

Cab Gab

by Abe Mittleman

Main Street Flushing

I've heard it said: A journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step. It's been almost 2½ years since the program at Main Street Flushing to reinvigorate the long dormant taxi stand was put into effect. Main Street Flushing is one of the busiest transit hubs in NYC. Hundreds of taxi rides commence from this location every day, 7 days a week, 24 hours a day. For too long it had been overrun and commandeered by illegal livery street pickups. I was very pleased that a program was started to take back this location and put the taxi business back where it belonged, in the rear seats of yellow medallion cabs.

Many medallion taxi drivers aren't aware of this location. There was no incentive for medallion taxis to go there. More money could be made elsewhere. Because of the infestation of illegal livery activity throughout Queens, it has been difficult to make money with continued business after dropping off passengers who take taxis from Main Street Flushing to other Queens locations.

However, the pen is mightier than the sword. I suggested both in my columns and in letters to Councilman Liu and TLC Chairman Daus that the TLC consider giving "shorty" tickets for the airports to those medallion drivers who volunteer to work at Main Street Flushing. They listened! Now it's up to us to follow through. Now you have a great reason to go to Main Street Flushing when you're in Queens. Instead of wasting your time in line at the airports, you can now go to Main

Street Flushing. After taking a fare anywhere in Queens or Brooklyn you will now be able to go to the nearest airport and proceed directly to the front of the line.

This is only the beginning. Hopefully many more medallion taxis will now come to the taxi stand at Main Street Flushing to take advantage of this program. This program will be in effect Monday thru Friday from 8am to 8pm. But let's not forget that there is business at this location 24 hours a day 7 days a week. Encouraging drivers to go there while the program is running will hopefully enlighten more of them to continue working there during the off hours.

In addition to this positive program, the battle goes on to stop illegal livery activity in Queens. We must have enforcement of the law in addition to the program. There should be more medallion taxis available throughout Queens for other street hails. The program at Main Street Flushing is a step in the right direction. I suggest the following other locations in Queens where similar efforts must be made: Queens Blvd. & Continental Ave.; the end of the N train line at 31st Street & Ditmars Blvd.; the Queens Center Mall; and along Queens & Northern Blvd. There has to be enforcement and penalties to all illegal livery activity at these locations.

They Should Listen To Us More Often

I'm gratified that the TLC took my idea to give out "shorty" tickets at the taxi stand in Main Street Flushing. It was a good idea, if I say so myself! They actually listened to someone who knows this industry from the inside out. I'm hoping that it proves successful beyond

anyone's imagination. If and when it does maybe they will listen to us about other things we have been telling them for years!

For example:

How many times do we have to tell them that "pedicabs" are hazardous and that someone will eventually get killed in one?

How many times do we have to tell them that hotel doormen are stealing our business and giving it to limousines willing to kick back money?

How many times do we have to tell them about all the illegal hustlers that solicit people going to the airports at the Javits Center?

How many times do we have to tell them that "through streets" create more problems than they solve?

How many times do we have to tell them that the "no left turn" sign on Park Ave & 42nd Street makes it difficult for taxis to service waiting passengers at the taxi stand in front of Grand Central Station?

How many times do we have to tell them that the point system is unfair to taxi drivers who work 60 to 80 hours per week and are subject to additional harassment from police who are just out to write summonses for any infraction real or imagined?

How many times do we have to tell them that our passengers will be tortured by any advertising that will be part of a GPS system which is not going to benefit anyone?

How many times do we have to tell them that credit card transactions will take more time than is imagined and in many

instances there will be problems with verification or reception from the service? How many times do we have to tell them that the system isn't broke and cash works just fine.

How many times do we have to tell them that the price of gas is cutting into our earnings and that we need fair compensation?

There are many other examples. But how many times have we made suggestions to the TLC which fall on deaf ears?

Port Authority Bus Terminal

Here is another familiar story I've mentioned before. Every night after the dispatchers go off duty at the Port Authority Bus Terminal there are a group of medallion taxi drivers that turn this location into their private entrepreneurial opportunity. They park their taxis and stand around waiting for potential passengers to come out of the building. After first asking these people where they are going (which is illegal), if they like the destination they take them after negotiating the rate (another illegal practice). If their destination is a short ride they guide them to a taxi that is not part of their scam. This is illegal and unfair to the legitimate drivers who are also working at this location. It has to be stopped!

Hybrids- Easier Said Than Done

Are you planning on buying a hybrid vehicle as your next taxi? Well, I'm considering it. I have until the end of January to decide. The TLC has approved several vehicles for this purpose. However, there are some obstacles. First there is an insurance problem. Although, it is believed that the

companies that presently insure our taxis will write insurance for the hybrids they have yet to commit in writing. Also, some of the cars that have been approved are not ready for “hack up” and would have to be converted to meet TLC specifications.

I spoke with a Honda sales person and was told that the vehicles could be altered to meet TLC specifications. However, I must weigh the cost of doing this against buying a vehicle that is already priced with the necessary specs. Can I risk making a commitment to a hybrid vehicle not knowing if the insurance will be available by my January deadline? And even if it becomes available, I've been informed that it may cost more than for a gasoline-only vehicle. I've also been told that the TLC may not give a five year retirement date. It may be less. At this time I'm totally confused and may wind up buying a gas only vehicle just to simplify things.

If commitments from insurance carriers (about covering hybrids) may not be ready until February, owners whose taxis have to be replaced by December or January should have the option of extending their expiration dates to wait for this insurance decision. Otherwise they might have to buy a a car they don't want and will be stuck for five more years eating up their profits at the gasoline pump. Why does the TLC do things this way and not consider us? When they approved hybrid vehicles, did they know that the price they were showing for these vehicles did not include the additional cost of altering them to meet TLC specifications? Did they know that insurance would not be readily available and may cost more? If not, they should have.