Beck Taxi Deputation #1: Risks of Standardization

Speaker: Gail Beck-Souter, General Manager, Beck Taxi

Check against delivery

First, I would like to congratulate staff on the work they have put into these consultations and the Preliminary Review discussion paper and thank everyone, particularly Tracey Cook, who has worked very hard to come up to speed on a complex file.

We support the City's efforts to improve the safety and already high level of customer service enjoyed by Toronto's riding public. Beck Taxi will respond to approximately 7.5 million customer calls this year. No one is more interested in serving the public than we are.

While much data was gathered during the consultation, a few of the statements made in the Preliminary Report are incomplete or inaccurate and need to be corrected so that Councillors can make decisions based on accurate information.

For example, contrary to the information in the report:

- Brokerages cannot act as agent to plates[1]
- Lease costs have NOT levelled off since 1998. They have increased almost 100% in the last few years, largely because of the pressure Agents put on lease rates.[2]

Public Safety

The Preliminary Report makes positive mention of standardized paint colours and vehicles. It makes no mention at all of the many damaging effects standardization could bring. This is a serious oversight and must be corrected in the future draft. Beck's green and orange, Co-op's red and yellow, Diamond's black and orange STAND OUT because they are meant to stand out.

The most significant oversight is the aspect of **Public Safety.**

[1] "Toronto's Taxicab Industry Discussion Paper," page 10, 'Agent'

[2] "Toronto's Taxicab Industry Discussion Paper," page 40, 'Leasing'

When you have your kids picked up from school or send your mom to the hospital in one of Toronto's branded, identified cabs, you know who you are doing business with and you know who to call if you have questions or concerns.

If you have a negative experience, you are likely to know which cab company to complain to.

This would not be the case with standardized colours. Riders will have very little hope, if any, of ever knowing whose cab they are in, more lost articles will remain lost.

The Preliminary Report suggests that standardized colours would reduce the number of bandit cabs. I suggest standardized colours would be a field day for bandit cabs – they will copy the colour and hit the streets en masse, and find new creative ways to take advantage of people on the street.

If a criminal act is committed in or against a taxi or driver, any witness who sees the colours can easily identify Toronto cabs and make investigations much easier for police. Toronto Police Service was very clear in 2002 when the issue of standardization was raised. They were completely against the proposal of standardization and MUST be consulted on this topic before any other discussion is entertained.

Environmental

In Toronto today, a great percentage of taxis on the street are the best possible example of the free market meeting environmental concerns.

Toronto has thousands of hybrids and fuel-efficient models on the streets. They use the least amount of fossil fuels possible. This is economical for drivers and a giant improvement for the environment. Our research has shown that the public's concern for the environment is a high priority when considering taxicabs.

Nobody wants to spend less on gasoline than Toronto cab drivers. They do not need a government incentive program or any taxpayers' subsidy to go shopping for the lightest, most fuel-efficient, cleanest cars on the market, and they are helping the environment by doing so.

Dictating a standardized vehicle will increase costs and remove the ability for cab owners to shop for the vehicle that works best for them and their passengers.

"Standardization would remove choices for the riding public – people ask for a van and as many ask for no vans. What the taxi industry needs are choices and transparency for members of the industry and for the riding public."

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