

Public Release Report

Mystery Shopper Program 2025

Background

The Department of Logistics and Infrastructure (DLI) commissioned True North Strategic Communication to deliver the 2025 Mystery Shopper Program assessing taxi and rideshare services in Darwin and Alice Springs. The program builds on previous surveys conducted in 2016, 2018 and 2021 and evaluated service quality, safety, accessibility, booking systems, driver performance and fare transparency across all taxi operators and Uber (in Darwin only).

The program included taxi and Rideshare trips being anonymously completed over an approximate 2 week period in both locations and a survey completed rating the level of service following each trip.



Participation

- **Darwin:** 20 participants completed 150 trips (taxis and rideshare). Two participants used wheelchairs and completed only taxi trips. Participants generally preferred rideshare when they had the choice.
- **Alice Springs:** 7 participants completed 46 trips, including 2 participants living with disabilities (wheelchair and walking frame).

Key findings

Darwin

1. Taxi services

- **Booking trends:** Increased use of apps and rank pick-ups; phone bookings declined.
- **Wait times:** Immediate pick-up wait times highly variable; average wait was 37 minutes, with some cancellations.
- **Service quality:**
 - Phone service satisfaction declined significantly from 2021.
 - One taxi network outperformed the other taxi network in customer service.
 - More than half of participants rated in-vehicle conditions including music, temperature and general ambience as very satisfactory or superior during the program.
- **Vehicle standards:** While overall vehicle standards were assessed as generally satisfactory, there was an increase in reports relating to cleanliness, odours, and maintenance issues when compared with 2021, indicating some inconsistency across the fleet.

- **Safety and driver behaviour:**
 - 9% of passengers felt unsafe (up from 5% in 2021).
 - 4% of drivers used mobile phones while driving.
 - Decline in perceived driver knowledge of the local area.
- **Payment issues:**
 - 85% reported no issues.
 - Multiple reports of app-based prepayments not being recognised by drivers (double-charging).
 - 4% were charged off-meter, the driver charged independently to the meter.
- **Overall satisfaction:** Average rating 7/10, down slightly from 7.1 in 2021.

2. Taxi services for participants living with disabilities

- **Trips undertaken:** All trips were undertaken with only one taxi network using wheelchair accessible vehicles.
- **Wait times worsened:**
 - Immediate pick-up delays significantly increased.
 - Future bookings only 50% arrived on time (down from 100% in 2021).
- **Driver assistance:** 94% received basic assistance; however, wheelchair securing dropped from 100% (in 2021) to 81%. 13% indicated their driver did not secure their wheelchair.
- **Vehicle and lift condition:** Mixed results – some improvements in lift stability, but more somewhat satisfactory ratings for lift condition.
- **Safety and driver behaviour:**
 - 13% of participants felt unsafe (up from 4% in 2021).
 - 19% of drivers used mobile phones while driving.
 - 69% of driver ID cards were not displayed (up from 13% in 2021).
 - 31% of driver ID cards were not the same person as the actual driver (up from 13%).
- **Overall satisfaction:** Average rating 6.8/10, slightly improved from 6.4.

3. Rideshare

- **Wait times:** Strong performance with 93% arriving within 5 minutes.
- **Accuracy:** Estimated arrival times highly accurate.
- **Vehicle quality:** High satisfaction, though a small number of poor ratings appeared in 2025.

- **Safety:**
 - 96% felt safe, though this is a slight decrease from 100% in 2021.
 - 7% of drivers used their phone.
- **Payments:** No payment issues reported.
- **Overall satisfaction:** Average 8.7/10 (slight decrease from 8.9 in 2021).

Alice Springs

1. Taxi services

- **Fare charging:** 98% charged by the taximeter, 3% were charged by a schedule of rates, no off-meter charging.
- **Wait times:**
 - Increased waits over 15 minutes compared to 2021.
 - Average wait 35 minutes.
- **Phone service:** Satisfaction declined, particularly with one of the taxi networks.
- **Vehicle standards:** Generally consistent with 2021 - average to very satisfactory.
- **Driver experience:** Improved across all driver-related measures.
- **Safety:** 98% felt safe (improved from 2021) and 7% of drivers used their phones during the taxi trip.
- **Overall satisfaction:** 6.9/10, down from 7.4. Both taxi networks overall satisfaction scores from participants have slightly decreased in 2025 compared to 2021.

2. Taxi services for participants living with disabilities

- **Trips undertaken:** All disability trips used only one taxi network.
- Strong improvements from 2021:
 - 100% driver assistance.
 - 100% wheelchair/device being secured (up from 63%).
 - Improved vehicle and lift condition ratings.
- **Safety:** 100% felt safe (up from 81% in 2021), and no drivers in 2025 used their phones.
- **Overall satisfaction:** 9.7/10, up dramatically from 6.6.

Overall conclusions

- Rideshare outperformed taxis in Darwin across almost all measures being wait times, safety, accuracy and overall satisfaction.
- Taxi wait times in both locations deteriorated, especially for passengers living with disabilities in Darwin.

- Phone booking experiences deteriorated across the NT, with Alice Springs showing the steepest decline.
- Disability service quality in Alice Springs improved substantially, while Darwin showed mixed results with several safety and assistance concerns.
- Vehicle quality issues were more common in Darwin; Alice Springs vehicles remained mostly adequate but ageing.
- Fare transparency issues persisted in Darwin taxis (including double charging); Alice Springs had fewer issues and improved from 2021.

Recommendations

For Taxi Networks and/or Operators

- Improve driver training on disability assistance, securing equipment, customer service and safe behaviour.
- Upgrade phone systems and improve call response times and accuracy.
- Enhance vehicle cleaning and maintenance protocols.
- Conduct technology updates to address inconsistencies in app payments.
- Strengthen internal monitoring of wait times, cancellations and missed bookings.

For Rideshare Networks

- Maintain strong performance but address driver phone-use safety risks.
- Explore accessibility supports, including broader provision of access-friendly vehicles.