

DC Taxi Drivers Summit

March 2021 Summary Report

Prepared by Public Engagement Associates for the Department of For-Hire Vehicles (DFHV)

Comments and feedback described in this report are from Summit participants (taxi drivers), not from DFHV.

On March 24, 2021, the Department of For-Hire Vehicles (DFHV) invited all DC licensed taxi drivers to participate in a DC Taxi Drivers Summit. The two-hour, interactive summit was organized to engage more than 180 drivers on issues currently impacting the industry. In particular, it focused on:

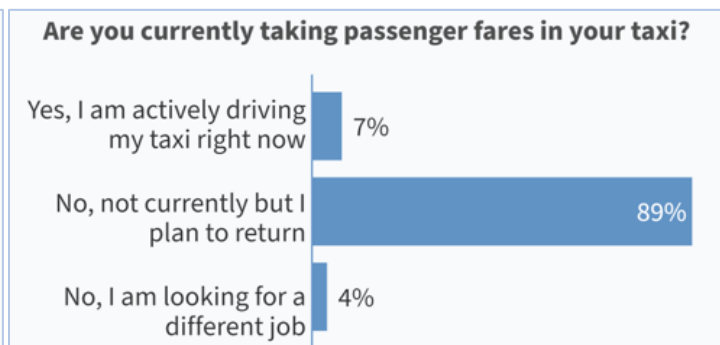
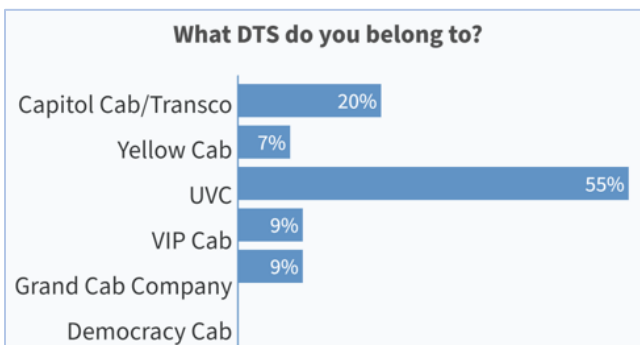
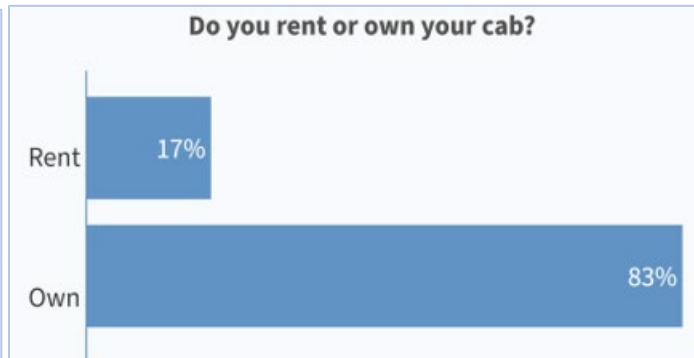
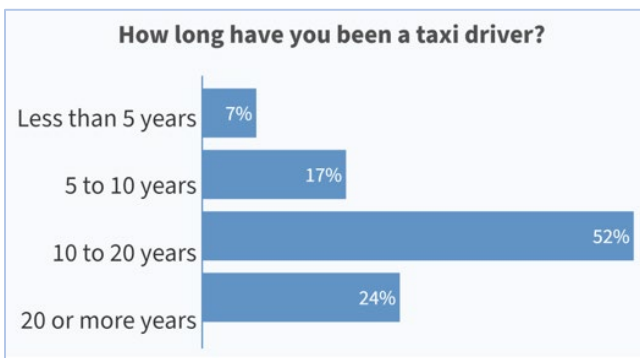
- The current state of the taxi industry and paths to recovery for drivers and the industry
- Obtaining feedback from drivers to help guide DFHV actions in the next few years.
- Hear about vaccinations in the District.



The program featured opening comments from DFHV Director David Do, Deputy Mayor for Operations and Infrastructure Lucinda Babers, and For-Hire Vehicle Advisory Council Chair Linwood Jolly.

The summit facilitator asked a series of polling questions of drivers to help determine clearly who was in attendance and how the pandemic had impacted their own driving. The results can be found below.

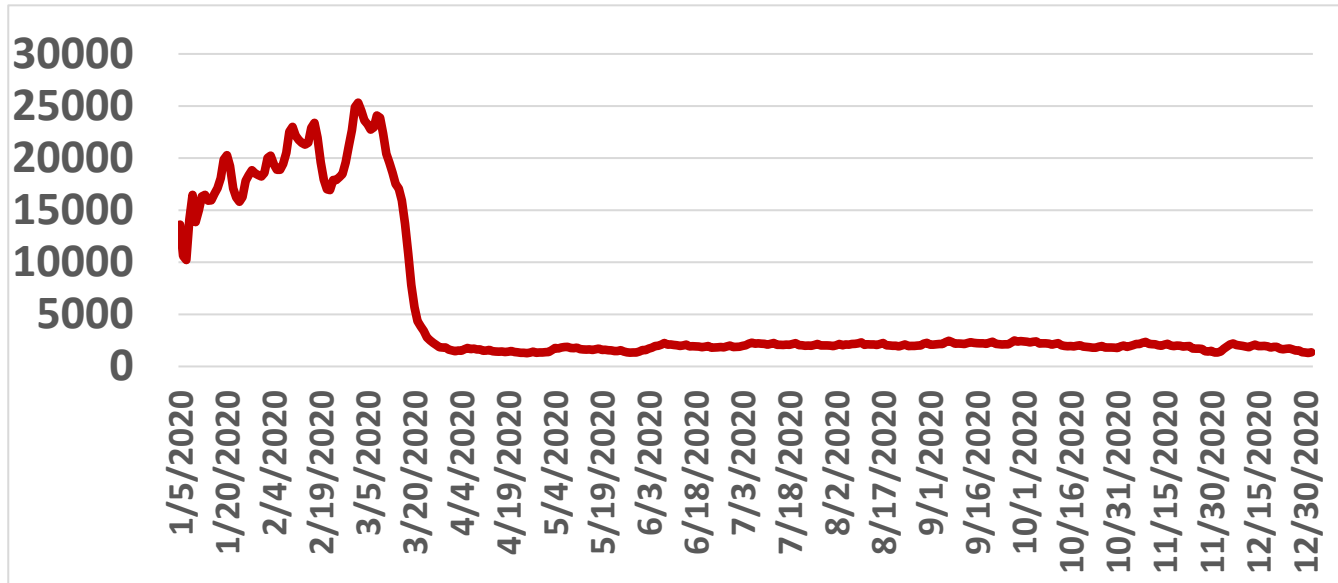
Most drivers attending (76%) have been driving a cab for 10 years or longer and more than 80% own rather than rent their cabs. More than half of those in attendance (52%) use UVC for their digital taxicab solution (DTS) with Capitol Cab/Transco in a distant second (20%). Eighty-nine percent of drivers attending are not currently taking passenger fares, but plan to return during the recovery. Only 7% are currently driving.



Finally, those drivers who are not currently driving were asked for the top two reasons that would make them return, 8% said when Pandemic Unemployment Assistance ends; 34% said “when I am vaccinated,” 30% said “when more businesses are open,” and 28% said “when more people are vaccinated.

To set up discussions with drivers about how the taxi industry can move toward economic recovery, Director Do presented data that demonstrated just how powerfully the pandemic impacted taxi trips during 2020. The chart below provides the stark evidence of that impact.

Taxi Trips in 2020 (Average Daily Trips)



Director Do also recounted the key actions DFHV has taken during the pandemic to assist drivers in surviving the public health crisis and economic downturn. This included:

- Automatically extended the Face IDs, renewals, registrations, and delayed fees.
- Extended the vehicle age limit permanently from 8 to 10 years.
- Clarified that taxi vehicles can deliver food and packages to provide more opportunities for drivers.
- Distributed 1,000 free safety barriers to taxi drivers.
- Conducted a Ride Safe Campaign

After the Director’s presentation, Senior Policy Advisor Wendy Klancher reviewed five significant recovery options for drivers to deliberate on. The five were:

1. Promote e-hailing and move towards a digital dispatch culture rather than a street hail culture. Offer training and create a public awareness campaign.
2. Require independent owner-operators to affiliate and sign-up for dispatch.
3. Allow drivers to use their taxi to take Uber and Lyft trip requests.
4. Allow taxis ordered via dispatch to provide upfront pricing and allow passengers to pre-pay.
5. Promote the use of discounted rates citywide.

ADVANTAGES and DISADVANTAGES for Five Options for Taxi Industry Recovery

In their twenty-plus breakout sessions, drivers were asked to identify the key advantages and disadvantages for DFHV pursuing each of the five options.

OPTION ONE: Promote e-hailing and move towards a digital dispatch culture.

Some Examples

- **ADVANTAGES**
 - Digital Dispatch will allow us to be more competitive.
 - This will allow us to make more money instead of looking for fares.
 - You will know who you are picking up.
 - Public awareness campaign is especially important.
- **DISADVANTAGES**
 - Some people would be uncomfortable using the technologies.
 - How are we going to compete in terms of the fares? Are the prices going to be low to compete with uber?
 - The system must be universal for all drivers so that the work would be evenly distributed.

OPTION TWO: Require independent owner-operators to affiliate and sign- up for dispatch.

Some Examples

- **ADVANTAGES:**
 - Good to be affiliated and have access to dispatch.
 - Most taxis are already affiliated
 - Technology/enhancements are needed.
 - There should be uniformity. A uniform message and uniform system. Independent owner-operators should be incorporated into one system.
- **DISADVANTAGES:**
 - It should not be mandatory. Driver should have choice.
 - There are already too many existing DFHV/Cab Company requirements.
 - Taxi Drivers maintain their own vehicle and maintenance.
 - The public does not want or fully understand what the impact to them as consumers may be.
 - Riders/ Drivers must pay for the dispatch service.

OPTION THREE: Allow drivers to use their taxi to take Uber and Lyft trip requests.

Some Examples

- **ADVANTAGES**
 - Increased Opportunities & More Income
 - It is the future of the business.
- **DISADVANTAGES**
 - Concerns of difference in pricing structure

OPTION FOUR: Allow dispatch to provide upfront pricing & passenger pre-pay.

Some Examples

- **ADVANTAGES:**
 - Increased ridership
 - No surprises with fares
 - Passengers do not have to carry cash.
 - Ensure drivers get paid by rider.
- **DISADVANTAGES:**
 - Drivers would need more training to understand process and the collection of fees.
 - Public may not have credit card.
 - Revenue lost when there is traffic and/or long-distance ride request.
 - General concern about decreases in revenue.

OPTION FIVE: Promote the use of discounted rates citywide.

Some Examples

- **ADVANTAGES**
 - This will allow us to be competitive. Unfair for taxi drivers to have standard fees when Uber and Lyft fares can change based on the time of day and weather.
 - It is good when you are busy.
 - Will help to promote the use of taxis, as our business has declined.

- **DISADVANTAGES**

- This is not a good idea it could impact my income
Why: It may increase maintenance costs.

- It will be disadvantage for the drivers. Why: The discount will be taken from the driver's payout.
- This is not Walmart; this is a cab service. You do not need cab drivers to have discounts when someone will have a lower price.

Drivers were also asked to identify additional options for industry recovery. Although they brainstormed dozens of ideas, there were six repeated frequently in the conversations.

Themes – Other Ideas for Industry Recovery:

1. Revisit Taxi Vehicle Limitation Allowance (increase amount of years, mileage)
2. Increase Vaccinations/Testing and accelerate getting to "New Normal"
3. Promote street hailing.
4. Reduce regulations for drivers.
5. Allow for drivers/dispatcher extend and decide on whether to discount if business is slow.
6. Ensure equity amongst all "Trip Providers: RideShares and Taxis Alike. The city needs to limit the number of vehicles in the city. Not allow drivers from other states like Delaware to drive in DC.
7. Reduce Fees & offer a "Pandemic Allowance and Acknowledgement of Driver Fees, Registrations, Renewals etc.," from DFHV.

Barriers in Moving to E-Hail.

Finally, drivers were asked to identify what challenges they experience in the migration to e-hailing. Here are some examples of the challenges.

- Need Training - Lack of knowledge and understanding of e-hail process and how it will work.
- Fear of regulation of pricing & higher prices of taxis
- Lack adequate app production to be successful.
- Industry push back, industry fear of advancement and reluctance to accept assistance from government.
- Prefer Street Hailing
- Lack of rider accessibility to phones/ apps.
- Drivers believe street hails will increase eventually.

However, some drivers indicated that they preferred e-hail because it is easier for riders and is clearly the wave of the future.

Voting for the Top Two Options to Pursue

At the end of the meeting, DFHV asked which two of the five options presented did drivers believe were the most important to focus on in the coming year.

By far, “promote e-hailing/digital dispatch culture” had the highest vote count at 48%. “Allow drivers to take Uber and Lyft requests” was a distant, second top vote-getter at 28%.

“Requiring Independent Owner Operators to affiliate and sign up for dispatch” received 10%; “discounted rates” received 8% and “Upfront pricing and pre-payment” received 6%.

Vaccination Presentation

Near the end of the meeting, the Medical Director from DC Health Care Finance, Dr. Pamela Riley, presented on Covid-19 Vaccine Eligibility and then fielded numerous questions from drivers. Afterward, drivers were asked whether they had enough information to seek out a vaccine appointment and 85% said yes, with 9% not sure, and 6% saying no.