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Lyft's co-founder weighs in on Dallas' attempt to rewrite transportation-for-hire rules and allegations of redlining



By Robert Wilonsky
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One month after [A.C. Gonzalez tried unsuccessfully to cut Uber's brake lines](#) on behalf of Yellow Cab, a ride-sharing competitor sporting a pink mustache pulled into town. It was clear then that Dallas City Hall was in no rush, and no shape, to rewrite its transportation-for-hire regulations, which had been in place since Al Lipscomb was on the council. Lyft saw that opening and squeezed into that spot, assuming that when Dallas finally did get around to rewriting its rules it would get a place at the table, [which is exactly what happened](#).

"We did want to be part of the conversation," says Lyft co-founder John Zimmer in a rare interview. "We definitely want to be part of the conversation when new rules are being considered. We have a different vision of what we're trying to operate. So that played into" Lyft's decision to come to Dallas.

And, the 29-year-old Zimmer says, it's here to stay regardless of what Sandy Greyson's transportation-for-hire work group comes up with.

"We're gonna fight to stay there," he says. "There are thousands of drivers and passengers in Dallas and across the country that believe in this mission and movement, and we'll be there alongside them to make sure we work together in a responsible and thoughtful way with local officials and defend their right to do this."

That fight continues today at 2 p.m. and Friday at 11 a.m. and for God knows how long, as the work group — which consists of Yellow Cab's CEO and Uber's right-hand Dallas man and other limo owners and operators — seemingly sorts through every definition in the Dallas City Code related to things with wheels. For weeks the task force has had trouble even defining "transportation-for-hire." We could be here a while.

Meanwhile, Lyft isn't waiting for anything: In recent days it has expanded its local coverage area, stretching from Farmers Branch to Duncanville to Pleasant Grove to Garland, [or thereabouts](#). Zimmer says that was a "organic expansion" based on data provided by Lyft's app. There are a handful of hot spots, he notes, around Lower Greenville and Uptown and downtown, but Lyft's seeing a lot of use all over, so it made sense to recruit more drivers and widen the area in which rides are being shared.

Zimmer also wants to be very, very clear: This wasn't done in response to [council member Vonciel Jones Hill's charges that Uber and Lyft are engaged in redlining](#) by staying out of southern Dallas.

"It didn't have anything to do with that," he says, referring to Hill's so-far unsubstantiated allegations made during several meetings of the council's Transportation and Trinity River Project Committee. "It's just natural once there's demand. We're still so new in Dallas — it's been a few months — it would have happened either way. That's how we roll out in other cities.

"We look at population density, and the important thing about creating a transportation market is there is enough supply and demand, and it works better when there's greater density. That's where we start. Lyft's only been in Dallas a few months, and as it gains critical mass it becomes easier to expand the area because there's critical base. Then we look at the activity in the app. Whenever you're doing something new there are questions, and it's on us to demonstrate how it actually works. We hope people, local officials, use the service and see it works really well in *all* areas. We got started to bring more accessible transportation at a more affordable price point to more people. That's what we're doing."

And, perhaps, things might go a little easier for Lyft if it wasn't driving around with Uber's baggage in its trunk.

[Uber's being sued in San Francisco over the death of a 6-year-old girl](#) killed on New Year's Eve by an a driver who'd been using its app. Uber maintains it's not responsible for the child's death, insisting the driver was between pick-ups and, therefore, off the clock. Others, including Dallas City Council members, disagree, and have grilled Uber's reps over its insurance requirements and driver background checks following the fatal accident.

"We're trying to stay focused on what we do and how we operate," Zimmer says when asked about how Uber's problems have become Lyft's issues.

Uber, and its ride-sharing offshoot UberX, and Lyft have maintained both have safety standards on par with the cab industry's — and both have insisted to the council that they're on board with tightening those regulations in order to keep operating in Dallas, pointing to [the template created by the California Public Utilities Commission](#) in September. [Lyft even wrote a letter to Vonciel Jones Hill last month proposing a batch of new regulations](#), including \$1 million per-incident coverage, criminal background and driving record checks, vehicle inspections, a zero-tolerance drug-and-alcohol policy and receipts for all.

"What I wish people focused more on is: What is the purpose of regulation historically and today?" says Zimmer. "I believe the purpose I agree with is the one around safety and consumer protection in general. There are now new ways to accomplish it than better before. Technology and innovation are happening so quickly these days, and regulations and government processes take time. Innovation and regulation are taking place at slightly different paces. That's a relevant piece of the challenge. I hope the focus is on safety and providing more options and safer options."

The discussion going on at Dallas City Hall is the same one presently taking place in Seattle and Pittsburgh and anywhere else a cab company wrote the rules intended to protect the industry's monopoly. At the same time, the app [TaxiMagic](#) is trying to prove the cab industry is innovating its service. Locally it counts among its partners Golden Cab, Executive Taxi, Freedom Cab, Jet Taxi and, of course, Yellow Cab, which wrote the very rules presently being debated at 1500 Marilla.

"We don't like seeing that kind of thing, where there's that kind of activity happening," says Zimmer when asked about Yellow Cab's attempt last summer to run Uber off the road. "It can deter entrepreneurs. But in the end we thought Dallas was a great city that would understand. We're glad we came when we did. The city has embraced the concept, and we'll keep working hard to work as much as possible with local officials to make sure our story is told and the community is served."

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 **Wylie H Dallas** 3 hours ago
[...council member Vonciel Jones Hill's charges that Uber and Lyft are engaged in redlining by staying out of southern Dallas.]

It is very easy to disprove Vonciel Hill's false allegations that Uber is engaged in redlining-- anyone can do it.

Simply open up the app, set your pick up location anywhere in South Dallas, and... like magic, you can order a car to pick you up there... day or night.

It's irritating when elected officials make things up... certainly not helpful when setting policies. Vonciel Hill really has no business running this committee.

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 **Robert Wilonsky** 2 hours ago
Also: Scott Goldstein and I recently went to a deserted block near Fair Park, along Second Avenue. He ordered Uber; I called Yellow Cab. Scott's SUV arrived 15 minutes before my cab, which actually went to a spot across Robert Cullum before I had to flag him down. His driver got out and opened the door to the shiny ride, My driver spent the whole time telling me how much he hated Dallas. Scott's ride was clean, and had a WSJ for his perusal. My cab looked like it had last been cleaned sometime in 2008. Scott's Uber ride cost more, though -- by one whole dollar.

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 **tuna07843727**
[same here](#)

2 hours ago

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