

To: Public Safety & Regulatory Services Committee
Chair Dan Niziolek

Re: Taxicab Standards Summary

Date: September 8, 2005

This summary looks at some of the performance standards used by the City of Minneapolis to review Taxicab drivers, vehicles, owners of vehicles and service companies on an annual or bi-annual basis before receiving a new or renewal of their license to operate a taxicab or taxicab Service Company. Over the past 2-years the quality of taxicab vehicles operating on the street and drivers receiving a regular license to operate has improved. Some of the tools used by staff are:

- Taxicab Driver Cab College – All new applicants are required to attend and successfully pass the taxicab driver cab college before being granted a permanent taxicab driver's license. Staff worked with St Paul and the Metropolitan Airports Commission to create a standardized training class that all prospective drivers will attend. Hennepin Technical College currently provides all of this training. Staff is currently working on ordinance language to amend chapter 341 so that all new taxicab driver applicants will not be allowed to operate a taxicab under a provisional license until successful completion of the training course. Present language allows an applicant to operate a taxicab for a maximum of 60-days on a provisional driver's license while attending the training course.
- Administrative Citations / Technical Advisory Hearings – This process allows staff the ability to take punitive action on persons, owners and/or service companies with poor performance standards or failure to comply with city ordinances.
- Semi-Annual Vehicle Inspection – All taxicab vehicles receive a complete mechanical and esthetics inspection semi-annually. Once a vehicle has passed they receive a permit to operate. Vehicles can be taken out of service at any time for imperfection and mechanical defects until repaired to the standards set by ordinance.
- Taxicab Meter Inspections – All taxicab meters are inspected semi-annual for accuracy. If a meter is found inaccurate, has missing components or found unsealed the cab is taken out of service until brought into compliance.
- On Street Inspections – Once the semi-annual inspection is completed staff conducts on street inspection of appearance and taxicab meters. When a taxicab is found in violation it is taken out of service until brought back into compliance.
- Vehicle Age Limits – Current ordinance only allows a vehicle 5 model years of operation as a taxicab not counting the current year we are in. (i.e.

This year vehicles allowed to operate on the street will be 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003 and 2004.)

- Citizen Complaints – Staff conducts an investigation and background check on all complaints lodged by citizens. When infractions are found the person(s) are dealt with appropriately. However, if a pattern is found the person may be required to attend classes outside the city imposed fines or suspensions and provide documentation that they attended a required course or class. (i.e. bad driving habits required to attend a certified safe driving course or a person with an attitude problem may be required to attend an anger management course before being allow to operate a taxicab again.) In some cases drivers have lost their right to operate a taxicab ever again in Minneapolis.
- Taxicab Driver Applications – All new taxicab driver applications are reviewed by staff for approval or denial. A criminal background and driver's license check are conducted, past employment verification is conducted and references are contacted. Applicants who are denied may not reapply for 6-months. The process in place is to try and provide the highest quality of taxicab driver. All licensed taxicab drivers receive a yearly driver's license review for compliance with the ordinance in May before their driver's license is renewed. Drivers that do not meet the minimum standards are taken out of service until in compliance. There are some cases where drivers have been suspended for long periods of time or have had their licenses revoked.
- Service Company Reviews – City ordinance provides a list of standards that service companies must comply with each year before they can renew their license. During the last review staff found minor infractions that were brought into compliance within a months time.

Staff surveyed 10 cities across the country to see what kind of standards are used to monitor service levels and found Minneapolis to have the same level of standards with minimal deviation. Drivers training we found the only difference is the length of time a driver must attend the course. Minneapolis is currently has a 24-hour class. The minimum is 15-hours in Boston, MA and New York has the longest at 80-hours. Everyone conducts vehicle inspection either annual, bi-annual or semi-annual basis. Minneapolis currently conducts semi-annual inspections. One item that separates Minneapolis from a couple of cities (Seattle, WA; Boston, MA; Atlanta, GA and New York City, NY) is the use of a point or matrix system for monetary penalties or grievous violations of rules and regulations.

Overall Minneapolis is on the right track when monitoring the taxicab industry with other cities across the country. Staff continually converses with taxicab regulators to look for way to improve quality of equipment and customer service that citizens and visitors of Minneapolis expect and deserve.

The Department Regulatory Services, Licensing and Consumer Services Division recommends a detailed review of best city practices and working with the Taxicab

Service Committee, the hospitality industry (GMCVA and the Minneapolis Hotel Association), The Minneapolis Advisory Committee on People with Disabilities, and the Senior Ombudsman's office to make recommendations for improvements to taxicab service over the next four months.

Initial areas of focus are:

- Educate and encourage cab users and others to make complaints to the taxi service company and our office when customer experience poor service.
- Review the taxicab driver's certification training standards and explore need for semiannual training and or testing as an addition to the current requirement.
- Hold Taxi Service Companies more accountable for the drivers operating under their colors.