

Dallas council begins to tackle updating rules on cabs



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By TOM BENNING

Staff Writer

tbenning@dallasnews.com

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Dallas City Council members appear eager to revamp the city's regulations for taxicabs, limousines and app-based car service companies. But it is still unclear what that overhaul will entail.

Several council members on Tuesday took a first pass in the Transportation and Trinity River Project Committee at debating what could end up being a total rewrite of that portion of the city's code.

Among the major possible tweaks are deregulation of how fares are calculated, adjustment of some of the insurance requirements for those companies and fine-tuning the permitting process for companies, drivers and vehicles.

But other than most agreeing that something — anything — has to be done to address the increasingly complex industry, council members were far from a consensus on how city staff should proceed in drafting a new ordinance.

Some, such as Vonciel Jones Hill, said the rules being suggested by staff regulate too little. Others, such as Philip Kingston, said they regulate too much. And nearly all of the eight council members at the meeting had quibbles with some aspect of the proposed regulations.

"It's going to take years to get this straightened out," council member Tennell Atkins said, offering one of the more pessimistic takes on the proceedings.

The "transportation-for-hire" regulations have been in the spotlight since August.

That's when a revised ordinance — drafted with the help of Yellow Cab representatives — was almost pushed through the council by city staff. Some said that version would've driven Yellow's app-based competitors, such as Uber and Lyft, from the Dallas market.

In the aftermath of that fiasco — which elicited an apology from City Manager A.C. Gonzalez — the council decided to re-examine those rules. The growth of those app-based companies, which aren't regulated under the current rules, also hastened that push.

In recent weeks, council member Sandy Greyson has led a special work group to hash out challenges and possible changes. The group featured representatives from all industry stakeholders, from cabs to limos to car services.

And they produced what Greyson called a "compromise" proposal.

"Not everybody loves everything," she said. "But everybody can live with it."

An underlying goal of those proposed changes was to bring a market-based approach to a field that has been lacking competition, the city staff said. So all the different kinds of companies would be, for the most part, treated under the same rules and same requirements.

"The market will determine which of the companies survive," said Charles Cato, an interim assistant city manager. "Those who meet their customers' expectations will survive and those that do not, will not."

That overall concept won praise from council members. But the details proved to be a bit more complicated.

Among the major concerns from council members Tuesday was making sure all companies would have to provide citywide service. Some have accused the newer app-based companies of denying service, for instance, to southern Dallas.

Other council members, such as Lee Kleinman, wanted to discuss when commercial insurance has to be in effect. Is it only when a

passenger is in the car? Or is it when a driver is cruising around, looking for service?

Some, such as Atkins, derided the suggestion that there no longer be a rule that cars be below a certain age and mileage. He didn't seem impressed by city staff's explanation that annual vehicle inspections would take care of that.

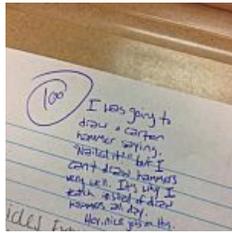
Others, such as Hill, said they didn't want to delete rules that allow vehicles powered by compressed natural gas to go to the front of the line at Love Field. She didn't seem moved by the proposed alternate incentive of a \$25 discount in vehicle permit fees.

The discussion will next head to the full council for a briefing, with city staff promising to bring a variety of options. Then the council will open a public comment period before taking up a draft ordinance in a more formal way.

If the process goes according to plan, the new regulations would be in place by January.

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 **fritz** 5 hours ago
These articles keep commenting Uber is not regulated, but Uber only uses the City of Dallas permitted drivers. Drivers & vehicles have to be permitted.
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 **Anonymous** 8 hours ago
Watch out for several things:
1) Who on the city council is under the control of Yellow Cab? There are some - do we know who?

2) Whatever rules are developed, watch out for AC Gonzalez and several city staff members who have proven that they are definitely under the control of Yellow Cab. Dallas will never be a "world class city" when they name as city manager someone who has demonstrated such low integrity as AC Gonzalez. The council can make whatever rules they want, but if they rely on Gonzalez and city staff to enforce these rules, look out. They may selectively enforce the rules or make up their own rules to benefit Yellow Cab. In fact, some of the city staff should have been fired for actually working for Yellow Cab while being on the city of Dallas payroll.

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