

Connecticut Public Transportation Commission
Minutes of September 6, 2012

Legislative Office Building, Hearing Room 1-C
Hartford, Connecticut

Attendance: Members: Kevin Maloney, Richard Schreiner, Mort Katz, Richard Sunderhauf, Yvonne Loteczka, Robert Rodman, Russ St. John, Chris Adams, Alan Sylvestre, Ed McAnaney. **Ex-officio members:** Fred Riese (DEEP). **ConnDOT staff:** Dennis King. **Guests:** Bill Scalzi (Metro Taxi), Marco Henry (Yellow Cab), Kim Dunham, (GHTD), Zeke Zyjeski.

Chairman Kevin Maloney called the meeting to order at 1:32 pm. The minutes of the meeting of August 2 were accepted as written.

Featured Speakers

Marco Henry, President of the Yellow Cab Company, and William Scalzi, President and CEO of Metro Taxi, presented a comprehensive overview of the taxi industry in Connecticut, the regulatory framework within which it operates, and their vision for where they would like to see the industry in five years. Mr. Scalzi mentioned that he has 25 years of experience in the taxi, livery and paratransit fields and serves on the board of the ADA Coalition of Connecticut, among other entities.

Marco Henry discussed the composition of the taxi industry in Connecticut. There are approximately 1,000 taxis operating in the state. Two large companies (Metro Taxi and Yellow Cab) operate over 100 cabs each. There are 11 medium-sized firms with 25-99 cabs. Fifty-three small operators have 2-24 vehicles in service. There are also 23 single cab operators.

Mr. Scalzi mentioned that Connecticut issues certificates to operate, as opposed to the more well-known medallions issued in New York City. These certificates, which, unlike medallions, have no transferable monetary value to them, stipulate the number of taxis an operator can run. An operator may get a certificate from ConnDOT or by acquiring an existing taxi operation which has a certificate.

Characteristics of a modern full service taxi company are:

- High tech dispatching
- Use of GPS
- Smart phone applications
- Texting as an option to reserve a ride
- On-line reservations

Larger, full service taxi companies like Metro Taxi and Yellow Cab have fully manned, 24-hour call centers where every call and every keystroke is recorded. Fully 80-85% of calls for service can be matched up to the nearest taxi by computer. Approximately 15% of calls to the dispatch center require human intervention, mostly related to a pick-up not being made or a drop-off at the wrong location. At times when large demand is anticipated, cabs may be pre-positioned. The Yale-Harvard football game was given as an example of such a time. Metro Taxi would pre-position taxis near the Yale Bowl for such an event.

Credit card usage and other cashless technology transactions are increasing exponentially in the taxi industry. Such technology even accommodates choices for tip levels for the drivers.

Thanks to the use of in-vehicle video cameras, occurrences of assault or robbery of drivers has virtually disappeared. In cases of accidents, the video camera will automatically back-up and save the previous 30 seconds of data. In cases where a driver feels potentially threatened, he can activate the capture of the previous five minutes of video and audio data. Sixty percent of Metro Taxi's vehicles are now camera-equipped. These units run approximately \$1,500 apiece.

Lastly in taxi technology news, phone apps are increasingly used to make taxi reservations. This allows the dispatch center not only to confirm the call but to let the rider know that, for example, cab #123 is coming to pick you up, allowing riders to know which vehicle to look for.

As to the profile of taxi users, fully 80% of them are repeat customers who are often well known to the drivers. They may be from carless families. Typical trips would include trips to work, trips by elderly riders to medical appointments, trips for errands such as grocery shopping or to the laundromat, and trips by college students.

Collectively, taxi companies provide 24/7/365 service to every location in Connecticut. The availability of this service lessens dependence on bus service for late nights and weekends, when bus service is typically less available or unavailable. Scalzi mentioned that taxi service also allows more independence to senior citizens for medical appointments and shopping. The availability of taxi service also leads to a dramatic reduction in DWI accidents.

Discussion next turned to the new MV-1 accessible taxi vehicles recently placed into service by both Metro Taxi and Yellow Cab. The MV-1s of both companies are powered by compressed natural gas (CNG) and, at current prices, enjoy a price savings equivalent to \$1.40 per gallon over similar gasoline vehicles. They also offer reduced maintenance costs (e.g., oil changes every 8,000 miles as

opposed to every 5,000 miles), a reduced carbon footprint, and a healthier environment for the drivers (less harmful emissions). A U.S. Department of Energy grant paid the incremental difference between the cost of the CNG-powered MV-1 vehicles and gasoline-powered MV-1s, that difference being \$8,000-9,000 per vehicle. The DOE subsidy and the fuel savings allowed Metro Taxi and Yellow Cab to purchase 70 MV-1s each. With these vehicles in their fleets, Yellow Cab is now 65% accessible vehicles and Metro Taxi is 44% accessible, far exceeding any national average. Further, elderly riders love these vehicles, Scalzi said, due to ease of entry, both because they are lower than vans and because of their ramps.

On the regulatory front, various facets of Connecticut's taxi industry are under the jurisdiction of ConnDOT, the Bureau of Weights and Measures of the Dept. of Consumer Protection, and the Department of Motor Vehicles. Much of Connecticut's regulatory framework is very old, though some regulations were updated last year. The Certificate of Authority application fee was raised from \$88 to \$2,000, with the fee to transfer or sell a certificate raised from \$88 to \$1,000. It is unlawful to operate a taxi without a Certificate of Authority.

Another change made last year exempts taxicabs from the required use of child restraints systems. With at least four different types of child restraint systems in use and the possibility of multiple children per family, it was physically impossible to carry all of the potentially needed types of child seats straps and hook-ups in a cab. Previously, drivers simply had to risk operating out of compliance with this requirement. Other changes included issuing operating infractions directly to the drivers as opposed to the companies, and setting a minimum fleet size of three vehicles per company, with the existing smaller operators being grandfathered.

Connecticut is one of only six states with uniform statewide regulation of the taxi industry. Connecticut currently mandates a maximum age limit of 10 years for taxi vehicles. Scalzi mentioned some topics he would like to see addressed by future regulation in Connecticut. These include setting uniform service response times within each market which would reflect the size of the service area involved, setting uniform regulatory platforms for all operations (e.g., # of calls taken, # of calls served, pick-up locations, trip data), a requirement that all taxis accept credit cards, and a requirement that all violations on a driver's record follow that driver from company to company. Other changes he would like to see in the industry, not necessarily by regulation, are expanded fleets of CNG and hybrid vehicles, an increase in accessible taxi service to the disabled community, expanded phone apps for easier service, continuous improvements in high tech dispatching, and safer service by trained, professional, informed drivers.

Nationally, taxis are increasingly being used to provide complementary ADA transportation service, especially for late night trips and longer distance trips

which are more difficult for demand response operators to accommodate. Also, non-emergency medical trips are increasingly being provided by taxi service. Another trend is discounted transportation to the disabled community using New Freedoms funding and city or state-administered voucher systems. A program of this sort is being operated in Connecticut in Hartford, New Haven and Bridgeport to provide senior and disabled transportation under the Freedom Rides label. Propriety cards issued by taxi companies in the form of debit cards are increasingly popular and eliminate much of the back office administrative costs of such programs.

Scalzi's vision of the taxi industry in the next five years would include:

- Creating a favorable environment for for-hire taxi service including fair, predictable and uniformly-enforced regulation
- Significantly enhancing the standards of quality and customer service
- Adequate staffing within the ConnDOT taxi division
- Encouraging membership by ConnDOT in the International Association of Transportation Regulators (IATR), and
- Public/private partnerships to compete on a level playing field with public entities for public transportation contracts.

In response to a question about the status of most taxi drivers as contractors rather than employees, Marco Thomas said that there are 2,500-3,000 drivers in Connecticut and that most do well, but a small percentage complain.

Regarding training, drivers typically undergo four days of training, which include some basic maintenance of the vehicle. They then spend a day with another driver. Typically, the company then discounts the vehicle lease rate to the driver for the first month that the driver is in revenue service.

The Department of Motor Vehicles performs safety inspections on taxi vehicles. The Bureau of Weights and Measures checks the taxi fare meters. ConnDOT also inspects the vehicles and their operations. DMV and ConnDOT can perform inspections any time and without notice.

Scalzi mentioned that Metro Taxi performs dispatching for some other taxi companies on a contract basis, including for taxi companies as far away as Philadelphia, and also for the accessible cab service in Manhattan.

The new accessible taxis purchased by Yellow Cab and Metro Taxi are MV-1s made by Vehicle Production Group in the old Hummer plant in Indiana. They were designed by the taxi industry exclusively for taxi use. The gasoline version of the MV-1 costs \$39,000 per vehicle while the CNG-powered version costs \$8,000-9,000 more per car.

As a last point, Scalzi discussed some specific areas where taxis are providing service traditionally operated by others. He said the industry is interested in any area where it can cut costs of service. Houston, Texas is using taxis to provide non-emergency medical transportation which can supplant use of a more expensive ambulance trip. He cited a broken arm as an example of such a trip. ADA complementary transit and Medicaid trips are other areas where taxi use is expanding. Much of this service happens at times that are off-peak for the traditional taxi service and therefore when the taxi companies have spare capacity available.

Comments from the public

None.

Comments from Operating Entities

Rich Sunderhauf reported that repair work on the Waterbury Branch of Metro-North was running behind schedule and that CT Transit would continue to supply bus service along the corridor until rail service is restored.

Chairman's Report

Chairman Maloney mentioned that nine Connecticut cities were awarded a total of \$20,000,000 in Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality funding from the Federal Highway Administration. Replacements and upgrades of downtown traffic signals and signal systems were funded in Hartford, Waterbury and Norwalk (\$3.0 million each), New Haven (\$2.87 million) and Greenwich (\$2.75 million). Bridgeport will receive \$1.6 million to create a city-wide bicycle network and a "Bike Share" program. Norwich received \$2.08 million to construct two CNG refueling stations and to purchase alternative fueled vehicles. Glastonbury received \$1.6 million for an intersection realignment. Lastly, Plymouth received \$86,524 to replace five municipal vehicles with hybrid electric vehicles.

Chairman Maloney also reported that he had a 90 minute meeting with Commissioner Redeker last month. He asked the Commissioner how the CPTC can better serve the department. Redeker said he would like the Commission to help ConnDOT in its outreach function. Kevin in turn asked the CPTC members for their input on how the Commission can improve its outreach to the public.

Old Business

Fred Riese reported that the demolition of the abandoned SNET building at the Waterbury train station is scheduled to occur before the end of the year. The removal of this building was called for by many speakers at the Commission's Sept. 2010 public hearing in Waterbury and was recommended in the Commission's 2010 Annual Report. The presence and location of the SNET building blocks the view of

the station parking lot from Meadow Street and contributes to a feeling of a lack of security and safety at the station.

Mort Katz reported the death of long-time CPTC member and vice chairman Frank Partridge on August 28, 2012. Frank had served as the bus labor representative on the Commission from 1983 to 1989 and on its predecessor, the Connecticut Public Transportation Authority, from its creation in 1975 until 1982.

New Business

Mort Katz said he has been avoiding the airlines of late and using Amtrak's ACELA service instead. He would like to see better bus service from the Hartford area to New Haven to improve access to the ACELA service.

Kevin Maloney's recent experience on Metro-North tells him that the new M-8 cars can't come soon enough. On a recent Metro-North trip in heavy rain, a deluge of water came into the car when the train accelerated.

Fred Riese reported that ConnDOT will be holding a public hearing September 20 in Stamford on an environmental impact evaluation (EIE) for a new parking garage at the Stamford Transportation Center to replace the 727-space 1987-vintage garage. The EIE generically discusses the potential impacts of new development at, or within ¼ mile of, Stamford Station to build a minimum of 1,000 new parking spaces combined with transit-oriented development and other uses in a public/private partnership. The comment deadline on the EIE is October 5. ConnDOT has not selected any specific development proposal yet.

The tentative 2013 Commission meeting schedule has been released. It includes five meetings at ConnDOT in Newington, four meetings in New Haven, and three at the Legislative Office Building, plus the Annual Report work session in New Haven.

Lastly, Fred mentioned that the October 4 Commission meeting will be at the Greater Hartford Transit District conference room at Union Station with ConnDOT's Lisa Rivers speaking on the Freedom Rides program, other current programs funded under the New Freedoms Program, and the outlook for these programs under the new federal transportation bill.

Chairman Maloney closed the meeting at 3:18 pm. Bill Scalzi and Marco Thomas then showed Commission members two of the new MV-1 accessible taxi vehicles and answered numerous questions about them.