

Cab Gab
by Abe Mittleman

Wait a minute.....

What part of “Exclusive Right” does the City Council not understand?

Medallion taxis are supposed to have the “Exclusive Right” to street hails!
That is what our license mandates. Is there something I’m not reading in the fine print?

Several years ago, pedicabs started to appear on the streets of Manhattan. First there was one or two. Then others joined in. Before long there were a few hundred. Right from the start they were violating the “Exclusive Right” that medallion taxis had, but no one stopped them. The city administrations made no effort to enforce our rights.

At first it was hardly noticed. Few of us complained. But some of us complained right from the start. We knew that if our rights weren’t protected, it would grow like cancer, and it did.

So, now after this cancer spread to where it was almost uncontrollable, the City Council stepped in and decided to regulate the pedicabs. Regulate, why not abolish? They hadn’t the right to steal our business to begin with. Why should they have the right now? They should have been stopped when there was just one or two.

Just because they grew to the numbers they have doesn’t mean they are not violating our rights. It’s like a bank robber who robs many banks and is permitted to keep some of the money. Had he been caught after the first one he would have gone to jail. But after a few hundred, he keeps some money and is regulated in the number of robberies he can commit.

Ok, so let’s say you’re comfortable with the new Pedicab regulation that says only 325 instead of countless hundreds can legally violate our rights. Isn’t it true that after 36 years of the TLC being in business there are still hundreds of illegal taxis running all over the city violating our rights every day of the year? And you believe that there won’t be any “Gypsy Pedicabs.” Don’t make me laugh.

Sure, The Department of Consumer Affairs will issue licenses and the Police will check to see that these Pedicabs have licenses. But lets be real, how long is that going to last? It may take a couple of years, but it's for sure that when the dust settles the pedicabs will appear without licenses and the police will turn their attentions elsewhere.

As for licensed pedicabs, how will their rates be regulated? How will they be inspected for safety? How will the drivers be held responsible for their actions?

The taxicab business in New York City is more than one hundred years old. But it took all this time to establish that the drivers have to display their identities, have their rates regulated and have their vehicles inspected for safety. And as if that isn't enough we are now having GPS and TLC Service Enhancements shoved down our throats to further the control that the city government has on us. Furthermore, we will soon have to accept credit cards for payment.

Are pedicabs immune from these regulations? The only difference between a pedicab and a taxicab is the way it is powered and the way they are constructed. They both do the same thing. They transport strangers from one destination to another. Why shouldn't the pedicabs be subject to the same controls as taxi drivers? They are just as capable of abusing their passengers as medallion taxi drivers. In fact they are probably even more capable.

They are required to have drivers' licenses. But, they don't have to display their identity. There is no criminal background check before they are permitted to operate.

Will there be pedicab courts like the kangaroo courts of the TLC. Where will passengers file their complaints? Whom will they call for lost property? Will there be trip cards? Will they have credit card meters? Will GPS follow their every move?

Perhaps we need a Pedicab Commission! Perhaps there should be a Pedicab Division of the TLC. Perhaps when the TLC has regulated the medallion taxis to the brink of insanity and suicide we can all go out and get into gypsy pedicabs with illegal motors and work with the peace of mind that no one will enforce any regulations against us!!

Credit Card Fees

I am a taxi driver. I am an independent businessman. As such I take all of the risks that my business has. I know full well that every day that I go to work in my taxi there is the possibility that I will encounter any number of adversities.

Perhaps I will have mechanical problems. Perhaps my business will be slow and I may not be able to make the money that I need to pay my expenses and walk away with a reasonable profit. Perhaps I'll be a victim of crime. I may even lose my life to a crime or an accident that is not my fault. These are the risks that I take when I go to work. But that's the way it is and I'm fully aware of this and I am willing to take these risks.

Having said that, it is only reasonable to conclude that when things go well I should be able to reap all of the rewards for having good fortune as well as suffer the consequences of misfortune.

There are other entities that want to profit off my good fortune. Rooftop advertisers are a good example of this. Although I feel that by the time the owner is paid after all of the agents in between, the amount is not enough to make it worthwhile. Still, the advertiser pays for the privilege of piggy backing on my business. I also would add that no one mandates that I have this advertising. The choice as an independent businessman is totally mine. This should be the case with anyone who wants to piggy back off my business.

Soon I will be forced to accept credit cards. The credit card companies will be making big profits from this. I first want to say that I don't agree with the reasoning behind this. Not only that, it is also true that credit cards are not considered the accepted currency of the United States Govt. The uses of credit cards are a voluntary way of payment that was invented by private financial institutions. The only currency that is mandated to be accepted by law is US currency. The legality of any legislation by lower government agencies to mandate their use should be called into question. Perhaps it may be before long. I only hope it is. Nevertheless, I personally will not argue with the fact that many in the public want to use these credit cards and it is in the public interest for these people to be able to.

Considering that I am a private businessman who is taking all the risks of my business and that credit card companies are also private businesses that are in business solely for the purpose of making a profit for their stockholders, considering that they are asking me to be a part of my business and I am not

asking them to do so, and considering that the only form of payment I am obliged to accept by the United States Government is cash, why am I being forced to pay the fees for credit card transactions? Shouldn't the credit card companies be paying me? I don't want their service. They want mine! Who from American Express is riding next to me when I go into the most crime ridden neighborhoods on the planet and have to take my life in my hands to make a living?

The Last Cash Cow

I wonder how many taxi drivers wake up in the morning and are broke. I know over the years I've had many a morning like that. Having a hack license has always been good in the respect that on those days when you needed instant cash to eat or pay an overdue bill you could usually find an available taxi at your nearest fleet garage to instantly satisfy your needs.

After TLC service enhancements are in all the taxis, this will not be so easy to do. A driver will have to wait a few days at least to get paid, even the tips will be on credit cards, so no instant cash here! I wonder how many taxis will sit idle because drivers have to find another way to get instant cash?

It seems that the last cash cow will be the pedicab. So, if you need cash today you will have to pedal your way around town!

