



MEMORANDUM

October 25, 2005

TO: Mayor and Council

CC: City Manager
City Clerk
General Manager of Community Services

FROM: Paul Teichroeb, Chief License Inspector

SUBJECT: Requirement for Additional Taxi Driver Training (RTS #05554)

PURPOSE

Recently, Council and staff have heard from a number of taxi drivers and owners concerning the requirement for all taxicab drivers to complete the advanced Taxihost Level 2 Program, offered by the Justice Institute of British Columbia, by January 1, 2006. Staff have also heard from Tourism Vancouver and a number of tourism-related businesses who are concerned that this training requirement may be revised or rescinded.

On October 6, 2005, after considering the taxicab license fee issue and hearing speakers from the taxi industry express concerns about the advanced training requirement, Council directed staff to provide additional information on this issue.

This memorandum responds to Council's request. It provides background information on the modules included in the Taxihost Program Level 2 course offered by the Justice Institute of British Columbia, other jurisdictions that currently require Taxihost Level 2 driver training, as well as the number of Vancouver taxi drivers that have completed this course to date.

BACKGROUND

In mid-1990, the Greater Vancouver Taxi Partnership Committee (GVTPC) (included representatives of the Tourism industry, Lower Mainland taxi companies, Motor Carrier Commission, ICBC and regulators including City staff) met to address taxi service levels in the Lower Mainland. One result was the development of a taxi driver training program designed to create a consistently high standard of taxicab service in the Lower Mainland.

In 1997, Council endorsed a by-law amendment requiring all taxicab drivers in the City of Vancouver to complete at least 27 hours of training designed to develop the driver's knowledge, skills and attitudes, through the Taxihost Level 1 Program provided by the Justice Institute.

Subsequently, the Justice Institute developed Taxihost Level 2 training which many drivers have completed voluntarily. This training became mandatory in 1999 for all drivers picking up passengers at the Vancouver (YVR) airport.

On March 1, 2005, Council instructed staff to amend the Vehicles for Hire By-Law to require all taxicab drivers employed by the four licensed taxicab companies in Vancouver to successfully complete an additional 18 hours of advanced training on transporting people with mobility aids including loading and unloading, driver safety including assault avoidance and awareness, collision prevention and advanced geography. This training is to be taken through the Taxihost Program level 2 course provided by the Justice Institute of British Columbia by January 1, 2006.

The educational material included in each of the four modules of the Taxihost Program Level 2 is outlined below:

Module 1: Transporting People with Disabilities

This course uses disability awareness simulations to give participants an opportunity to experience what it might be like to have different disabilities. Principles for transporting people who experience specific disabilities is discussed and practiced. The course also reviews appropriate language for discussing the eight major disabilities (impairment of mobility, agility, vision, hearing, blindness, deafness, mental disability and mental illness)

Module 2: Taxicab Driver Safety (Assault Avoidance Awareness)

This course draws upon joint knowledge of police officers and experienced taxicab drivers to identify ways for drivers to reduce risk of assault, reduce conflict with customers and take action to minimize risk when violence occurs. The course emphasizes taxicab preparation, situation and customer assessment, conflict management, avoidance of dangerous situations, building of positive relationships with police, and identification of support services to help reduce stress resulting from violence.

This course has received an award from the International Television Association for the video on assault avoidance awareness.

Module 3: Driving with Finesse (Collision Prevention)

This is a hands-on driving course providing participants with time to practice new driving techniques and receive feedback from the instructor, other participants and an on-board computer that registers the smoothness of braking, accelerating and handling. Participants receive strategies to prevent collisions and receive feedback on their personal strengths and weaknesses as drivers. The course is designed to lead to smoother, safer and more economical driving.

This course is also a requirement for the Police, B.C. Hydro, WCB, CSIS, Department of Fisheries and Oceans, sheriffs and other agencies.

Module 4: Advanced Regional Geography Test

This course tests knowledge of the geography of the Greater Vancouver region with an emphasis on the City of Vancouver, map book skills and tourist destinations. The test covers knowledge of routes, communities, major transportation destinations, acute care hospitals,

docks, major hotels, entertainment, cultural and sports facilities, tourist attractions and shopping centres. At least 40% of the questions on the test are about Vancouver.

The cost and number of hours required for each of the four modules in the Taxihost Program Level 2 is shown in the following table:

Taxihost Program Level 2 Modules	Cost	Number of hours
Transporting People with Disabilities	\$70	4.5
Taxicab Driver Safety (Assault Avoidance Awareness)	\$50	4.5
Driving with Finesse (Collision Prevention)	\$150	7
Advanced Regional Geography	\$50	N/A

DISCUSSION

Currently, the Taxihost Level 2 Program is a requirement for all taxicab drivers servicing the Vancouver airport (YVR). Customer feedback undertaken by the airport has indicated an improvement in the quality of taxi driver services since the implementation of the advanced Taxihost Level 2 training.

Furthermore, Surrey, New Westminister and West Vancouver have amended their by-laws to make the Taxihost Level 2 Program a requirement for all taxi drivers in their jurisdictions. However, the municipalities are currently not enforcing this requirement, largely due to opposition from the taxi industry and the fact that a large number of taxi drivers servicing the airport have already completed the Taxihost Level 2 training. As well, some municipalities are waiting to see whether the City of Vancouver will continue to support and enforce the advanced training requirement.

The number of taxicab drivers that have successfully completed the Taxihost Level 2 Program in the City of Vancouver to date is shown in the table below:

Vancouver Taxi Company	Number of Drivers	# of Drivers with Taxihost Program Level 2 Training
Yellow Cab	856	247
Black Top Cabs	400	75
Maclure's Cabs	190	138
Vancouver Taxi	242	16

At a recent meeting with taxi industry representatives, opposition to the current requirement for all drivers to complete the Taxihost Level 2 Program by January 1, 2006 was expressed. During this meeting, the taxi industry representatives pointed out that they are having difficulty attracting new drivers in the current labour market. They presented staff with the following alternate proposal:

Only new taxicab drivers as of January 1, 2006 should be required to complete the entire Taxihost Level 2 Program and all existing drivers would be "grandfathered" regardless of driving record. All existing taxicab drivers should be required to only complete the "Transporting People with Disabilities" module of the course.

Staff have considered the taxi industry's proposal but continue to support the requirement for all taxi drivers to complete the entire Taxihost Program Level 2 course (ie. all four modules) by January 1, 2006, as approved by Council on March 1, 2005. This recommendation is based on the following:

1. The Taxihost Level 2 Program was developed to enhance and compliment the Taxihost Level 1 training and is specifically designed to improve drivers' customer service skills.
2. The Taxihost Level 2 Program is already a requirement for all taxicab drivers servicing the Vancouver airport. Furthermore, Surrey, New Westminster and West Vancouver have amended their by-laws to require this training (although it is not currently being enforced). The objective is to establish a higher service standard for all taxicab drivers in the Lower Mainland.
3. On October 6, 2005, Council decided to keep the taxicab license fee increase for Year 2006 relatively low by approving a mere 2.75% inflationary adjustment. The intent was to better enable the taxi companies to assist their drivers with the cost of the additional driver training.
4. Existing training provided by the individual taxi companies is inconsistent and does not address key training needs. Long time drivers would benefit from the components of all four modules in the Taxihost Level 2 Program to keep current with existing techniques and practices.

CONCLUSION

On March 1, 2005, Council approved a requirement for all taxicab drivers in the City to complete an additional 18 hours of advanced training through the Taxihost Level 2 Program provided by the Justice Institute of British Columbia by January 1, 2006. Further to reviewing the scope of this advanced training and the justification for the course as outlined above, staff recommend that Council continue to support this requirement.



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