

Cab Gab  
by Abe Mittleman

### We Didn't Agree to Anything

Every time I read that the TLC claims that we agreed to the “Service Enhancements” as part of the package for our fare increase of 2004 I wonder why they are saying that. We didn't agree to that. We didn't agree to anything. Do you know anyone who did? I don't!

In an article written by Bruce Shaller in February 2004 that anyone can read by going to this website address:

<https://www.gothamgazette.com/index.php/transportation/2331-taxi-fare-hike>

The following was written:

#### *Paying By Credit Card And Other Improvements*

*The city also announced four other service improvement proposals along with the fare increase. Two of the proposals are much-needed improvements: mandating acceptance of credit and debit cards for payment of the fare, and mandating scratch-free partitions so that passengers can see out the front window and can see the driver and cab licenses, which are mounted on the driver's side of the partition.*

*The city also proposes to establish a group ride program at various as-yet unannounced locations. Group riding promises to give passengers a break on the fares they pay. Unfortunately, most group ride experiments have failed due to the difficulty of matching up passengers with similar destinations and because the process of grouping passengers compromises a main benefit of taking a cab, which is speedily getting to one's destination.*

#### *Mapping Technology*

*The city proposes to mandate GPS (global positioning system) technology in each cab. The idea is to bring cabs up to speed with current technology, a sensible idea that fits nicely with the mayor's background and goals. The announced specifics of the program, however, are weak – in-car mapping capabilities and automated data collection.*

Does this sound like an agreement? Not to me! It sounds like a dictated

declaration. It sounds like “Ok here’s your fare increase but now we want this and we are going to get it.”

What about the scratch proof partitions that were mentioned? That never happened. Did we agree to that? Will they pursue that after we buy new partitions to accommodate the “Service Enhancement” equipment?

What about the “Group Riding” proposal that was mentioned? If we agreed to the “Service Enhancements” then we definitely agreed to the group riding proposal. So where is that?

### Public Toilets

The Daily News reported on July 24 that the first of twenty public toilets is to be opened in Flushing in September followed by one in Madison Square Park. This is the park that is at Madison Avenue to Broadway between 23<sup>Rd</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> streets. Users of these self-cleaning public toilets will have 15 minutes for twenty-five cents.

Although this is a good start, it is certainly inadequate in numbers. What’s needed is one on each corner, especially in Manhattan. But even if a toilet on every corner was to be installed, how would it help us in taxi cabs when there is inadequate parking to use them? And, even if they are never installed, the need for relief places for taxis to park is a continuing and constant need.

Myself being a driver, I know how desperate a situation it is when a driver needs to use a toilet on the busy Manhattan streets. The lack of parking spots for cab drivers who spend many hours in their vehicles is a problem that is long overdue in addressing. Personally, I would be more than willing to pay for a metered spot if one was available anytime I needed one. But, that is often not the case.

So, I would like to make the following suggestion: We in the taxi industry aren’t looking for free relief spaces, we have plenty of them, unfortunately not enough to serve everyone’s needs. We would like to have metered spaces reserved for taxis only. Perhaps the first metered space on every block on every avenue in Manhattan would adequately fill the need. It is true that there are not enough public toilets to fill the needs of all the citizens, including drivers of for hire vehicles and taxis, but with a place to park at least we will have a fighting chance of finding what we need.

## Tips

Last Sunday I picked up two young gentlemen who were apparently from out of town. I picked them up in front of the -----hotel on Little W12<sup>th</sup> street and ninth avenue. They asked to be taken to a park in Ft Greene, Brooklyn. After a brief conversation with them I realized that they really had no idea where they were going or why they were going there. They were just looking to go somewhere to eat and have a good time, a place where they could mingle with the crowd. The only reason they wanted to go to Ft Greene was because someone told them there was a party in this park that they didn't even know where or what park they were looking for.

So, I quizzed them and after understanding their need I suggested that they go to Little Italy. When I showed them the crowd of people and the assortment of restaurants on Mulberry Street just south of Grand Street, they knew that's what they wanted. The meter was only \$8.50, not the \$20+ they expected to spend on a taxi ride to Brooklyn. This is what someone told them it would cost. One of the gentlemen handed me a \$20 bill and told me I did good! Now that was a tip well earned.

One of the perks that the TLC is pushing with the "Service Enhancements" is that it would generate more tips. So, I'll ask how would this ride have turned out if I had a screen blasting advertising and showing them a map of where they didn't want to be? I'll just assume they would have gone to Brooklyn, had a lousy time and I would have gotten a lousy tip because the equipment blasting the ads would have hampered my ability to relate to them and use my instincts to help them. What do you think?

## Taxi Ray

Well we can all breath easier now, "Taxi Ray" has been grounded. We have all seen him at one time or another. Ray Kottner is a career taxi driver who decided that he wasn't going to put up with the system any longer. For several years he has been giving supposedly free rides to passengers in his vintage unlicensed checker taxi. By doing so he claimed he was not "For Hire" and therefore did not fall under

the jurisdiction of the TLC.

When the TLC finally followed him last month and caught him charging a passenger for a ride, this sparked the beginning of the end for Ray's scam. His taxi was impounded. He had to pay \$1500 to get it back and an additional \$185 for the officer who drive it to the lot. On August 6 at a TLC hearing he was told that if he was caught again, he would lose his car for good.

Now, I agree that this had to be stopped. Naturally if you allow one person to get away with this fraud then others will follow. But, I have to ask if the TLC has limited resources then why are they wasting them on an 80-year-old eccentric when there are hundreds of illegitimate car service and livery taxis that are stealing our fares all over the city of New York. The TLC enforcement unit actually staked this man out and followed him. They went after an ameba. What about all the sharks that are riding the streets of Queens, Brooklyn, Bronx and uptown Manhattan? What about all the sharks that are stealing our fares at the midtown hotels and in front of places like the Javits Center? Come on guys you can do better than to follow around an 80-year-old eccentric!