Aussie cab may green Big Apple

ROBBIE D’ORAZIO
in New York

NEW York’s yellow cabs are set for a green overhaul, thanks to the expertise of a Melbourne university student.

RMIT student Damian Lucaci is part of an Australian design team shortlisted to supply 26,500 environmentally friendly taxis to the Big Apple.

Mr Lucaci told the Sunday Herald Sun he pitched for the New York contract after his idea was rejected by Melbourne City Council.

“I first proposed this idea for the City of Melbourne two years ago,” he said.

“Because of our big taxi culture here, I could see the parallels between Melbourne and New York so I thought, ‘What a cool idea to just check this out!’,” he said.

Mr Lucaci has pitched an electric system based on his Unicab design.

His taxis would run solely on electric power and be recharged at strategically placed stations across the city.

The taxis are designed for passenger and driver safety, easy access for all and to stand apart from other vehicles on the road.

“It was a university project to begin with, based on trying to analyse the way we use taxis and what the experience is like for passengers — the interaction between driver and passengers and what the space is like for passengers because in the end we design cars for people,” Mr Lucaci said.

His study found safety was the biggest concern for drivers and passengers so his Unicab is split into two compartments — one for the driver, the other for passengers. He has also included a ramp on the passenger door for easy curb-side access for wheelchairs, a large sliding boot for luggage and four seats for passengers.

Despite its big size the taxi would run solely on electricity via a hydrogen fuel cell, battery generators, a solar panel system and recharging hubs.

The only recognisable element retained of New York’s famed cabs is their distinctive yellow livery.

Many more details of the New York project cannot be revealed because of confidentiality clauses in the competition.

Mr Lucaci, 26, came to Australia from Romania with his parents in 1990.

“I finally made it to RMIT where I loved my design and industrial design. It is what has led to this taxi design,” he said.

The winner of the contract will be chosen in October and the lucrative commission aims to serve the Big Apple from 2014.
**High hopes:** An image of the easy-access Unicab, an electric taxi designed in Melbourne, may become a New York showpiece.