

# MINUTES

## MEETING OF THE SAN DIEGO METROPOLITAN TRANSIT SYSTEM TAXICAB ADVISORY COMMITTEE (TAC)

July 27, 2022

1. Roll Call

Chair Elo-Rivera called the Taxicab Advisory Committee meeting to order at 10:04 a.m. A roll call sheet listing Taxicab Advisory Committee member attendance is attached.

2. Approval of Minutes

Antonio Hueso moved to approve the minutes of the May 25, 2022, MTS Taxicab Advisory Committee meeting. Chair Elo-Rivera seconded the motion, and the vote was 10 to 0 in favor with Brian Hilemon, Louis Vasquez, Marc Nichols, Margo Tanguay and Michael Trimble absent.

3. Public Comments

There were no Public Comments.

### COMMITTEE DISCUSSION ITEMS

4. Transportation Brokerage and Vehicle Sharing Program Opportunities for Taxicab and Nonemergency Medical Transportation Companies (Arun Prem, Megan Schmidt, Budd Anderson, Christian Hernandez of FACT)

Arun Prem, FACT Executive Director, provided information on FACT's mission to broker accessible transportation within San Diego County. He noted that FACT's costs have more than doubled due to the pandemic and has affected their operations. He provided details on: the number of rides FACT provides annually, ride costs for passengers, service area and eligibility requirements. He also covered FACT's transportation brokerage model that includes taxicabs, nonemergency medical, and transportation network companies (TNCs) such as Uber and Lyft, allowing passengers to get the most affordable trip price option.

Arun Prem explained how FACT purchases wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAVs) through grant funding and how interested transportation providers can apply to operate FACT WAVs for their own profit so long as they commit to providing FACT passengers with three (3) trips per day.

### PUBLIC COMMENT

*William Johnson*– from United Taxi Workers San Diego (UTWSD) asked if the FACT WAVs have MTS decals and requested clarification on the three (3) trip minimum requirement for FACT passengers.

*Lilli Irani*– Professor from University of California San Diego (UCSD) asked how does FACT evaluate equity outcomes of its brokerage model for the transportation workers providing their service through FACT.

### COMMITTEE COMMENT

Antonio Hueso asked if FACT's WAV vehicles are electric, natural gas (CNG) powered, or whether there are plans to acquire these types of alternative fuel vehicles.

Arun Prem stated FACT is limited to encouraging its vendors to invest in zero emission vehicles, as it is up to them to acquire those vehicles if a contract requires it.

Antonio Hueso stated he understood FACT brokerage model is supported by SANDAG and suggested that FACT make a partnership with MTS to reach out to other organizations or County groups for the purpose of securing more funding and being able to network in other cities to provide transportation services. He asked how FACT pays its vendors for their services.

Arun Prem stated the grants it receives are not only from SANDAG, but also from California Department of Transportation (CALTRANS), San Diego County, and a variety of other discretionary grants. FACT also collects revenue directly from services provided in some north county cities. As for how payments to vendors are disbursed, Prem stated vendors submit an invoice to FACT and are then paid for services rendered.

Mikhail Hussein asked if FACT is providing trips outside the north county area, particularly in the San Diego city heights area, and if so, if those trips are provided on a prearranged basis.

Arun Prem stated that FACT service covers the whole county and its interested in doing business with vendors from all areas within San Diego County.

Chair Elo-Rivera requested clarification on previous questions regarding vehicle decals trip fees and requirements for zero emission vehicles.

Arun Prem stated FACT does not require any vehicle decals but vendors can have decals as required by other regulations or contract program. He stated that FACT is flexible with the three (3) FACT trip minimum requirement. Arun Prem concluded by stating passengers will always pay the lowest available fees and FACT will manage any type of vehicle, zero or low emissions, so long as they are safe to operate but encourages vendors to purchase zero-emission vehicles. Arun Prem further acknowledged that FACT has no leverage on payment disparities between TNC and other driver types, but has found that having TNCs provide short trips has lowered overall trip refusals based on distance.

#### Action Taken

Informational item only. No action taken.

#### 5. Taxicab Advisory Committee Election Results (Leonardo Fewell)

Chair Elo-Rivera welcomed all new and continuing members to the TAC and said he appreciated the feedback provided by permit holder, lease driver and organization representatives for the benefit of the taxicab industry.

Leonardo Fewell provided information in the TAC Election results. He stated that there were nine (9) self-nominations for nine (9) open lease driver and permit holder seats. Nominees were given an option to provide a headshot and short biography to be displayed on the electronic ballot, but only one (1) lease driver, Agustin Hodoyan, did so. Mr. Fewell stated how the election process was electronically held through [associationvoting.com](https://associationvoting.com), from June 13, 2022 through June 27, 2022. He added that out of 564 eligible permit holder and lease driver voters, only 55 persons voted, resulting in a 9.8% turnout.

Mr. Fewell named the newly elected TAC members for the permit holder of one (1) taxicab permit category as follows: Able Seifu, Zewdu Girma, Agustin Hodoyan and Akbar Majid. For permit holders of two (2) or more taxicabs category, Antonio Hueso and George Abraham were

elected. For the lease driver category, Alfred Banks, Margo Tanguay and David Tasem were elected.

#### PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment on this item.

#### COMMITTEE COMMENT

Alfred Banks had technical difficulties and was unable to proceed with his comment.

Mikhaill Hussein thanked MTS leadership for organizing the TAC election and promoting lease driver participation.

Chair Elo-Rivera thanked Samantha Leslie and Leonardo Fewell for their efforts in successfully organizing the TAC election.

#### Action Taken

Informational item only. No action taken.

#### 6. Taxicab Advisory Committee Membership Guidelines (Leonardo Fewell)

Leonardo Fewell informed the committee of the need for lease driver, permit holder and organization representatives to attend the TAC meetings in order to reach the required quorum for each meeting. He informed the committee of the possibility of one (1) to two (2) current TAC organizations, the San Diego Tourism Authority and Cross Border Xpress (CBX), not appointing representatives for the 2022-2025 TAC term. He stated that TAC is standing by for confirmation from the San Diego Tourism Authority and CBX to ensure if they will appoint a representative and retain their TAC membership.

Mr. Fewell said he would provide more information at the November TAC meeting pertaining to membership appointment from these organizations and requested feedback on how to address the possibility of these organizations not appointing a representative and what organizations could be considered for TAC membership to replace any vacancies.

#### PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment on this item.

#### COMMITTEE COMMENT

Mikhaill Hussein stated that there is a need for CBX to remain part of the TAC as there are several issues involving taxi driver business and activities with CBX and hoped that CBX confirmed their continued membership with TAC.

Chair Elo-Rivera said we wanted to make sure that all parties with a stake in the region's taxicab industry had a seat at the table and will collaborate with MTS to ensure this.

Leonardo Fewell stated that CBX became a TAC member at the request of MTS precisely for the aforementioned reasons. He said MTS will stand by for CBX response and provide an update at the next TAC meeting in November.

Zewdu Girma asked Leonardo Fewell if MTS has oversight of CBX's taxicab activities, if CBX is located within County of San Diego's property and if MTS is aware of the taxicab activities that take place at CBX.

Leonardo Fewell answered that all taxicabs that operate at CBX, as well as in all areas under MTS area of jurisdiction, must be properly permitted by MTS. He stated that CBX is a private entity and may stipulate the criteria as to who is allowed to operate within their property and their operation guidelines.

Chair Elo-Rivera provided clarification by stating that all taxicabs that operate within CBX are permitted by MTS, but not all MTS permitted taxicabs are able to operate within CBX as CBX is a private operation and is able to establish its own admittance criteria.

Zewdu Girma stated he understood this concept, but said that the taxi drivers who work at CBX are not being heard by CBX management and asked who can take the role of voicing drivers concerns to CBX management.

Leonardo Fewell stated that this has been a concern by taxi drivers but was unable to answer who would take this role as this was an internal matter between taxi drivers and CBX management. He said there are driver representatives that communicate with CBX management on a regular basis, but as a private operation, CBX manages their ground transportation as they choose. He reiterated how one of the goals to invite CBX to become a TAC member was to establish communication channels between them and taxi drivers where these types of concerns could be addressed.

Akbar Majid asked if committee members could provide specific examples of the problems that taxicab drivers face when dealing with CBX.

Mikhaill Hussein said the majority of CBX taxicab drivers that work at CBX are members of UTWSD. He said one of the biggest issues facing taxicab drivers is that CBX charge them a \$180-\$200 monthly fee to operate. Another issue is an entry waiting list that is administered by two (2) drivers who think they are in control, prioritizing friend and family over other drivers that have been waiting. He requested any drivers that experience problems with CBX to reach out to UTWSD to seek a solution.

Able Seifu said it was a good opportunity to keep working with the TAC to seek solutions to this and other challenges facing the taxicab industry. He suggested that MTS could intervene and talk to the people administering the CBX admission program in hopes that the process becomes fairer and more equitable.

Antonio Hueso stated that CBX has a limited access program similar to the one utilized by the San Diego Airport. This causes dissatisfaction amongst drivers that would like to work at CBX, and asserted that CBX is a private entity and therefore is able to operate in such manner.

#### Action Taken

Informational item only. No action taken.

#### 7. Integration of Soft-Meter and Trip Information Technologies (Leonardo Fewell)

Leonardo Fewell defined soft-meters and traditional hard meters, and provided a technical explanation of how they operate. He also explained the role of the California Department of Agriculture, Weights and Measures role in certifying these meters, and how there are currently only three (3) authorized "Service Agents" in San Diego able to service and repair hard meters.

Mr. Fewell stated that soft-meter technology has become the industry standard in most cities, allowing drivers to take advantage of features like providing up-front pricing and adjusting fares based on passenger demand. He stated that currently, Yellow Cab dispatch is the only dispatch

service that utilizes soft-meter technology in San Diego. He also explained the benefits of utilizing soft-meter technologies including electronic collection of trip data, enabling drivers to receive instant text or electronic communications from dispatch services, in addition to providing up-front pricing and ability to adjust fares to better compete with Transportation Network Companies (TNCs). He finalized by explaining other soft-meter benefits such as enhanced fraud prevention, remote certification by California Department of Agriculture, Weights and Measures, and the ability to integrate with app-based dispatch services as drivers choose.

Mr. Fewell stated that MTS supports the adoption of soft-meter technologies and is exploring possible incentives including allowing taxicabs that utilize soft-meters to charge an additional 6% on top of the maximum authorized rates of fare and meet the trip sheet reporting requirement per Ordinance No. 11. FHVA could also waive the dispatch service change administrative fee for those drivers that change their subscription to a dispatch service that offers soft-meter technologies.

#### PUBLIC COMMENT

There no public comment on this item.

#### COMMITTEE COMMENT

Able Seifu stated that he recently tried to adjust his taxicab's hard meter and sought the assistance on one (1) of the three (3) remaining authorized service agents in San Diego, only to be told that he would not be able to provide service, as he was not a member of the dispatch service the agent is associated with. He said that something had to be done as taxi drivers cannot continue to depend on the few remaining service agents. He suggested that TAC inform or enforce all dispatch services to adopt soft-meter technologies.

Mikhaill Hussein informed that UTWSD is developing a soft-meter application that will be available for interested drivers. He agreed with Seifu that this poses a challenge as many drivers do not know how the hard-meters operate and welcomes the soft-meter technology and the idea for all dispatch services to provide it.

Antonio Hueso stated that technology is always a good thing but it also brings expenditures that some dispatch services do not support. He added that some drivers are recycling old hard meters that can be as old as 20 years due to them being inexpensive. He suggested finding ways to adopt the usage of soft-meter technologies in a similar way the industry adopted to hybrid vehicle technology by the introduction of the Toyota Prius. He stated that although soft-meter technology is less expensive when compared to previous years, it is still more expensive than the use of hard meters. He suggested the industry should embrace new technologies and acknowledged that there are very few service agents available to service and install meters. He thanked Akbar Majid for assisting with access to Yellow Cab's service agent for servicing and installing equipment for other non-yellow taxicabs.

Akbar Majid stated that Yellow Cab will continue to assist any taxicab with their meter and equipment needs regardless of what dispatch service they subscribe with. He warned that there are several soft-meter products that are not in compliance with the California Department of Agriculture, Weights and Measurements requirements. He added that in order to properly function, soft-meters need to synchronize with other dispatch system software.

Zewdu Girma asked Mr. Fewell why are taxicab drivers required to have a radio dispatch service and if there was a possibility for this requirement to become optional.

Mr. Fewell clarified that two-way radio equipment is no longer required in taxicabs and taxicab need only communicate with a dispatch service through text messaging or other electronic means. He added that dispatch-driver communications can be met through a soft-meter. He stated that other drivers have expressed that dispatch services no longer provide them with trips but a subscription is still required to locate and receive lost and found items, as well as to request assistance in case of an emergency. He added MTS will evaluate future revisions to the dispatch service requirements as more drivers choose to conduct business exclusively from the San Diego Airport or CBX.

Mikhail Hussein agreed with Antonio Hueso in that introducing new technologies poses a challenge as UTWSD has experienced challenges in its previous attempts to develop and launch a soft-meter. He added that the industry needs to work together to overcome those challenges. He responded to Zewdu Girma that UTWSD has reached out to MTS to evaluate the need for taxicabs to subscribe to a dispatch service as well as providing first/last mile service to trolley passengers.

Zewdu Girma said that he does not advocate for the removal of the dispatch service requirement, but to require other dispatch services to adopt and offer new technologies at an affordable subscription price for drivers. He asked how long would it take for this to occur.

Mr. Fewell stated that at this point MTS requests the industry to provide feedback that will lead to the adoption of necessary measures to adopt these technology solutions. He added that drivers will ultimately decide what dispatch service they subscribe with and that MTS will continue to consider incentives to adopt this technology.

Chair Elo-Rivera asked if incorporating soft-meter technology into MTS PRONTO app could be an additional benefit for taxicab drivers.

Mr. Fewell stated that that is a possibility and that other cities incorporate similar technologies into their public transit apps, and that MTS will explore all possible incentives for adopting soft-meter technologies.

Chair Elo-Rivera stated that incorporating soft-meter technology to MTS PRONTO could also benefit passengers by offering first/last mile taxicab service.

#### Action Taken

Informational item only. No action taken.

#### 8. For-Hire Vehicle Administration Operations Update (Leonardo Fewell)

Leonardo Fewell presented on the For-Hire Vehicle Administration quarterly report and operations update. He discussed: number of active vs. surrendered permits, FHVA operations update, field inspections per vehicle type percentages and issued citations and warnings, customer feedback case comparison between January-March and April-July periods between San Diego Airport taxicab and TNC trips and FHVA operations update including a request from the port of San Diego to repurpose underutilized taxicab stand curbspace along Harbor Drive and increased Convention Center and Cruise Ship terminal activities.

#### PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment on this item.

## COMMITTEE COMMENT

Agustin Hodoyan said that during special events such as baseball games many drivers refuse to use the meter and overcharge passengers. He also stated that the Marriot Hotel located at Harbor Drive requires taxicab drivers to stage along the entrance ramp, hence the reason why that particular taxicab stand is mostly empty.

Antonio Hueso stated that diversification of taxicab service was vital to the industry survival during the COVID pandemic. He suggested for drivers to network together to meet the needs of passengers. He stated that there is underutilization of taxicab permits as most drivers work out of the Airport due to a lack of vision that taxicab service is needed at other parts of the city and other places other than the Airport.

Zewdu Girma asked Mr. Fewell about passenger comments resulting from drivers not utilizing the meter and displaying rude behavior.

Mr. Fewell stated passenger complaints vary from fare refusals, drivers using profanity, overcharging and other egregious behaviors. He stated that these negative behaviors affect the industry and undermine the positive and professional behavior of the vast majority of taxicab drivers. He added that MTS stresses the importance during driver training on customer service.

Zewdu Girma said he believes there can be a solution to these issues and he will share it with the TAC at a later time.

Mikhaill Hussein requested FHVA to forward convention center event and cruise ship activity to UTWSD so they can share it with their subscribers.

Mr. Fewell said he would share the weblinks for the convention center and Port of San Diego with dispatch services.

Chair Elo-Rivera requested to combine the remaining number nine and ten agenda items in an attempt to finalize the meeting by 12:00 pm.

## Action Taken

Informational item only. No action taken.

## 9. Topics for Next Taxicab Advisory Committee Meeting (Leonardo Fewell)

Mr. Fewell presented on topics for next Taxicab Advisory Committee Meeting including providing a FHVA Quarterly Operations Update, Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle policy update, and presenting on topics of interest affecting the taxicab industry. Mr. Fewell requested feedback for additional topics.

## PUBLIC COMMENT

*William Aloze*, taxicab driver, said he believed that the measures discussed are a step in the right direction. He added that he does not utilize the Harbor Drive taxicab stands because the

majority of business is at the Airport. He also asked who would have access to the soft-meter and if a driver's private information could be compromised.

Mr. Fewell stated that FHVA would follow industry standard safeguards such as only allowing persons with regulatory and authorized service roles to access soft-meter and trip data information.

#### COMMITTEE COMMENT

Zewdu Girma said that drivers at the Airport are frustrated due to longer wait times to get a trip, in addition to the trip being a short one. He suggested authorizing a minimum \$25 flat rate for short trips such as Point Loma and downtown. He believes that passengers would happily pay what Uber or Lyft charges and drivers would be satisfied.

10. Committee Member Communications

There was no Committee Member Communications discussion.

11. Next Meeting Date

The next Taxicab Advisory Committee meeting is scheduled for November 16, 2022, at 10:00 a.m.

12. Adjournment

Chair Elo-Rivera adjourned the meeting at 12:01 p.m.

/S/ Sean Elo-Rivera  
Chairperson  
San Diego Metropolitan Transit System

/S/ Dalia Gonzalez  
Committee Clerk  
San Diego Metropolitan Transit System

Attachment: Roll Call Sheet



SAN DIEGO METROPOLITAN TRANSIT SYSTEM  
TAXICAB ADVISORY COMMITTEE (TAC) MEETING

ROLL CALL

MEETING OF (DATE): July 27, 2022 CALL TO ORDER (TIME): 10:04am  
ADJOURN: 12:01pm

COMMITTEE MEMBER		(Alternate)		ORGANIZATION	PRESENT (TIME ARRIVED)	ABSENT (TIME LEFT)
Voting Committee Members						
Sean Elo-Rivera (Chair)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	None	<input type="checkbox"/>	MTS Board of Directors/ SD City Council	10:04am	12:01pm
Able Seifu	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	None	<input type="checkbox"/>	Permit Holder / Odyssey Cab	10:49am	12:01pm
Agustin Hodoyan	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	None	<input type="checkbox"/>	Permit Holder / Soul Cab	10:01am	12:01pm
Alfred Banks	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	None	<input type="checkbox"/>	Taxicab Lease Driver	10:45am	12:01pm
Akbar Majid	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	None	<input type="checkbox"/>	Permit Holder / SDYC Holdings	10:45am	12:01pm
Antonio Hueso	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	None	<input type="checkbox"/>	Permit Holder / USA Cab, LTD	10:04am	12:01pm
Brian Hilemon	<input type="checkbox"/>	None	<input type="checkbox"/>	SD Tourism Authority	ABSENT	ABSENT
David Tasem	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	None	<input type="checkbox"/>	Taxicab Lease Driver	10:03am	12:01pm
George Abraham	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Daniel Fesshaye	<input type="checkbox"/>	Permit Holder / Eritrean Cab	10:03am	12:01pm
Louis Vasquez	<input type="checkbox"/>	Claudia Rubio	<input type="checkbox"/>	SD Convention Center	ABSENT	ABSENT
Marc Nichols	<input type="checkbox"/>	Michael Anderson	<input type="checkbox"/>	SD Regional Airport Authority	ABSENT	ABSENT
Margo Tanguay	<input type="checkbox"/>	None	<input type="checkbox"/>	Taxicab Lease Driver	ABSENT	ABSENT
Michael Trimble	<input type="checkbox"/>	None	<input type="checkbox"/>	SD Gaslamp Quarter Association	ABSENT	ABSENT
Mikail Hussein	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Peter Zschiesche	<input type="checkbox"/>	United Taxi Workers SD	10:04am	12:01pm
VACANT	<input type="checkbox"/>	VACANT	<input type="checkbox"/>	Cross Border X-Press	VACANT	VACANT
Zewdu Girma	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	None	<input type="checkbox"/>	Permit Holder / Beezee Taxi	10:04am	12:01pm
Non – Voting Committee Members						
Austin Shepherd	<input type="checkbox"/>	None	<input type="checkbox"/>	SD Department of Agriculture, Weights and Measures	ABSENT	ABSENT
Edna Rains	<input type="checkbox"/>	Stacie Smith	<input type="checkbox"/>	SD County Sheriff's Department Licensing Division	ABSENT	ABSENT

COMMITTEE CLERK: /S/ Dalia Gonzalez