

POLITICS AS USUAL: Wither UberX?

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

I had to take a cab home from the gym the other day (long story?) and, as I was in a chatty mood, I asked the driver about his day, what it's like to drive a cab in Aurora, etc.

The lovely driver proceeded to fill me in on a few facts of which I was largely unaware. While I knew that driving a cab is a hard way to make a living, I was not aware just how hard.

It's pretty tough to make a buck.

Taxi driving is highly regulated. However, the rules are not standardized across the province. Each municipality has its own set of bylaws, regulations, etc., that govern how taxis operate in town ? even how many operate in Town.

The driver maintains that some of the rules that govern taxi operations in Aurora put cabbies at a disadvantage, as compared to those that drive in neighbouring municipalities.

For example, in Aurora, a driver must replace his car every eight years. In Newmarket, drivers must replace their cars every 10 years. That's a significant cost differential born by drivers in adjacent communities.

There are other differences, small and large, that also affects their ability to earn a good income.

But nothing affects their bottom line more than UberX.

For folks that may not be aware, UberX is a taxi service that isn't a taxi service. It is a ?ride-sharing? service for which you must ?share? a fee. It has been described as, ?an app-based ride-sharing service?One tap and a car comes directly to you?and payment is completely cashless.?

The company argues that they're not a taxi service but rather more of a ?matchmaking service to willing parties.?

So, if I understand them correctly, they're saying that their service is E-harmony for folks that need to get around town? Nonsense. Semantics aside, it sounds like a taxi service to me. But, make no mistake, they are not. They are not licensed taxi drivers. They do not carry the necessary or relevant insurance (IE: commercial driving insurance). There are little or no security screening or safety measures in place, and most if not all are not accessible.

But, they are cheaper and that's why they are becoming so popular.

They are cheaper, however, because they don't currently have to obey the same rules as licensed taxi drivers or pay for the attendant costly overhead.

A number of cities (such as Ottawa and Calgary) have banned UberX. The City of Toronto is currently debating what to do about it.

I was not aware that UberX was operating in Aurora. But it is, and has been for some time now.

It has flown under the radar thus far, but I think municipalities in York Region will soon be in the same position of having to make a decision one way or another.

I am all for free enterprise. If someone can offer a service at a better price then I am all for it. However, everyone who enters the marketplace should have to play by the same rules. I am not for or against UberX per se, but I am not in favour of allowing them to operate outside the standard rules that govern all other modes of public transportation.

It isn't safe and it isn't fair.

UberX should be regulated or it should be prohibited. Period.

Until next week, stay informed, stay involved because this is ? after all ? Our Town.