

TAXIS AND ACCESSIBLE SERVICES DIVISION

Monthly Report

March, 2009

TAXIS

❖ Town Hall Meetings

The Director conducted Taxi Town Hall Meetings on March 10 (Proposition K reform; Permit Applications & Eligibility regulations) March 18 (Dispatch Service permit requirements; Proposition K reform). The meeting of March 24 was cancelled as it conflicted with the SFMTA Board of Directors' Policy Advisory and Governance Committee meeting. The Town Hall meetings have been well attended in the 1 South Van Ness 2nd Floor Atrium, which was arranged to provide seating capacity for 90 people. The debate has been lively but respectful and very productive.

❖ SFPD

The Director has been meeting frequently with the Police Department on the following topics:

- Configuration and staffing of the SFPD Taxi Detail
- Terms of the SFPD-SFMTA MOU
- Effective use of work order for enforcement
- Enforcement timing and strategies
- Follow up from FBI investigation of Taxi Detail

Planning efforts with the SFPD have been disrupted by the FBI's investigation of the Taxi Detail. The removal of one of the two assigned officers has overburdened the remaining officer, Sgt. Reynolds, and SFMTA has encouraged SFPD to re-assign at least one more officer to fill the vacancy. DTAS hopes to begin providing new driver training and taking new driver applications as soon as possible in order to be able to use the SFPD's uniformed officers for critical enforcement efforts. Until then, Sgt. Reynolds' time will be almost completely consumed with driver training and application processing activities. The Director explored the possibility of a moratorium on new driver applications until the SFMTA could take over those administrative functions, but the industry strongly objected to any reduction in the flow of new drivers.

DTAS staff is developing plans for taking over the new driver application and training process. The Director has sent out a request for information to the industry requesting suggestions about the qualifications for trainers that should be included in an RFQ to hire as-needed trainers for new drivers. The response received will form the basis for a Request for Qualifications to be issued to identify trainers who can be hired on an as-needed basis.

Another challenge that has resulted from the FBI investigation is the need to re-check drivers' qualifications for drivers' permits, in light of the allegation that some drivers may not have had to meet regulatory requirements for their permits. The first pass in that process is to check drivers' license status for 7500 active driver permit holders. DTAS looked into the possibility of calling all drivers in with their DMV records in order to confirm the validity of licenses. However, given the number of drivers involved, the location and staffing of such an effort became problematic. Accordingly, the Director requested the Chief of Police to look into confirming drivers' license status with SFPD resources.

The Police Department has restructured the Taxi Detail over the DTAS Director's objections, reassigning the unit from its administrative Permits Division to Field Operations. The SFPD promises that "enforcement will increase 50% at 10% less cost to the SFMTA", but no analysis has been offered to support those projections. The SFPD has drafted a transition plan for the Taxi Detail to go from administration to enforcement, but has not shared that document with SFMTA. It appears that there will be a struggle to ensure that DTAS is able to monitor appropriate use of the funds. The Director is currently working on SFPD MOU provisions that will be protective of the SFMTA's interest in monitoring the appropriate use of SFMTA fund for taxi enforcement purposes.

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Monthly Report

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❖ Other Meetings

The Director continues to meet with industry representatives. This month meetings were held with the owner of Black and White Checker and with the owner and managers of Luxor.

The Director also made a presentation to the Citizens' Advisory Council pursuant to a request from that body for more background information on the taxi industry.

❖ Staffing and Facilities

On March 12, 2009, the Taxis and Accessible Services Division had their first all-staff meeting. It was the first time everyone had met each other, and we went around the room to describe the work that each person does. There was a lot of common ground between the two subject matter areas, especially overlapping interests in the debit card project.

The Discount ID staff was also very helpful in thinking through options for receiving materials from the taxi industry, which continues to be present logistical challenges, including high volume filing seasons and security at reception areas of 1 South Van Ness.

The staff will remain separated until early June, when the Taxi staff will move over from 25 Van Ness. The Accessible Services section will move to the 7th floor at the end of March.

The need for security measures at the 7th floor reception area was made apparent by a visitor who is on the Taxi Commission staff's list of people who are not allowed to enter Taxi Commission offices for safety reasons. Security has reviewed the silent panic alarms and procedures at the 3rd and 7th floor reception areas so that reception staff is prepared for any similar incidents in the future.

❖ Website

Information about Taxi Town Hall Meetings has been on the SFMTA website, with meeting dates and topics, and downloadable versions of the regulations to be discussed at each meeting posted at least 72 hours in advance of the meeting. The taxi pages of the SFMTA website feature a page with information that is useful to taxi customers, and another page specifically addressed to the industry with information useful to taxi drivers such as parking and traffic information, health care resources and policies, rules and regulations applicable to the industry. There are also links to the former Taxi Commission's site to provide access to archival material.

There are two email addresses on the website for use by the industry and the public to send emails to DTAS' attention. To date, seven emails have come into the industry site and have been answered. Two emails have been received and answered through the taxi customer email address.

DTAS is working with the IT team to create survey forms for website visitors that will download survey information provided into an Access database. Staff is currently designing the survey forms in consultation with the IT team.

❖ Databases

DTAS has met with PRWT and the SFMTA IT team to discuss development of databases. Currently all taxi industry information resides in between the Treasurer's Rhumba system, to which the DTAS staff does not have access, and the SFPD's ancient Foxpro system. The Taxi Commission staff had developed a very basic, interim Microsoft Access solution with the help of the Department of Technology, but additional functionality is needed as the DTAS undertakes the new function of processing permit payments and new driver applications. It is also critical to be able to track disciplinary history of permittees, a function that is not provided by any of the existing solutions. Accordingly, DTAS is meeting with PRWT and the IT team to look into conversion of PRWT's existing Residential Permit program into a database that would work for DTAS, or, in the alternative, purchase of an off-the-shelf software solution.

TAXIS AND ACCESSIBLE SERVICES DIVISION

Monthly Report

March, 2009

❖ Regulations

DTAS prepared additional regulations for consideration by the SFMTA Board at its meeting of April 7. These regulations would:

- Simplify administrative procedures for a request for a driver to change a color scheme, a request for a color scheme to transfer ownership or relocate, or a request for an alternative parking space for a taxicab vehicle by providing that they need not go to the SFMTA Board of Directors for resolution;
- Improve hearing procedures that were adopted by the SFMTA Board on February 3, 2009;
- Prohibit SFMTA employees from receiving any taxi permit issued by the SFMTA;
- Prohibit color schemes from charging new driver applicants for letters of employment;
- Delay implementation of drug testing requirements until the SFMTA Board adopts a drug testing plan; and
- Allow the SFMTA to define all training requirements for new drivers.

Additional regulations will be the subject of public meetings in the Second Floor Atrium of 1 South Van Ness in accordance with the following schedule, and the text of regulations to be considered at each meeting will be posted at least 72 hours in advance next to the meeting notice on the SFMTA website.

❖ Prop K reform

The Taxi Town Hall Meeting schedule also includes dates and times for discussion of Prop K reform issues. DTAS has posted a Request for Information to solicit ideas and proposals for Prop K reform. The deadline for submitting materials is May 1, 2009. After that date the proposals will be compiled, analyzed and discussed in public meetings. DTAS will summarize the results of that discussion and analysis and present it to the SFMTA Board for consideration.

❖ Next Taxi Priorities

The top priorities for taxi side of DTAS in the coming month are:

1. Implement drivers' license check procedure with SFPD.
2. Increase regular coordination with the taxi enforcement staff at the Airport.
3. Develop a written enforcement plan with the SFPD for illegal limousines.
4. Prepare a plan to receive new driver applications and permit fees.
5. Continuing discussions with industry about regulations and preparing regulations for presentation to the SFMTA Board.
6. Continue developing Proposition K reform proposals

Accessible Services

❖ Paratransit Debit Card

The soft launch of the pilot debit card program is underway. Currently, DeSoto, National and Yellow are participating in the pilot. Luxor is anticipated to join the pilot in the coming weeks, once their existing software has been modified and passed final acceptance testing. The first successful debit card transaction was recorded last week on a Yellow ramp taxi. The pilot is expected to last 60 days. The project team is working together to analyze the pilot implementation and recommend any needed changes to the program for full implementation.

TAXIS AND ACCESSIBLE SERVICES DIVISION

Monthly Report

March, 2009

❖ Paratransit Van Procurement

Forty new paratransit vehicles have been procured by the SFMTA and 35 are currently deployed in the SF Paratransit program. The remaining five vehicles have been delivered and accepted by the SFMTA, and will be deployed in the next week. Once these last five vehicles are in service, there will be a total of 60 city-owned vehicles deployed in the SF Paratransit fleet.

❖ SF Shopping Shuttle

Implementation planning is on-going. Accessible Services staff is conducting outreach in targeted neighborhoods (Bayview Hunters Point, Visitation Valley, Tenderloin/ South of Market and OMI). A survey instrument has been developed and distributed to potential Shopping Shuttle participants. The survey response has been strong, and once the surveys have been analyzed, work will begin on the scope of work for the competitive procurement of Shopping Shuttle providers.

It appears that the program will be funded by the Lifeline Transportation grant and the New Freedom grant at recommended levels despite the State budget crisis, though final grant award has yet to happen. Annette Williams will make a presentation on Shopping Shuttle at the upcoming APTA Bus and Paratransit Conference in Seattle.

❖ TEP (Transit Effectiveness Project)

Accessible Services staff met with Parsons Brinkerhoff consultants to express Muni Accessibility Advisory Committee (MAAC) concerns regarding accessibility issues within the TEP. Staff highlighted the need to improve amenities at stops and assure service to areas frequently used by elderly/ disabled users. Accessible Services staff has been participating in Pre-TASC meetings regarding new bike lanes and along with TEP staff is working to limit negative impacts to Muni Operations and customers.

❖ Next Bus Push-to-Talk

Push-To-Talk hardware has been installed at all the T-Third platforms. Signage with Braille is being produced and will be affixed to the PTT buttons. Currently the vendor has started work on the sign prototype targeted to be available end of April.

❖ Elevator Status on NextMuni Display

Accessible Services staff is working with SFMTA construction, communications and stationary engineering to increase accuracy of the essential elevator status information on NextMuni displays. Accessible Services staff is also working with 311 to improve communication between station agents and 311 staff to assure that elevator messages are posted as soon as possible. AS Staff working with Chas Belov to produce a web page for www.sfmta.com that aggregates all messages related to elevator access as a one-stop check point. This will be tied to the NextMuni feed.

❖ ADA Observer/Spotter Program

Accessible Services staff is coordinating the transition of the clandestine disabled rider program to the new Muni security contractor, Cypress Security. Accessible Services staff has discussed increased responsibilities for the observers and are looking to bring additional observers into the program.

❖ Light Rail Vehicle Digital Voice Announcement System (DVAS) Program

Accessible Services staff is working with CPUC, Grants and Fleet Engineering to develop cost estimate and identify funding sources and technology to equip LRVs with DVAS audible announcements and text displays. This project is on the list of projects slated to receive stimulus funding as part of the Tier 2 projects.

❖ Balboa Park Station Improvements/SFMTA Customer Access

TAXIS AND ACCESSIBLE SERVICES DIVISION

Monthly Report

March, 2009

Accessible Services staff is working with SFMTA construction/engineering and BART facilities planning staff to improve access to Muni stops from the new Ocean Ave Entrance at the Balboa Park Station. BART is designing the walkway between the two facilities and Lifeline funds may be available to fund this walkway because BART has received "stimulus" funds to meet the shortfall in the original scope, freeing up Lifeline funds for this new walkway to the Muni stops.

❖ Clear Channel Shelter Review

Accessible Services staff reviewed new shelter design and has voiced concerns about the missing back panel behind the wheelchair stationing area which doesn't provide the perception of significant sheltering. Accessible Services staff is working with designers and other SFMTA staff on the push to talk and information signage for the shelter.

❖ Translink Disabled/ Senior Pilot

MTC and Translink presented information about how members can participate in the program pilot to the MAAC. Accessible Services staff is working with Regional Transit Discount (RTC) ID office on updating all MAAC member RTC IDs, transferring monthly MAAC membership funding onto the RTC Translink ID and creating a failsafe for when the RTC Translink transponder is not functional and participants need to show alternative proof of payment.

❖ BART/Muni Senior/Disabled Pilot Pass

Accessible Services staff is working with BART to implement a monthly Senior/Disabled Pilot Pass (SDPP) to allow unlimited BART rides within San Francisco and all regular transit services offered by Muni. The SDPP will assess the functionality, popularity and potential costs of implementing a program similar to the current Adult Fast Pass for qualified Muni consumers who hold either the Regional Transit Connection Discount ID (RTC) Card or another government-issued ID to verify age. The SDPP is expected to be implemented in January 2010.

❖ BART Elevator Rehabilitation on Market Street

The street level elevator at Civic Center BART Station was closed for 3.5 months for head housing rehabilitation and is expected to re-open in April, 2009. Next, the street level elevator at Embarcadero BART Station will close on May 1, 2009, for similar construction work. Accessible Services staff is coordinating with BART staff and Muni operations and marketing staff to ensure customers reach their destinations on Market Street.