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Beck Taxi Statement

Good Morning and thank you for allowing me this time to address what I feel is one of the most serious problems facing our City and our industry.

Let me start by saying that violence against taxi drivers affects our entire community. The moment a call for help or report of violence comes in, a terrible, immediate sense of fear and panic sets in for us all. Is he or she okay?

I would never suggest that I could speak for drivers and I can't begin to understand or even imagine the dangers they face or what that feels like. What I can offer is the perspective I have gained from feedback with drivers I have interacted with and the experience of a brokerage in business for more than 45 years.

Beck Taxi is a dispatch centre in communication with thousands of drivers. Based on years of experience, it is clear that no single measure will keep drivers safe.

Our industry needs an all-encompassing, multi-faceted driver safety solution which takes into consideration items including:

1. driver training;
2. public awareness of the safety items already in place; and,
3. research into new measures including pre-payment and whether these are working in other cities.

In terms of driver training in conflict resolution: many times we have been told by drivers that assaults have been the result of the lack of a driver's ability to diffuse a potentially volatile situation.

Unfortunately, drivers may expect that they will be treated badly when someone is behaving in a confrontational manner. At such times drivers may react to the confrontational attitude, when in fact they should be doing everything in their power to get the rider out of the vehicle at the desired destination without incident.

For example, a long-time driver I know was able to succeed in doing just that. His passengers were aggressive and revved up for a fight. The driver remained calm, and asked them to exit the vehicle if they were unable to control themselves. They got out. The driver could have moved along but he didn't and this is an opportunity for driver training: He scolded them through his slightly open window. Suddenly his window was smashed and he was faced with a gun.

Drivers also need to be instructed to trust their instincts and to engage their passengers. If someone alone in the back seat starts to slide across behind the driver, won't make eye contact in the rearview mirror, or asks the driver to go down a dark alleyway, these should be recognized as red flags. Being able to anticipate danger is a learned skill. In this industry, knowledge is power and could mean the difference between life and death.

Our second suggestion is for the review team to examine the success of existing safety features such as the cameras and mandatory emergency lights.

We believe a comprehensive, Toronto-wide public awareness campaign on the safety features which ALREADY exist could prevent crime and protect drivers.

Drivers have many times suggested that the cameras in the vehicles have had a large impact on reducing violent incidents. The cameras in

the vehicles take still pictures intermittently depending on the status of the vehicle, doors opening and closing, etc.

These pictures, downloaded by TPS have resulted in the capture and conviction of violent criminals. In 2006, driver Mahmood Bhatti was killed. The pictures from the camera were downloaded and circulated by media and police.

The killer was found across the country in British Columbia, arrested and sentenced to serve jail time for his crimes. People need to be aware that if you assault a cab driver, your picture will be on the 11 o'clock news. A campaign raising awareness of these cameras could really help to prevent attacks. Currently one difficulty presented by the process of downloading the pictures is that there is only one location that is equipped to do it and the car is often impounded for days which could be improved.

Along with this, media needs to resist announcing how much cash was stolen from the driver. It may be that the police should not disclose this information. If people think that drivers carry large amounts of cash, they will become even bigger targets.

Emergency lights are another issue. Have they made a difference? Statistics have shown that after a decade of use, the incidence of violence against drivers has gone down but what role have the lights played?

We have no statistics and I have never heard a driver suggest that they have had any positive impact. What I do know is that there have been thousands of false alarms which may result in more harm than good.

New ideas need to be considered to prevent violence and to prevent the elusive "fare-jumper". Prepayment is a good example and seems to have been well-received in parts of Australia.

If assaults have been the result of fare disputes, this may help; but how would such a program be designed? Would drivers be estimating fares? What if the customer wants to stop on the way?

Does that involve the driver offering change or the customer topping up based on the final meter rate? This requires a second transaction at the end of the trip.

The argument I have heard since the suggestion of pre-payment is that while it could work in preventing fare-jumpers, many drivers believe that someone intent on robbing a driver, will find a way to get the job done. This person will pre-pay his $20.00 only to steal it back, and collateral damage could depend on how difficult it is to get it.

Notifications in the taxis that the driver carries no more cash than $25.00 have been suggested. This is something that would be included in driver safety training. If cash starts to accumulate, drivers should head to a bank machine.

If potential criminals were aware of this, maybe they wouldn't bother. Expensive smartphones, and other items that would be attractive to criminals should also be left at home.

There is no simple answer. Our biggest fear is that some one-dimensional so-called "solution" will be implemented without understanding its impact or ability to reduce risk to drivers.

Please ensure that the research done is thorough and that drivers are not plagued with any "quick-fix" that changes nothing. Their lives and

safety are too important and at Beck Taxi, we believe that prevention is and strong tools for conviction are the key.

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