

TAXI

INSIDER

Vol. 8, No. 3

"The Voice of the NYC Transportation Industry."

March 2007

TAXI INSIDER • MARCH 2007

TLC Commissioner's Corner

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misinformation that the TLC is pleased to address.

While the Customer Service Technology Enhancements Project has been in intense development for three years, we are getting very close to its being a tangible reality...in fact, there are almost 200 technology equipped cabs serving the public as we speak. The time has come for us to speak quite plainly about this, and for us to shine a light on facts that have become muddled in the 'debate' and have become the very opposite of fact. In this column, I will try to replace the myth with the reality, and bring, I hope, some perspective to the dialogue about this important evolutionary step for the taxicab industry.

Our first myth? "GPS." To call this system simply "GPS" is an oversimplification on par with saying the Atlantic Ocean is a lake. Way back in the beginning of the design process, we asked the technology providers who were competing for contracts to electronically duplicate the trip sheets that every taxicab driver must fill out. In other words, the information that is captured right now with paper and pencil on a clipboard would instead be captured automatically and electronically, and without the driver having to do a thing. Though we had not specified using it, Global Positioning System (GPS) turned out to be the system of choice for each of the four vendors that earned contracts. It is important to note, however, that this system has many other important functions...none of which even remotely involve the tracking of drivers.

Myth #2 "the passenger screen is just advertising." In reality, the amount of advertising really represents a small percentage of what passengers will see. Mostly, they'll be choosing to watch exactly what they want to watch...entertainment, restaurant, hotel information, public service messages or other City information, an interactive electronic map, movie or restaurant reviews, stocks, weather, news segments, music...the list goes on and on. In fact, each of the four companies will offer something different, with two of them having even entered into content partnerships with both major national and local television networks to develop content especially designed for taxi rides.

Will "GPS be used to enforce speed limits"? Another myth. Simply put, the voluminous and highly specific contract that is in place with the four chosen vendors has no provisions of any kind for any such kind of enforcement. There are no laws or regulations to support such a concept; and it has never been discussed.

Next myth. "The systems will cost over \$5,000, plus \$175 per month in

maintenance fees." Whatever the ultimate price tag for a system chosen by any medallion owner, whether it be \$2,400 at the low end, or \$5,200 at the high end, that will be the full cost of three-year ownership. In other words, if you, as an owner, choose a \$3,000 system, the sum total of what it will cost you for a full three years, until you re-negotiate your contract or change vendors, is that \$3,000. There is no \$175 maintenance fee.

GPS has a built-in "error code" myth, myth, myth! There are some folks who just love to use the acronym GPS because, for some, it has a connotation that harkens back to the technology's creation as a military application. Well, just as Tang orange drink came back to earth after missions in space for average folks to enjoy, GPS quickly became more a private sector thing after its creation decades ago. It is, of course, legendary, that the military inserted "error codes" into GPS systems all those years ago to ensure that no one could have the same level of accuracy that the military enjoyed with its GPS applications. The bottom line there is, today's GPS is a vastly different system that has simply evolved past the "error codes" of its ancient ancestors.

Here's one more to leave you with...many of the drivers who attended today's March 8, 2007 public TLC meeting and hearing took a day off work in the belief that the Board of Commissioners was today voting on whether or not "GPS" (more accurately known as the Customer Service Technology Enhancement Project) would come to be in New York City taxicabs. These drivers, who had the best of intentions to make their voices heard on this important issue, were truly shocked to learn that the Customer Service Enhancements were mandated in March 2004 and that what was discussed, and ultimately passed unanimously by myself and my fellow Commissioners were simply administrative, technical aspects of the project. Two non-priority aspects of the rules will be revisited in the future involving credit card transaction fees and the details of interfacing the vendors' systems with taximeters.

The people involved in this project have worked long and hard to make sure that it remained true to the vision of its creation, a vision of bringing taxi technology into the 21st century, and taking customer service to the next level. We are excited to be moving forward, and we welcome everyone reading this to share in that excitement. It can only be good for drivers and passengers alike for there to be some enthusiastic "give and take" about the system's many benefits...and the more enthusiasm you "give," I assure you, the more benefit you will "take!"



Hundreds of New Yorkers, young and old, attended the Garden in Transit public art project on February 24th. Most families arrived in old clothes as they prepared to paint over 800,000 square feet of vinyl flowers.

"Garden in Transit" is a dynamic project that will help New Yorkers to celebrate TAXI 07, while calling attention to community involvement and hands-on civic engagement by uniting families and communities through public art. The symbol for the "Garden in Transit" program is a flower in an array of vibrant colors. The artwork, consisting of hand-painted panels with garden motifs, will be painted by children from hospitals, schools, recreation centers, and shelters throughout the five boroughs.

These flowers will be seen on the roofs, hoods and trunks of New York City Taxis starting this September. Paint was provided as was music and refreshments. The entire taxi industry is invited to bring their families on March 31st, between 11 AM and 3 PM for their chance to paint. The large studio is located at 149 W. 32nd Street. Hope to see you all there!

Taxi Industry Paint Day

Bring the whole family for 3 hours of fun!! All taxi drivers and their families are invited! Be sure to wear old clothing for painting. This event will be held on

Saturday March 31 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

The Event will be held at our studio at 149 W. 32nd St.

We hope you will attend!

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PHOTOS BY DAVID POLLACK



Commissioner's Corner

By Matthew W. Duns, Commissioner and Chair of the NYC TLC

I have spoken from the forum of this column a number of times about the realities of the new customer service technology enhancements, which we are pleased and proud to see come closer to fruition every day. As with anything that is new and groundbreaking, there are voices of dissent being raised, which is something we welcome and appreciate for providing perspectives we otherwise may not see or hear about. Out of this debate, however, has also come some misinformation;

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TLC Systems Implementation Manager (and proud dad!) Gary Roth shows sons Milo and Zane Roth the finer points of flower painting, along with some help from several helpful Garden in Transit volunteers. The occasion was Garden in Transit's "TLC Family Fun Day." See page 18 !!!