

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

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DEPARTMENT OF FOR-HIRE VEHICLES

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FOR-HIRE VEHICLE ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING

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TUESDAY
DECEMBER 17, 2019

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The Council met in Suite 2032, 2235 Shannon Place, S.E., Washington, D.C., at 10:00 a.m., Linwood Jolly, Chairperson, presiding.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

- LINWOOD JOLLY, Chairperson
- DAWIT DAGNEW, Member
- DAVID DO, Director
- JEFFERY SCHAEFFER, Member
- DOTTI LOVE WADE, Member

STAFF PRESENT:

- CHAU TRAN, Secretary to the Council
- NAKEASHA SANDERS-SMALL, ESQ., General Counsel
- WENDY KLANCHER, Senior Policy Advisor

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P-R-O-C-E-E-D-I-N-G-S

(10:12 a.m.)

CHAIRPERSON JOLLY: Good morning. The time is 10:12. We are at 2235 Shannon Place Southeast, Hearing Room Suite 2032. I'd like to call this meeting to order, and let's start with a moment of silence.

(Moment of silence.)

CHAIRPERSON JOLLY: Thank you. Thank you for being patient with us while we waited for some of our members to get here so we could gavel in.

At this time, we're going to move past roll call and opening remarks. Our fabulous director has a big agenda for his part as you can see, so without further ado, we're going to let our director start with his presentation.

DIRECTOR DO: Good morning everyone. Thank you so much. I appreciate it. So I'm going to first start with our performance oversight hearing, which is going to be on January 15th.

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The hearing starts at 10:00 a.m., and it's front of the Economic Development Committee that's chaired by Councilmember McDuffie. If you would like to testify, please reach out to the committee. I think it's 48 hours in advance, so that you can be put on the agenda.

DFHV is anticipating over 75 written questions from the committee, so we'll be preparing for that. And one of the big things that has come up year over year is the vehicle age limits.

And so I want to make sure that we address this firsthand and that, you know, I've been hearing from commissioners, like Commissioner Jolly and many of the other commissioners and also many of the community members.

And so I'm continuing the vehicle age limit waiver for 2019 for those vehicles that are aging out. And we're going to 275,000 miles. We're looking at the data. The official AI should be released within the coming days.

I think a lot of people are anxious and

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anticipating that decision, so I want to let you know that that's coming out. I'm also tasking and working with Commissioner Jolly to form a community task group to finalize rules for Title 31 to make our rules more, I think, to give you the best information possible when making the decisions for your companies and independent drivers.

And so rules will be in effect sometime this year for public comment and then enacted in the -- sometime in the new year. And so we'll be working on those next calendar year and Chairman Jolly will be convening a community task group to give advice to our department and also the Commission, so I want to thank him for that.

CHAIRPERSON JOLLY: Thank you.

DIRECTOR DO: So we have another exciting pilot. It's called the Union Station Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle pilot. That is working with Transport DC providers to give drivers who take a certain number of wheelchair trips each month the ability to get to the front of the line

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pass.

I think this is a pilot that will help increase the availability of wheelchair accessible vehicles. But that's not the end all, be all. So this is just a part of a wider strategy to make sure that we have options available for our wheelchair accessible communities and also people who use wheelchairs.

But it's also a benefit to our driving community. And what we have seen in the last couple months of utilizing this, that drivers are increase their potential revenue. And also, we have expanded this program from 15 drivers in October to 25 drivers in November and December.

So we're going to continue working with Union Station, our TDC providers to make this a successful program as well as working on other ways to increase wheelchair accessible vehicles for our communities.

So our next update is our Microtransit program. This is a program that is incredibly

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exciting for me, and it's a door to door, curb to curb service anywhere within a zone designated in Northwest and Northeast D.C., mainly in parts of Ward 4 and Wards 5.

And it includes communities that haven't seen as much transit as we would like, including Ivy City, parts of Michigan Park, Union Market, Trinidad. And what it does is it provides people with a first and last mile service seven days a week and it's provided by one of our companies, Transco.

And in just the last six months of our program, we have seen about 566 drivers take about 21,000 rides. And we have been close to about 300 rides a day. And so that's an incredibly exciting program that we continue to see growth in.

And we will continue making investments to make sure that all of our communities have access to safe and accessible modes of transportation.

We also have our VetsRide program, which is an incredible program that started on November 15th, and it's in partnership with the Mayor's

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Office of Veterans Affairs.

And it provides low income veterans with the opportunity to get I think, it's a Via ride to different appointments and services that they need for their daily living. And they are provided four rides a day.

And we've seen tremendous, tremendous excitement about this program. And we're very glad to work with the Mayor's Office and Via to make this program incredible successful.

And there's also a new program that is under DFHV's belt, and that's the -- that's a partnership with the Department of Aging and Community Living for the Med Express Program. And that's a \$1.8 million program annually that is being administered by us in partnership with Yellow Cab.

And it provides our most vulnerable residents, our seniors, the ability to go to their medical appointments in a timely manner. So we're very excited to work with that and to have that under our budget for our fiscal year '20/'21. So this

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year the contract will continue with Yellow Cab.

And then we'll move on to a competitive bidding process in the new year.

And then finally, I'm going to turn it over to our General Counsel to recap our Ward 1 public meeting on October 22nd. That was about a couple months ago, and it was a lively meeting, a meeting that I think had over 10 community members, including many of our taxi independent driving community and also a couple of our users of our programs.

And so I'll turn it over to Nakeasha to give us an update.

GENERAL COUNSEL SANDERS-SMALL: Good morning everyone. As the Director said, it was a lively meeting in the evening. It was held at Carlos Rosario International School, and it was -- we would characterize it as very successful considering we were competing with not only heavy rain but also with the World Series that night.

The Director was there as was

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Commissioner Dottie Wade, other members of DFHV, members for the For Hire Advisory, For Hire drivers as well as community members. And our special guest that evening was Ward 1 Councilmember Brianne Nadeau.

We had a lively discussion where community members expressed their wishes for the for hire industry and the Director engaged with them. And one of those topics was increasing or addressing the vehicle age parity, which as the director just mentioned, we will be issuing an AI to address that. So this was another example of DFHV working with the community and their concerns.

Other concerns that were raised that the agency is currently considering and exploring are certain requirements placed on taxi drivers, as well as the best shared use of public space for private and public rideshare. So those are all items that were discussed and the agency is considering and looking forward to making some decisions based on what's best for all users of the for hire industry.

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DIRECTOR DO: Is there anything you want to add, Dottie?

MEMBER LOVE-WADE: Good morning. Just that the councilmember was as concerned as we are about the bottleneck traffic up in front of DC USA at 14th and Irving. A big group is continuing to idle there, both taxis as well as our rideshare vehicles. This creates a problem up there, so we're still working with DDOT and MPD to help mitigate that problem. And we're also encouraging our drivers to please not idle there.

It's one of the most dangerous spots in the city. It has more foot traffic than any intersection in the city because of that active metro system there and what they call the barnes cross where the traffic stops and pedestrians will cross in all directions.

That creates an additional bottleneck.

So if you have taxis idling there waiting for people to come out USA DC shopping center and then you have the buses because it's an active bus stop there.

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You have the emergency vehicles because they was a fire station two blocks up, so it really creates a really dangerous situation for bicyclists who can't get by because our vehicles are idling in their lane.

They pull over into the bike lane to get out of the traffic lane, which forces the bikes to have to veer into the traffic lane. And there's been several near misses and a lot of complaints about that one spot. So that was one of the things that gave concern and that we are addressing.

DIRECTOR DO: All right. Thanks so much, Dottie. And yes, that's an area at 14th and Irving that we continue to look out and that our Chief of Enforcement is here and is continuing to pay attention to that spot of our city.

It has continued to be a problem, and we'll continue making sure that the roadways are safe for every single user. So thank you so much for that.

And my final update is I want to

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introduce our new Senior Policy Advisor, Wendy Klancher. She is someone who I've worked with in my previous role as the Director of the Mayor's Office on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs as I sat on the Access for All Committee.

And she has been at MW COG, and she's been a stalwart community member that has worked with every single member within the taxi industry, including Jeff and Roy and a couple of the other TDC providers. So at this time, I wanted to introduce you so that you can introduce yourselves to our community.

MS. KLANCHER: Okay. Thank you. I'll use the mic here. Can you all hear me? Just good morning, and I've very happy to be here at DFHV. I spent 20 years at the council of governments, as Director Do said, and I led the program called Roll DC, which got the first 20 wheelchair accessible cabs to D.C. in the mid-2000s, working with the previous iteration of this agency, DCTC. Taxis and transportation are my absolute loves, so I'm just

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really happy to be here. And thank you. The staff has been so welcoming to me.

CHAIRPERSON JOLLY: Wendy, thank you very much for your membership on this great team.

I spent about an hour and a half with you the other day, and I was very impressed and I know you're going to add to the team that the Director already has and help DFHV continue to tell a better story about what they do in all eight wards. Thank you very much.

At this time, we have one registered speaker, so we'll take the registered speaker first, and that is Mr. Degfae Setegn, Chairman of the UVC.

And then after we take our registered speaker, I will call for anybody who has not registered, who is here who would like to speak.

So Mr. Setegn? The floor is yours. Please, as always, state your name and spell your name for the record and then you can proceed.

MR. SETEGN: Okay. My name is Degfae Setegn, Chairman of UVC. I will be represented by

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our PR person here.

EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT TRAN: Could you spell your name for the record?

MR. SETEGN: D-E-G-F-A-E, last name S-E-T-E-G-N.

MS. GREENWALD: My name is Brooke Greenwald, and I do communications for UVC and they've asked me to speak on their behalf, a couple of things. First, we want to start out by thanking everyone for their time and their help and for letting us have this opportunity to speak with you.

We're very passionate about D.C. We're very passionate about transportation, and we're very passionate about being a big partner with D.C.

And to that end, I think one of the things we'd like to learn a little bit more about from you is how you define success within certain programs, being T2R and Transport DC as a couple of those.

And then I think one of the others things that we want to address is one of our programs, which is Easy Rider.

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And Easy Rider is a proprietary system that we've got that competes with the non-professional drivers, like an Uber or a Lyft or someone else where we've got 2,500 cars on the road at any time in D.C. where passengers can see where we are, can find us, can set an appointment in advance, can pay in the cab, can have access to our services any time and that includes T2R and Transport DC.

So I think one of the things we would like to do is grow in our partnership with D.C. in all these different forms. I know I heard you speak a little bit about some of the other initiatives with Union Station and other things.

We have a large number of wheelchair accessible vehicles, and one of the things I think that I'd like to add to all of this is that because someone has a wheelchair and needs special support doesn't mean that they want to be treated differently than anyone else.

And I think part of what factors into

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all of this and why we do all of this is not just because we want to help them but because we want to help them feel the same as everyone.

And I think that's something that's a real core faction of ADA. And I know it's something that's a core faction or a core belief of the Mayor, and I'm sure, you know, this council and everyone else.

So I think that's something really important to address. And to that end, we spend a significant amount of time training our drivers in very different types of things, not just the rules and the regulations and how to be a good ambassador, not just for UVC but also for the District of Columbia.

Our drivers, as you know, are all professional drivers. They're not working somewhere else and then driving a shift because they feel like making a little more money.

I think one of the other things that we're very proud of is we do ongoing training, and

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we go a lot further with our training and how we do things that other companies because we really believe in the way a person feels about themselves and the way we should feel about them.

To us, our passengers are our guests.

They are guests of this city. They are guests of our company, and they are guests of our drivers.

And to that end, I think as we look at rules and as we look at changes and we look at cabs and we look at different things, I think it's very important to think about that because we are the representative city of the entire United States.

And I think that it's very important for us to go further beyond anywhere else to demonstrate exactly how things should be. And I know Director Do, you're doing that with a lot of your efforts, and so is everyone else.

I think that's really the core part of what we want to talk about today, and I think we'd like to see Transport DC and some of these other things grow. And we'd like to help you do it. So

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we'd like some advice from you on how to get there and what we can do to help make it even more successful than it is.

CHAIRPERSON JOLLY: So thank you very much, and welcome to UVC.

MS. GREENWALD: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON JOLLY: Let me start with a question, and then I'll ask the other advisors. And then we'll have the director share a follow up for you. You mentioned you have wheelchair accessible vehicles.

So I've heard varying opinions about uses. So how many wheelchair accessible vehicles do you have in your fleet at UVC, and what do --

MS. GREENWALD: I'm going to defer this one.

CHAIRPERSON JOLLY: That's fine. And what's the utilization rate?

MR. SETEGN: Currently, UVC owns from its fleets, 13, and then we have about 100 with the other vehicles.

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CHAIRPERSON JOLLY: What's the utilization rate? Are people -- are they used? I mean I hear so many different versions of the cars sitting and nobody wants to drive them to we can't find business. I mean tell me what's your use rate?

MR. SETEGN: Currently, we have two as Transport DC providers. UVC, as you can understand, we don't have Transport DC service support with all those number vehicles. We don't have that service.

We have a new fledged dispatch, and we have those vehicles and the trained people. But we don't have a single Transport DC, and the utilization is most of the vehicles are served with other fleet, Transport DC providers.

And there is a complaint where there is a complaint where there is a disparity between those drivers as well. And many of our vehicles are new sitting, and we are not using that.

CHAIRPERSON JOLLY: Okay. So let me start with Member Wade, and then we'll come on down

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if you have questions on anything you've heard today.

MEMBER LOVE-WADE: I don't. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON JOLLY: Okay. Schaeffer?
Dagnew?

MEMBER DAGNEW: Yes. I'm glad to just mention about the not participating on Transport DC. Why exactly are not participating with Transport DC? Did you ask the government? Have you applied for Transport DC?

MR. SETEGN: Yes.

MS. GREENWALD: We applied and received it, but we're not getting traction from it.

MEMBER DAGNEW: Again, what happened? You applied for it and what happened?

MR. SETEGN: Now because for the last five years we applied and participate in Transport DC. Never given any single trips to us and this is the only time they promised us they will us a trip, but no, no, it hasn't happened yet.

MEMBER DAGNEW: Correct me if I'm wrong.

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You have been granted money to upgrade your system. And you were up and running since the last year. And it was a percentage you were mentioning to me last time, 50 percent of experience was required to participate in these government subsidized programs for Transport DC. Is there any criteria that you have to take?

MR. SETEGN: I don't think you, know. According to the requirements, we filled that. We filled all the requirement. I consulted the RFA, and I don't know why we are not given the chance, you know, to participate.

DIRECTOR DO: All right. Thank you so much. I really appreciate the opportunity to answer the questions about Transport DC. I want to first congratulate UVC for getting an award this year.

I think this is a big milestone for them, but one of the big concerns for our organization is to make sure that when we start providing you trips that the trips are reliable, efficient and

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timely.

So we've been working on the background with Easy Rider and Easy Meter to fulfill that mission. And I think -- and just I think I get updates regularly in a couple weeks or sometime in the new year that we will start pushing rides to the Easy Rider.

UVC is I think incredibly special because we're working on a user interface app with the Easy Rider and Easy Meter team. And I think that it's going to take some time to get it perfect.

And I think my team continues to work with the development team and your team to make sure that when we get online that all the trips are within our criteria. You know, we have issues in the entire universe of Transport DC. So I don't want to start a new program or a new subset of the program and all and not be able to be responsive to our most needy residents for this program.

And so, you know, again, it's going to take a little bit of time.

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And we're going to continue working together with Michael Tietjen and Jerry Kasunic to make this happen as soon as possible. It is on my radar on a weekly basis to make this happen, and we're getting close, you know.

Yes, you have a -- you've done everything that we've asked, implemented a dispatch system, implemented the backseat consoles. And you know, we're close.

And it's just going to take a little bit more time to get across the finish line. But you will get rides. Don't expect, and I can't promise you. I'm going to set expectations and be very honest.

Don't expect thousands of rides in your first month. We need to slow roll this to make sure that this program is as successful as I want it to be. So that's where I'm at right now.

MR. SETEGN: Thank you.

MS. GREENWALD: Well, I was just going to say in the meantime we've got these 13 vehicles

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that are ready to roll. Maybe they could be allocated to the Union Station program or something else, at least in the short-term, until Transport DC is ready to go because UVC has made the investment.

The drivers have made the investment. They understand all, you know, sides of the need. Maybe this is an opportunity to grow together.

DIRECTOR DO: I think we can talk offline with the program team about that.

MS. GREENWALD: Okay.

DIRECTOR DO: I don't want to get ahead of our program team in how we implement the rules that is fair for everybody, but definitely we'll take a look. Thank you.

MS. GREENWALD: Thank you very much.

MR. SETEGN: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON JOLLY: Thank you. Is there anyone else here that did not register that would like to speak for a minute or two? Let's see. I don't see anybody. So we'll go to final

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announcements.

Advisors, does anyone else have any input, Jeff, Dottie? I'll finally say that the record does, is always sometimes the Department of For Hire Vehicles doesn't give a lot of positive feedback, but I want to provide some positive feedback.

I have spoken to the many drivers, independent drivers, in the last month or two and the enforcement team is doing an excellent job of partnering with the industry. And I'm looking at the chief right now and really educating drivers instead of penalizing however drivers to realize there are some issues out there.

And I've met with the enforcement team, and I've seen them for myself. But I think the environment has changed a lot under your leadership, and I appreciate that. And it is resonating in the community. And hopefully that work will come back to you and to your team here.

I think I even talked to Degfae about

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this as well. Degfae, I think you've even seen some positive encouragement with enforcement, yes, that you hear from your drivers. Yes, thank you. I knew you were one of the people I checked in with.

So that being said, I'm excited about our task force on aging of vehicles. I know the industry comes at it in a variety of different ways, but my goal and as I talk with the director, is to just find a couple things that we all agree on in terms of aging vehicles, particularly in the conversation we have with the industry.

I'm going to rely heavily on Advisor Dawit because he is an independent driver, and the director was very intentional about insuring that we not only got the fleet owners, but we got input from independent drivers on this topic.

I think some of the data that I started looking at recently is about 600 taxis in January 2020 would go out if nothing was done.

And I think that the director, the Department for For-Hire Vehicles team, you guys are

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very concerned that you don't want to be seen -- we don't want to be seen as not being on the side of ensuring that these business owners, because a lot of them are business owners, lose business or go out of business.

So this conversation is going to be very important in terms of ensuring that we maintain jobs, tax base and all those things for our great city. With that being said, the time is 10:41. There being no more comments, this meeting is adjourned. Thank you.

(Whereupon, the above-entitled matter went off the record at 10:41 a.m.)

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