

Cab Gab
by Abe Mittleman

Well, I hate to say I told you so. But, the after effects of the “Service Enhancements” aren’t working out exactly as the TLC would have liked them to. I had been predicting all along that the drivers would not be happy with the 5% credit card fee. I had been predicting all along that if there were any problems with the equipment not working 100% of the time in a manner that allows people to pay with their credit cards promptly with no delays that the drivers would find a way to object.

Those who regulate the industry may have everyone’s best interests in mind. But they surely don’t understand the needs of those who drive taxis. Why should we be surprised? This is what happens when authority is given to those who do not rise through the ranks of those they are given authority over. How can they possibly understand how a taxi driver thinks if they never drove a taxi?

Driving a taxi isn’t rocket science. Understanding taxi drivers isn’t that difficult either. What do they want? They want money. When do they want it? They want it now. What do they not want? They don’t want money taken from them unnecessarily. They don’t want any aggravation in getting paid. They don’t want to be delayed in the process. They want to make as much as possible of the time they spend in the taxi. It’s that simple.

The “Service Enhancements” shoved on them by the TLC goes against every one of these desires. The TLC expects that the drivers will just have to get used to them. They threaten to punish those who do not break down and accept them. Well I have news for the TLC, it will get a lot worse before it gets better if they take this approach. Drivers will quit and taxis will be parked.

Caught in the middle of this are the passengers. There were more than 100 responses to a blog on the New York Times web site from passengers and drivers both. Passengers are reporting that in many taxis there are signs that the Credit Card machine is “Out of Order.”

Some drivers in frustration and lack of understanding in many instances have

placed these signs because the credit card equipment seemed not to work properly. Passengers, in many cases paid cash to cover the charge when this happens, only to find out later that the card was charged. Ok, you can say that if this happens they can cancel the credit card payment. But, I don't think this is possible with a debit card.

I have been told that in many of these situations what actually happens is that the taxi is in a "Dead Zone" and the transaction will not immediately go through. However, as long as the meter prints a receipt the transaction goes into a waiting state and is recorded when the taxi's location enters a zone where it can be transmitted. Unfortunately, this inconsistency is not fully understood by both the driver and the passenger. This creates a problem for both the driver and the passenger. The driver wants to be sure he or she is being paid and the passenger wants to be sure that they have not cheated their driver. If a passenger pays twice because of this misunderstanding of how the system works, this is wrong. Somehow this has to be prevented.

It was wrong to rush these systems into the taxis before all the kinks were worked out. The TLC has a responsibility to both the public and the industry. Those who rushed this are playing with other people's money. How can they explain to a customer who pays twice that they are still working on the "Kinks." They should have been sure that the system was perfected before even one passenger was introduced to it. They should at the very least have made sure that the drivers understood that they weren't being cheated.

This is the month that I am scheduled to have the "Service Enhancements" installed in my taxi. I have yet to experience them. By the next edition of "Mini Press" I should have first hand knowledge of how they are working out. So stay tuned, I should have a lot more to say.

One thing that I can say right now is I am not going with the vendor I signed with. I am telling my former vendor to forget it. I can't get along with them in a simple telephone conversation before I install the system. So, what will it be like later on? I called and spoke to Jess Davis of CMT. He is very friendly and easy to get along with. I'm going to pay the penalty and sign with CMT. I would also add that I have no intention of refusing credit card transactions. However, I will keep notes

and ask my driver to keep notes on any inconsistencies.