

## Setting record straight on cab industry

<http://www.calgaryherald.com/news/todays-paper/Setting+record+straight+industry/2234859/story.html>

By Twyla Laakso, For The Calgary Herald November 18, 2009

According to Len Bellingham of the Calgary Livery Association and president of Mayfair Taxi Ltd., everything is fine just the way it is with Calgary's taxi industry. There are plenty of cabs on the road whenever they are needed and there are never any wait times when calling dispatch. What's more, it's really the customers who are to blame, since they "call two or three cab companies" and then take the first cab.

Based on our findings, the real reason people call two or three cab companies is to assure that a cab will respond at all, because they have been left stranded without cab service on previous occasions.

The travelling public has lost faith with taxi service in Calgary. Calling a cab is no longer considered a realistic option for those requiring transportation during high-demand periods. The result of that lack of faith is people no longer calling cabs as frequently, deferring to other transportation alternatives, or calling several companies at once to assure their needs are met.

Unlike Bellingham's group, Voters for Taxis was not born of any interest other than the public interest. We are working to put standards in place for taxi service in Calgary. These are real issues that real people have brought to Voters for Taxis. We, in turn, are trying to take them to council and to industry. Why would anyone see that as a bad thing?

Rather than trying to work collaboratively to find answers that work for all stakeholders, Bellingham's solution is to deny there is any problem at all. After all, he has a scientific survey to back up his findings. Just like Big Tobacco in the '60s.

The truth of the matter is, there are big problems with the current taxi model in this city and there are several forces trying to elicit change in addition to Voters for Taxis. The chamber of commerce recently presented its opinion about reforming the local industry in the editorial pages of the Herald; groups representing the disabled recently invited Voters for Taxis to sit with them to discuss their issues.

Hundreds of Calgarians have made their dissatisfaction with the current taxi system known through comments on the Voters for Taxi's website, letters to the

editor and through the Herald's online comments. Even taxi drivers, afraid of repercussions from brokers if they speak out themselves, have implored VFT to be their advocates for taxi reform.

The theory that Bellingham advocates is "if it ain't broke, don't fix it." Assuredly, the best way to maintain the status quo is to deny that the taxi system needs fixing at all. As further evidence, if people don't relinquish a day's wages to come downtown for a meeting, well then that's just more proof that nothing is wrong.

People who have issues with taxi service in Calgary shouldn't be expected to attend a downtown forum when they have jobs and families that understandably take priority. To expect otherwise is patently unrealistic. To point to lack of attendance as lack of interest is absurd. And it goes to the heart of why Voters for Taxi's is there, to be the customer's voice.

Any large corporation, when faced with hundreds of complaints about its product or service, would sit up, take notice and find a way to improve the situation, rather than dismiss complainants out-of-hand as being disgruntled or deny there is a problem at all.

If the taxi system in Calgary were a transparently operating, efficiently functioning business model that adequately served the public interest and treated drivers fairly, there would be no need for Voters for Taxis to exist. But we do, Mr. Bellingham. And from that, even without the benefit of a scientific survey, Calgarians can draw their own conclusions.

Voters for Taxis is here because people who are dissatisfied with the taxi system want us here. They want us to speak for them, to broaden the discussion to include all stakeholders, and to bring transparency and openness to an industry that does not serve the needs of the travelling public and continues to operate quietly and behind closed doors. Calgarians deserve effective representation, and city council deserves to get better information to more effectively deal with the issues.

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