

# Taxi regs encyclopedic, e-ride rules like a brochure

► CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

the driver's ID and shift start and end times and other vehicle data — but “not including personal customer information.” As of April 30, 2013, all of this had to be transmitted electronically “with a default setting of every six seconds.”

Legally operating one of the city's 1,900 cabs requires that either the driver — or whoever he or she is leasing the cab from — owns a taxi medallion, which not long ago cost \$250,000. To increase the number of cabs, the SFMTA recently cut the cost in half for the 200 new medallions it's in the process of issuing. To even be eligible to buy a medallion, cabbies must have driven at least 800 hours a year for four of the past five years and have been on the SFMTA waiting list that closed in December 2009.

In March The Extra repeatedly asked Uber, Lyft and Sidecar to tell us how many drivers they have working in San Francisco. None replied. However, Lyft representative Emily Carter, speaking at a Mayor's Disability Council hearing in September last year, said Lyft had 10,000 drivers operating in the city then — too many, she suggested, to realistically require an extensive training program.

SFMTA regulations detail such particulars as a minimum age for drivers (24); a citizenship requirement; a prohibition on gifts or gratuities from drivers to permit holders; the maximum time a cab can be parked on a city street (four hours); drug testing; rules on staffing and dispatching; lost-and-found property; vehicle maintenance; spare vehicles; compliance with greenhouse gas reduction efforts; workers' compensation; accident reporting; a plan for public emergencies; and a requirement that all telephone calls be answered within six rings, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year; and be answered in a certain (professional) manner.

**(Taxi companies must document) the number of passengers, fares, fees, mileage, time of hire and discharge of each trip and the driver's ID and shift start and end times. ... All of this has to be transmitted electronically “with a default setting of every six seconds.”**

For the e-ride newbies, Lyles said, “there aren't significant regulations” at all.

Uber, Lyft, Sidecar and other app-hailing companies, don't answer to the SFMTA. They're the responsibility of the California Public Utilities Commission, which also oversees charter buses, shuttles and limos.

In September 2013, the CPUC, more than a year after demanding that Lyft and Sidecar cease-and-desist, an order they ignored, issued 28 rules for “TNCs,” or transportation network companies, the agency's name for the new transportation system.

E-companies pay but a \$1,000 fee to apply for a three-year permit that precludes them from owning the vehicles or fleets of vehicles whose operation they direct, but allows “no limit to the number of drivers that utilize the app under one permit,” according to the CPUC's 10-page “Basic Information for Transportation Network Companies and Applicants.” So Uber got its multibillion-dollar business started for \$1,000. Three-year permit renewals cost \$100.

The handful of regulations include requiring the e-ride companies to check their drivers prior to allowing them “on the platform” and quarterly thereafter. They are barred from hiring

drivers with more than three points on their DMV driving record or any major violations such as reckless driving, hit-and-run or driving with a suspended license in the previous three years, or any DUIs in the past seven years.

The transportation network companies, or TNCs, as officials call them, must also provide \$1 million-per-incident commercial liability insurance for drivers and vehicles “while they are providing TNC services.” This last bit of verbiage became a point of contention in the New Year's Eve 2014 death of 6-year-old Sofia Liu, when Uber said that because its driver who hit the girl and her mom in the Polk Street crosswalk at Ellis Street did not have a passenger at the time, it was not liable in the death, although it fired driver Syed Muzzafar.

The PUC's regulations also call for a 19-point vehicle inspection covering lights, locks, steering, windshield viability and other basics, and a driver training program, useless because it comes with no specifics on what is to be covered. Companies are required to file reports on a regular basis, including one on how they intend to address the gap in making transportation available to disabled clients, something they've been slow to get around to while fighting for access to more lucrative fares,

such as to and from the airport.

Does that sound like a lot? It's a drop in the bucket compared with what taxi companies handle.

Taxis also must comply with guidelines governing the color schemes, signage and lights that identify taxis. The number of taxi permits issued, too, is subject to a no-more-than-annual revision.

All cabs are required to be equipped with, among other things, a flashlight for night shifts and a security camera “manufactured after December 31, 2006.” They have to allow passengers to split the tab any way they choose, but cannot charge more than the fare shown on the Taximeter and must issue a receipt if asked.

City Hall has encouraged Uber, Lyft, Sidecar and the others to take over the ride-for-hire industry here, which has led to frequent stories of public abuse by their relatively unprepared drivers and unregulated vehicles.

The Department of Motor Vehicles in January issued an advisory stating that vehicles used for ride-hailing must obtain commercial license plates. The companies quickly cried foul. Lyft complained that “to get commercial plates would essentially treat peer-to-peer transportation the same as a taxi,” according to a Chronicle report. So the DMV immediately backed down.

Contrast the taxis' hard-and-fast charges with Uber's notorious “surge pricing” that saw the company quadruple its rates during a hostage situation in downtown Sydney, Australia, on Dec. 15 until public outcry shamed it into a U-turn.

But a few days earlier, in San Francisco, passengers were charged 3.8 times the usual rate during the heavy rains that month, and similar rules go into effect whenever demand goes up, such as for popular concerts in Golden Gate Park. ■

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