

**Cab Gab**  
**by Abe Mittleman**

**It's The Money**

**With a taxi driver strike planned for October 22, I was in the taxi holding area at the Delta air terminal at La Guardia airport several days prior to this date. I was there asking drivers who have the "Service Enhancements" already installed about the problems and objections they have for the "Inquiring Photographer" segment of this newspaper that we do in each issue. While I was there I came into contact with personnel from the TLC who were handing out flyers and talking to drivers in an obvious attempt to convince them that all was well and that they should not participate in any taxi strike.**

**The flyers described some of the objections that the TLC has heard from drivers with rebuttals to these objections. Although the objections described in the flyer have been voiced by some drivers I don't believe that they are really what's bothering them. Here is what the flyer said:**

**The Technology  
Enhancements....**

- 1. will NOT be used by the TLC to track drivers.**
- 2. will NOT show the TLC what you are doing when you are off duty.**
- 3. will NOT give the TLC information about what route you take on a trip.**
- 4. will NOT automatically send fare information to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS).**
- 5. Will NOT show TLC how fast you go.**
- 6. Will NOT be used to issue speeding tickets.**
- 7. will NOT be connected to the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS).**

**I don't really think, except for number 3 and number 4 above , these are really major concerns of the drivers. As for the route, the TLC may not be getting information on your route directly. However, it's not clear if the information is being stored and accessible to the TLC**

upon request if there should be a complaint by a passenger. As for fare information being given to the IRS, the key word here is "AUTOMATICALLY". Drivers need to be aware that for the first time since drivers became independent operators there is now a tool that the IRS can tap into to determine what any drivers grossed for the taxable year(s) in question. Before that it was strictly on the honor system and of course we were all honest!. But drivers should be aware that if requested they will give this information to the IRS, "AUTOMATICALLY".

Now all this aside, my impressions from the many drivers that I spoke to was the issue of losing money. They do not agree that the 5% credit card transaction fee is being compensated by higher tips. In fact they believe just the opposite, that tips are being withheld. They have been reporting that they are losing money on credit card transactions because the equipment is not perfected and there is a loss of signal in many areas. Passengers swipe and after they are gone they

realize that the transaction did not go through. They also object that the equipment and the constant barrage of advertising is an annoyance. This is something that the passengers don't like either. Some drivers have even said that the fun has been taken out of the business because of the alienation it has created. The art of having intelligent conversation between drivers and passengers is become more and more of a lost art. I will refer you to a letter that is elsewhere in this news paper.

The TLC has said that the credit card equipment works 99% of the time. So, in a way they are admitting to a 1% failure rate. It very well may be greater. What they don't realize is that anything over 0% is too much. A driver averages 30 trips per shift. So, 1% is a failure of one trip every 3.3 shifts. Before the enhancements there was a 0% failure rate. Drivers are paying high lease fees, gas prices that are rising to levels never seen before, and a 5% credit card fee. This doesn't really leave room for any errors at all. Until the equipment has a 0% failure

rate and rising costs are compensated there will be turmoil. Fed up drivers will be leaving the industry in droves to seek other employment.

#### **Credit Card Users.**

I knew this would happen. Now that half the taxis have the “Service Enhancements” some passengers are expecting that all taxis have them. So, they are getting into taxis that are not yet equipped and after the ride has started they claim that they thought they could use their credit card. The ride then ends abruptly. The driver can suggest that they go to a cash machine. But in some cases they just get out and look for a taxi that is equipped. I think that the TLC knew this would happen and hoped that this would hasten the installment of the equipment.

My inspection is at the end of January. I am in no hurry to install. I will not be rushed. The vendor I signed with mailed me a schedule for installation that gave me a date in December. I will not install the equipment until

January. We have until our next scheduled inspection. I am not happy that I was rushed to sign a contract. I am watching the experiences of those who have already installed and I am very tempted to break the contract I have signed and pay the penalty. I think this is better than having equipment that will give me more trouble than another may. Also, once I install the equipment, if I change my mind, the vendor I signed with has a \$500. de-installation charge. This was put in microscopic print and not told to me when I signed. I’m still nauseous from the way these contracts were presented.

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