

Cab Gab  
by Abe Mittleman

## They Did It All Wrong

I can't imagine what was going on in the minds of whom ever thought up the contingency plan for us during the three day transit strike last month.

This had to be the worst thought out plan they could have come up with. Why weren't we asked for some advise? We certainly could have done better.

It's laughable that they are taking credit for it being an overwhelming success. Fact is it was a miserable failure! Most of the time half the taxis were empty.

Ok, let's back up here a little. Let's think this out the way it should have been done to begin with. First of all who are the people that are most affected by a transit strike? Well they are not your everyday taxi riders. They are the working poor who can just barely afford the four dollar a day round trip on the bus or subway they must take to get to their minimum wage job. These same people who live in the far reaches of Queens, Brooklyn, and the Bronx struggle day in and day out to pay their bills and feed their families. The way this quickly thought out disaster of a contingency was arranged these people would have to pay \$20-\$30 for a one way ticket to work and double that to get home. That's not a contingency plan. That's a shutout. No working poor person can even dream of affording that.

Even the people that could afford the ten dollars and five dollar a zone rate felt they were being taken advantage of. Why should a taxi ride during a transit strike cost any more than a taxi ride any other time? The strike wasn't their doing. They were victims also. They were victims of an ill advised plan that didn't do what it needed to do, while charging passengers more than they should have been charged.

No Meters No Receipts! It's just plain dumb to have taxis operate without the taxi meter to guide them on what the fare should be. The reason for the meter in the first place is to end all fare arguments. Not using the meter leaves an opening that invites abuse. And, it did! Not only were there no meters to go by. But, there was no way for a passenger to get a receipt.

And finally the allowance of unauthorized liveries to pick up street hails should never ever be permitted. They should have been assigned to do multiple radio calls only. What would have been wrong with that?

Ok, I know what you asking. Your asking if I have a better idea. Well I do. It's the same idea that we used during the transit strike in 1980. It's the same idea that worked quite well and was fair to everyone who needed a taxi. It was a very simple one that kept all the taxis filled with four people at all times and was fair to everyone including the taxi driver. The taxis ran the meter. If there was an empty seat and someone was going in the same general direction as the other passengers then they could get in. The passengers paid the amount on the meter for the time they were in the taxi. In other

words if a passenger entered the taxi and the meter read \$10 and when they reached their destination it read \$15 then they would pay \$5. This was fair to the passenger and also to the driver. If there were always four passengers paying the meter then the driver was getting four times the meter. In 1980 no taxi was empty for long and there was usually someone to get in the moment someone got out.

Here's another question I would ask: How much time did they take to think up the disastrous plan they enacted? Was this something that took a lot of thought. I can't imagine that was the case. There should be a contingency plan that is in place for any disaster that disrupts transportation service. Not something thrown together at the last minute as was probably the case here. Remember the blackout in August of 2003. That was a similar situation that can happen again. We should always be ready to go into action when the time comes. We can't predict the future. You never know when action such as a contingency plan for transportation is needed!

Finally, I would urge the TLC to convene a meeting of industry representatives along with members of the general public in order to have a standing contingency plan in place for any disruption of transportation in the future This plan should be ready to go any time it is needed, when ever it is needed.

### Gas Prices Rising

Well here we are again. After a period where gas prices fell we now see them on the rise again. I've been hearing rumblings in the news that they may go even higher than they were last year. This certainly will get everyone up in arms demanding a surcharge or a fare increase.

Last year we were denied. Will that happen again? Well I think we should keep two things in mind. First is that last year was an election year. Our mayor had to be re-elected. Any increase in the taxi fare would have been contradictory to this effort. So, now with that behind him he may be a little more sympathetic to our needs. The other thing is that the city still has three hundred medallions to be auctioned. They certainly want to keep things favorable for a high auction return. So, our luck just may swing the other way this time around.

Also, keep in mind that GPS is still in the cards. They know how much we don't want this. So, they may give us a surcharge just to keep us happy enough that we won't mind as much when they shove this totally unneeded technology down our throats. And speaking of GPS.....

### GPS

I couldn't imagine how this system would work. I couldn't imagine how we would be able to fill out electronic trip cards and drive at the same time. Well I finally got to see how this will be done. GPS is a system that is so amazing it's hard to believe. Through satellite tracking this computerized tracking system knows exactly where you are at all times. It's all mapped out on a screen. You still have to punch or type in where you are going. But it will precisely direct you to that location. It can do it in many different languages. When you start a trip all you need to do is hit a button and it will record

where the trip started. When you end a trip it will do the same.

But I wonder will GPS know all of the silly rules and regulations that we must abide by in New York City. If we start a trip on E 45TH Street between Vanderbilt and Fifth Ave at 3pm on a Wednesday and the destination is 34th and Fifth will it know that we cannot turn left on Fifth Avenue because of the silly ill thought out "Through Street" regulation. If we start a trip on the North Side of W 23rd street between Sixth and Seventh Avenues at 5pm on a Tuesday and the destination is Christopher and Seventh, will it know we can not turn left from 23rd street onto Seventh Avenue between 7am and 7pm.?

The only thing left for me to figure out is simply: Why do we need this unnecessary expense? Things are just fine the way they are now. Is anybody not getting to their destinations because we are not using GPS? I think all this will do is cause confusion, arguments between passengers and drivers, and more summonses to be written for defective equipment when the systems break down. I'm still hoping they will reconsider the monster they are about to create.

Another One Bites The Dust

Well. last issue I told you of the closing of the Green Kitchen on 77th and First Avenue. This time I'll tell you about The Market Diner on 43rd and 11th Ave. This diner that had it's own on premises parking on 43rd street and 11th ave had been a favorite pit stop for taxi drivers and other people who are stuck on the streets of our city since 1964. Now it is gone!

Not too long ago we had a dozen or so locations spread around town where we could take a break and use the facilities. They have all disappeared one by one. This is an out rage. The city must provide us with some way of being able to take breaks when we need to. What good are taxi stands when there are no facilities. When are they going to get the message?

Finally I would like to share with you a letter I received from City Councilman, John C. Liu of Flushing:

Dec 9, 2005

Dear Mr, Mittleman

I write to thank you for proposing the idea of expanding the airports "shorty tickets" program to the Flushing Taxi Stand. In the short time that the "shorty ticket" incentives have been offered, the program has been very successful, helping to attract many new drivers to the stand.

Please accept my best wishes for a happy holiday season and a terrific New Year. Your idea has helped many people in Queens to be able to count on consistent yellow taxicab service.

Sincerely,

John C. Liu