

Cab Gab
by Abe Mittleman

Main Street Flushing-Some Thoughts

When a program that was suggested by me to issue Shorty tickets to taxi drivers who volunteer to work the taxi stand at Main Street Flushing was enacted last November I was very happy. I was under the impression that this would lead to further initiatives in the struggle to rid Queens of illegal livery activity that has infested the streets of this thriving Borough of the City of New York. Happy as I am that this program is successful and many more taxi drivers are going there. A steady flow of yellow taxis can be seen during the times the program is in effect. I must say I am somewhat disappointed of the overall picture. Let me explain:

Twice this past week I was at the taxi stand. Aside from the times that the program is not in effect, weekends and night time the illegal activity flourishes as if no program was ever created. I was there at 5 p.m. on a Thursday afternoon when the program was in effect. I noticed the waiting time for a fare was much longer than it should be. That was not because there were no fares available. It was mainly because right in front of our noses the illegal liveries were cruising by and picking up passengers that should have been getting into yellow taxis. Remember the illegal liveries are desperate. They tell the passengers that it is their choice what taxi they want. No one is stopping them from brainwashing potential passengers.

And to make matters even worse, the dispatcher on duty is totally unaware that this is wrong. When I asked him if he was writing down the plate numbers of the livery taxis that are picking up fares at the taxi stand, he replied that it was the passenger's choice. Duh! Is he kidding me? Whose side is he on? Who's training him? Who's paying him? Do they know he is making no effort to help put an end to this illegal activity that the program was created to stop? We need more than a complacent dispatcher that only cares about what time it is and when he can go home. We need an enforcement officer!

The people in Flushing Deserve better than this. The taxi drivers, who are voluntarily working at this location, deserve better than this. I am calling on Councilman Liu, the TLC, and the NYPD to start enforcing the laws and put an end to the illegal activity not only in Flushing but throughout Queens and The City of New York.

The TLC is auctioning more medallions. These medallions are going for record prices. How can they auction these medallions and not make room for them? The best way to make room is to get the livery cars that do nothing but violate the rules off the streets. Flushing was a good place to start. Now following through, is dumb and irresponsible. I rest my case.

Medallion Prices

Is there no end to how high the medallion price will go? When it went to \$100,000 during the 1980's everyone thought that was incredible. But now it has been reported that a corporation recently sold for \$890,000. That's \$445,000 per medallion. I hear that in the next and final auction that the City is holding in June brokers are advising that bids should be \$1,000,000. I wonder if they are advising that, will they may go even higher to insure that a bid is successful.

Now here is what is really puzzling: These bids have gone this high when gas prices are rising. These bids have gone this high even though the TLC has refused to grant us a surcharge. These bids have gone this high even though the TLC is hell bent on shoving GPS and all of its components down our throat at a cost of thousands of dollars. These bids have gone this high while thousands of illegal cars steal a large percentage of our business.

Imagine how high they would go if the TLC gave us a surcharge or fare increase to compensate for the extra expenses we have incurred in the last two years since the last increase. Imagine how high the medallion price would go if the TLC vigorously enforced the rules against all the livery cars that steal our business off the streets. Imagine how high they would go if the TLC abandoned this GPS insanity.

Now here is another perspective to why the price of the medallion may be going up and up:
Simply, the commercial development in The City of New York is going up and up.

Recently, the following was reported in the NY Post: Rising up out of the industrial waterfront overlooking the East River in Queens will be a \$1 billion complex of high-rise apartment and office towers, film and TV studios and upscale shops in a new mega-development called Silvercup West. This development is expected to employ 3,900 people. Just look around and you can see sky scraping office buildings and residential towers going up all over the city. So, perhaps all of

this development will bring us more business than we can handle.

Gas Prices

Well here we go again, the up and down roller coaster ride for gas prices. Last year when the price shot up to more than \$3, a gallon, we cried for a surcharge to help compensate for the added expense. They said no! The crying stopped when the price fell back to a more reasonable price of less than \$2.40 a gallon.

Well, they are rising again. This time the experts predict they will go even higher than last year and not fall back. Can they continue to say no? It will surely be interesting to see what happens.

Pedicabs

I can't believe the rhetoric that the people who operate unlicensed uninsured pedicabs have to say about the dangerous death traps they peddle through the streets of our city.

Here is a quote in the NY Post from a recent hearing before the Department of Consumer affairs:

"People on the street, they smile, they wave. It's like leaving a trail of good karma," said Craig Molino, a five-year veteran of the trade.

Yes, that may be true. But will they be smiling and waving when they get hit by a truck while the irresponsible driver peddles through a red light as we see them do every day. Will they be smiling and waving when they are sitting in their wheelchairs, if they are lucky enough to survive, and they realize that there was not enough, if any, insurance to compensate them for the injuries, pain and suffering?

Not only are pedicabs dangerous beyond belief, they are stealing business that is rightfully ours. They have not paid one penny for the right to pick up people in the street. I remember a time when Broadway shows let out and we were busy. Now the pedicabs stalk the theaters and solicit our passengers into taking a ride back to their hotels in a pedicab. That's stealing! They steal business at busy Columbus Circle by stalking people who are coming out of Central Park and need a short ride back to their hotels.

What is so difficult here? There is no question that they are hazardous. There is no question that they do not have insurance to cover injuries to their passengers. There is no question that they have no right to pick up people on the streets who are looking for taxis. So, why aren't they removed?

Cab Driver of The Year

I had an interesting conversation with one of my passengers the other day. My passenger asked me what I thought of the recent Cabby of The Year award:

Here was my reply that my passenger agreed with: We all return items to passengers. I have returned many things over the years. But we all have instances where we hope the passengers won't make a complaint. So none of us are perfect. But it seems to me that it is more important that I know where you are going and the best and safest way to get you there. Just because a cabby returns, an item doesn't make him "Cabby of The Year." It just means he was honest that one time. The cabby of the year is never noticed because he just does his job well and draws little if any attention, and that is the greater portion of us.