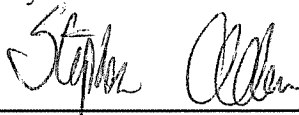


Halifax Regional Municipality
December 11, 2007

TO: Mayor Peter Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY:



Deputy Mayor Stephen D. Adams, Chair, Taxi and Limousine Advisory Committee

DATE: October 11, 2007

SUBJECT: Taxi and Limousine Advisory Committee - Annual Report

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

The Taxi and Limousine Advisory Committee meetings of January 18, 2006 to October 11, 2007.

BACKGROUND

The newly formed Taxi and Limousine Advisory Committee held their first meeting on January 18, 2006. Areas of focus included the following:

- Mandate of the Committee
- Taxi Driver Safety
- Taxi Owner Licences (ownership/transferability/inequities)
- Waiting List for Roof Lights
- Review of By-Law T-108
- Differential in Limousine/Taxi Rates to and from the Halifax Stanfield International Airport
- Certification of Limousine Drivers
- Roof Light Advertising
- Moratorium on Licensing of New Taxi Drivers, Halifax Zone
- Accessible Taxi Service in HRM
- Cash on the Dash
- Code of Ethics
- Booster Seat Legislation
- Pre-Arranged Cars (pick-up) at the Airport

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- Ticketing of Non-Illuminated Roof Lights

The following reports were forwarded to Regional Council from the Taxi and Limousine Advisory Committee:

1. Request for a Councillor to be appointed to the Taxi and Limousine Advisory Committee (January 19, 2007)
2. Request for Seatbelts in Limousines
3. Information Report - Update on Taxi Driver Safety (April 25, 2006)
4. Request for an amendment to By-law T-108 to mandate that all new limousine drivers be required to complete the National Certification Program similar to that required for Taxi Drivers (April 25, 2006)
5. A request for a member of the Business Association in HRM be appointed to the Taxi and Limousine Advisory Committee (June 27, 2006)
6. Request for the Ability to Transfer Taxi Owner Licenses (January 11, 2007)
7. Information Report - Update on Taxi Driver Safety (July 23, 2007)

The Taxi and Limousine Advisory Committee held a workshop on March 6, 2006 to review their mandate and identify areas of concern to be included in a defined WorkPlan for the Committee. See Attachment "A". The intent was to enable the Committee to focus its attention and energy on issues of greatest concern to taxi service in HRM.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

None. For information purposes only.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT POLICIES / BUSINESS PLAN

This report complies with the Municipality's Multi-Year Financial Strategy, the approved Operating, Capital and Reserve budgets, policies and procedures regarding withdrawals from the utilization of Capital and Operating reserves, as well as any relevant legislation.

ALTERNATIVES

None. Information Report.

ATTACHMENTS

Workplan

Additional copies of this report, and information on its status, can be obtained by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 490-4210, or Fax 490-4208.

Report prepared by: Barbara Coleman, Legislative Assistant, Taxi and Limousine Advisory Committee.

HRM Taxi & Limousine Advisory Committee

Planning Workshop

Radisson Hotel, March 6th 2006

Proceedings

1. In Attendance

- Mr. Denis St. Laurent, Taxi Driver
- Mr. Bob Richards, Limousine Driver
- Mr. Paul Matthews, Citizen Representative
- Ms Darlene Grant Fiander, Nova Scotia Tourism Human Resource Council
- Mr. Bill Harrison, Hotel Association of Nova Scotia
- Mr. Patrick Harrington, Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities
- Mr. Kevin Hindle, Regional Coordinator, HRM Taxi and Limousine Services
- Ms. Chris Newson, Legislative Assistant, HRM Municipal Clerk's Office
- Mr. Rick Williams, PRAXIS Research, facilitator

Regrets:

- Mr. Tim Hosford, Citizen Representative
- Mr. Wayne Black, Halifax International Airport Authority
- Mr. Derek Mathers, Taxi Broker

2. The Process

At the beginning of the meeting the participants agreed on the following objective:

To develop a plan for short and longer term action to fulfill to the mandate of the Committee.

To achieve this objective the participants discussed each of the five main elements of the Committee's mandate and "brainstormed" about possible actions that might be undertaken. The five mandate areas were:

1. Safety & Driver Performance: Promote and encourage a safe, accessible, friendly and professional service to the public.

2. Industry Performance: Work with all stakeholders to encourage the industry to improve the level of service for all citizens, businesses and visitors.
3. Training and Service Standards: Work to promote and encourage a standard of quality service and professionally trained drivers throughout the industry.
4. Regulation & Enforcement: Make recommendations to Regional Council respecting improvements to the Taxis and Limousine By-law and its enforcement.
5. Communications: Enhance communications with stakeholders and promote best practices within the industry.

Following this open-ended discussion, the Committee reviewed the points raised and worked to identify action priorities that were within the mandate and achievable within a reasonable time period.

Below is a summary of the points raised in the open-ended discussion, followed by a listing of the action priorities on which the Committee members reached consensus.

3. Discussion of the Mandate

A. Safety and Driver Performance

- The status of drivers has to be formally recognized in the mandate statement
 - ◇ The Committee should address the concerns of drivers as well as passengers with regard to safety
 - ◇ We should add words “including driver safety” at end of point one in the current mandate statement
- Potential assaults/thefts
 - ◇ There should be more training for all drivers on this issue -- how to protect yourself
 - ◇ The current training needs to be beefed up to address this issue more effectively
- Drivers would like to see the introduction of a “cash on the dash” rule for safety purposes. At present drivers cannot “discriminate” by asking a person to prove they can pay a fare in situations where drivers feel they are in danger of being robbed or cheated. They would like to have a rule that late at night the driver can ask for proof of ability to pay before taking the fare.

- ◇ The Committee should examine current rules and evaluate options for change
- There could be mandatory First Aid kits in cars
 - ◇ This could be required under provincial safety regulations
- The question needs to be answered: who is responsible to lead on the safety issue?
 - ◇ Self-employed workers are responsible for their own safety under the Occupational Health & Safety Act (this needs to be confirmed)
 - ◇ This information needs to be communicated to all drivers and there needs to be better enforcement
 - ◇ The Committee should work to get taxis on the radar screen at the Department of Labour in terms of enforcement of labour standards and health & safety regulations
 - ◇ (It was pointed out that the issue is now “very much on the radar” because of recent efforts by the HRM Taxi & Limousine Licensing Office to expand and improve enforcement and make other changes in the system.)
- The Committee should identify all safety equipment/tools that are available and recommend minimum standards
 - ◇ Develop a strategy and advocate minimum changes
- The Taxi & Limousine Licensing Office is preparing a report detailing options that will soon be presented to the Committee for its consideration and to help it formulate recommendations to Council
- With regard to passenger safety, there should also be standards for equipment that should be in the car and skills the driver should have in case of emergencies
 - ◇ First Aid kit
 - ◇ Fire extinguisher
 - ◇ First Aid training and CPR
 - ◇ Emergency road kits
- The standards for vehicle condition need to be reviewed and there must be better enforcement
 - E.g., frequently see power windows that don't work
 - Recent increase in enforcement activities and inspections shows that about 25% of vehicles are in violation of the standard

- In the current system criminal records of drivers are checked only every 5 years when they renew regular driver's licenses (not when they renew taxi licenses).
 - ◇ There is an option to use outside contractor to do the criminal record check at less cost
 - ◇ General agreement (not unanimity) in the Committee that it should be done with each annual taxi license renewal
- As happens in other jurisdictions, more information should be available to passengers about the car and the driver
 - ◇ In other cities there are plastic sheets on the door column or back of the front seats giving name and license number of the driver, a number to call with complaints, information on rates for different services.
 - ◇ There could be a pouch or holder with all this information on a card the customer can take with them and be able to mail in comments
 - There is some concern that drivers can abuse the system by mailing in bogus comments
 - ◇ Information could be provided in Braille if there is a standard and accessible location for it on the back of the seat.
- It was suggested that there are not enough cars that are accessible for persons with disabilities
 - ◇ Persons with disabilities need 24-hour access to accessible cabs
 - ◇ There is a need for more training to promote driver awareness on disability issues and the special needs of persons with disabilities
 - ◇ There should be service benchmarks to determine the levels of availability of accessible taxis, and standards of service
 - ◇ HRM has 4 subsidized accessible cabs now. There could be more but people are not aware of the availability of licenses and the opportunities to expand these services
 - ◇ Province provided funding to adapt vehicles to be accessible. Only 4 bidders qualified to get the funding.
 - ◇ It's a private business decision, and there may not be enough business to support more cars, particularly for round-the-clock services. Best option may be to have vehicles that carry regular passengers as well as persons with disabilities

B. Industry Performance

- There was lengthy discussion on the issue of ensuring there are enough taxis when and where they are needed
 - ◇ In the current system there are no incentives for brokers/dispatchers to improve service. They make their money by selling dispatch services to drivers, not by carrying customers. The Committee should look at ways to encourage brokers to take more responsibility to improve service and to promote better driver performance
 - ◇ There are 610 cabs in the Halifax zone, over 1,000 in HRM. That is a higher ratio of cabs to population than you have in cities like Ottawa. What are the reasons why there appear to be shortages?
 - ◇ There are many more drivers than cars – some cars operate round-the-clock with different drivers.
 - ◇ Some drivers feel that customer expectations are unrealistic – there are times of the week when traffic is heavy and there is high demand. During these hours, and when there is bad weather or major events at the Metro Centre, it just takes longer for cabs to arrive.
 - ◇ There is a problem with cabs that line up at hotels and refuse local fares because they are waiting for airport trips. Drivers should be limited in their rights to refuse fares sent to them by dispatchers.
- Some drivers lease roof lights at high costs from retired drivers or from brokers who own multiple lights. This is clearly a complex problem. One option is to have a one car/one driver rule, use it or lose it
- After lengthy discussion it was agreed that the first step must be to gather evidence and to quantify the problem
 - ◇ Need to establish if there really is an issue in terms of how our industry performs compared to other cities, and what the problems or bottlenecks might be
 - ◇ The focus of the information gathering should be customer wait-times. There is a need for benchmarking in terms of reasonable wait times for customers in different parts of the city
 - ◇ Need to develop clear evidence of how many cars are needed relative to the demand for service
- One possible source of problems is that there are 200 cars operating on their own, independent of the two major companies

- ✧ They control a significant number of roof lights but we don't really know how much service these cars are actually providing to the public
- ✧ There may be a need for more effective regulation for this sector of the industry, e.g., there could be minimum service provision standards, "use it or lose it"
- ✧ Again, the first problem is that we do not have good data on what really goes on out on the streets
- There have been complaints about inappropriate language over the radios, conflicts between dispatchers and drivers, but it was agreed that this problem has largely been solved by the introduction of GPS systems.

C. Training & Service Standards

- There is a clear need to beef up driver training on health and safety
- There is a need for more training on disability sensitivity
 - ✧ For drivers of both regular and accessible vehicles
 - ✧ Some drivers refuse to take you if you have a guide dog – they are not aware of the rules on this issue
 - ✧ The current training program is based on an interactive video – it could be strengthened by having a person with a disability serve as a resource person during the training session.
- It was generally agreed that the standards and curricular content for driver training should be reviewed annually
- The idea was suggested that there be a Professional Code of Conduct for drivers, and a separate code for passenger behaviour, both posted in the cars
- Limo drivers should also have to do national certification
- There should be mandatory Health & Safety training for all drivers
- The Committee needs information on the numbers and percent of drivers who are certified

D. Regulation & Enforcement

- The Committee reached consensus on the need for a thorough review of Ordinance 108 to understand how it was arrived at, comparison to other jurisdictions, etc.
 - ◇ Should start with this rather than with specific regulatory issues
 - ◇ The Committee will work through a 2-step process:
 - Review Ordinance 108 and identify issues
 - Pull together information on what goes on in other jurisdictions, what are the best options to address particular issues, etc.
 - ◇ Much of the preparation for this review has already been done by the Taxi and Limousine Licensing Office – they are preparing a report that will have information on policies, regulations and practices in other jurisdictions.
- It is recognized that enforcement is being beefed up. But there are still issues to address:
 - ◇ There is a need for more consistency in enforcement with regard to quality of vehicles on the road;
 - ◇ Enforcement should also be done at night – 24-hours a day – when some of the poorer quality cars and drivers may be on the road.
- Improvements are now being made in enforcement using police, traffic officers and cross-training of inspectors

E. Communications

- There is a need for expanded efforts to inform drivers about rules re persons with disabilities, Health & Safety regulations, etc.
- Development of a Driver's Code of Conduct would be a useful communications tool
- An over-arching concern is that there is no comprehensive, effective system to contact all drivers
 - ◇ The driver grapevine works well but does not reach everyone
 - ◇ TIANS has a newsletter that reaches many drivers
 - ◇ There should be a database of all stakeholders
- There will soon be a web site for all taxi drivers accessible from the HRM web site

- ◇ The Committee should give advice on how to make it effective
- The Committee should work to develop an integrated communications strategy linking and coordinating initiatives including:
 - ◇ An annual Taxi Day or Week
 - ◇ The Newsletter
 - ◇ The Web site
 - ◇ Notices/faxes
 - ◇ Public service announcements in the paper and on TV and radio
 - ◇ The information provided in the car could give the website for customer feedback
- The strategy should address how to communicate with all stakeholders – drivers, customers and others.

4. Action Priorities

After review of the above points of discussion, the participants agreed on the following as priority actions for the Committee to begin to fulfill its mandate in the short to medium-term:

1. Development of the communicate strategy
2. Review of Ordinance 108 to identify issues and options for improved regulation and enforcement
3. Review of current training standards
4. Data collection on service levels and related issues
5. Development of an overall safety improvement strategy addressing the needs of both drivers and customers

It was agreed that the immediate next steps for the Committee will be:

1. Start with the review of Ordinance 108 making use of the report prepared by the Taxi and Limousine Licensing Office
2. Review the report on safety issues
3. Send a letter to the City expressing strong support for the expanded enforcement campaign

5. Evaluation of the Session

Participants made the following comments on the usefulness of the session:

- The Committee needs to take full account of the attitudes of drivers, their concerns and diverse interests. They are very independent minded, and many just want to be left alone, so they have to be brought along in the process
- This has been a good process to get to know each other, develop strategy and direction, and identify important next steps
- It has helped the Committee to get focused
- It provided a good flow of information and we learned more about the industry
- The Committee needs to have a full turn-out to make sure all stakeholder interests are considered
- These are good first steps to make the industry better.