

Cab Gab
by Abe Mittleman

Three years ago I wrote an article for Mini-Press that may have been one of my best. It was so good The NY Sun chose to reprint it. They believed in what I had to say in this article. At the time it may have fallen on deaf ears at the TLC. With a new TLC Chairman David Yassky, I would like to revisit this article for his benefit. Mr. Yassky has expressed his desire to bring better taxi service to the outer boroughs. This article expresses my opinion of this. The article as it appeared in the NY Sun follows:

An Ocean in the Boroughs

By ABE MITTLEMAN
April 30, 2007

Mayor Bloomberg doesn't like the idea and neither does the chairman of the Taxi and Limousine Commission, Matthew Daus. But Council Member John Liu of Queens and several other council members favor changing the double-standard taxi system that has been in place for too long in the City of New York.

Mr. Liu wants the TLC to set up two taxi stands in all five boroughs similar to the very successful one that has been in place in Flushing for the past four years.

Referring to medallion taxis working the proposed taxi stands in the outer boroughs, Mr. Daus said, "When there's an ocean of water to drink in Manhattan, why would they go for a puddle in the outer reaches of the city?"

According to Mr. Daus, the current system of livery taxis works well enough. Mr. Liu points out that it only works because thousands of people a day are hailing gypsy taxis illegally.

As is the case on many subjects in the city, New Yorkers have varied ideas. Suggestions posted on the Internet range from creating special medallions for the boroughs only to getting rid of medallions altogether and letting the number of taxis be uncontrolled. The latter was the case before 1937, when the Haas Act froze the number of licenses because there were far too many taxis on the streets.

But one thing that is common with all is just about everyone wants to have a metered medallion taxi available anytime and anywhere should they decide to step out and hail one. No one wants to wait for a car service if they are standing out on the street.

A look at the city's taxi history may provide a solution to the taxi service problem.

Prior to 1937 just about anyone who wanted to be in the taxi business could get a license and buy a car to be a taxi. In 1937, the city's Board of Aldermen passed a bill introduced by one of its members, Lew Haas, that limited the number of licenses to those that already existed. At the time, the number of taxis satisfied the needs of the public in all five boroughs and there also was concern to protect driver earnings. This action established the medallion system as we know it today.

As time went on, the need for taxi service far exceeded the number of available medallion taxis. But still

medallion taxis worked in all five boroughs. Unlicensed gypsy taxis began to take over in neighborhoods that the medallions could not serve.

By the 1980s, with only medallion taxis working legally for street hails in all five boroughs and the demand for taxis growing rapidly in all areas, Mayor Koch tried to add 1,800 medallions. Facing legal opposition from the taxi industry that feared additional medallions would create more competition, the Taxi and Limousine Commission decided to create more radio cars. The TLC said that a medallion was not needed to do radio calls and told the gypsies that if they joined a radio group they could operate legally.

All radios were removed from medallion taxis, which received the "exclusive right" to all the street hails in the city. Thereafter, the medallion taxis had the street hails, and the radio taxis had the radio work.

With no cap set on the number of radio taxis, far

more such cars than what was needed to do radio calls were created. In order to survive, they had no choice other than to steal the street hail business in the outer boroughs. This led the medallion taxis to work mainly in Manhattan and at the airports. The public had no choice other than to use what was available.

It's time to admit that mistakes were made. Ed Koch never got the 1,800 medallions that he wanted. But between Mayor Giuliani and Mayor Bloomberg, 1,300 medallions were issued. Business in Manhattan and at the airports has been good enough to keep them all busy.

The question remains how do we satisfy people in the boroughs who want medallion service?

One answer is first to figure out how many taxis are actually needed to do radio work and limit the number of radio taxis to that. Then more medallions should be issued to satisfy the need for street hails in the boroughs. The radio taxis should then understand that their street

hail days are over. There should be heavy penalties to enforce this. Medallion taxis should also have radios for those who desire. Let the public decide what kind of taxi they want to pull up to their doors.

Yes, Matthew Daus is right. Medallion taxis won't go to a puddle when there is an ocean elsewhere. What he doesn't realize is that there is an ocean in the outer boroughs. It's just been polluted by cars illegally swimming in it. It's time to clean it up.

Sunday Night April 25

I don't understand some of the taxi drivers. Why don't they think about what the best ways to make money are? Here is a good example:

I was working the night shift on April 25th. It had been raining all night. Around 10PM I had a fare from Manhattan to Astoria. I wasn't too far from La Guardia airport. I was also aware that the NY Mets were playing a night game in the rain at Citi Field.

I decided to take a look at the situation in the airport. It turned out not to be so good. All the taxi hold lots were filled to capacity. So, I did some thinking.

The baseball game was still in progress at Citi Field. So, I went to Main street Flushing and picked up a fare almost immediately to College Point. That was \$10. I listened to the baseball game on my radio so I would be aware of when the crowd would be disbursed. It was raining very heavily. The game went into a rain delay at 10:30 PM. It now made sense that some people would be leaving the ball park.

I drove to Citi Field. On the 126th street side I saw livery taxis lined up, illegally waiting for passengers to exit the ball park. I parked on the other side of the street. I was the only medallion taxi there. Within a very short time a woman and two men walked out of the ball park and leaned into a livery taxi to negotiate a fare. Apparently they didn't like what they heard. They looked up and saw my taxi. They just walked over and got in. I had just picked up a two stop

fare. First stop was Williamsburg, next the New York Sheridan Hotel in Manhattan. The total fare with tip was \$40.

So, I have this to say to all the taxi drivers that were probably still waiting at La Guardia airport while I was making \$50.: Stop wasting your time . While you were waiting at the airport, unauthorized taxis were stealing work that could have been yours. There should have been many more medallion taxis at Citi Field. The people want you there. Check the baseball schedule and know when the Mets are playing a night game. It will make you money.

Thank You CMT

Three years ago many of you may recall the circus that took place at the Woodside Inspection facility when four of the GPS service vendors were demonstrating their systems. They were in fierce competition with each other to win over as many medallion operators as possible. I was one of the medallion operators that had to consider which one to

choose. It wasn't an easy choice. They all had a good sales pitch.

After choosing one vendor, it didn't take me long to get the feeling that I made a wrong choice. So, before any equipment was installed, I signed up with CMT. Now after almost three years of their service I can say that beyond any shadow of a doubt that I had made a correct choice. Their service couldn't have been better, especially the internet access to all information.

But, times change and situations change. I was due to replace my vehicle in a few months and I decided that I didn't want to reinvest in another vehicle with my own funds. So, I leased my medallion to my broker. He in turn sub-leased it to my driver. I retained the option of driving part time as I had been doing before this. I thought I'd be in a better financial position by not having to take the risk of refinancing for a new vehicle. It's too early to tell but I think I made a good move by doing this. Unfortunately, I had to give up my contract

with CMT. I want to take this opportunity to thank CMT for the excellent service they provided while I was with them. The personnel I dealt with were all courteous and professional. If I ever have the opportunity to go back to them I will do so with no hesitation.

PA Madness

What happened to the dispatchers at the Port Authority Bus Terminal? They are not there and it's back to being a free for all like it was back in the 1970's.

When the dispatchers were there, it was an orderly line and the first taxi served the first passenger on line. They must be brought back!

Total with Surcharge Should Show at End of Fare

We are losing money every day because of silliness! When are they going to at least let us show the total fare on the meter when the ride is over instead of the fare and the surcharge separately. It's true most newyorkers

understand to add them. But there are many newyorkers as well as non newyorkers who don't. When the ride is over and the "Time Off" button is pressed the two should come together so the passenger doesn't have to compute the total!

Hybrids

Well, what do you know! I dumped my Crown Vic and joined the Hybrid Club. The Crown Vic was due for replacement in a few months anyway. I now have a Ford Escape. Yesterday I drove it for the first time. I must say I'm very impressed, especially when I went to the gas pump. I couldn't believe my eyes when the gas cost was about 1/3 of what it was with the Crown Vic. I only hope the Ford Escape holds up as well as the Crown Vic did. Only time will tell.