EPC Oct 18 17 Vehicle for Hire working group motion: by Marty Gold

The devolution of taxicab regulation to the City of Winnipeg was first advanced in April of 1993 when Highways Minister Albert Driedger let it slip in a debate in the Legislature. As Editor of the Taxi Observer, I was tipped off and quickly appeared as a delegation at the Mayors Race Relations Committee and Mayor Thompson. Her shocked look told me she and council had been given no warning. I always assumed a furious phone call ensued, because the idea somehow fell off the agenda and the province brought forward revisions to the Taxicab Act, Bill 24 instead.

In June of 1993 Employed drivers, along with dissident cab unit owners were tired of labour, shareholders, and customers being abused and used as pawns by dispatch service politics, and wanted the Taxicab Board held responsible to improve public and driver safety and industry competitive practices. We organized a grass-roots filibuster that shocked the Filmon government and frankly the opposition parties. At that time there was no time limit for speakers, and we had 150 lined up, in June, with no air conditioning in the Legislature.

The first few speeches with revelations about industry labour conditions, racial tensions between taxis operators and customers, and dismal economics rapidly resulted in energetic discussions for true inclusion of all people in the cab industry, beyond the boards of directors of Unicity and Duffy's. Those discussions were between a young MLA named Brian Pallister, myself, and future taxicab company General Manager Phil Walding, now chief inspector of Wood Buffalo, Alberta.

The promises of consultation did not materialize and the drivers and frankly, cab customers of Winnipeg, were doublecrossed by the Taxi Cab Board. The end result, 24 years later, is that service has fallen with the decay of a customer base, plates have traded for over $400,000, the spectre of UBER and other for hire services has emerged, and customers use Facebook and other platforms to make clear, they are not getting the service they require and deserve. This crossroads today is the result of the failure of Bill 24.

That is history. **Today, the creation of a working group will be crucial for the City to approach regulation with a full spectrum of input, not only by relying on academics or bureaucrats who have never driven a taxi for a living.** Do councilors realize you will have to make important decisions - such as what size of dispatch services will be permitted? A limit of say, 100 taxi's, might force existing dispatch services to break up, thereby instigating actual competition for customers and good drivers? This is now in your hands.

Will the City require dispatch services to observe labour laws and not act as agents for owners to suspend drivers, with no right of hearing, and no labour rights because the dispatch service is not the "employer of record? Drivers, including some owners, are subject to unregulated hearings and pay unregulated "fines" to buy their way back on the road. Will the city say "No" to such pickpocketing?

Most importantly, drivers and owners without political influence came to me in January 2015 after they saw my City Circus TV show and heard I used to be a driver and dispatcher. They explained how the NDP had abolished care and control standards and the regulated set wage of 50% of the meter, to allow for per shift or weekly leases. There was no effort by owners controlling companies to increase or even maintain market share. Drivers felt were slave labour working long hours, not being allowed to acquire plates and become owners, and were blackballed for complaining. I urged the consultants to add driver issues and leasing to their inadequate survey, and in the final weeks they did. Here is one important finding:

"Focus group participants **indicated rents paid by the driver to the owner of the car ranged from $85 to $100 per day** depending on the arrangement. This rent to the owners provides an additional potential **$31,000 to $36,500 income FROM ONE SHIFT, AND ESSENTIALLY FINANCES THE TAXICAB**.

This rent amount also appears to be **higher than in other markets,** with reports of $65-85 per day (Reevely, 2016)"

So financial risk shifted to drivers, and owners profited. A $36,000 a year subsidy. Will City Hall abolish shift fees, and reinstate the pay rate of drivers to 50% of the meter? Or will you allow Leases? And if so under what conditions and amounts?

If employed taxi drivers - who surely might also view UBER as a path to a better lifestyle and work environment - if those drivers are not heard from, you will never have the knowledge necessary to evaluate workplace issues which are at the core of attracting and keeping a stable, regulated, Professional for-hire driver fleet.

That is why the proposed working group, that can include employed drivers with big and small companies, owners shareholders, directors, citizens who use cabs, industrial or organizational users such as charities, health authorities and school divisions, all can be fairly heard and be part of the solution to ensure Winnipeg residents and visitors gets the transportation services, they want and require.

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