



City of Cambridge

Committee Report #2

IN CITY COUNCIL

December 16, 1996

COUNCILLOR DAVIS

ORDERED: That the Traffic and Transportation committee Report relating to taxi transportation issues to and from the Senior Center for the elderly be and hereby is referred to the License Commission.

In City Council December 16, 1996

Adopted by the affirmative vote of nine members.

Attest:- D. Margaret Drury, City Clerk.

A true copy;

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

ATTEST:-

D. Margaret Drury
City Clerk

City of Cambridge

The Traffic and Transportation Committee held a public meeting on Wednesday, November 20, 1996 at 3:15 p.m. in the Ballroom at the Senior Center, 806 Massachusetts Avenue. The purpose of the meeting was to resolve taxi transportation problems to and from the Senior Center for the elderly.

Present at the meeting were: Councillor Henrietta Davis, Chair of the Committee, Vice Mayor Kathleen Born, Councillor Michael Sullivan, Donna P. Lopez, Deputy City Clerk, Benjamin Barnes, License Commissioner, Ellen Semonoff, Deputy Director of Human Services Department, Eileen Ginnetty, Executive Director of the Council on Aging and Susan Pacheco, Director of Social Services at the Senior Center.

Councillor Davis stated that she scheduled the meeting to find out what was the problem the elderly were experiencing trying to get transportation to and from the Senior Center and to find a way of solving the problem. She announced that she would take testimony from the public.

The committee heard from Helen Johnson, 237 Franklin Street, who stated that she needed taxi service because she has a problem walking. She outlined to the committee that she has had to wait 1 to 1 1/2 hours for a taxi. Councillor Davis asked Ms. Johnson what time of the day she had experienced the problem. Ms. Johnson responded around 3:00 p.m. in the afternoon after Bingo.

The Committee heard from Catherine (Connie) D'Marino who complained about Medallion #26 who refused to carry her bags to her house and let her sit in the front seat. She also stated that the cab driver was rude; however, the cab was clean. She complained also about the waiting time for the cab to come. She questioned the amount of a tip to be given to the taxi driver when they do not even open the door for you. Ms. D'Marino informed the committee that the cab drivers took the city coupons and threw them on the floor of the cabs. She told the committee she had left her cane in a cab and it was returned to her within two hours. She asked why she had to explain to the taxi drivers that she was handicapped.

Councillor Davis questioned the License Commissioner on the rules and regulations regarding a passenger sitting in the front seat of a taxi and if Ms. D'Marino needed an identification card stating that she was handicapped. Mr. Benjamin Barnes stated that there is no requirement to have an identification card to sit in the front seat of the cab, however, the cab driver has the option to let you sit in the front seat and it is up to the individual driver. Mr. Barnes stated that there is no rule that you must tip the driver. The taxi industry is a service industry, he stated. He informed the committee that Cambridge has over 600 taxi drivers and a lot of them are good taxi drivers. The License Commission has received complaints from the Senior Center. He stated that the License Commission needed the medallion number, then we can go back to the driver and hold a hearing and the driver can be removed if we get many complaints.

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Ms. D'Marino stated that she had received two letters from the License Commission on her complaint. She was asked if she would identify the driver and she said that she could and she never heard from the License Commission again. Ms. D'Marino questioned if the taxi drivers were required to display the medallion number identification in the taxi. Mr. Barnes responded that it is a definite requirement. He said an investigator of the License Commission is inspecting the cabs and there will be fines issued if there is no identification displayed.

Ms. D'Marino told Mr. Barnes that cab drivers are not taking the vouchers. Mr. Barnes stated that the License Commission had received five or six written complaints but the medallion numbers were missing on the complaints. These calls were made to Ambassador, which is a radio service who sends out the dispatch to the cab drivers. Cambridge/Somerville Elder Services has limited themselves to the Ambassador radio service.

Ms. Eileen Ginnetty, Executive Director of the Council on Aging, told the committee that the License Commission has been helping to get better service for the elderly and that the Senior Elder Services met with the new cab drivers who are the new handicapped medallion owners.

Mr. Barnes told the committee that the License Commission is working with the Senior Center to get a taxi stand outside the Senior Center which will provide for at least one van out front. The four new accessible taxi drivers were introduced by Mr. Barnes.

The first accessible taxi driver, Hisham Hegazy, 71 Springfield Street, Somerville, stated that he would serve the handicapped. He informed the committee that he has a pager and will be getting a cell phone number.

The committee next heard from Edelmira Soto, 5 Carol Avenue, Burlington, who stated that she was medallion #250 and she would try her best to serve the needs of the community.

The committee then heard from Reza Saburi, 233 Massachusetts Avenue, Arlington, who informed the committee that it is a pleasure to work with the seniors and handicapped persons in the cities of Cambridge and Boston. He said that if there are any suggestions regarding the wheel chairs, he would be willing to meet with the seniors to solve any problems. He said that all taxi drivers are not rude. Please do not make a judgement for all taxi drivers, he asked.

The final accessible taxi driver the committee heard from was Abdul Kafal, 49 Summer Street, Arlington, who informed the committee that his cab would be on the road in two weeks. He told the committee that he was handicapped for 2 1/2 weeks in May and understood the needs first hand.

Mr. Barnes stated that no one is ignoring the problem; we are trying to improve the service to the senior citizens.

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Vice Mayor Born questioned Mr. Barnes on the problem with the dispatchers. She asked if we knew who the taxi drivers were that are not coming to the Senior Center. Mr. Barnes responded that we need to know the medallion numbers.

The committee heard from Joe Silva, CEO, Ambassador Radio Dispatcher, who outlined to the committee that when a call comes into the radio dispatcher, the dispatcher dispatches the call to a taxi cab driver, the cab driver is expected to go to the job. The cab drivers are being written up and complaints are being sent to the License Commission. The License Commission is taking whatever steps are necessary. We have 125 individual taxi owners.

Councillor Davis asked why were there cabs waiting in the taxi stand on Mount Auburn Street. Mr. Barnes responded that they are waiting for the long job.

Mr. Silva stated that in July there were 500 taxi cab jobs for the month. October had 710 taxi cab jobs for the month.

The committee heard from Mr. Copitas who stated that waiting time is long. There is another area that needs to be serviced, the short jobs.

Councillor Davis asked Mr. Silva if this is the way service is working, what does this mean? Customers should be serviced on a first come first served basis. Mr. Barnes said that during 3:30-4:30 is the back up service time. The day drivers are moving from one side of the city to the other side. The dispatchers, he said, call the cabs and they are not leaving the stands. The driver is supposed to leave the stand and take the call. The medallion number must be given to the License Commission who will call the driver into the office for a hearing.

Councillor Davis stated that if this is the way service is supposed to work, there should be no distinction between customers. If customers are being discriminated against this is a problem which needs to be fixed.

Vice Mayor Born asked if the dispatchers have to ask where the customers are going. Mr. Silva responded in the negative. Vice Mayor Born stated that drivers are refusing the calls because of their destination; maybe we should not ask destination. Mr. Silva stated that the driver does not have to inform the dispatcher when he is at the taxi stands. We ask destination to help expedite work, he said.

The committee heard from Bill Cavellini who stated that he was a taxi driver for twenty-three years. He distributed a brochure entitled "How can I get better Taxi Service in Cambridge" which is attached as **ATTACHMENT A**. He stated that the new Senior Center was for the whole city. There was more demand. Some problems will take care of themselves such as the street construction was underway when the Senior Center opened. There is no taxi cab stand, but the Traffic and Parking Department will be removing 2 parking meters in front of the Senior Center to install a taxi stand. He suggested that the dispatchers prioritize the Senior Center. The jobs to the Senior Center should not be defined as a short job.

He further suggested that the radio service not give out any other job in Central Square until the call at the Senior Center has been accepted.

Councillor Davis requested the License Commission to update this brochure.

Ms. Eileen Ginnetty stated that 3-5 calls to the dispatcher are getting lost.

The Committee heard from Bill Joyce who suggested a jitney service be set up in the city.

Ms. D'Marino asked if the drivers had a right to charge the passenger waiting time. Mr. Barnes said there is a waiting period of five minutes before the meter is put down, but exceptions should be made if there are elderly or handicapped.

Councillor Davis stated that she was appalled that seniors are receiving this kind of treatment. Mr. Cavellini stated that the meter should not be started until the person is physically in the cab.

Ms. Semonoff inquired if it were possible for groups to be taken in a cab, especially where the seniors are concerned. Mr. Barnes responded that Ms. Ginnetty is grouping the seniors together and they are being driven to the same side of the city.

In response to a question by a senior citizen regarding the route around the city. Mr. Barnes responded that the passenger is allowed to tell the driver the way he would like to go and if the driver does not comply, a complaint could be filed with the License Commission.

The committee heard from Virginia Jay who had an issue with the home care transportation on the first and third Thursdays of the month between 10:00 - 12:00. If the transportation was provided in the morning, why is there a problem in the afternoons. Mr. Silva stated that lists are given to the dispatchers daily. If a name is on the list for one way, we cannot provide a round trip unless we have verification.

The committee heard from Susan Pacheco, Director of Social Services, who stated that the Senior Center would like the cab drivers to pull into the driveway on Green Street to pick up seniors.

Councillor Davis stated that the accessible vans would be scheduled to begin in 2 - 5 weeks. Mr. Barnes stated that they are scheduled to start in 2 weeks and will pull in the back of the Senior Center. He would set up a meeting with the three radio services on this matter, also, Mr. Barnes distributed a draft schedule and method of servicing Massachusetts Avenue Senior Center (ATTACHMENT B).

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Councillor Davis stated that a meeting will be held in 2 months to visit the same issue and monitor its progress.

The meeting adjourned at 5:00 p.m.

For the Committee,

Henrietta Davis
Councillor Henrietta Davis *by dw*
Chair

If you are
a Senior Citizen
or
Handicapped . . .

**Use Your
Cambridge
Taxi Discount
Program**

Get free coupons worth
\$1.00 each

Call for information:

**Council on Aging
349-6220**

**Commission on Handicapped
349-4692**

The Taxi Discount Program is a
service of the City of Cambridge
and the Cambridge Taxi Industry.

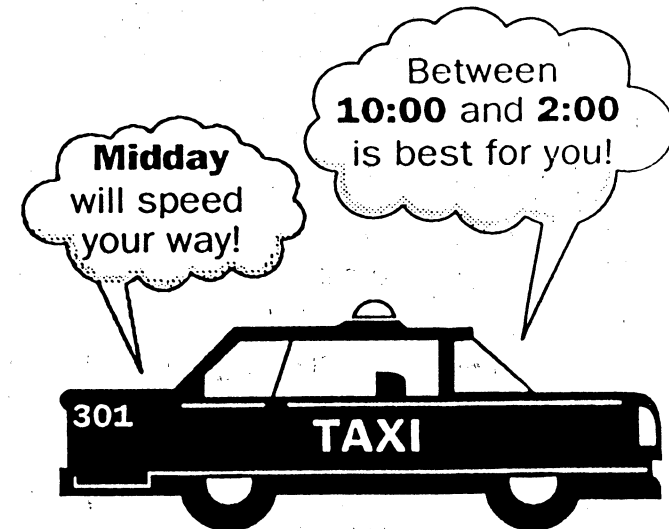


Provided as a service to the riding public
by the Cambridge Taxi Association (CTA).
12/90

Please feel free to contact us with any
questions:

**CAMBRIDGE
TAXI ASSOCIATION**
P.O. Box 1900
Cambridge, MA 02238

**HOW CAN
I GET
BETTER TAXI
SERVICE IN
CAMBRIDGE?**



GENERAL ADVICE

Scheduling appointments:

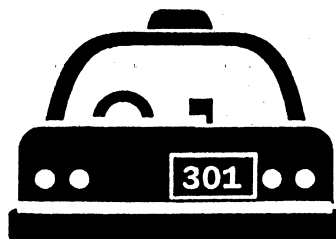
- Try to schedule appointments and other trips during **non-rush hour** periods, when possible:
Morning rush hour – 7:30-9:30 a.m.
Evening rush hour – 3:30-7:00 p.m.
- If you must take a cab during the rush hours, give yourself extra time. Call the cab company 15-20 minutes before you usually do.

When you reach the operator at the cab company:

- If you are a regular customer, and especially if you go to the same place every day, alert the operator to this fact.
- Tell the operator if you are in a wheelchair or need assistance.
- Ask the operator how long (s)he thinks it will take to get a cab.
- Remember, you're not speaking with the dispatcher, so estimated times of arrival are approximate.
- If the cab comes right away, be ready to leave. If it is late, call the company back . . . let the phone ring.
- Do not call more than one cab company.
- If you must cancel a cab, don't wait for the driver to arrive. Call back right away.

IF YOU LIVE IN AN APARTMENT BUILDING

- Always give your apartment number to the operator
- If there is an intercom with a dial code instead of an apartment number, give the operator the dial code for your apartment (you should do this even if you intend to meet the driver in the lobby or in front of the building).
- If the buzzer or intercom system isn't working or the elevators are broken down, tell the operator. The operator will tell the dispatcher, who will then communicate this information to the driver.
- When the intercom in the building isn't working, be in the lobby of the building at the appointed time



IF YOU HAVE A PROBLEM WITH A DRIVER OR A CAB COMPANY

The driver must take you where you want to go.

If (s)he refuses or if you have any other legitimate complaints with a driver or a cab company, report it to:

The Cambridge License Commission
at 831 Mass. Ave.

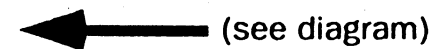
349-6140

Ask for Frank Anastasio,
Chief Hackney Inspector

(Your call will be kept confidential)

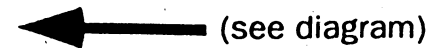
You are not required to have the name of the driver to make a complaint; however, you must have the cab number.

The cab number is printed on the side of the taxicab.



(see diagram)

It is a two- or three-digit number that should also be prominently displayed on a card inside the cab and on a metal medallion on the back of the cab.



(see diagram)

(Don't confuse it with the telephone number of the cab company).

ATTACHMENT B**DRAFT**

TO: Accessible Taxicab Medallion Owners

FROM: Richard Scali, License Commission Executive Officer

RE: Schedule and Method of Servicing the Massachusetts Avenue Senior Center

Below you will find a schedule of hours you are expected to service the Senior Center on Massachusetts Avenue. Until the two taxi stands have been established, probably in the spring of 1997, please pick up passengers in the rear of the building on Green Street.

ACCESSIBLE TAXICAB SENIOR CENTER SCHEDULE							
HOURS	SUN.	MON.	TUES.	WED.	THURS.	FRI.	SAT
HOURS	MEDALLION NUMBERS						
2:00PM 2:30	249A	250A	251A	252A	251A	249A	250A
2:30PM 3:00	250A	251A	252A	249A	250A	252A	249A
3:00PM 3:30	251A	252A	249A	250A	249A	250A	251A
3:30PM 4:00	252A	249A	250A	251A	252A	251A	252A
4:00PM 4:30	249A	250A	251A	252A	251A	249A	250A
4:30PM 5:00	250A	251A	252A	249A	250A	252A	249A

Committee Report #2

S-648

A report was received for a meeting held
on November 20, 1996 for the purpose of
resolving taxi transportation problems
to and from the Senior Center for the elderly.

In City Council December 16, 1996

Report Accepted,
Placed on file
on motion of
Councillor Davis.
Order Adopted.