

Airport block threat
Passengers warned of chaos over cabbie protest
Jamie First

Passengers at Melbourne Airport could face morning chaos today, if taxi drivers blockade its entrances in a protest against rank changes.

A text message is circulating among drivers encouraging them to block entrances at Tullamarine between 10am and noon.

The airport axed its "short-fare queue" on Wednesday, after it was claimed it was allegedly rorted by about 200 drivers a day.

The text message reads: "We can't just be quiet and accept this abuse. I ask every taxi driver to please come to the airport on Friday 3rd of May at 10am and block all entries to airport until our voice is heard."

The protest has been criticised by the Victorian Taxi Association.

The Herald Sun understands a hand-written flyer is also being handed out.

Previously, drivers who waited in the airport's holding yard at Tullamarine and picked up a passenger going to a nearby destination, had been allowed to return to the airport, bypass the yard and head straight to the terminal taxi rank.

Now, all cabbies must head to the holding yard.

Melbourne Airport spokeswoman Anna Gillett said: "We'd like to reassure passengers that if this does occur, we will have contingency plans in place to minimise any inconvenience caused by such actions."

Victorian Taxi Association CEO David Samuel said he had been told a small number of drivers were discussing blockading the airport, but he did not believe it would eventuate.

He said the industry body wanted a short-fare system but did not support the proposed protest.

"We think it is disruptive and won't achieve an outcome for drivers," he said.

Taxi drivers earn an average of \$12 an hour. It is illegal to refuse a short fare.

Australian Federal Police Assistant Commissioner Shane Connelly said officers would monitor the situation.

"Should protest activity impact on the ability of the airport and its users to go about their business, the AFP will respond appropriately," he said.

Ms Gillett said the airport had consulted the industry before implementing the

changes and initial feedback showed taxis queueing times in peak periods had fallen by up to 20 minutes.

“Ultimately, the uninterrupted flow of taxis from the normal queueing system now means that all taxis wait for less time,” she said.

The State Government is considering its response to Prof Allan Fels' report into the troubled industry.