

### Chicago Cabbies Propose First Fare Hike in Nearly Five Years

During a recent public hearing by the Chicago City Council's Committee on Transportation, cabbies and passengers alike supported a proposal to raise local taxi fares. Riders said they would also like to see improved service, particularly for the disabled. The hearing was in response to a petition signed by 11 percent of the city's cab drivers, who have not seen a fare increase since the year 2000. Cabbies are asking to raise the initial flag pull for a taxi ride from \$1.90 to \$2.50 and to up the per-mile rate to \$1.80 from \$1.60.

The proposed increase in the flag-pull is almost 32 percent, but over a five-mile trip, the cost of the ride would actually increase by only 14 percent, which did not sound "totally off the wall" to committee chair Thomas Allen. Allen said he has not yet decided whether to support the fare increase, though he remarked, "The drivers have a difficult profession. It's not easy to survive on what they're paid."

According to cabbies who attended the hearing, Chicago drivers are in dire straits. Gas prices are at near-record levels, and many conventions that came back to Chicago year after year have now moved to other cities. Caught in the pincers of fewer riders and higher costs, cabbies are forced to work longer hours to make ends meet, they contend.

The last increase carried with it a commitment to improve service for persons with disabilities, and that service has improved markedly, according to Allen, but spokesmen for that group said they would like to see still more cabs with disabled access and more drivers responding to dispatch calls for service to riders with disabilities.

Allen says the committee will hold further public hearings, but none has yet been scheduled. ●

American Country Insurance Company publishes *Roadwise*, a safety newsletter for the taxi, livery, and paratransit industries. In it, we offer news you can use, safety tips, and general information that can help you cut costs and keep your drivers safe and on the road. We welcome feedback: this is *your* newsletter. Let us know what you think. If you have ideas for features you'd like to see, or if you'd simply like to sound off on a particular topic, contact us at the e-mail address listed below. We'll be happy to publish any letters to the editors we receive, and if you'd prefer to have your name withheld, we'll do that too.



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### NSC Alerts Drivers to Legal-Drug Impairment

The National Safety Council has a new campaign: educating drivers about the dangers of driving while under the influence of drugs. What's new about that? Simply that we're talking about *legal* drugs that millions of people take every day. Drugs like antihistamines and anti-anxiety medications. Drugs that few people think twice about taking and then driving a vehicle. Many common prescription and over-the-counter medications can cause impairment that a driver may not even recognize.

What are the symptoms of medication-induced impairment? Some of the symptoms are drowsiness or its opposite: excitability. Others are reduced — or, surprisingly, increased — reaction times and altered depth perception.

Though there is currently no database in place to track the incidence of accidents and deaths caused by driving while impaired by medications, the NSC believes greater public awareness can help save some of the more than 43,000 lives lost each year in traffic accidents.

At present, 37 states and the District of Columbia have laws against drug-impaired driving. Within each of these states, specially trained police officers are designated as Drug Recognition Experts (DREs). They are part of the Drug Evaluation and Classification Program, a transportation safety program that focuses on the detection and apprehension of drug-impaired drivers.

To protect yourself and others on the road, follow these guidelines:

- Talk to your physician or pharmacist to learn the side effects of any medications you're taking.
- Ask your physician or pharmacist about nonimpairing alternatives for drugs you need to take.
- Read directions and warning labels on medications.
- Never take more than the recommended dose.
- Don't mix medications without checking with your physician or pharmacist.
- Don't mix alcohol with medications.
- Make sure you know the signs and symptoms of drug impairment before you get behind the wheel.
- Don't take medications just before starting a shift unless you know you will have no adverse reaction. Give a new medication time to take effect before going on the road, even if the drug purports to have no undesirable effects. People react differently, so don't take a chance. ●

## Nevada Ponders Driver-Safety Plans

In the wake of the horrific death-by-burning of Las Vegas cab driver Pairoj Chitprasart in August, Nevada cabbies are clamoring for new safety measures for their vehicles.

According to a University of Nevada-Las Vegas study ordered by the board of the Nevada Taxicab Authority after the killing, more than 87% of drivers who responded to a survey want either cabbie cams (their first choice), GPS systems, or protective shields installed in their vehicles. Some favor a combination of methods.

The UNLV report reinvigorates the drive to mandate still-picture cameras in taxis. This measure was rejected by the board last February, but it's back on the front burner.

However, preliminary results from tests with the cameras found problems: Nevada's extreme heat apparently limited the efficiency of the cameras, and unavailability of infrared models prevented clear-quality night pictures. Tests of shields also found limitations, again heat-related. Shields were a barrier to cool-air circulation from the air conditioning system.

Despite the problems, all parties attending the September Taxicab Authority board meeting agreed that cameras would help law enforcement, and that shields would be immediate protection for drivers.

The UNLV study also conducted a focus group with riders to get their take on the situation. Most riders accepted security measures as a fact of life and said that they didn't believe these measures would disturb tourists. Riders sympathized with drivers' desires to protect themselves, but they felt that measures should not jeopardize the safety of passengers.

The Taxicab Authority will hold a public hearing on October 26 to receive comments on a resolution to institute some kind of safety measures. Board vice-chair Kathryn Werner said that the eventual resolution could be flexible enough to allow cab companies to install the protection that would best suit the individual company's needs. "I think it's not a bad idea to give the owners options that they can pass on to drivers," she said. ♦

## Slipping into Winter



It's almost time to make that seasonal adjustment again: getting used to winter weather. For drivers, it's a good opportunity to bone up on how to avoid skids in slippery conditions or to minimize the severity of a skid should one occur. Here then are some tips on staying out of ditches and away from immovable objects when road conditions become hazardous:



The first tip is obvious: reduce speed to suit traffic conditions and the weather. Watch out particularly for bridges and overpasses, which may become treacherous when temperatures drop.



Leave a four-second interval between you and the vehicle in front in inclement weather. Find a roadside landmark and count the time between when the vehicle in front passes it and when you do.



If you have antilock brakes (ABS), it's okay to brake hard and swerve if you need to avoid an accident. Brake first, then steer. Don't try this without ABS, though. If you have a non-ABS vehicle, don't let the brakes "grab." Brake gradually.



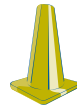
If the ABS light on your vehicle's dashboard comes on, get it fixed immediately. The light means that the antilock function of your brakes is not working, so the cab will handle like a non-ABS vehicle.



Remember that the new thinking is *not* to use the 10 o'clock-2 o'clock hand positions on the wheel. You'll have more turning range if you keep your hands on either side of the wheel in the 9 o'clock-3 o'clock positions.



Teach yourself to watch the road as far ahead as you can. In slippery conditions, you need a longer reaction time to avoid an accident if there are obstacles in the road or a vehicle pileup in front of you.



If you do start to skid, ease up on the accelerator and steer in the direction that the rear wheels are skidding. For example, if the rear of the car skids to the right, turn the wheel to the right. Avoid oversteering.



In bad weather, whenever possible, downshift to a lower gear to use the power of your vehicle's engine to help you brake. However, when roads are icy, sudden downshifting can cause a vehicle to skid, so downshift judiciously.



Keep a pair of sunglasses or yellow lenses in your vehicle. Sun glinting off icy or snowy roads can cause tremendous glare, so be prepared. If it's foggy, put on your lights on low beam and leave a longer traffic interval. Above all, use common sense. Know when to pull off the road and wait for help. ♦

## IN-THE-TRUNK TOOLKIT EMERGENCY GEAR

Everyone needs to prepare for winter driving, but it's doubly important for cabbies who must drive in all kinds of weather and who have passenger safety at stake as well as their own. Start by having a complete checkup and tuneup before winter arrives. This includes inspection of exhaust system, brakes, defroster, heater, wipers, hoses, and belts. Also check tires, battery, and fluids and have the oil and antifreeze changed. Then put together an emergency kit and keep it in the trunk. The kit should include:

- Flashlight
- Jumper cables
- Blanket
- Ice scraper
- Charged cell phone with adapter
- Spare tire and jack
- Snow brush
- Small (or folding) shovel
- Sand, kitty litter, or burlap for traction
- Warning devices, such as flares, flags, and reflectors
- First-aid kit

## Cabbies Can't Carry Says Connecticut Supreme Court

Connecticut's highest court has ruled that a taxicab driver who shot a robber carried the pistol illegally because he could not claim the cab as his place of business. According to the court, a cab has no fixed location and is therefore not a place of business.

Justice Richard Palmer, who wrote the court's opinion, said that cab drivers should be required to obtain handgun permits and undergo mandatory training on handgun use and safety before "allowing them to carry such deadly weapons while traversing the highways of the state." The ruling sends the case back to Superior Court for further disposition.

Taxi driver John Lutters fatally shot Travis Hazelwood, when Hazelwood tried to rob him with a pair of scissors. Law enforcement officials deemed the shooting justified but charged Lutters with carrying a pistol without a permit, a felony that carries up to five years in prison and a fine of up to \$5000.

However, Superior Court Judge Lubbie Harper, Jr., dropped the gun charges, citing a state law that exempts businesses from the state's gun-permit requirements.

Prosecutors who appealed Judge Harper's decision said they feared that everyone from ice cream vendors to traveling salesmen might begin to carry weapons in their vehicles if the decision were allowed to stand.

*This article is based on one appearing in the August 2004 TLPA Taxicab newsletter.*

## Did You Know . . .

### LOOSE EQUALS LETHAL

An object, such as a pen or pencil, left lying on top of the airbag compartment becomes a lethal projectile should the airbag suddenly deploy in an emergency. Keep airbag compartments clutter free. Secure loose objects anywhere else in the vehicle as well, to keep from being hit by them in an accident.

Most Americans apparently don't know about this danger. A recent survey by the National Safety Council found that only 34 percent of respondents regularly check for loose objects and secure them, even though unsecured items — everything from soft-drink cans to luggage — are responsible for 13,000 injuries in accidents each year, on average.

### A PENNY SAVED ADDS UP

Proper tire inflation can actually save five cents a gallon for each fill-up. And, regularly checking your oil and replacing it with the correct grade during an oil change can improve gas mileage as much as two percent, a saving of up to three cents per gallon. With gas prices soaring toward the stratosphere in most locations, even small savings are welcome ones. To learn more about fuel savings, visit <http://www.fueleconomy.gov>.

## TLPA 2004 FACT BOOKS NOW ON SALE

TLPA 2004 Fact Books are now available for purchase at \$15 each for TLPA members and \$72 each for nonmembers. A substantial rate increase has been approved, but those who order early can avoid the price increase. The Fact Books can be ordered at [www.tlpa.org](http://www.tlpa.org) or by calling the TLPA office at 301-946-5700.

## City of Chicago Opens 2004 Medallion Auction

On September 20, the city of Chicago opened the bidding on 60 new cab medallions; 25 are designated for vehicles that are factory-manufactured stretch sedans; 25 are for vans; and 10 are for wheelchair-accessible vans. Successful bidders for the wheelchair-accessible vans will be eligible for reimbursements of up to \$15,000 per medallion to cover the cost of equipping each vehicle with a ramp and wheelchair locking device. Bids must be received no later than the close of business December 1, 2004 and must be accompanied by a certified check, cashier's check, or money order in the amount of \$5,000. Request bid forms by calling 312-744-4006 or access them at [www.cityofchicago.org/consumerservices](http://www.cityofchicago.org/consumerservices). ●

## Cabbie Recognition Awards

In December two deserving Chicago cabbies will receive taxi medallions in recognition for their exemplary service to the public. One medallion will go to a driver who has worked to improve the availability and quality of service to people with disabilities. The other will go to a participant in the city's Master Chauffeur Program. Individuals wishing to nominate a driver should submit the name, chauffeur number, and reason for consideration. Drivers may not nominate themselves. Get nomination forms from the Department of Consumer Services, Daley Center, 50 W. Washington St., Room 208. Forms must be received by November 22, 2004. ●

## Serving Passengers with Disabilities

Sometimes cabbies are uncomfortable when they pick up a passenger with a disability. This is not because they don't want to serve the passenger. They simply may not be sure of the protocol. How much assistance should they give? Should they ask if the person needs help? Or wait to be asked? Because disabilities take many forms, there is no one answer to these questions, but Easter Seals Project Action offers some guidelines:

- Treat passengers with disabilities as you would want to be treated.
- If you need to communicate with a passenger with a disability, speak directly to him or her, not to the passenger's companions. Don't say, "Does she need..." or the like. Ask the passenger.
- Speak in a normal tone of voice and rate of speed unless the passenger requests otherwise.
- If you are asked to repeat or write what you said, do so calmly and pleasantly.
- Ask if a passenger with a disability needs assistance. Don't make assumptions.
- Give passengers with disabilities the same information you would give any other passenger. If you have to take a detour because of road construction, for example, explain that to the passenger.

All passengers want and expect good, safe, courteous service. People with disabilities are no different. Insofar as it is possible, these people want to be treated like anyone else. Common sense should prevail, though. Give help when it's obviously needed. For example, don't strand a person who is visually impaired at curbside. See him or her safely to the door of the building or home that is the destination. If you were in the same circumstance, that's what you would want, isn't it? ●