Council – January 30, 2025
Report – Standing Policy Committee on Public Works – January 9, 2025 Item No. 2 Vehicle for Hire Industry 2024 Annual Update and Proposed Vehicles For Hire By-law and MBEA Enabling By-law Amendments

Winnipeg Community Taxi Association.

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Written submission on behalf of the Winnipeg Community Taxi Association.

Winnipeg's taxi industry has faced significant challenges in recent years but has worked hard to bring about positive change to Winnipeg despite these challenges.

The current annual Vehicle for Hire update includes a number of bylaw changes and outlines a new training initiative that is important. The reality however is that we believe more needs to be done.

How did we get to where we are today?

In 2017 the then mayor lobbied the province to pass legislation, not only transferring jurisdiction from taxis from the province to the City of Winnipeg but to give the City the ability to bring in PTP's, particularly Uber.

The province cancelled the existing licenses of hundreds of small business taxi owners without compensation and then required the city to establish its own licensing structure. Taxi owners lost tens of thousands of dollars almost overnight.

Right from the start the regulations that were established were clearly unfair and established an unlevel playing field.

But it didn't just stop there. Uber didn't enter the Winnipeg market because it didn't like the MPI rate structure and the city lobbied to have it overhauled. The province complied.

Winnipeg's taxi industry did everything to be competitive. We brought in state-of-the-art dispatch that has given our companies some of the best on time performance in North America. At the same time, we worked hard to improve our relations with Indigenous people. We worked with the city to operate the central dispatch for WAV accessible vehicles that is providing service comparable to standard taxis to WAV users for the first time.

All of these changes were brought in while we continued to deal with a regulatory framework that was largely unchanged. All this while PTP companies were able to operate with a very different regulatory framework with far fewer requirements.

The end result? The numbers in this report tell the story. There has been a major increase in VFH trips in 2024 but it is all in the PTP category.

In 2024 there were over 2600 PTP vehicles on the road. In 2024 there were in the range of 5.5 million PTP trips.

5.5 million trips with PTP drivers who have have taken no vehicle for hire training from the city. If you look at the section on Indigenous training, you will find that even though the city has made it mandatory for Uber and now Lyft drivers to have to take this training, most haven't.

These PTP vehicles have no shields, no cameras, no audio recording for the protection of drivers and passengers.

Untrained drivers and vehicles without key safety features that have been mandatory in taxis for more than 20 years. All legally allowed to take passengers.

Let's be clear. We have been talking about the Taxi advantage. We have in particular been talking about the fact we have fixed rates, no cancellation charges, etc. We have been talking about how different taxis and PTPs are in fares. A recent example? A $20 fare from the airport via taxi was listed by Uber at $50. You even had to pay more for a hybrid vehicle which is standard with most taxis.

And let's also be clear when it comes to accessibility, taxis are the option. Uber has no Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles, and when it comes to the City's WAV central dispatch it is Winnipeg taxi industry that is providing the dispatch and every single one of those trips was provided by an accessible taxi.

Many people often assume PTP's have similar regulations. That PTP's are more regulated than they are.

Understanding this background is important because we believe that there needs to be a serious examination of all of these regulations, particularly focussing on safety and customer service for all.

We were very pleased when Mayor Gillingham made a clear commitment to look at the regulatory regime and in particular to levelling the playing field. We also want to put on the record how the manager of vehicles for hire Grant Heather has made a commitment to consult with us on key issues and to move ahead on levelling the playing field.

We are seeing clear evidence that this commitment is being put into practice.

Probably the most significant initiative is the work on training. We were very pleased to participate in a process that is going to lead to a modernized training program. One that focusses on key issues, such as safety, sexual harassment, sexual assault, discrimination and customer service. What is particularly important is the fact that for the first time the city is also going to be requiring PTP drivers to take this training.

This is about more than just levelling the playing field. It's about public safety. Given what has been happening not only in Winnipeg, but throughout the world we believe this should have been something that was the case right from the start. But the fact that it is happening now is positive.

What is needed now is a timeline and deadline to ensure every PTP drivers is trained so that every VFH trip is with a trained driver.

We note as well that there are proposed bylaw changes that are focussed on ensuring PTP drivers and vehicles have to follow the same regulatory requirements and process as taxis. We support this.

Our vision as a Taxi industry is clear. It has always been to provide the best possible taxi service for all our citizens. This includes WAV accessible users, people that don't have a credit card or choose to use cash, the vast majority of Winnipegers that can't afford surge pricing or cancellation fees for trips, the many people that need to street hail a taxi and much more.

Most importantly we are proud to be an essential service. 24/7, 365 days a year. We were proud to be there for Winnipegers during Covid, unlike Uber we operated throughout this very difficult period of time.

We want to thank Mayor Gillingham and the many supportive Councillors that have been committed to positive change. We also want to again thank Grant Heather for his ongoing commitment to consult and work with us.

Much has been accomplished particularly in terms of the training, but there is much more to do, not only to level the playing field, but to improve safety and customer service for Winnipeg vehicle for hire users.

Finally, we would like to stress that we are committed to even further positive change. We have been working to continue to improve our relationship with Indigenous peoples, building on the public statement on reconciliation that we made which was driven by Indigenous women and two spirited peoples. We are focussing on human trafficking, doing what we can to be part of the solution to this horrific exploitation of people, particularly women. We are committed to being part of the solution in dealing with crime in our community. We are committed to supporting our community.

Our message is clear. Much has been accomplished but there is more to do as we continue to strive to provide the best possible community based taxi service for Winnipeggers and visitors to our city.

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