



City of Cambridge

Committee Report #1

IN CITY COUNCIL

January 27, 1997

MAYOR RUSSELL

ORDERED: That the City Manager be and hereby is requested to provide the City Council with a status report of transportation to and from the Senior Center by the Council on Aging.

In City Council January 27, 1997

Adopted by the affirmative vote of nine members.

Attest:- D. Margaret Drury, City Clerk.

A true copy;

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "D. Margaret Drury". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped "D" and "y".

ATTEST:-

D. Margaret Drury
City Clerk

City of Cambridge

The Traffic and Transportation Committee held a public meeting on Wednesday, January 15, 1997 at the Senior Center at 806 Massachusetts Avenue at three o'clock and seventeen minutes p.m.

Present at the meeting were: Councillor Henrietta Davis, Chair of the committee; Councillor Michael Sullivan; Vice-Mayor Kathleen Born; Donna P. Lopez, Deputy City Clerk; Eileen Ginnety, Executive Director, Council on Aging; Susan Pacheco, Director of Social Services, Council on Aging; Ellen Semonoff, Deputy Director of Human Services; Michael Muehe, Director of Commission for Persons with Disabilities; and Benjamin Barnes, License Commissioner.

Councillor Davis, Chair of the committee, opened the hearing by stating that this meeting was a follow up meeting to the meeting held in November for taxi service to the Senior Center and that things have improved since the last meeting. The voucher, coupon and pre-paid systems for taxi service will be discussed.

The committee heard from Benjamin Barnes, Chair of the License Commission, who outlined the steps that the License Commission has taken, such as:

1. Installation of two cab taxi stands in front of the Senior Center;
2. Availability of handicapped accessible vans in front of the Senior Center between the hours of 2:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m. daily;
3. Classes for vans owners at the Arthur Santoro Taxi School;
4. Officer Kenel Princeton, Hackney Inspector, stated that he has inspected the cabs to ensure that the hackney identification is visible. If this identification is not visible, a warning is issued for the first offense and a fine is issued for the second offense;
5. The requirement to display the hackney license more conspicuously would be in place by April;
6. Communications have been opened to address and resolve problems and issues; and
7. The radio services, he said, have been helpful to resolve the issues of short fares and more cabs.

City of Cambridge

- 2 -

Mr. Barnes stated that the brochure distributed by Mr. Cavellini, at the last meeting, was very informative, but needed to be updated. He informed the committee that permission would be required from the Taxi Association before changes could be made to the brochure because it was their property. He further stated that the License Commission was working closely with Ms. Ginnety and Ms. Pacheco from the Senior Center. A brochure entitled "Hey Taxi - Wait for Me" and a pamphlet outlining tips for serving the elderly and disabled taxi passengers was distributed and attached to this report as **Attachment A**.

At this time, Councillor Davis invited members of the public to come forward and address the committee.

The committee heard from Heddy Pocius, 2 Mount Auburn Street, who stated that she was a senior citizen and she did not have a car. She stated that transportation is important and when an emergency situation exists, the service needs to be good, the drivers are not familiar with medical facilities. The passengers in the cabs cannot see the street numbers and the drivers should know this, she said. She informed the committee that the drivers have a bad attitude about the coupons. She felt that she had to pay more when she used the coupons. Ms. Pocius stated that drivers did not understand that handicaps are not always visible such as heart problems. She informed the committee of a situation where a disabled passenger was requested to give the driver cash instead of a voucher. She complained that to get a cab for a short trip was difficult and the wait was long and that honking cabs were annoying and accomplished nothing.

The committee heard from Joyce Smith, Lyndon B. Johnson Apartments, 150 Erie Street, who stated that she felt intimidated by the drivers when she uses the coupons. Mr. Cavellini, she said, should drive every cab.

Councillor Davis asked Mr. Barnes what the passengers should do when the drivers give them a hard time about the coupons. Mr. Barnes stated that the coupons system is a valid system, if a driver does not accept the coupons, he is wrong. This information must be given to the License Commission and we will act on this complaint, he said. Mr. Barnes went on further to say that the passengers should not be made to feel like a second-class citizen. The information which would be beneficial to the License Commission to act on a complaint is the medallion number, located on the cab window, the date and the time. The License Commission will call the cab driver in for a hearing.

Councillor Davis asked what could be done if the Medallion number was not seen. Mr. Barnes responded that if a license plate number was given, the day, date and time would also be helpful.

The committee heard from Gladys Lane, 8 Rockwell Street, who informed the committee that there was a problem with the taxi drivers because they do not take the vouchers. She stated that she called for a taxi today and she was unable to get one.

City of Cambridge

- 3 -

Councillor Davis asked Mr. Barnes what happens when the cab does not come. Mr. Barnes responded that this complaint needs to be communicated to the License Commission as well. Mr. Barnes stated that he has never turned down a complaint. He stated he was very concerned with the feeling of hopelessness. Mr. Barnes told the committee of a situation he encountered on a short trip so he, too, understood the problem. He stated he wished that he had more Bill Cavellinis, but he could not regulate civility. Mr. Barnes informed the committee that vouchers are issued to a particular cab company and it covers the entire fare, if passengers want to tip the driver that is their prerogative. He outlined that the Somerville-Cambridge Health Service was a home care service and the passenger must call in advance to book their fare.

The committee heard from Michael Muehe, Director of the Persons with Disabilities Commission, who asked when a health clinic calls for a cab do they inform the dispatcher that it is a voucher call? Ms. Susan Pacheco, Council on Aging, responded that they do not inform the dispatcher of this.

The committee heard from Gary Fleming, Somerville-Cambridge Health Care, who outlined the home care services to the committee. He stated that eligibility is based on income and need. Clients get cab service, service is billed to home care and payment is made on a sliding scale. He stated that the meal sites are paid for with Title Three monies at no cost to client. He informed the committee that his service contracts out all of their cab services. Councillor Davis asked Mr. Fleming if he had tried another contract. Mr. Fleming responded that an RFP was completed but no response was received so we did not seek any additional contracts. Services were well maintained by the service provider. He stated that he received a lot of complaints in October and November, but they have lessened.

Ms. Heddy Pocius asked about the physical needs of the van for persons with, for example, arthritis or fibro myalgia. Mr. Barnes responded that the vans are inspected by Mr. Muehe. Vans have been rejected he said, but the vans on the road have been approved by Mr. Muehe.

At this time Vice Mayor Born asked how the drivers get reimbursed for the coupons and vouchers. Mr. Joe Silva from Ambassador-Brattle responded that the radio services get paid. Vice Mayor Born asked how did the radio services get reimbursed. Mr. Silva responded that the radio service bills the city, Ambassador-Brattle gets \$1.25 per coupon. Vice Mayor Born asked what was the disincentive for the drivers not to use the coupons. Mr. Silva stated that he did not know.

The committee heard from Bill Cavellini who stated that he did not know if Checker Cab and Union Cab have the same policy as Ambassador-Brattle. The drivers, he said, do not distinguish between the vouchers and coupons, they think there is a handling fee for both and some of the drivers are in a cash need situation. Mr. Cavellini stated that there is a difference between the old and new coupon system. The first system failed because there was a handling fee. The present coupons are free coupons with no handling fee, he said.

Vice Mayor Born stated that the drivers need to take the coupons and should be reported if they refuse. Mr. Cavellini stated that we need to know if Union and Checker Cabs are changing handling fees.

Vice Mayor Born asked Mr. Barnes about the handling fee. Mr. Barnes stated that there is an 8 to 10% service fee for the voucher program. The City's coupon program does not have a handling fee. Mr. Cavellini stated that the driver gets the full amount of the meter and 8% is taken off of vouchers for printing and handling. Vice Mayor Born responded that she understood why the drivers were reluctant to accept vouchers. Mr. Cavellini stated that the radio services like to give vouchers because it encourages the use of their services. The drivers object to the vouchers because of the handling fee.

Mr. Fleming stated that for the SCES services, the client only has to sign a slip for the services and there is a handling fee. Mr. Cavellini responded that the service fee is on SCES vouchers and the cab driver is required to make out a hand voucher.

Councillor Davis stated that there are three programs and each program has problems. Mr. Barnes again stated that the coupon program has no handling fee; the voucher program has a handling fee. For any driver to request cash instead of accepting a voucher is offensive, he said. He informed the committee that he had only received two complaints in two years about the drivers not taking the coupons.

The committee heard from Ellen Semonoff, Deputy Director for Human Services, who stated that education would be helpful, both at the radio services and for the drivers to let them know they get paid in full. We need to do outreach in the community, she stated. Councillor Davis stated that we have to find out about the other radio services regarding the voucher system.

Mr. Cavellini stated that outreach should be done at the radio service. The coupons and vouchers should be displayed and explained. He stated that the drivers are not bringing in the coupons for reimbursement, the cab owner is being reimbursed. The cab owner may be charging a service fee. Education needs to be done with drivers and owners, he said.

Councillor Davis stated that the License Commission has spent time to address the issues and she would like to give the License Commission the opportunity to resolve the issues on the coupon and voucher systems and they may be able to report to the committee in six weeks to see what progress has been made on this issue. Mr. Barnes stated that he had not received any complaints on the coupons or vouchers. He stated that the new accessible vans are not a shuttle service. Councillor Davis stated that she would also like a report on how the vans are working in six weeks as well.

Ms. Heddy Pocius stated that the people who need these services are low income and they are afraid to complain. Mr. Barnes stated that the License Commission is the most user friendly office. We are reaching out to the community. There are over 600 cab drivers in the city - not all drivers are bad, he said. The good drivers are weeding out the bad drivers.

Councillor Davis asked if the complaints about the vouchers could be collected by the Senior Center. Mr. Barnes said that would be fine.

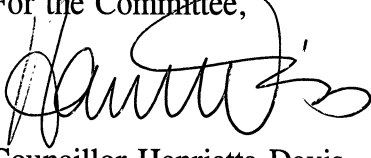
The committee heard from Lawrence Prift for the Accessible Handicapped Vans, who outlined that the first van went on the road in October; the second in November; the third in December and the fourth would be on board soon. Mr. Prift distributed a flyer entitled "Accessible Cambridge Taxicabs Available," attached as **Attachment B**. He said these flyers would be distributed in January. He said that when all four vans are on board, a press release will be forthcoming. He stated that restaurants could use the vans for their clientele.

Councillor Davis stated that seniors could not get home, now those issues have been resolved. Ms. Eileen Ginnety stated that the seniors can walk outside and get a ride home from the new cab stand, improvements have been made.

Mr. Cavellini applauded the taxi stand and signs in front of the Senior Center. He stated that the cab stand in Central Square is being moved to Essex Street. He said that it was important to be near other modes of transportation.

Mr. Silva stated he was happy, there were fewer complaints because all parties are working together.

The meeting adjourned at four o'clock and fifty-five minutes p.m.

For the Committee,

Councillor Henrietta Davis
Chair

**If you are a Cambridge
Elder (age 60 or over)
or a
Cambridge Resident with a
Disability...**

***Use Your
Cambridge Taxi Discount
Coupon Program***

**Receive free coupons worth
\$1.25 each**

**You can use one coupon towards a
fare of \$5 or less, or 2 coupons
towards a fare over \$5.**

For information call:

**Council on Aging
349-6220**

**Commission for Persons with
Disabilities
349-4692 (Voice)
492-0235 (tty/TDD)**

Helpful Phone Numbers

**Ambassador Brattle Taxi
492-1100**

**Cambridge Checker Cab
497-9000**

**Union Transportation Services
661-2500**

**Yellow Cab of Cambridge
547-3000**

Other: _____

**Council on Aging
349-6220**

**Commission for Persons with
Disabilities
349-4692 (Voice)
492-0235 (tty/TDD)**

**License Commission
349-6140**

This pamphlet was produced by:

- *Cambridge Consumer's Council*
- *Council on Aging*
- *Commission for Persons with Disabilities*
- *License Commission*

Graphics by Tyson Lashley

3/95



**Hey Taxi —
Wait For Me!**

***Getting The Most Out Of
Your Taxi Ride***



Calling For A Cab

Be prepared to give the following information:

- Your name
- The address from which you are calling (including apartment number)
- Where you are going
- When you would like the cab to be there

If they cannot be there when you request you may want to call another company. Be aware that during rush hour there may be delays.

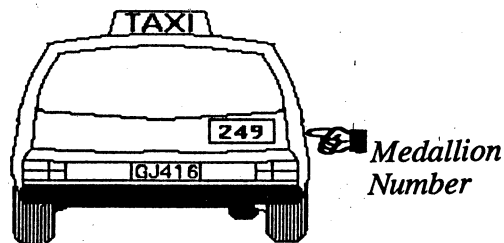
If you must cancel a cab, don't wait for the driver to arrive. Call the dispatcher back right away.

If you request a station wagon (or require one to store your luggage) you may be charged a \$6 surcharge.

Be prepared to leave when the cab arrives. You may be charged for waiting time beyond 5 minutes.

While In The Cab

- The driver must take you where you want to go. Let the driver know if you have a preferred route. Keep in mind that you are responsible for all tolls.
- If you use a wheelchair, walker, or other mobility device, the taxi driver must assist you in storing your device in the trunk (as long as it fits with the trunk fully closed). The driver may not charge you for providing this service.
- If you need to sit in the front seat because of a disability, the driver must let you do this.
- If you have a disability, and use a service animal (such as a guide dog for the blind) a driver may not refuse to take you.
- No smoking is the norm - you have a right to request that the driver not smoke.



The End Of The Ride

- If you are using a Cambridge taxicab, the driver must accept your Taxi Discount Coupons (don't forget to write your name on the coupons first!)
- Drivers must be able to change a \$10 bill. However, giving them a small bill, or exact change is always appreciated.
- Receipts should include the taxi medallion number, and the driver's Hackney License number.
- Don't forget to check for your belongings before you get out of the taxi.

It is illegal for taxis to discriminate on the basis of race, color, religious creed, national origin, age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or destination. If you feel you have been discriminated against, or have any other complaint, note the date, time, and the License Plate number, Medallion number or driver's name. Then call the Cambridge License Commission at 349-6140 or write them at 831 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, 02139. Compliments are also welcome!

Any questions, call Cambridge Licensing Commission at (617) 349-6140 or Cambridge Council on Aging at (617) 349-6220.

TIPS FOR SERVING ELDERLY AND DISABLED TAXI PASSENGERS

1. You must accept discount coupons from the Taxi Discount Program for elderly and disabled Cambridge residents.
2. If a passenger is elderly or disabled, offer assistance getting into and out of the cab and onto the curb.
3. Passengers with aides such as regular wheelchairs or walkers may require special equipment storage. You must store equipment which fits in the cab or trunk, and you cannot charge for this service. You do not have to take apart and put together complicated or heavy battery operated wheelchairs unless they are easy to collapse and store.
4. If elderly or disabled passengers have a problem getting into the back seat; offer to let them sit in front.
5. Some elderly or disabled passengers may have hearing problems. Speak slowly and clearly to them, and face them so that they can see your lips move.
6. You cannot refuse to take an elderly or disabled passenger if he or she needs to travel a short distance.
7. Park the cab clear of snow, ice or puddles for the elderly or disabled passenger to enter and exit the cab safely.
8. If you are picking up a person who lives in an apartment building with several floors, please give them extra time to get down to the cab after you honk. It may take an elderly or disabled person longer to get downstairs.
9. Many elderly and some disabled people may not drive or may have problems seeing. They may not be able to tell you where to turn. It is very important for you to know your streets as they may not be able to guide you.
10. Always try to pick up an elderly or disabled passenger on the same side of the street as where they are standing. It may be hard or unsafe for them to come to you. Please go to them.
11. Please make sure you give your elderly or disabled passengers plenty of time to get in the cab. Do not start driving until they are securely in with the door shut.
12. Your attitude is very important to elderly and disabled passengers. Please do not use bad language, be kind, have respect, and be polite.

Accessible Cambridge Taxicabs Available



Three wheelchair-accessible taxicabs are now available for use by Cambridge residents and visitors, with one more accessible taxicab due soon. These taxicabs serve the general public 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Priority service is given to elderly and disabled passengers. Cambridge accessible taxicabs operate as any other Cambridge taxi: they may be flagged down on the street, boarded at a taxi stand, or contacted by telephone. To phone for an accessible Cambridge taxicab, call:

Ambassador Brattle Taxi: 492-1100

Cambridge Checker Cab: 497-9000



Regular Cambridge taxi meter rates are in effect for all accessible taxicab service. The taxi meter starts at \$1.00 and 25¢ is charged for each 1/8 mile; the first travel mile costs \$2.75 with \$2.00 charged for each mile thereafter.

Taxi Discount Coupons are available for Cambridge residents who are 60 years of age and older, or who have a disability. For more information about the Cambridge Taxi Discount Coupon Program, contact:

**Cambridge Council on Aging
349-6220 (voice) or 349-6054 (TTY)**

**Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities
349-4692 (voice) or 492-0235 (TTY)**



P L E A S E P O S T



A report was received for a meeting held on January 15, 1997 for the purpose of a follow up meeting to the meeting held in November for taxi service to the Senior Center and to discuss the voucher, coupon and pre-paid systems for taxi service.

In City Council January 27, 1997

*Report accepted
Placed on file
Order adopted*