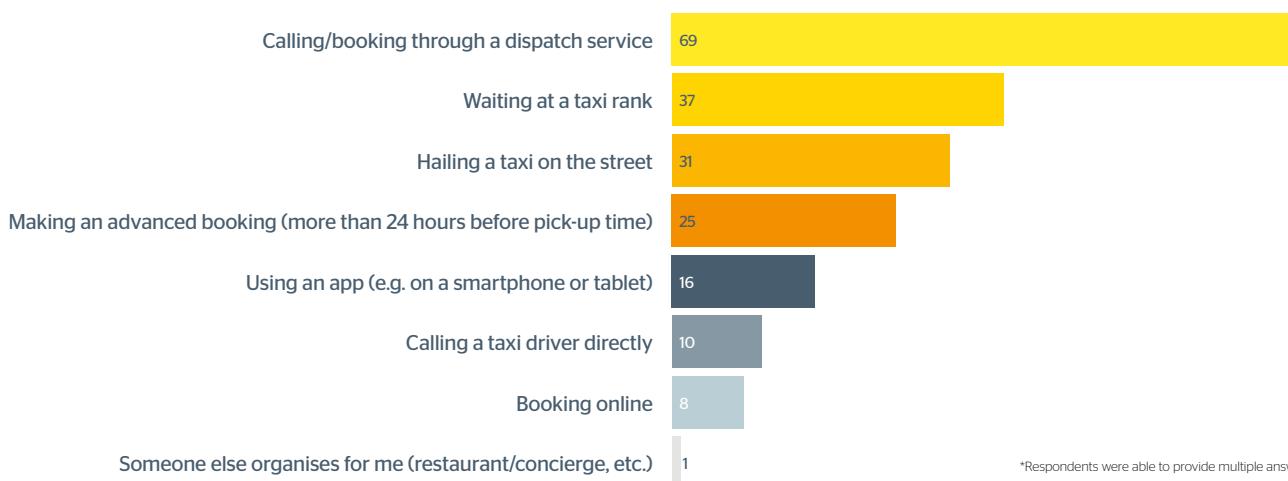


Figure 2 » Method of catching a taxi*



*Respondents were able to provide multiple answers.

User perceptions & attitudes

When it comes to satisfaction with taxi services, eight in ten survey respondents indicated they had at least one negative association with the industry, and nearly six out of ten had experienced a problem with taxis in the last 12 months. Respondents indicated that in some instances these bad experiences had caused stress and cost them time. Despite this, overall satisfaction is positive, with 1 in 3 extremely satisfied with the service received (Figure 4).

Those in regional areas and older generations are significantly more satisfied with their taxi experience. While overall satisfaction with the taxi service received in the last 12 months is generally positive – there is room for improvement among particular segments.

"Taking a taxi takes the worry out of making travel arrangements. No parking, no fuss, especially if you're going to the airport."

More than one in two say taxis are expensive or costly, particularly those in metropolitan areas and younger generations. However, survey respondents identified a range of other negative associations such as wait times, unreliability, safety and driver behaviour.

A perceived lack of personal safety, particularly during the evening, and high fares (Figure 3) are seen to be important issues underpinning attitudes towards the taxi industry. Safety concerns are stronger among females, with 37% of females strongly disagreeing with the statement 'I feel safe catching a taxi alone at night'.

Despite experiencing issues with taxi services, most do not file a complaint or report the incident. The issues that are most likely to result in a complaint are related to fare disagreements or refusals, the taxi not showing up, and vehicle safety. Those that complained were typically not provided a resolution – only 27% received some form of closure. Experiencing a problem or issue will deter some from catching a taxi in the future – but for the majority, it has no impact.

Overall, there are mixed views pertaining to the performance of the taxi industry (Figure 5). Consistent with overall satisfaction, regional and older generations are more likely to rate the taxi industry's performance as 'excellent'. Survey respondents said that the best things about using taxis are being able to drink alcohol (32%) and travelling from point to point (18%).

"If you're going out with a group for drinks, taxis give you the freedom without worrying how to get home. There are also no parking issues, and they drop you off at the door of your destination."

Figure 3 » Views about the safety of taxis at night and taxi fares

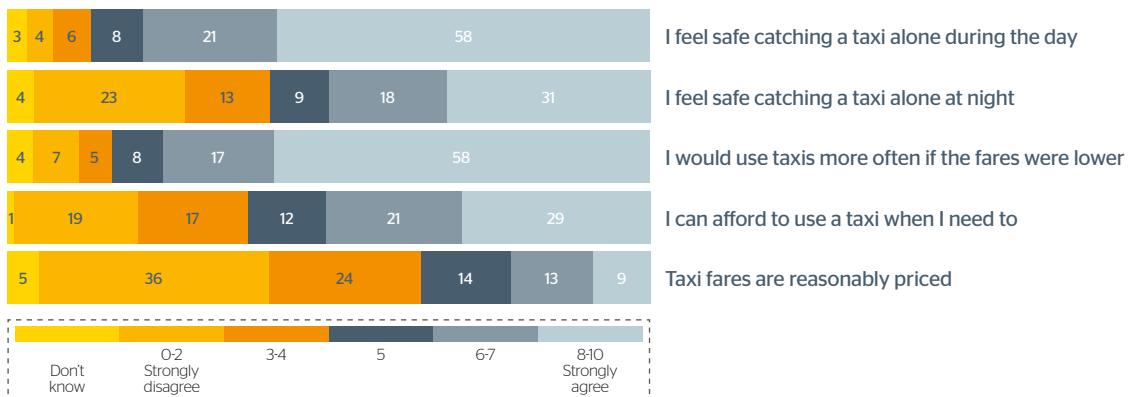


Figure 4 » Overall satisfaction with the taxi experience

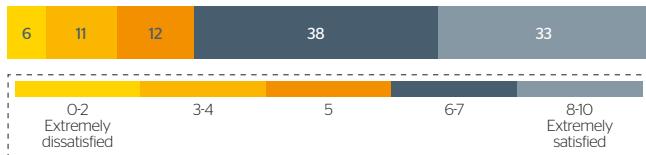
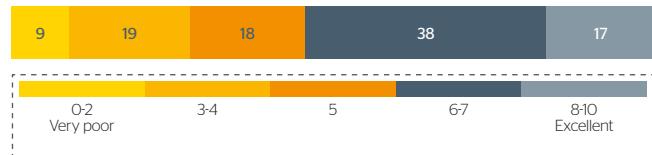


Figure 5 » Views about overall performance of the taxi industry



Looking forward

When it comes to the longer term outlook, only 3% of survey respondents indicated they are likely to use taxis more frequently in the next year and four in five said that they don't plan on changing the way they currently use taxis unless some changes or improvements are made.

Respondents were asked to provide their views on a range of potential ideas for encouraging greater taxi use. Of these, guaranteed availability, without an added charge, and prompt service would influence people to use taxis more frequently. Having the option to pay a fee to guarantee a taxi; and environmentally-friendly and purpose-built taxis were of lesser importance (Figure 6).

Respondents were asked to provide their views on SCVs. It was found that

SCV's could impact heavily on future taxi use because not only are those who have used them extremely satisfied, 1 in 3 have utilised these services more frequently over the past 12 months (Figure 7 and Figure 8).

The 2014 RAC Taxi User Survey has helped highlight the essential role of taxis in keeping Western Australians connected with their communities. In informing the Review of aspects of WA's Taxi Industry, commissioned

by the RAC, consideration must be given to growing concerns within the community about the safety, reliability and affordability of taxi services. A robust response to the views and expectations of users relating to service quality will enhance the role of the taxi industry in better providing for the future mobility needs of Western Australians.

Figure 6 » Factors that would encourage greater taxi usage (prompted)

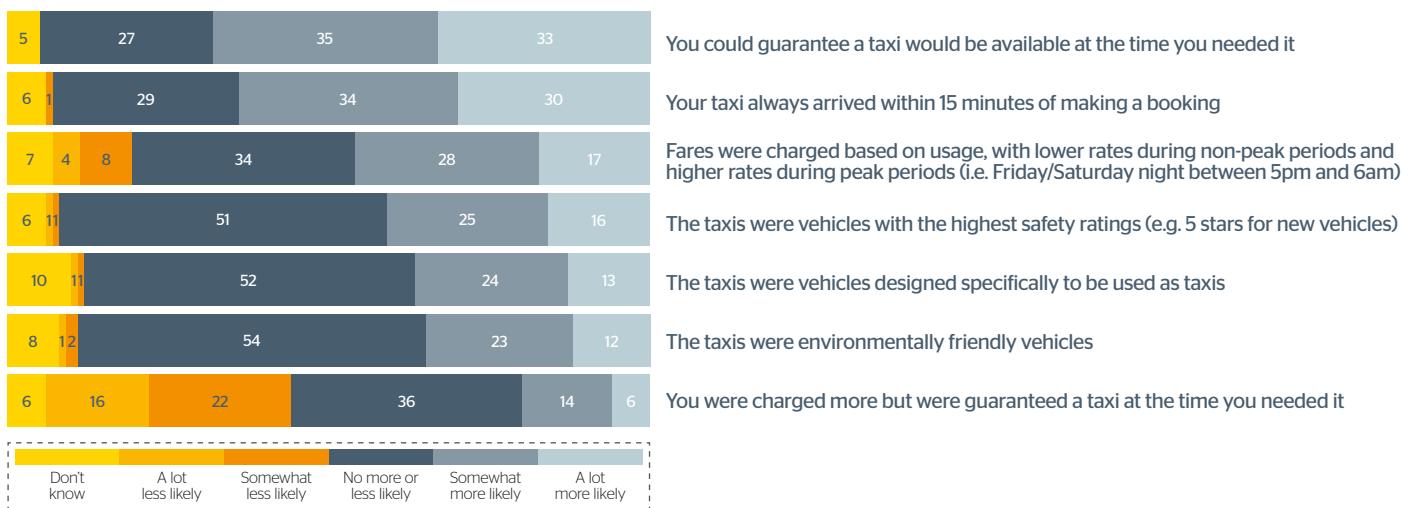


Figure 7 » Views on Small Charter Vehicles

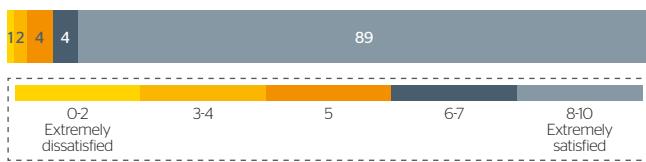


Figure 8 » Frequency of SCV usage (relative to 12 months ago)

