



Transport
Roads & Maritime
Services

Guidelines and conditions of funding

Wheelchair accessible taxi interest-free loans guidelines 2017

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Key features

- Part of broader package of wheelchair accessible taxi (WAT) service support measures
- Loans for new or converted WATs up to \$100,000
- Interest free loans, repayable up to 10 years
- Priority given for first or additional WATs in areas of highest need
- Opportunity for WAT replacement, particularly in country areas
- All areas are eligible (including Sydney).

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1 Aims of the program

- Passengers with disabilities better able to access a range of transport services, conveniently and more affordably
- Expanded and customer-focused wheelchair accessible taxis (WAT) services.

The NSW Government aims to improve the availability of wheelchair accessible transport services and the levels of service provided to people with disabilities in NSW. This is particularly important as the number of people with disabilities who rely on wheelchair accessible transport increases and demand for accessible services continues to grow strongly.

The interest free loans scheme is designed to assist taxi operators in NSW to place new and additional wheelchair accessible taxis (WATs) into operation, particularly in areas of high demand where insufficient WATs are currently available. There is also capacity to fund replacement WAT vehicles, particularly in high priority areas.

The NSW Government has allocated \$5 million in funding for WAT interest free loans to support improved WAT availability. The expanded interest free loan scheme complements other new measures which support improved WAT services for customers, including:

- **WAT licences are free** in all areas (previously \$1,000 per annum in Sydney), to support viability and expansion
- **Removing licence restrictions** which prevent double-shifting
- **WAT drivers paid \$15 + GST** for each "M50" WAT trip by passengers in a wheelchair (previously \$7.70 + GST)
- **Centralised booking service** in Sydney funded by Government
- **WAT driver training costs paid** for specialist training.

These programs also complement an enhancement to the Taxi Transport Subsidy Scheme (TTSS) which provides a half fare subsidy for registered participants with a severe and permanent disability. TTSS participants can now benefit from a higher subsidy cap of \$60 (previously \$30 cap per trip) which will improve affordability for participants who undertake longer trips. Initially, these measures will support better services delivered in WATs and will help the taxi industry to be well placed to provide the best possible services now and into the future.

In the longer term, the NSW Government will move towards a broader approach that allows for a range of different transport providers to offer services, addressing a broader range of customer needs.

While there has been substantial growth in WAT services in the past, some areas of NSW are better serviced than others. Clearly, more improvements are needed – particularly in areas where WAT services do not currently exist or are insufficient to meet the growing demand.

2 Improved WAT interest-free loans process

The WAT interest-free loans scheme has been updated to provide a more streamlined process for applicants and greater focus on availability of WAT services for customers in all areas.

Applicants are able to receive in-principle approval for a loan before purchasing the WAT vehicle and loan repayments can be made on a monthly basis over ten years.

Applications for the 2017 round of the WAT interest free loans open on Monday 1 May 2017 and closes on Wednesday 31 May 2017 at close of business.

3 Demand for accessible services

WATs are often the only accessible transport service available for people who need to travel in their wheelchair, particularly in some locations and at times when other accessible transport is not available. Accessible taxis are a vital link for people with severe or profound levels of disability to be able to reach medical, training, employment and other essential services.

As the population grows and ages over time, the number of NSW residents with a profound or severe level of disability is continuing to grow strongly. This rate of growth demonstrates the need for expanded services, as well as the future business opportunities for WAT operators. WAT operators should engage with customers and other disability services in their local communities to find the best ways to meet their needs.

WAT operators can seek out and negotiate contractual agreements to provide other transport services in order to secure a regular income and help build the viability of operating WAT services, including:

- Community transport services
- Department of Veterans' Affairs clients
- Department of Education and Training's Assisted School Travel Program.

4 Requirements

Existing or prospective taxi drivers and vehicle owners who want to apply for a WAT interest-free loan will need to comply with a range of Commonwealth and NSW requirements which are designed to ensure that WAT services meet the community's expectations.

Commonwealth Disability Service Requirements

Under the *Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992* and its *Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002*, the Australian Government requires taxi networks and cooperatives to ensure that response times for wheelchair accessible taxi bookings meet those of other taxi services and to provide accessible transport service information.

The standards also set accessibility requirements for WAT vehicles. Further information can be found at <http://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/operators/taxis/wheelchair-accessible-taxis/disability-standards-accessible-public-transport>.

The Australian Government is carrying out a review of the transport standards under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992. The NSW Government will raise the need to provide clear guidance for taxi, hire car and newer transport services on their obligations with the Australian Government.

WAT vehicle requirements

A WAT vehicle must comply with the Commonwealth Disability Standards, as well as the NSW WAT Measurement Protocol for internal space and access requirements which clarify the Commonwealth's standards. These requirements may vary from time to time.

A WAT must have capacity for at least one wheelchair but a vehicle with capacity for two wheelchairs can be used, if suitable. Operators will need to obtain a recent (within six months) certification from a licensed certifier that the WAT vehicle complies with these requirements. The nearest licensed certifier can be found at www.rms.nsw.gov.au/vsccs.

As well as checking for compliance with Commonwealth and NSW WAT vehicle requirements, operators are encouraged to investigate which vehicles best meet the needs of current and potential WAT passengers. It is recommended that operators actively consult with passengers to obtain feedback on this issue.

WAT licence conditions

The WAT must be operated under the requirements of the NSW WAT licences, including requirements relating to giving preference to passengers in wheelchairs over other hirings and to complete a minimum of 365 WAT jobs per year. Previous restrictions on operating hours and shift changeover times have been removed to provide more flexibility and to support double-shifting.

WAT licences are available at no charge and there is no requirement to obtain a loan to apply for a WAT licence. Further information can be found at <http://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/operators/taxis/taxi-licences>.

Roads and Maritime monitors the performance of all WATs operating in NSW. WAT licence holders should take all steps to make sure you and your WAT drivers give preference to wheelchair hirings and complete a minimum of 365 WAT jobs per year. If you fail to comply with the licence conditions or requirements of the *Passenger Transport Regulation 2007*, Roads and Maritime can take action to either cancel, suspend, vary or show cause your WAT licence, and may take action against you.

WAT licences are issued for varying periods according to geographical area, and to continue operating after the initial term the following processes must be followed:

- In Sydney, annual licences are granted and these can be renewed each year for up to 10 years
- Outside Sydney, short-term licences of up to 12 months are granted and must be reapplied for once the term expires.

Your licence application and continued loan will be assessed against the number of wheelchair jobs your taxi has done during the life of the previous licence. You will be required to repay your loan (which may attract interest at the overdue rate in the case of late repayments) if your WAT licence is suspended, cancelled or not renewed. Roads and Maritime will not compensate you should your licence not be renewed, or be cancelled or suspended.

WAT driver requirements

The driver of the WAT must be an authorised taxi driver, with specific endorsement for driving a WAT obtained following specialist training and assessment.

<http://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/professional-drivers/taxi-driver/applying-taxi-driver-authority>.

Taxi networks

The WAT, vehicle owner and WAT driver must have a relationship with an authorised taxi network, where one is available. This provides WAT passengers with the option to book a WAT service directly with a WAT driver, or via the taxi network's booking system.

General requirements

WAT drivers, vehicle owners, licence holders and taxi organisations must comply with the requirements of the Passenger Transport Act 1990, Passenger Transport Regulation 2007 and all relevant standards. Applicants for WAT loans will need to continue to comply as they may be amended from time to time to meet community needs.

5 What costs will the loans cover?

The loans cover the cost of purchasing or converting a WAT vehicle up to a maximum of \$100,000.

To be considered, applicants must provide an itemised cost-breakdown attached to the loan application, of those items which have been included in the loan amount sought. A list of items that are included or excluded from the loan are set out below:

Inclusions

Items which will be considered for inclusion in the loan, as essential costs of purchase or conversion to a WAT may include:

- Lengthening the vehicle to accommodate at least one standard wheelchair
- Adjustment of door opening to the required width and height to enable wheelchair access
- Raising of the roof to provide the required head clearance for comfortable travel
- Flat floor for easy manoeuvrability
- Floor strengthening to bear the additional weight of wheelchair(s)
- Floor and seat anchorage

- Suitable device to enable a wheelchair to be lifted easily into the vehicle (eg ramp or hoist)
- Adequate suspension to take account of the extra length of the vehicle, in particular the fitting of heavy duty shock absorbers to the rear
- Sufficient lighting in the rear cabin
- Seatbelts for wheelchair occupant safety
- Tinted side and rear windows for passenger comfort
- Additional aluminium ramp for motorised wheelchair
- Storage for wheelchair straps/restraints
- Partial spray painting of extension to match original paintwork
- Air conditioning for both driver and passengers
- Additional, or large font, meter display for visibility by passengers in wheelchair
- Help button for passengers' use.

It is the responsibility of the taxi operator to meet the requirements and associated costs of a standard cab, such as taxi meter, roof sign, and emergency devices (such as the radio alarm system and boot lid release).

Exclusions

Items which will not be considered when determining the amount of a WAT loan (which are general requirements of all taxis) are:

- Taxi meter
- Roof sign and roof sign lighting and harness
- Two way radio or other booking despatch equipment
- Duress alarm, vehicle tracking device and security camera systems
- Boot lock release device
- LPG conversion costs
- Roof rack or driver's window weather shield
- Company livery (logo and contact number) door signs
- Full respray, or metallic colours in partial respray (above)
- Spot lights
- Vehicle registration
- Insurance cover (including vehicle, workers' compensation or public liability)
- Stamp duty
- Vehicle Safety Compliance Certification Scheme (VSCCS) compliance certificate, as to the WAT vehicle's compliance with requirements
- Spare wheel cover, wheel arch trim or mud flaps

- Additional seating for able-bodied passengers that cannot be used simultaneously while carrying passengers in wheelchair(s). This includes removable or flip-down seats (if permitted) that can only be used in the wheelchair allocated space. As this seating is provided for passengers who are not in a wheelchair, it does not qualify as a modification for creating a wheelchair accessible taxi.

6 Assessment criteria

Applications for the 2017 round of WAT interest-free loans open on Monday, 1 May 2017 and close on Wednesday, 31 May 2017.

In considering the application for an interest-free loan, Roads and Maritime will consider the following criteria:

Criteria	Score
<p>How does the application improve access to WAT services?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will it be the first WAT in the town or Local Government Area (LGA)? • Will it add a WAT to a LGA with insufficient existing WATs? 	40
<p>How much demand for WAT services needs to be met in the operating area?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the <i>current</i> and <i>potential</i> demand for WAT services, as measured by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Numbers of TTSS participants and trips undertaken ◦ Local population • How much demand exists per WAT in the LGA? 	30
<p>How does the application maintain existing WAT services?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the current WAT service unviable without a loan? • Will a loan enable replacement with a compliant WAT vehicle? 	10
Total	80

Roads and Maritime does not represent that applications meeting all or any criteria will be funded.

In considering an application, Roads and Maritime may ask for clarification, seek advice from other parties or obtain advice from Transport for NSW Senior Regional Officers¹.

Important: *It is a requirement that loan funds are only available for the operation of WAT services as set out in the application. If the WAT licence is suspended, cancelled or not renewed, or if the WAT is not operated for any reason according to the loan conditions, the outstanding loan must be repaid to Roads and Maritime and may attract interest at the overdue rate in the case of late repayments.*

All applicants will also be subject to an assessment of credit worthiness and financial viability. Applicants must provide:

- Financial statements or individual tax returns for the past three years
- A summary of all banking facilities and covenants and latest statements
- Quotes containing an itemised list of inclusions and costs substantiating the value of the loan applied for.

7 Process and timeframes

Applications for the 2017 round of WAT interest-free loans open on Monday, 1 May 2017 and close on Wednesday, 31 May 2017 at close of business.

Roads and Maritime will administer two rounds of loan applications per year. Once applications have closed, applicants will be notified of the expected timeframe for consideration of their application.

Loan agreement

The loan agreement executed between the applicant/borrower and Transport for NSW will cover the following requirements:

- Insurance cover is in place
- Vehicle and modifications comply with the WAT measurement protocol
- Vehicle registration details
- The specific security deed executed by the applicant/borrower in favour of Transport for NSW will provide for repayment of the loan and/or the right for Transport for NSW to repossess and resell the vehicle to recover any outstanding loan amount.

All legal costs, stamp duty and registration charges and any other costs arising from the loan agreement and specific security deed are to be paid by the applicable borrower.

8 Useful links

Commonwealth Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport	https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2005B01059
NSW WAT Measurement Protocol	http://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/b2b/taxi/WAT-protocol-final.pdf
NSW WAT Driver Payment	http://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/operators/taxis/wheelchair-accessible-taxis
NSW Taxi Transport Subsidy Scheme	http://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/customers/taxis/ittss
NSW Community transport programs	http://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/customers/community-transport
NSW Country Passenger Transport Infrastructure Grants Scheme	http://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/customers/community-transport/community-transport-agreements-programs/cptigs
Community transport and taxi - Best practice standard service agreement	http://www.cto.org.au/Sites/cto/CMS/Docs/CT_Sector_Resources/Resources/Community_Transport_and_Taxi_Provider_Best_Practice_Standard_Service_Agreement.2008.pdf
Commonwealth Department of Veterans' Affairs clients	http://www.dva.gov.au/health-and-wellbeing/home-and-care/travel-treatment
NSW Department of Education and Training - Assisted School Travel Program	http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/studentssupport/scholarshipsmore/transprtspecial.php

9 Contacts

All application enquiries for the Wheelchair Accessible Taxi Interest Free Loan should be directed to:

Telephone	02 9689 8888 or 1800 227 774
Facsimile	02 9689 8813
Email	licensing@transport.nsw.gov.au
Mail	Roads and Maritime Services Locked Bag 5085 Parramatta NSW 2124

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