

Cab Gab  
by Abe Mittleman

So here we are! Finally after three years of speculation, designing, testing, debate and controversy, the “Service Enhancements” are about to make their official debut in New York City Medallion Taxicabs. The ultimate test will begin when the first 25% of taxis will be required to have the system installed and working by the end of October. We will all have them by January of 2008.

There is a whole lot at stake. Millions of dollars have been invested into the four vendors that were given contracts to provide these systems. Taxicab owners and drivers will have to bear the burden of operating and maintaining the systems. The reputations of those who have legislated the requirement for taxis to have these systems is on the line. If it proves to be a success they will shine and smile. If not, they will look foolish.

It will now be up to the riding public to either embrace the systems or reject them. Will they use the credit systems with little or no problems? Will they keep the TV monitors on enough for the advertisers to want to keep advertising? Will the passengers reject the advertising causing the vendors to go out of business? Will the competition among the four vendors force some of them to go out of business leaving some owners on a leach without service? Will the owners be punished for this even though it will be no fault of their own if and when this happens? Will the equipment stand up to the rigors of 13,000 taxis riding up and down the perforated streets of our city?

It’s no secret that few of us if any wanted these systems in our taxis if given the choice. But the choice we did not have. Wouldn’t it be amazing if a year from now we have to admit that we were wrong and the “Service Enhancements” prove to be a positive addition to our business? At least that is what those who have required us to have them are saying. We are skeptical. But all we have to relate to are all the failed ideas that have preceded this. So why should this be any different? Why will this prove successful when other ideas have not? As, I said to TLC public relations advocate Allan Fromberg, recently when I spoke to him at one of the vendors’ expos: “Ask me in a year” I may have a different viewpoint then. As, for now if you gave me a choice, I would choose not to have it.

Our City is Getting Bigger

Our city is growing. Just look around and you will see buildings rising all over town. But it is not just Manhattan that is growing. Recently the NY Post reported that Flatbush Avenue and the downtown area of Brooklyn is growing also. Here are some of the projects that are reported to be in the works.

A \$750 million development to transform the former Albee Square Mall into 900 apartments and 600,000 square feet of retail and office space.

The BAM Cultural District, a \$500 million city and private-sector investment in Fort Greene around the existing Brooklyn Academy of Music that will include adding a 299-seat theater and 350 apartments.

The Oro Condos, a \$400 million project that will bookend a section of Gold Street near Metro Tech with massive 40- and 35-story condo towers.

It has been reported recently that our taxi medallion has reached a new record price of \$600,000. With all the construction and growing this price will probably grow also. We must insist of our elected officials that our investments are protected. Medallion service must be available to satisfy the additional business that will be generated by this growth.

### Airport Hustlers

Well guess what! According to an article in the NY Post the Bloomberg administration wants to track illegal airport drivers more closely and punish them more harshly. A bill pushed by the mayor has been introduced in the New York Assembly and Senate. It would make it a misdemeanor to provide unlawful ground transportation services at airports.

Unlike taxi and livery drivers that are licensed to work at the airports and must be fingerprinted, the crime does not require the violators to be fingerprinted. This bill will change that and make it easier to track repeat offenders. The illegal drivers often take advantage of tourists. Currently the fine is just \$250. Making it a misdemeanor would increase the penalties.

We hope that not just unlicensed drivers will be stopped. There are many licensed livery and black car drivers who hustle fares at the airport that should be going to medallion taxis. That must be stopped as well.

## Drivers are Concerned

It seems that even though it is the intention of the TLC not to have costs for “Service Enhancements” to be passed on to drivers, they say that some lease managers are passing the costs on by not specifically naming the increase as such. But rather they are just saying that expenses have gone up and that they need to increase the lease fee. Many drivers are also concerned that they are not permitted to pass the 5% credit card fee onto the passengers.

How these extra expenses will affect drivers and their attitudes down the line is anybody’s guess. But, this is not a very healthy situation. Stay tuned!

## Sicko

Have you seen the Michael Moore film documentary “Sicko?”

If not, I recommend that you do. It clearly documents how desperate and unfair the health care system in the USA is. It shows how other countries not as medically advanced as ours are way ahead when it comes to providing for its citizens.g

It will take determined unity among those who care to change things. This film is a good start. Go see it!