GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

DEPARTMENT OF FOR-HIRE VEHICLES

FOR-HIRE VEHICLE ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING

THURSDAY
JUNE 22, 2017

The Council met in Suite 2032, 2235 Shannon Place, S.E., Washington, D.C., at 1:17 p.m., Linwood Jolly, Chairperson, presiding.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

LINWOOD JOLLY, Chairperson
JASON ARVANITES, Member
ERNEST CHRAPPAH, Member
ERIK MOSES, Member
EVIAN PATTERSON, Member
JEFFREY SCHAEFFER, Member
ANTHONY THOMAS, Member

STAFF PRESENT:

JUANDA MIXON, SECRETARY TO THE COUNCIL
MONIQUE BOCOCK, ESQ., INTERIM GENERAL COUNSEL
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I'd like to call this meeting to order. This is the second Advisory Council meeting for the Department of For-Hire Vehicles.

We're in 2235 Shannon Place, Northeast, main conference room on the second floor. At this time I'd like to call the meeting to order and we'll observe a moment of silence for those that have departed.

Thank you. I want to welcome everybody here today. And thank you for coming out today. It's 1:00 in the afternoon.

And we see that there are a good number of drivers here. And we also would like your input on if 1:00 is a good time. Versus our normal time at 10:00. But we can do that later on in the public comment period.

We're fortunate today to have Dr. Chrappah as one of our Advisory members. And at this time he's going to give us a brief update on
things that have been going on at the Department of For-Hire Vehicles.

DIRECTOR CHRAPPAH: Thank you, Chairperson Jolly and my fellow members of the For-Hire Vehicle Advisory Council. Welcome. Very nice to see you all.

The Department has been quite busy for the last couple of months since we met as a group. And I'm delighted to announce some of the accomplishments that we've been able to put in place, particularly to help drivers, companies, and also our residents who use for-hire vehicles.

I'm going to start by giving a quick update on our progress with respect to the digital taxi solution. The genesis of the digital taxi solution was not only to help taxis compete, but also reduce the burden of regulations or legislation in a way that impacts the gross margins for the taxi business.

So more specifically, the digital taxi solution drastically reduces the equipment cost that a taxi owner or operator has to incur.
Where we are today is we've received and processed seven applications from various companies who want to be DTS providers.

We've stated a process of field testing. And we've also partnered with Square so that drivers have an option for credit card processing at 2.65 percent.

Which is pretty phenomenal. If you look at the current marketplace, drivers are paying up to five percent plus ancillary fees just for credit card processing.

So this transition is going to save drivers several millions of dollars across the entire fleet. More importantly, it also introduces advanced features to enhance ridership experiences.

So, taxi companies, taxi drivers, will be positioned to be able to provide frequent rider discounts. They will be able to provide discounted fares consistently during slow periods.

And they'll be in an environment where
they can have access to expanded economic opportunities. Whether that is shared rides without necessarily having to invest in additional equipment.

Whether it is scheduled deliveries.

Whether it is integrating the Pandoras, the Spotifys or music applications to enhance their ridership experience.

And beyond all of that, they will have an easy way to execute rider surveys. For riders to provide feedback on their ridership experience.

So, these changes will definitely put D.C. taxies in a position where the real and true operators who are committed to service, will be able to excel.

We have reason to believe that the excitement that we've seen so far around the digital taxi solution will continue. And we will work with all the companies who get approved, and all the drivers, to manage the implementation.

Something that we did a couple of
weeks ago was also distributed to the industry, a
Know Your Rights card or flyer. So that
individuals will know how to address their
contract situations.

Individuals will know how to avoid
being victims of scams. Because we've received
reports about some drivers being coerced or being
put in a position where they can sign contracts
beyond the current licensing period for the
morning taxi solution.

Which we think is a problem. So we'll
continue to educate drivers, help them during the
transition. And then reposition at least the
taxi market in a way that it can be competitive
and supports the overall integration of all for-
hire modes in the District of Columbia.

Secondly, I want to touch on the D.C.
Taxi App. We transitioned the D.C. Taxi App to
the industry cooperative over a year ago.

And we are delighted that they were
able to relaunch the app a couple of months ago.

And they are focused on additional revenue
streams to help taxis. So the progress there has been very good.

The third category of updates from the Department is with respect to, you know, Innovation Grants Programs we launched a few months back. The idea behind Innovation Grants Program was for the industry to propose solutions to address transportation equities and to also help them open new revenue streams.

Based on the applications that we received, we've so far made awards in a number of categories. The first is school transportation service.

We have a grantee who now transports children in foster care to school. And the value promise has been very good.

We have one instance where, instead of a child traveling for two hours to school, they're able to get to school in 15 minutes. We have another instance where instead of siblings being transported in different vehicles, they get a ride together and have that family bonding
moment over a short period of time.

So, for us, this is an example of how the industry can transform to not only enhance ridership experiences, but also grow a pie in terms of our revenue.

The second category where we made an award is a Vehicle On-Demand program. The idea behind the Vehicle On-Demand program is that instead of government employees using fleet share or other transportation means to get to appointments or business travel within the District of Columbia, they can hail a taxi cab and it will take them to the appointment.

They don't have to worry about parking. And based on our initial analysis, this program can reduce the District's expenses by as much as 50 percent on transportation.

And it would also provide a revenue stream to the vehicle for-hire industry. So that's another area where we made a grant.

The third, is for non-emergency medical transportation. As some of you know,
sometimes people use 911 as a service to get to a doctor's appointment.

And that puts a strain on the city's resources. So one of the proposals we received, which was innovative, we think, is using taxis to provide transportation service to people so that they don't have to call 911 when they need a ride to a doctor's appointment or they need to do a checkup.

We've partnered with the Department of Healthcare Finance to provide us with guidance on how to implement this program. So that they can get knowledge transfer as well.

The fourth area is to address the lack of charging infrastructure. We've made a grant that would lead to the installation of at least two fast-charging, electric stations in -- at Union Station.

So this would give the industry members who've invested in zero omissions vehicles additional options to refuel at one of the hottest pickup and drop off destinations in
the District of Columbia.

Based on what we know so far, we are on schedule for that project to be completed before the end of the fiscal year. And that should alleviate some of the challenges vehicle owners currently have in terms of access to fast-charging stations.

There are charging stations. But there are just not enough fast-charging stations. So, we support this initiative very strongly.

The other area with respect to electric vehicles also, is a rebate program that we put in place. We put in place a rebate program that gives owners, or new owners of 100 percent electric vehicles or hybrid electric vehicles, five thousand dollars towards the acquisition or reducing the operating cost of that vehicle.

And it was open to at least 150 people. We received just tepid response, in that we received 27 applications.

And so far, 18 have been processed,
because they've come in to provide additional information. And we have reason to believe that in about 30 to 45 days, people will be getting checks in their hands.

Then the last area, which is a subset of the Innovation Grants Program, but has not been fully released yet, and this is more an FYI to the industry. Is we'll be looking at putting in place a wheelchair accessible vehicle driver and company incentive program.

Currently there are a number of wheelchair accessible vehicles that are not being utilized. And that creates a problem in that it reduces the accessible vehicle service in the District of Columbia.

So, we're working through our research department to craft an incentive program that would reward drivers for completing qualified trips. It would also reward vehicle owners or companies for meeting standards and completing wheelchair accessible trips.

And more importantly, it would ensure
that vehicles are in service for those who need them. So that is so far our updates from the Department in terms of what we've been able to accomplish so far since we last met.

CHAIRPERSON JOLLY: Thank you. So, as we move into the public comment period, I wanted too just first make a few remarks.

Being that we're a new Advisory Council, we have not taken any time to put together our internal processes here for handling the public comment period. You will remember when we were a Commission, the Commission had different rules on public comment.

Well, as of today, we don't have any. And we will be forming some soon. So, if there's anyone that has public comment, I invite you to get ready to come to the mic. We'll definitely hear you out.

And then I would also invite my Advisory Council members, if you have questions for any of the people that are presenting, feel free to do so. Bear in mind that our role here
today as Advisory members is to listen and to make recommendations to the Department of For-Hire Vehicles.

And the way that we hope to continue to do that is by engaging with you as you provide your public testimony. So, with that in mind, if there are folks here, you can raise your hand. Okay.

And if you have statements, you can give them to Ms. Mixon. And Ms. Mixon, I guess, we can at least, have you come to the microphone. Introduce yourself. And you can proceed from there.

SECRETARY MIXON: And sir, if you would you just state your name and spell it so that the court reporter has it. And then, how long?

CHAIRPERSON JOLLY: We don't have folks here -- we don't have many folks here.

SECRETARY MIXON: Okay.

CHAIRPERSON JOLLY: Give them five to seven minutes.
SECRETARY MIXON: All right. Okay.

So you'll have adequate time, five to seven minutes.

MR. ZEWDU: Thank you. Good morning.

That's just one of the jobs you give me. My name is Abebe Zewdu.

As you remember me, I attended the 1/4 meeting with Council Member Brandon Todd about the taxi industry. At the end of the meeting, I met with Mr. Chrappah and discussed an issue that I was having with my meter being locked.

When we spoke with Mr. Chrappah, told me to forget the old car. And he advised me to apply for the grant and buy a new car.

I took his advice. And I spent some money to prepare the grant application professionally.

Unfortunately, I received a rejection notice. My question is, what was the purpose of the grant program? And how could it have helped me?

I would like to know why there is so
much confusion about the grant program? And why everyone was rejected?

I was told that the grant program was cancelled. And now there is a rebate program.

Could you kindly explain to me how the rebate program works? And also, how drivers may participate within this program?

Thanks again.

CHAIRPERSON JOLLY: So at this time I'll ask if any of my other Advisory Council members have any questions for this presenter. And then Director Chrappah, I'll ask you to make some final comments.

DIRECTOR CHRAPPAH: Thank you Chairperson Jolly. Abebe, the grant program is a competitive process. No grant program has been cancelled.

What we do know is some times our stakeholders have challenge or have a series of challenges perhaps comprehending notices and letters that were sent to them, or instructions that they have to follow.
So, some of the things we've put in place depend on our Client Services Department to do an outreach. I don't know the specifics of your particular application.

What I do know is, anybody who received a denial letter, it was based off the evaluation criteria, how much they scored, or whether they not complete the requirements of the application.

We also made it crystal clear that drivers don't have to pay somebody to prepare an application for them. However, it was on an individual decision.

So, if you decided to pay somebody to prepare your application for you, that is between you and them. It is not a requirement.

The purpose of the rebates program, which is -- which was another incentive to drivers and owners on top of everything else that was in place, was to give five thousand dollars for taxi owners or drivers who choose to invest in greener vehicles.
Most people who received, if not all, who received a denial letter for what they didn't qualify, also received pre-approval notice and letter with instructions on how to apply for the rebate program. Some did. Some didn't.

We know at least 27 people followed the process and applied. So, they must have done something right. And those who chose not to apply, they made an individual decision.

The deadline for the rebate program I believe was June 12. So, between the time to go receive their notice to June 12, you would have to figure out why you didn't apply.

And if you applied, I'm sure your name would have been in the 27. I don't recall the 27 applicants off the top.

But, the Department's commitment to helping vehicle owners or drivers, has not changed. In fact, the Department has double downed on our investments to help the industry.

That is one reason why even people who didn't meet the qualification or people who
didn't have strong applications for any of the Innovation Grant Programs, received a notice and a letter about another opportunity that was available to them.

So, if there is something more that you think the Department should do, we are open to suggestions. But what we will remain steadfast on, is that we expect and we will hold individuals and companies accountable to standards that we put out there.

There's no such thing as cut me a check. Because that's not the way the City operates. There are rules that the Department has to follow.

There are rules that must be abided by to ensure that if we are giving funding to individuals or companies with taxpayer dollars, it is done appropriately.

MR. ZEWDU: Well, can I just say something about it? First you mention about not to pay any money for the application process.

But the reason why we go there is, we
are trying to avoid this rejection notice. We are trying to just be online, no.

That's why we just looking for professional applicant fillers, you know. And also, if you remember the time when I spoke to you, there was electric and wheelchair cars.

It was simply, and appropriately, and fairly, based off my meter. That was my complaint for you.

But you told me just forget about the old car. Forget about this. Just apply there for the grant money and buy a new car, and be on the street. If you remember that.

So now, all of a sudden it comes to me now, the electric cars and some wheelchair vehicles if we -- I'm just telling you right now.

DIRECTOR CHRAPPAH: I think you're conflicting different things. Your meter was deactivated. And if I recall, it was because your vehicle had aged out.

That is separate from grant opportunities. And if I recall, you wanted to
I know what the Department could do to help individuals or owners who had aged out vehicles.

And I mentioned to you that there are grant programs available. Now every grant program has terms and conditions.

At no point did I or anybody from our office say, you get a free pass. You get to go buy another car. No.

The requirements have to be met. So, you had an opportunity to replace your vehicle at your own cost as long as it meets existing regulations.

You had an opportunity to take advantage of the rebate programs and subscribe to the terms and conditions with it. You were firmly, and still are firmly, in the driving seat.

The choice is yours. Thank you.

MEMBER PATTERSON: Sorry, may I have a question, sir? Just a question about the confusion that you mentioned in your statement.

I guess this is a question for you and
also for the agency. What information did you receive prior to, you know, filling out the grant application?

      Where there things like information sessions available to you? Did it explain the grant process and what would be in the requirements?

      MR. ZEWDU: You know, I just -- in fact this is a good question. I just took the word from Mr. Chrappah.

      And when he just told me about the grant program, we were mentioned about the regular car. We were talking about the regular car issue.

      And then I took it just like, you know, well, if I was like, everybody knows about these dates because of, you know, our business was -- is going down.

      So, because of that, the City government or the Department of For-Hire Vehicle, they just made some kind of money to support the drivers. I took it just like that.
And in fact, I told you before, we tried, me and my friends, we tried to avoid this, you know, unnecessary applications, you know. And we tried to protect our application from the denial.

And we go further. And we pay almost eight hundred dollar, each of the -- each of us, to apply that application to fill it for us.

MEMBER PATTERSON: Sure.

MR. ZEWDU: But, unfortunately, we received denial notice.

MEMBER PATTERSON: And I'm sorry you received that denial notice. But, I have, you know, if we are to advise the Agency, perhaps some more information on, you know, what are the expectations that are in the grant process so that you know what you're getting into when you, you know, when you apply?

The Director and the Agency, and they're doing their good faith to provide you with the opportunities and what's available out there. But, I wonder what is available to the
industry, the information on just -- on the grant process? Because I'm not an expert.

DIRECTOR CHRAPPAH: Yes. A very good question. A number of things. The resources available is, quite frankly, incredible.

It is on our website in terms of the requirements, the deadlines, FAQs, what to do and what not to do. One example of what not to do, is to pay somebody to secure a grant application.

An example of what not to do is to say, just give me money because my business is down. You know, we went as far as to even provide templates that individuals can follow.

We provided an information session about a grant on 4/20. We sent email notices out about the grant programs. Our client services department engage with drivers on a one on one basis when they come to the service center to understand their unique challenges, what they need to do.

But, one thing that we are not able to solve is the -- what I call herd behavior. Where
one driver hears something and they all decide to
do the same thing. In spite of the information
that is clear.

And that is a natural issue within the
industry. And we think one way of mitigating it,
because we cannot eliminate it, is to ensure the
messaging goes directly to the drivers, and we
provide additional support in terms of questions
and answers.

We've even gone as far as to simplify
the application process for the rebate. You have
to put in only, I think, seven distinct fields.
Your name, the address where the payment should
be sent, the VIN Number of the vehicle if you
have it, the PVI. Basic stuff.

So, fill out a form with about seven
to nine fields. Sign a grant agreement. And we
initiate a process to get a check to you.

So we can't lower the barriers any
further then that. Or else, it will be
irresponsible on the government side.

MEMBER MOSES: So. I appreciate the
comments of the Director and Mr. Zewdu. Thank you for bringing your concerns to us.

I have some experience with running grant programs. Not as the primary activity of the organizations that I've run, but as a supplementary activity. Which just sounds like is the same case here for the Department.

Any time anyone puts forth their effort and gets their hopes up about potentially benefitting financially from a grant program, it's going to be disappointing when you're not successful.

The Department, I assume, has a very limited set of funds for grants. And there are probably way more applicants then there are funds to provide satisfaction to those applicants.

So, what I would say is, and a thing that I've done in the past, and our agency has been to, if necessary, to have those information sessions. Which it sounds like you have, and FAQs and information that's available on line.

But it might be to the extent that you
have the bandwidth on the staff side, for someone
to sit down with an applicant like this. And to
explain if there are ways that the application
could have been improved.

Or if there is something that was
outside of the guidelines. Or was not fitting.
If there are particular reasons.

Now, sometimes the reason will just
be, we had a hundred applicants for X number of
dollars. And we simply could not satisfy the
demand.

And that doesn't mean that you
shouldn't apply in the future. It does sound
like it means that you should not pay someone to
help you to apply in the future. Because it
doesn't sound like that's necessary in order to
put forward an application that will meet the
guidelines and will qualify.

And so, I think the -- I think what
you hear from the Director is a concern about
drivers like yourself and others being preyed
upon by people who might say to you, we can
ensure that you get a grant if you allow -- if you pay us to put forward your application.

And that happens across the board in many different forms. But it doesn't sound like that's necessary in order for you to be potentially successful.

You may have to be persistent. You may have to apply a number of times. But, you know, thank you for the effort you put forward.

I know it's disappointing. But, there is a balance that has to go on between limited funds, probably unlimited demand, and how those things come together.

So, if at all possible, perhaps someone on the staff can meet with this gentleman and go over his application. And if there are some tips that can be applied.

But, I would ask for your patients and understanding about the balance the Department also has to seek in trying to provide this kind of support.

CHAIRMAN JOLLY: Thank you. I think
-- oh, go ahead.

(Off record comments)

MEMBER THOMAS: I just wanted to kind of chime in on that note as well. I do have experience managing grants for the Federal Government as well as D.C. Government.

And so as a project officer, I'm familiar with, you know, the stipulations and just how grant applications have to be processed and reviewed and scored and et cetera. So, it's very important to know that, you know, when you're answering criteria or that you're very specific in what you're applying for.

But, I was going to make a suggestion that moving forward, like if the Department is moving towards grant, you know, applications, or grant funded programs that perhaps from an educational perspective we could hold like some trainings or just guidance with how to respond to grants. Or to our phase.

If you've never responded to one, it is a very difficult task. And again, it's, you
know, if you are paying someone to do it, they may not have the knowledge or the information to be able to prepare it in a way that you could win.

So, I would just propose that to the Council as an idea moving forward to be able to educate drivers on how to, you know, how to apply for grants. And I'd be happy to assist with that.

CHAIRPERSON JOLLY: Okay. Mr. Abebe, so, you've got -- we've had a lot of dialog about this.

So, one thing that I heard, it sounds like your rejection doesn't mean that there's no alternative. Correct?

DIRECTOR CHRAPPAH: That's correct.

CHAIRPERSON JOLLY: So, and I don't want to get into of it because for privacy issues. But, so there's going to be some follow up for you, sir, okay.


DIRECTOR CHRAPPAH: Yes I want to
address two things here for others who may be
listening as well. And also to Abebe.

You received an offer for the rebate
program. You did. It was standard. Anybody who
received a letter received the rebate offer.

By not taking advantage of the rebate
offer, you have to blame yourself. This is not
about DFHV or the government.

Yes, you got a denial letter for the
application you put in. But you received an
offer for five thousand dollars. You didn't take
advantage of it.

MR. ZEWDU: Not anything comes of it.

DIRECTOR CHRAPPAH: It's for electric
and hybrid electric vehicle. If that is not what
you're interested in, then there's nothing from
the Department.

So, we have to be clear. Because
sometimes people want grant funding for things
that are not within the scope of the grants.

If that's not what you're interested
in, then there's not a specific resource to
assist you.

For the others, we are going to be launching a resource center for drivers and companies and our customers, who will be operating two days in addition -- two days a week for two hours each, or on a Saturday for four hours, to assist drivers with whatever issue they have.

Completing an application, submitting a form. Whatever it is. That, in addition to information sessions and training sessions, will reflect our ongoing commitment.

Where it will stop, is where people have to make a decision and accept the consequences of their decision. Because as they say, you can lead a horse to the river, but you can't force it to drink.

So, if you are counting on the Department to get some financial incentive, yes, we have rebate financial incentives that we'll continue to support. Wheelchair accessible vehicles, incentives for certain types of
behavior, incentives for certain types of vehicles.

But, if you're not interested in any of those, then there's very little that we can do to help.

CHAIRPERSON JOLLY: Ms. Mixon?

SECRETARY MIXON: And then thank you for your statement. And if you will still state your name and spell it for the court reporter, please.

MR. DAGNEW: Good afternoon. My name is Dawit Dagnew, a District resident and a taxi driver.

In the past few years there have been many changes in the taxi cab industry that has resulted in a loss of review for drivers, decreased number of the street wells, and overwhelming competition from Uber, Lyft, and et cetera.

Drivers' frustration is at all time high. And we do not see any successful pathway forward. Drivers are beginning to organize in an
effort to survive.

And we disparately need the Department For-Hire Vehicles to work with us in an open and transparent manner to solve the variety of problems that we face. And to come up with innovative ideas to level the playing field somewhat for taxi drivers.

Taxi drivers understand that we must compete for business. And we also understand that the industry is changing. And we need to understand where we fit in.

Today I would like to outline some issues that we face. And secure assistance in working together to solve these issues.

Number one, taxi drivers are spending too much time in this facility conducting business. And we can -- and we are suggesting that a lot of the drivers' services to be decentralized and automated.

We further suggest that the -- you continue to roll back fees that impose on the driver. Such as fiscally new administrative fee,
tags, and so forth.

Number two, taxi drivers would like to understand why there is such a disparity of the tickets written by hack inspectors on taxis, but not for Uber and Lyft.

Number three, we taxi drivers would like to know the status of the taxi app. And have hard dates for release to gain a clear understanding of the benefit of the app. We disparately need this app for our success.

Number four, I repeat Mr. Abebe's. Recently, there was a grant program that was announced. And many drivers were told that they qualified for a grant.

The grant was a great idea. And we thought that this would be our opportunity to obtain critical fundings for -- to offset the high operating cost of our taxis and to implement innovation.

What we found out was that our over 65 applications were rejected. We also found out there's a 100, over 100 drivers of electric
vehicles submitted grant applications, and they
too were rejected.

While the electric drivers were
offered the rebate, we know that none of the
electric drivers have accepted the rebate. This
program would have been a great innovative
incentive for struggling drivers.

And we would like to find out the
status of the grant program. And if we are still
eligible.

I have spent a lot of time over the
past few weeks and months organizing a group of
drivers that now took on approximately 65
drivers.

My goal is to make sure that drivers
are informed about the new changes in the
regulations. And to work together for our
survival.

I would like to ask the members of the
Advisory Board to meet with myself and
representative of my group. So that we can
continue to provide you with ideas for the
Department.

Finally, I'm hopeful that if we work together, we can begin to solve some of the issues that I have addressed today. But there are many other issues as well.

I respectfully ask that we begin working together. Because if we don't, the taxi cab industry will continue to decline. And drivers will continue to go out of business.

Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON JOLLY: Thank you. Any questions from Advisory?

DIRECTOR CHRAPPAH: Yes. We thank you for your many statements.

We've had a history of working together on a number of different topics, from Xclass to enforcement and all of that. And I expect that relationship to continue.

Two things to get some context behind some of the questions or suggestions. The first one about decentralizing driver services.

Could you tell me what else can be
done in addition to giving drivers the online portal? As you know, we rolled out a portal for drivers or companies to initiate their licensing transactions online.

What else should be done in addition to that? To sort of like, you know, reduce the need for drivers to come here physically?

MR. DAGNEW: Thank you. Drivers services, we know what these are for the most part.

So, any government agencies these days, they have alternative application online. Such as renew my fees. Where do I have to come to pay. Renew my fees here.

If I can submit my application and keep me in my car. This business is not good no more. So don't bring me here. Let me sit and struggle in my car.

Give us an opportunity to do things online. For example, just recent I have to -- we have this meter.

A lot of cab drivers' meters have been
shut off often time for various reasons. Expired fees, expired drivers' license, anything. Anything or information.

So would that be possible to contact the driver through his email? Of course we have everybody's email now in the database. Or at least address or phone numbers.

And instead of just shutting it off from here and bringing the driver all the way here to solve it, would it be possible electronically to connect him through his email? Or even a phone call? Or even send him at his address, whatever concern or outstanding issue that he may have.

Instead of bringing him all the way -- shutting him off and bringing him all the way here for no reason. And that's what I'm outlining for, sir.

DIRECTOR CHRAPPAH: So today, any driver can go to the business portal and see information the Department has about them. What else needs to be done on top of that?
That's what I'm asking. Because there are online forms for drivers to initiate the avenues.

So, what else needs to be done on top of that? That's what I'm trying to understand.

MR. DAGNEW: Submitting application online. And instead of me bringing a hard copy, for example, if I wanted to renew my driver's license, I just simply apply online to DMV.

They will mail my driver's license without me going to downtown. Right?

DIRECTOR CHRAPPAH: So the current online application, where you log in securely. I'm not talking about pdf. Today on our website, you can click on a link. Put in your secure credentials, and see information about your vehicle and your license.

MR. DAGNEW: So, probably --

DIRECTOR CHRAPPAH: So, what is needed then? More training for drivers to use that system?

Or there's something missing here that
I'm trying to get to. Because this has been
rolled out for months now.

Drivers were notified through
townhalls, newsletter, community events, that
this functionality is available. And we're going
to build more on top of that.

So, if people still feel that they
have to come here in person when there's an
online application, is it more about reinforcing
that message? And perhaps maybe it is just a
function of time that people will get to this.

MR. DAGNEW: Probably you're right.

Maybe if I am misinformed a little bit. Because
I haven't seen or maybe I'm a little behind --

DIRECTOR CHRAPPAH: Okay.

MR. DAGNEW: With the new idea or the
secured log in process.

DIRECTOR CHRAPPAH: Okay. Okay.

MR. DAGNEW: If I don't hear it,
probably most of the drivers don't hear it.

DIRECTOR CHRAPPAH: Okay. Okay.

MR. DAGNEW: I think I am more
connected. So, maybe that needs to be released more over and over. So at least people to hear that across the board.

DIRECTOR CHRAPPAH: So why don't we do this. Let's partner. Because once the resource center is opened, --

MR. DAGNEW: Okay.

DIRECTOR CHRAPPAH: We will go over all these resources that are available to people already.

MR. DAGNEW: Okay.

DIRECTOR CHRAPPAH: That's nothing new. And then drive adoption. Same with the idea about this proportion of more tickets being issued to taxi drivers versus other for-hire drivers.

Because what we hear also from Uber drivers or Lyft drivers, or Black Car drivers is, you've given us all the tickets. And you don't give tickets to taxis.

You know so, everybody says they're the only ones getting the tickets. But, when you
go to our website, there's a dashboard that shows
tickets issued, not just by our enforcement
group, but you can also find tickets that other
agencies have issued, at our website.

So, there's a bit of a disconnect
between facts and reality. And that is where
perhaps you could help in getting the message
across.

Because for example, I have not come
across any ticket issued for somebody with regard
to a manifest. Because we know with digital
systems, electronic manifests are just there.

We've taken a different look at what
is defined as loitering. Enforcement has been
retrained. We have a very different enforcement
policy.

There are a lot more warnings. In
fact, over three hundred warnings have issued
this year, instead of tickets.

So, there's been tremendous progress
in helping people adapt to this new environment.
And sometimes it feels a bit weird when the facts
such as something else. But, others have a different opinion.

So, let's figure out ways we can partner to get a message out there. And unearth the real opportunities for improvement so that we can devote our government resources effectively in doing that.

CHAIRPERSON JOLLY: All right. Any other questions from any other members? Jason? I say Jason first.

MEMBER ARVANITES: I just wanted to ask a quick question about your second point. As someone who is representative of a, you know, competitor with Uber and Lyft, I'm just wondering what kind of tickets you're talking about when you say that there's a disparity?

What tickets -- I'm just trying to understand what tickets you think you're getting? But, drivers of Uber and Lyft would not be.

MR. DAGNEW: A good question. A simple example, Union Station is my usual drop off. At least all cab drivers at least once will
get to Union Station.

You drop a passenger. You go all the way -- all the way around Union Station to get in line. Which is a very long line, if you're out in the tail, I bet you will get a ticket.

Uber, you just drop the passenger there. Right there you can pick up passengers. Do you see the difference?

They don't even have to go or anything. Just drop the passenger, pull over to the curb, and pick up passenger.

That much is a difference of what we're talking about. Cab driver, once he drop passenger, he has to go all the way around the block and sit at least 45 minutes to an hour before he pick up passenger.

If he's in a tem -- if he's outside of the line, enforcement with cab drivers continue, he's going to be blocked from both sides. Not even give you a chance to go and hide. And give you a ticket.

Uber and Lyft, I don't know what it
is. If you drop a passenger, right where you are, you can stand there and pick up passenger. That's what I'm saying.

They have what's called loitering. We are getting ticket for loitering. They're not loitering.

MEMBER THOMAS: So -- okay. So, a couple of things there. I mean one, Uber, Lyft, Via are digital dispatch companies.

So, the way that their software or -- like I'm a Lyft driver. So the way that our software, like there aren't any guidelines that restrict us.

Like the agency wouldn't restrict me as a driver from being able to pick up a request. And in fact, it's more efficient if I'm at Union Station and a request comes in, and I can pick up a passenger.

Versus having to go all the way around. You know, that's different. Because it's digital dispatch. So the system's built to increase efficiency.
I would think that once the, you know, the taxi cabs move to more digital dispatch, that's something that perhaps could be built into that system as well. I don't know enough about it.

But, you know, I mean, I understand that that, you know, that that could be a concern. Because yes, we don't have to wait. We can pick up.

I mean, in fact a lot of times with Uber, you're queued with a passenger before you even drop off the one that's in your car for efficiency. That increases your down time and increases, you know, waits.

And from what I understand, just from reading about this new software that the digital taxi dispatch service, maybe that's something that can be added in.

I also want to make a comment as to the enforcement. I know that -- I don't know what the records will be, but I'm sure MPD, I've seen in the U Street corridor as well as other
high trafficking areas where MPD does issue
citations to rideshare drivers.

I know the airport certainly does it.

That's not under -- I mean, that's in Virginia.

But, I think there's a misconception
that for certain traffic guidelines or even for a
hack inspector, there's certain things that an
Uber and Lyft, you know, Uber, Lyft, or Via
driver, that we have to adhere to. That we can
be cited for.

I've never been cited. But I've been
close to being issued a citation for something.

That for example, I would like to see,
I know a lot of taxi drivers mention this, that I
think it's a law that taxi cabs can't let a
passenger out on the left side. Like, if they're
in the middle of the street, or the person in the
back next to the curb, you know, they need to get
out curbside for safety.

That actually, I've never heard of any
instances where a rideshare driver has been cited
for that, issued a ticket. I see it a lot. It's
very unsafe.

So I will say that's a good example to bring forth to say that. And you know, I'm speaking for myself. You know, because I also when I drop people off, I'm like hey no. You can't get out on that side, for safety.

But, I just want to make it perfectly clear that we as rideshare drivers, we face not the same type of, you know, penalties or, you know, the rules are a little different.

But we -- but they do, and maybe the Director can speak to that, they have issued citations to rideshare drivers. And we're subject to following laws just as, you know, any for-hire vehicle operator.

MR. DAGNEW: Well, in my testimony I have mentioned about leveling the playing field. Level the playing field for both of our, for taxi and for share riding.

Here's an example. As example, maybe the gentleman can help me. He's from share riding.
The District cab drivers cannot go across the board and pick up passengers where they're from Virginia or Maryland. The same goes for Virginia and Maryland.

They can't come and pick up passenger unless they have a call when they in fact are on their perspective jurisdiction. I am not against Uber picking up or Lyft picking up a fair from Washington. I'm not.

They have to have a District tag is what I'm asking. I can't go to Virginia and pick up. So why is Uber in Virginia, Maryland, Chicago, Dallas, Boston, all kinds of tags are coming to pick up a fair from D.C.?

Is it a fair playing field? This what I'm asking. Everybody can come. West Virginia. I have a Cadillac and can show you pictures.

All kinds of tags are in Washington sitting around pickup up passengers. Do you know how much traffic is in Washington in recent years?

Have you ever followed up with traffic
in Washington? It's all because more then half
of the street is occupied by Uber, or Lyft or
somebody else.

So there is -- what I'm asking is
level the playing field. Just level the playing
field. That's what I'm asking.

MEMBER ARVANITES: Yes. I have a
couple thoughts for you. Just one thing on the
disparity of tickets.

You know, to be perfectly honest, I'm
not familiar with all the regulations for the
taxi cab driers. But I know that people who work
on our platform are subject to, you know, all of
the laws that most people are.

And so, if they are doing something
illegal and they get ticketed, you know, that's
sort of like the decision of the hack inspector
or the cop on the beat that would be doing that.

I do know that there are some
instances where our drivers are not allowed, our
driver partners. For example, I was working with
the Department of Transportation on some things,
and I know that they have certain taxi cab stands
where like, we'll get ticketed if we park there.

Or we have our driver partners wait
there. But -- because we're just now allowed.
Whereas, I think you would be.

To your point around -- so I guess
just to reinforce that. Like, we're subject to
all the laws that a citizen, partners are subject
to.

And then there's some places we're not
allowed where you guys are able to go. To your
point around having to go circle and be partnered
around Union Station, I think the big difference
there is that we won't dispatch a driver partner
to Union Station until there's a ride for them.

So there's just the way that we pool
and queue the demand is, I think, fundamentally
different because of the digital situation.
Like, we wouldn't have somebody wait outside
there for 45 minutes, because they just won't go
until someone requested a ride.

So, I think that's part of why you
might end up sitting there for a while. Whereas that wouldn't happen to -- or it's less likely to happen to somebody on the Uber/Lyft platform.

And then for the question around the tags. I can only tell you what I know. But, I know that we're, you know, very strict regulations.

We can't have people on our platform that don't have a tag from Maryland, Virginia or the District of Columbia. So --

MR. DAGNEW: You don't?

MEMBER ARVANITES: Yes. That's not something that we can do. We can't operate -- we can't allow any driver partner on our platform that doesn't have a Maryland, District of Columbia, or Virginia tag.

And if we do, and we get caught, like that's a really bad problem for us. So, I don't know what information you have.

But I can tell you from my perspective as an operator of one of these businesses, and I don't know why it would be any different for Uber
or Lyft. I think they're subject to the same
regulations that we are.

So, if somebody is doing that, that is
-- it's certainly not legal. And if that was
something that they were to be caught for, I know
that I would get in a lot of trouble for that.

MR. DAGNEW: Okay.

MEMBER THOMAS: And let me raise one
more quick point about perhaps what you might see
with out of state vehicles. I can't qualify
this.

But, I know that Uber -- I know that
Lyft and Uber both have rental vehicle programs.
All of the Lyft vehicles are registered in
Virginia or Maryland, depending on how they're --
you know, what driver.

But, I have seen Uber uses, I think,
Enterprise. And so with Enterprise or Hertz,
keep in mind that vehicles that are rented
through those companies, I mean, you've seen
them, that they -- I saw one the other day that
had New Jersey plates.
So, they get these vehicles -- there's a fleet of vehicles. And it's based -- they assign them based on availability.

And so, it's not guaranteed that a rental vehicle is always going to have a D.C., Maryland, or Virginia plate. But, if that vehicle, if Uber has an agreement to be able to rent those vehicles out and operate, those out of state plates, from my understanding, it is -- I mean, it's okay. Because it's part of the -- they have that agreement.

But, if I had my personal vehicle, and it was New Jersey plates, I couldn't operate. So, I wanted to make that distinction.

MR. DAGNEW: That was -- oh wait, go ahead.

MEMBER SCHAEFFER: Thank you. I just wanted to chime in on the app. You asked about the app.

And I just want you to help me let drivers know that it is working now. There are trips on it daily.
Starting Monday, the 19th, it just passed, the vehicle on demand grant went in effect. And there are going to be 57 thousand dollars worth of trips on the app where agencies in the District are riding daily under contract.

They can get the app downloaded at the company. Anybody who wants to come by Benning Road, it's on two locations showing how to use it.

There's people that will help you download it on your device. There's only about 24 hundred drivers who have it downloaded thus far. And no more then 350 at any time have been logged in.

So, I encourage you to please get the word out to download the app. Monitor the app. Look for trips. Because it is in reality now, working.

So we need to accommodate it. And respond to those trips.

MR. DAGNEW: Oh, great. That's a good you mentioned that.
MEMBER SCHAEFFER: Thank you.

MR. DAGNEW: Is that the same app you talked about in the District?

MEMBER SCHAEFFER: The same app. Yes.

MR. DAGNEW: Okay. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON JOLLY: Dawit, I just wanted to say, continue to do good in organizing the drivers. I see you're starting to organize the drivers.

And over the last few years, I've mentioned, you know, publically that I think drivers should get better organized. So, continue to do so.

And we'll be following up directly with you as well on these issues.

MR. DAGNEW: All right. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON JOLLY: Thank you.

Anybody else? Okay, sir?

SECRETARY MIXON: Thank you and if you could say and state your name for the court reporter, please.

MR. AYELE: My name is Girmachew.
Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and Board Members and
deal colleagues.

My point goes around what Mr. Abebe
said already. I would like to add quite a few
points on it.

It's the same thing. But, I want to
start my part on behalf of many applicants and
drivers.

Today I would like to ask that you
help us develop an action plan that provides
assistance to taxi drivers frustrated by the lack
of opportunity in our industry. We believe that
taxis would always be needed in large cities
throughout the United States.

However, We understand that the amount
of taxis is decreasing due to competition. But,
we rely on the Department of For-Hire Vehicles to
help us figure out where taxis fit in.

We pay 25 cents fee and other various
related fees to this Department as required by
the regulation. We are always there to serve the
public at best.
We expect that if the fees decrease as they are now, not only we, the hard working cab drivers, but also the Department of For-Hire Vehicle will lose tremendous driven what is left.

Wouldn't it be a better idea to find different ways to generate more revenue to this Department as well as come up with a better solution to assist the drivers under this hardship and a descent wage, stay in business, and be productive? Then out of business and a burden on the society?

I would like to thank this Advisory Board for the opportunity given to speak to you about different issues in this -- in our case. Especially about the hardship assistance grant program that many of us applied for.

We sacrificed financially as well as emotionally, and recently submitted a hardship assistance grant application hoping it will bring the best outcome to satisfy our burning demand.

However, we are so saddened when we saw an email with the -- with an adverse news.
Your application is declined.

   Respectfully, that was not what we,  
the hard working applicants, were expecting it to  
be. The objective of the case for our  
application is clearly stated on each of our  
grant applicants.

   And we believe our wisely spent time  
and hardly earned money should not be  
disregarded. We work hard and strive for the  
best dealing with the almost out of hand  
showings.

   We kindly ask for your timely  
assistance, which is so crucial to us. We keep  
striving to serve the public and hope to stay in  
business.

   We feel optimistic that this sad news  
will duly be reconsidered again. And ask for it  
to come up with a better way which would satisfy  
our case and put us in a better position.

   We believe we deserve what we're  
asking for. Last but not least, we would like  
you to set up a meeting date and time to further
discuss about this issue.

We thank you in advance for all your efforts in making this happen.

CHAIRPERSON JOLLY: Thank you. Any questions from my fellow members on the Advisory Board?

DIRECTOR CHRAPPAH: I'm looking at the names on the bottom. I recognize at least Dawit. And I may have missed. Are you Girmachew or Mr. Collatte (phonetic)?

MR. AYELE: Girmachew.

DIRECTOR CHRAPPAH: Girmachew.

MR. AYELE: Third there.

DIRECTOR CHRAPPAH: Okay. Okay, I want to make sure I call you by your name, --

MR. AYELE: Yes, sir.

DIRECTOR CHRAPPAH: Mr. Girmachew.

Thank you for taking the time really to share with us how you feel about a number of different issues.

It's important for us to have that open communication where we hear how you feel
about things. And I think this is a step in the right direction.

Let me clarify a couple of things for the record. And then we'll go into some specifics.

Drivers don't pay 25 cents fee to the Department of For-Hire Vehicles. No driver pays that. That is a fee that riders pay.

For some interesting reason drivers think they pay that fee. No. You don't pay the passenger surcharge. Riders pay that.

When the previous rate structure that was in effect was implemented, drivers actually got an extra 25 cents on top of the flag drop. So drivers are getting 25 cents per trip.

Passengers are paying 25 cents. That goes into the passenger surcharge. So that's something I want to make sure is corrected for the record.

Secondly, the information session held up on the grant was not 4/20. It's 4/21. I received a message from my staff to put the
There's a set of opportunities available for drivers today to make money. One is what Mr. Schaeffer mentioned about the vehicle on demands program.

So yes, business is slow for taxis. But we've invested our grant funding to provide trips to the industry. Vehicle on demand, they are trips out there. Up to 50 thousand dollars in trips.

So, I ask, okay, you want business? That's one revenue stream. It requires you to be logged into the app so that when a passenger request a trip, you are more likely to get it.

Secondly, there is about 50 thousand dollars worth of trips also from the school transportation program. So that is yet another opportunity for people go get business.

There is also about 50 thousand dollars, and these number have to be checked on. Of trips from the non-emergency medical transportation.
So again, drivers will have to make themselves available to leverage these opportunities. Then there is the shared rides program which drivers can participate in once they convert to the digital taxi solution.

So the Department will continue efforts to bring more trips not only to taxis, but into the vehicle for-hire ecosystem in general. But, we need drivers to step up and take advantage of those opportunities.

When it comes to hardship assistance, we evaluate different ways that we can help. We think we're already helping by bringing trips into the industry.

There maybe more creative ways. And we'll make sure that an appointment is scheduled so that we can hear specific ideas that you have so that we can continue to help those who remain committed to providing service.

Is there anything else that you think we should do differently?

MR. AYELE: Well, I was thinking since
this is kind of general meeting, --

DIRECTOR CHRAPPAH: Yes, yes, yes?

MR. AYELE: If there would be a possibility that we can, like I had -- because we requested in my statement, if we could have sort of special time, you know down.

DIRECTOR CHRAPPAH: Okay.

MR. AYELE: Only for our talk that we can go over and discuss and maybe find, you never, never know a better way that we can be assisted. That our hardship instead of becoming not annoyed, you know.

DIRECTOR CHRAPPAH: Okay.

MR. AYELE: Something possible might come up with it if we, you know, possibly have a meeting with you or with your colleagues, you know.

DIRECTOR CHRAPPAH: Let me get --

MR. AYELE: I know -- I know you said the fund is special -- specifically for electric and X,Y,Z, the five things that you mentioned.

But, we -- me and my coworkers, we're
optimistic that there would be a way to go around it. You know, to assist us or to come up with a better outcome to help us.

DIRECTOR CHRAPPAH: Okay.

MR. AYELE: You know, tackle our issue and our question.

DIRECTOR CHRAPPAH: Okay. Well said. I think we can work to get him an appointment. That shouldn't be a problem.

CHAIRPERSON JOLLY: Any other comments? Mr. Girmachew, thank you very much. So, the Director has concurred that we'll set up a meeting.

MR. AYELE: Yes. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON JOLLY: And I do note that you're part of Dawit's group. So, that is good. So I would assume that you all will be speaking also on behalf of about the 65 people that you have that you're representing.

So, thank you very much.

MR. AYELE: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON JOLLY: Thank you. Is
there anybody else?

    (No response)

CHAIRPERSON JOLLY: Any final comments from the Advisory Members?

    (No response)

CHAIRPERSON JOLLY: No? So, I would just wrap up and say that we've -- the quality of the presentations were very good.

    Thank you very much for everybody preparing your written statements. This is very helpful in us understanding exactly what you're presenting.

    There were a couple of requests for meetings. And I think everybody agrees that Mr. Chrappah and myself will work together to set up those meetings.

    And then there are a couple of follow up issues that are in here as well. And I guess if there are no other concerns, you know, I hope everybody feels that what you presented and what you asked, you know, we got it. We heard it. We understand it. And we're going to follow up on
And Dawit, I mean, I know you. I see you all the time. So, you know, I'll make sure that everything you've asked is followed up on.

Just for the record everybody, I drink coffee at a certain 7-Eleven. And he's there every morning. We drink coffee together at the 7-Eleven.

So, if I don't do what he asks me to do, I've got to hear it in the morning for coffee. And that's not a good thing.

But anyway, on that note, this meeting is adjourned. Thank you for coming.

(Whereupon, the above-entitled matter went off the record at 2:29 p.m.)
This is to certify that the foregoing transcript

In the matter of: Council Meeting

Before: DC Dept. of For-Hire Vehicles

Date: 06-22-17

Place: Washington, DC

was duly recorded and accurately transcribed under my direction; further, that said transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings.

[Signature]
Court Reporter