




MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Council

CC: Marc A. Ott, City Manager
Robert Goode, P.E., Assistant City Manager

FROM: Robert Spillar, P.E., Director
Austin Transportation Department 

DATE: March 24, 2015

SUBJECT: CUIR 1312 – Austin Taxicab Task Force Preliminary Recommendations

On May 15, 2014, Council approved Resolution No. 20140515-025 directing the City Manager to work with taxi franchises and other stakeholders to consider short and long term options for meeting taxi demand, including the use of additional or specialized taxi permits, and the use of Transportation Networking Companies, increasing efficiency of existing permits, setting a standard for taxi service delivery, and to bring a report and any recommendations back to Council.

Background

The interest of the City of Austin is to assure that publicly provided ground transportation services are safe, reliable, reasonably priced and available equally throughout the community. There are members of our community that depend on taxicab services to meet basic mobility needs. Therefore, we require that taxi services be available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. We require that they serve the entire City and not just peak locations such as festivals. The taximeter is used for all trips within the City so that there will be a consistent price, which could not be artificially raised without notice.

In order to address the current levels of taxi service delivery in Austin, while considering the emergence of Transportation Network companies into the local ground transportation market, staff was directed by Council to engage the Austin Taxicab Task Force (ATTF) and provide a report containing recommendations on potential solutions.

The ATTF conducted four meetings from June through September 2014 and discussed a number of issues currently related to the local taxi industry. These discussions and report have staff's preliminary recommendations. Staff is challenged to keep pace with the rapidly evolving landscape of local ground transportation industries. As we move forward with proposed modifications to the Austin City code, and continue engaging the ATTF, staff anticipates presenting additional recommendations to Mayor and Council as they are formulated.

Recommendations

Attached is an outline of staff recommendations proposed to implement recommended solutions as well as initiate the franchise renewal process. There are currently three

franchises operating in the city of Austin and the terms of those franchises expire in August 2015.

These recommendations address issues such as taxicab dispatch acceptance, driver hours on duty as well as a proposal related to wheel chair accessible taxicab performance measures. With respect to the different service providers, staff recommends increasing the franchise permit allocation for each of Austin's three taxi franchises by one hundred permits each. Staff additionally recommends increasing the 6.5% wheelchair fleet requirement to a minimum of 10% of their respective fleets.

With this recommended allocation and increase of the minimum requirement for accessible vehicles, Yellow Cab's fleet size will fall below 60% of the total market and the accessible wheelchair fleet could increase from 44 wheelchair accessible taxis to 100. This provides a greater opportunity to align the taxicab supply with peak demands for service. This recommended allocation could also provide an opportunity to incentivize increased use of alternative fuel vehicles.

Finally, because the current Austin City code allows for the existence of a total of five taxi franchises and there have only been three franchises for a number of years, staff recommends that Council provides an opportunity for one additional taxi franchise. The ideal franchise would be provided 105 wheelchair accessible taxicab permits to utilize a fleet of 100% wheelchair accessible taxis. Staff proposes that the addition of an entirely wheelchair accessible taxi franchise would not relieve the existing franchises of their current responsibilities with regard to wheelchair accessible service. However, it would ultimately increase the supply of wheelchair accessible taxicabs from 6.5% of the local fleet to nearly 20%, thus better positioning the local fleets to provide a higher level of service to those with accessible needs.

Next Steps

Staff will present an ordinance for Mobility Council Committee briefing on March 25, 2015 and Mobility Council Committee will hear public input on April 1, 2015. Staff will present for Council consideration on the April 23, 2015 council agenda. This ordinance will contain code amendments consistent with staff's recommendations as listed:

- Driver hours on duty
- Dispatch acceptance
- Credit card acceptance
- Wheelchair accessible taxicab performance measures
- 10% minimum wheelchair accessible taxi fleet requirement

Additionally, to address franchise renewal and staff's recommendation for allocating 100 additional franchise permits to each taxi franchise to be affixed to alternative fuel vehicles or wheelchair accessible vehicles, staff will submit an item for council's consideration on first reading only on the May 7, 2015 Council agenda. Due to Austin City Charter requirements, any modifications to franchise ordinances must be considered on three separate readings, where the third reading cannot occur no sooner than 30 days after the first reading. Finally, pending Council's approval, staff will commence the process of advertising the availability of 105 available wheelchair accessible permits for a franchise wishing to agree to provide local taxicab service utilizing a fleet of 100% wheelchair accessible taxis.

Mayor and Council
CIUR 1312 – Taxicab Recommendations
Monday, March 24, 2015

Should you have any questions related to the attached outline of recommendations, please do not hesitate to contact me.