

Voters driven to put end to city's taxi tyranny

August 22, 2009 Corbella Report

COMMENTS(14)

<http://communities.canada.com/calgaryherald/blogs/corbella-report/default.aspx>

Editorial By Licia Corbella, Calgary Herald August 22, 2009 2:03 AM

<http://www.calgaryherald.com/news/todays-paper/Voters+driven+city+taxi+tyranny/1918979/story.html>

Several years ago, my husband Steve and I attended his company Christmas party at Calgary's Inglewood Golf Club. A good time was had by all, but for my husband, it turned into a very long night and day, thanks to Calgary's taxi service, or rather near lack of one.

I was the designated driver for the night but at around 11 p.m. when it came time to head home to relieve our babysitter, Steve was having such a good time celebrating with his friends and colleagues, I suggested he party on and take a cab home. Reasonable idea, right? Well, not in Calgary.

As the evening wound to a close and Steve and a few others called for some taxis none came. They waited more than an hour and still no cabs. Their assumption was that because the golf club is in a difficult-to-access location, cabs couldn't find their way. We learned later, there were simply not enough cabs in Calgary to fill the need on a chilly Saturday night.

One middle-aged fella named Dean ended up calling his dad to bring the biggest vehicle he had and so a van load of stranded partiers got rides home to Calgary's southeast, but seeing as we live in the southwest, Steve was still rideless.

Fortunately, Steve had struck up a friendship with the bartenders - Daryl and Ken. So, when closing time was upon them and still no cab was in sight, the bartenders suggested Steve head out with them to a different bar that cabs would have an easier time finding and he could call a taxi from there.

To Steve's dismay, he found himself at the Shamrock Hotel bar in Ramsay - not exactly the type of place you blend into wearing a dark suit with a silk Christmas neck tie that lights up and plays Jingle Bells when you press Santa's nose. Daryl and Ken may have been young but they were no fools. They recognized that they couldn't leave Steve at this rather rough bar on such a frigid night looking like a cop without backup, so they drove him to the basement apartment they shared in Inglewood to call for a cab from there.

Calgary's cab situation was so dire then - and it's gotten much worse since our city has grown by maybe another 100,000 citizens since then - that Steve wound up learning the

life stories of both men, counselled them on their love lives, vowed to (and did eventually) restring Daryl's guitar, that only had five strings, played that same guitar while they all engaged in rather raucous sing-a-longs and eventually got a cab home at 7 a.m. at which time he fell into bed and started snoring within about one second of his head hitting the pillow.

Nobody loves telling that story more than Steve, after all he had lots of fun, didn't get punched out at the Shamrock, made a couple of new friends and had an audience for his guitar playing. In short, he was able to sing a happy song about the cab that almost never came, but for many Calgarians and tourists to this city, Calgary's cab crunch has them singing ballads of pain and angst.

Currently, Calgary has just 1,311 regular taxi licences, which is the same number of plates that existed in 1986, when Calgary had a population of about 620,000 people. In 2006, 100 wheelchair accessible taxi licences were added, even though the city's population is now more than one million.

According to the group, Voters for Taxis (www.votersfortaxis.ca), which has a survey it wants Calgarians to answer, only four of Calgary's 10 dispatch cab companies have licences or plates of their own. And, according to this citizen's group, those 1,400 cabs generate about \$700,000 weekly or about \$36 million annually for the brokerages. In other words, it's big business and that's why the taxi lobby has been so driven to stop City Hall from increasing the number of taxi plates available in Calgary.

Prior to the closure of the system, taxi plate licences cost about \$150. Today, taxi licences are transferring for more than \$100,000, squeezing out small entrepreneurs and keeping licences in the hands of big business owners (who, not surprisingly, donate generously to city politicians.)

Until the establishment of the volunteer group Voters for Taxis, thousands of us had stories like Steve - only many with much worse outcomes but our complaints fell on deaf ears. While the inconvenience to users is widespread the advantage to the cab owners is condensed. Most of us wouldn't bother to take the time to attend a public hearing on taxi service, particularly if it's held on a workday at say 4 p.m., like the city is planning on doing on Sept. 10 at the downtown library, but expect the industry to be there en-masse.

Fortunately, in steps Voters for Taxis, which releases a poll that shows Calgarians are so fed up with Calgary's lack of cabs, they don't even bother calling for one anymore and now lo and behold, the city's Taxi Limousine Advisory Committee has launched it's own online questionnaire, though the questions are so leading it's clear they're fishing for positive answers.

Nevertheless, it appears the city may finally heading down the road to get moving on, well, getting Calgarians moving in cabs again? If you care about the taxi tyranny in Calgary, be sure they hear your voice. Fill out the survey at www.calgary.ca/taxisurvey

Sing your complaints loud and clear, like Steve and his friends all those years ago.

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Your Comments

August 22, 2009 Calgary's taxi tyranny
By streams 08-21-2009 COMMENTS(14) Corbella Report

sam

the real issue is not that we dont have enough taxis on the road but the actual taxi call centres. think about it, when you call for a cab, your put on hold for hours and so you assume there aren't taxis on the road.

the thing is, it makes no difference to taxi companies how many call they take because infact they charge the taxi drivers a fixed amount every week, so they could provide the public one taxi or one hundred what the company earns is still the same, so they chose to mess with everyone (just because they can).

they dont provide the public proper service and they dont let the drivers make a proper living. because again, it doesnt make any difference to the company how much the driver makes, he could make one dollar a week or a thousand, they will still charge him the same amount.

a cab driver invests about 25 to 30 thousand dollars on a car he put into a cab company, so why on earth wouldnt he want to work hard to make up for the invest that loses its value everyday for being on the road.

so, the solution is not to put more cabs on the road, but to make the companies more accountable to the public.

August 26, 2009

7:36 PM

Glen

It always amazes me the very little understanding people have about the taxi business. Sure, put 5000 plates out there if it thrills you. Cars cost alot of money: as does insurance. Right, you're all thinking several hundred dollars for ins.. Wrong!!! Taxi insurance is as much as a whopping..... brace yourselves....\$12,000 per year! Iam not kidding you. Makes the fuel bill not look to bad...eh? And, we have not even begun to tally the whole bill yet. Repairs, purchase of car, ins. , horrifically high stand rent...etc. etc. Trust me I'm not exaggerating when I quote \$50,000 the first year to start a car as a taxi. And , lets not forget those precious traffic tickets that the City Police love to give to us wealthy cab drivers(special order from city council) Allthis so you can make

nothing. This newspaper article is completely out of touch with present day. Presently, you can get a cab as fast as it can drive to your door. If you really think that any more fools are going to toss away their hard earned to put extra taxis on the road you are dreaming. Oh there will be a few Idiots but most quality drivers I know are leaving.

August 26, 2009

4:36 PM

Mel from Calgary

The city should go back to issuing licenses to anyone who qualifies the market will sort things out. Why Calgary adopted this discredited system is beyond me. Yes, the big broker's will lose some money on the value but they have made a fortune by monopolising the licenses all these years.

August 25, 2009

11:51 AM

gs

there are plenty of cabs for everyone in this city. the only issue with them is that there are hundreds of cabs lined up at the calgary airport for hours, sitting idle so they can 'milk' out more expensive/lucrative fares and they can apply their airport surcharge to their passengers.

August 25, 2009

11:37 AM

lois ottewell

I am a senior, and due to eyesight problems, I cannot drive my car at night.

Many times I would like to go to a concert or to theatre in the evening, but do not go due to the uncertainty of getting a taxi home. Please add my name to a petition for better taxi service.

Thank you.

August 24, 2009

5:54 PM

Robin

I live in Saskatoon and we have the same problem here. You can almost NEVER get a taxi unless by sheer luck you just happen upon one outside a bar. And then you have to contend with 50 other people running towards it! Good luck ever getting one to come to your house. And City Hall continues to tell everyone (despite all evidence to the contrary) that there's absolutely no problem and that there are more than enough taxis around. The very few people who hold the licenses seem to be able to influence the politicians to keep it this way. This entire system of licensing is just ridiculous and needs to change.....

August 24, 2009

1:35 PM

[Gord](#)

I would welcome more taxis with open arms. Most times when planning events we don't even consider the taxi option.

The waits are too long and the ultimate arrival of a cab is uncertain.

During peak times, hollidays, Christmas, New Years, etc. service is more or less non existant. I also think the business would improve greatly if drivers were allowed to be owner/operators as a free market should be.

Thanks,

Gord

August 24, 2009

9:57 AM

cabbie

If the city of calgary goes out and issues more taxi license plates then big brokers will benefit from that because most of the drivers think that these two big brokers (checker and associated) only have some business .Drivers have to get stuck with them(big brokers) untill the public realises that they should call small taxi companies more and make them competitive. If small companies have some business drivers will start shifting towards them because they have lower stand rent. Suddenly efficiency goes up and big brokers will have no choice but to be efficient. As a result public will have better service and drivers will keep making some money.

August 23, 2009

7:48 PM

Michael

The brokerages (especially Kurt Enders of Checker) like to say they can't get anyone to work at night or in bad weather. That way they have no responsibility for the problem. That is complete BS. The drivers don't drive at night because they are taking all of the risk. If they get in an accident or get assaulted by a drunk, the driver is out of work for weeks because Checker makes them be independent contractors. Checker has the ability TOMORROW to employ some drivers as employees and use company cars. But that would cost them money, and right now they don't have to spend any of their monopoly profits on the citizens of Calgary. City Hall has let these guys get away with shirking their responsibility for too long. When City Hall protects these guys from competition, it should come with some guarantees to they are going to give back to the City.

August 22, 2009

11:23 PM

[Voters for Taxis](#)

Please visit www.votersfortaxis.ca and take our on-line survey. If you want to tell the City your story in person, please come to the central library (John Dutton Theatre, 616 MacLeod Trail S.E.) September 10 from 4 to 7 pm. See you then.

Voters for Taxis: Elevate the discussion. Broaden the options.

August 22, 2009

12:06 PM

T.A.L.

I have friends who have been stranded in their cars for hours at a time, and I read a letter in the Herald over Stampede from a woman whose 18 year old daughter was stranded at 2AM. This has gone on too long. A few people are getting very rich and they have been purchasing influence and power at city hall for way too long. Voters for Taxis was down on the mall the other day trying to gather up support. It gives me hope. Their website is at votersfortaxis.ca Sign up!

August 22, 2009

11:40 AM

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August 22, 2009

11:40 AM

JonSun

Several years ago.....this issue has been AN ISSUE for years.

Glad to see the Herald realize this.

August 22, 2009

11:13 AM

Johnny

Me and my friends have been left stranded so many times in this town. One of these days we're just going to stop bothering calling at all. When it's cold out, it's impossible to get a cab after the bars close, which is why so many people drive drunk in Calgary. It's either that or freeze to death on the street. One time, when I lived in Bridgeland, I walked home from the bar on 17th and I thought I was going to die from the cold. I got frostbite on my ears and toes. City hall sucks.

August 22, 2009

1:42 AM

ask dave

ask mayor dave WTF is going on. better yet, toss him under a bus 10/10/10. let someone else develop a plan to combat this monopoly.

August 21, 2009

3:46 PM