

Cab Gab  
by Abe Mittleman

### Some Thoughts On Traffic

Ask any taxi driver what one of the most asked questions is from passengers and bound to be on the top of the list is this one: Driver, why is there so much traffic?

Drivers hear this question so many times that it can sometimes be annoying. Of course if you have a good attitude about what you are doing you will have a standard reply that should make them laugh. If not then you should. Because humor is the only way to keep cool under the stressful conditions that most New Yorkers are subjected to when the traffic is heavy and the meter is ticking. Personally I like to play comfortable and enjoyable music because it helps distract from the stress.

Most people don't realize it but traffic is probably one of the most subconscious things that make people feel angry in their daily lives. When people feel angry and don't know why, they are likely to take it out on people that are not responsible for their anger. Yes, taxi drivers unfortunately fall into this category. In other words we as taxi drivers have to take measures to control our stress. If we let traffic make us angry we risk taking it out on our passengers or innocent pedestrians who are least deserving of it.

Personally, I find traffic a lot easier to deal with when I'm feeling well and my physical needs aren't hindering me. If I find that hunger, fatigue or the need to go to the toilet is becoming a problem, I'll stop dead cold, lock the doors of the taxi, put on my "Off Duty" sign and then do what ever is necessary to alleviate my problem. More often than not I won't even wait for that to happen. If I see an opportunity to use a toilet or grab a bite I'll do so then. This way I will head off the situation arising at an bad time.

How we drive in heavy traffic can also determine the degree of stress. It does not make sense to keep your foot on the brake while the car is not moving. When I'm caught in real heavy traffic I'll keep the car in park, relax, think about something more important then the traffic and only put the car in drive when the traffic moves. If I'm sitting relaxed while thinking I can many times think of a reasonable way to get around the traffic. If that's not possible I can just imagine I'm sitting in my living room at home while I entertain myself and my passenger with some

good music or intelligent conversation.

Traffic in New York City is not news. Probably it would be safe to say that even in the days of Horses and Carriages there has been traffic in New York City. Those days ended with the invention of the automobile a little over a century ago. But with cars the traffic has only gotten worse year after year till we have arrived at where it is today. I don't think there are enough fingers at a crowded ballpark to count how many times I've answered the question by saying that what I don't understand is why no one ever does anything to help alleviate it. But the news is that finally after years of suffering with this traffic people that have some power to alleviate it may finally be taking it up as an important issue.

Is congestion pricing reasonable?  
Are there other ways to reduce traffic?

People love the freedom of driving their cars and don't want to give it up to government regulations. Many of them will pay what ever it takes to keep doing what they are doing. Many would not be able to afford any fees that are being proposed to drive in midtown. This naturally would force them to find other means of getting to where they must go every day to earn a living. Of course there will be great debate on this before any regulations are passed or not. Every New Yorker who comes to midtown regularly has a stake in this matter.

Where does the traffic come from?

It was recently reported in the news that 35 percent of government workers in Manhattan drive to work, compared with 14 percent for those who work in finance. Many city workers drive because they can park at no charge using parking placards obtained through their agencies. You would have to wonder why this is tolerated. It doesn't seem fair to many New Yorkers who take mass transportation to work. No one should be exempt from the parking regulations just because they work for a government agency. It would certainly help reduce traffic if these people were not given this unfair privilege.

It is also reported that it is a myth to believe that much of the traffic comes from the suburbs. The report goes on to say that of 19 counties in the metro area 53% of the traffic in Manhattan below 60<sup>th</sup> street comes from the 5 New York City boroughs. Of that number the heaviest concentration is from areas of Queens and Brooklyn where access to subways is limited. Addressing and solving that

problem by giving these people some real options such as more inexpensive non stop bus service would be a good idea.

It is also reported that 39% of drivers that use the East River bridges are destined for places other than the Central Business District but find it convenient to get to their locations using the Central Business District as part of their route. This is another area that should be addressed.

In a report done by Shaller Consulting the following was stated:

“Putting public space in the CBD to anything less than the most efficient use unnecessarily slows the movement of people and goods in this dense district, thus wasting time and sapping the economic efficiency of CBD workers. Since the personal auto is the least efficient user of street space, and since auto users have alternatives, the amount of space allocated to the personal auto should be re-balanced in favor of more productive uses for pedestrians, bicyclists, buses, taxis, trucks and commercial vehicles that can more efficiently contribute to the mobility of persons and goods in Manhattan. Doing so would increase the quality and comfort of travel in the Central Business District and the Central Business District’s attractiveness as a place to work, shop, visit and live”

There can be no debate that something should be done. One would have to be very nearsighted not to see the benefits of reduced traffic in midtown Manhattan. People would be happier they would feel better they would breath more easily and accidents that kill many people each year would be greatly reduced just by the fact that there is less danger on the streets. And of course there are us in the taxi business, would it help us or hurt us?

Certainly reduced traffic would help us with lower stress, but, what about business. This you could argue two ways. The truth may not be known till action is taken to reduce traffic and that action actually does what it is intended. But, first you could say that discouraging traffic in midtown may discourage many of the people that use our taxis to come to midtown. Businesses that people go to may pack up and leave for areas where regulations don’t interfere with their business. If that is correct it will hurt us. The other argument is that if people have no other choice than to come to Manhattan anyway it can only help. Not only will these people be more inclined to take taxis when they are in Manhattan but with the easing of traffic taxis will be able to handle more passengers in the time they are

on the streets. Personally I think the second is more likely than the first.

## Health Insurance

Last January I turned 59 years old. Up until my 50<sup>th</sup> birthday I thought like most young people that I was probably indestructible. Of course there's a fool born every second also. For most of my life I took my chances and didn't have health insurance.

Although I do remember paying off a hospital bill in 1990 for hemorrhoid surgery. Hemorrhoids are very common with taxi drivers since they sit so much. It wasn't till the late 1990's when I decided that it was wiser than not to have some kind of health coverage.

I was not too long after that I was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes. This is something that millions of people every year are diagnosed with when they get into their 50's and are overweight. If you're a taxi driver you are at risk, especially if you spend hours sitting eating and not exercising. I was also diagnosed with high cholesterol. Between the three medications that I am taking to help control these conditions the cost is over \$200.a month. Also, the blood tests that I need to take every three months to help monitor my conditions cost around \$500. However my insurance pays for it less a few very affordable co-payments.

But here is the killer on April 3 I voluntarily went to the emergency room of my local hospital with a very painful and frightening pain in my back that I knew was internal. I spent two days there, had many tests and was sent home undiagnosed two days later. The hospital charged my insurance company \$14,200 for this incompetence.

But it didn't end there my doctor had me go back as an out patient for some very expensive tests and it was finally diagnosed accurately as an acute Gall Bladder. I guess all those years behind the wheel eating too many fatty foods didn't help either. On April 26 I had surgery to remove my Gall Bladder and I spent another two days in another hospital. The total of all the bills from every where including the doctor who did the surgery were over \$25,000. My insurance payed all the bills less a few affordable co-payments.

I'm not going to start a debate here about health coverage, you could go nuts

trying to compare different policies rates and benefits. And I'm not going to start a debate here about who should help us obtain health coverage. But, I will tell you what I have and can just barely afford at \$400 a month is called a GHI Hospital Alliance Plan for individuals. It doesn't pay for doctors office visits, that comes out of my pocket, but it does pay for everything that I can do in a hospital, less small co-payments provided the facility and doctor is in their network. If I'm admitted to a hospital the coverage is good for 365 days. Let this just be a word to the wise.