

January 28, 2019

**Vehicles for Hire Regulatory Framework Report:**

Good Evening Mr. Mayor and Council Members: Thank you for the opportunity to speak to this report. I'm Sandy Archibald manager of Regina Cabs.

You may hear today that competition is healthy and the industry agrees. But competition at what cost to local family businesses? Does this report set out a level playing field for competition?

Can small family businesses like the Taxi Operator, who is your constituent, and who has invested in a taxi license and owns and operates his taxi vehicle 24 x 7 along with a second driver; can he compete with billion dollar international TNC's?

Can the local family operated taxi brokerages compete with billion dollar international companies that have no foot print in the city and don't employ any workers in Regina and don't rent office space and pay property taxes etc.?

The TNC giants in the Ride-share business have marketing strategies and lobbyists whose full time jobs are to influence decision makers and governments at all levels and to muscle their way into markets large and small.

Real people and real families have invested real time and their money in the taxi industry in Regina like in other cities across North America. The municipalities created the legislation and regulation that the industry complied with and invested under.

I urge the Mayor and every City Councilor to read the December 2018 article attached to my submission titled: Why are Taxi Drivers in New York Killing Themselves?

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/02/nyregion/taxi-drivers-suicide-nyc.html>

It describes taxi driver suicides resulting from the financial challenges facing the regulated taxi industry since the advent of unlimited TNC's and Ride-sharing. In New York, Ride-Sharing now takes more passengers than taxis do. However, in August of 2018, New York City Council approved a cap on ride-sharing vehicles and is considering a bill to establish a health fund for drivers and offering mental health counseling. New York council is taking a leadership role to help alleviate some of the financial stress its' prior legislation caused.

We all say 'those tragedies, that can't happen here'... let's ensure that it doesn't.

The advent of TNC's and Ride-sharing will have an immediate financial impact on taxi drivers and operators. Ultimately many full time taxi-driving jobs will fracture down to part time. The representative from a billion dollar TNC at Executive committee meeting stated 90 per cent of its drivers have full time careers and are just earning a little extra to make ends meet.

The numbers in the taxi industry are the opposite where most drivers are full time and make their living and support their families while driving a taxi serving all

citizens of Regina not just the select citizens with a smart phone, data plan and credit card.

Regina is a very small market and the economy is in a slump. TNC's will not create a new market of any significance; rather it will siphon off business from the existing taxi industry and from City transit. The result will be to divide the transportation-for-hire market into smaller pieces.

You may hear today that TNC Ride-Sharing and taxi service are not the same. One only has to look at the basics and it is clear that they are the same: both transport the public, in vehicles, on the streets of Regina for payment. The service may be ordered by a phone or on a computer or with an app. Regardless, a customer is requesting transportation service in a vehicle and will pay for that service.

Therefore, safety and security requirements for citizens and drivers should be the same and the number of Ride sharing vehicles should be limited ie: a cap on that number.

The taxi industry has undergone significant expensive and burdensome regulations passed since 2012 including: computer assisted dispatch, GPS tracking, age limit of the vehicle, in-taxi cameras, electronic payment terminals, several lotteries for regular, seasonal and accessible licenses and regulation right down to the size of the decal on the exterior of the taxi.

The industry has expended hundreds of thousands of dollars in order to comply. The question is: for what?

If the City is going to remove itself from regulating TNC/Ride sharing drivers and vehicles then it follows that it must lighten up the regulation of taxi drivers and vehicles.

Let's compare:

1. Vehicles licensed & inspected by the City:

Taxi: mandated - TNC: exempt

2. Vehicle age requirement:

Taxi: mandated - TNC: exempt

3. In Vehicle Camera:

Taxi: mandated – TNC: Exempt

4. Wheel chair accessible service:

Taxi: mandated – TNC: exempt

5. Number of Vehicles:

Taxi: mandated limit – TNC: unlimited

6. City Driver License:

Taxi driver: mandated – TNC driver: exempt

7. Vulnerable Sector Search:

Taxi Driver: mandated – TNC driver: exempt

8. Regulated fares charged to public:

Taxi: mandated – TNC: exempt

9. Surge fares charged to public:

Taxi: not permitted – TNC: permitted

10. Pre-paid fare charged:

Taxi: not permitted – TNC: permitted

This outlines some of the difference in the proposed regulations.

After expending hundreds of thousands of dollars and countless work hours, the industry is faced with a competitor welcomed into the market with virtually none of these regulations. If Council chooses light regulation for TNC's then it follows that it has to unshackle the taxi industry from regulation at the same time. The taxi industry cannot wait months or a year. The taxi bylaw has to be amended concurrent with the Vehicles for Hire bylaw in order to make a smooth transition to the "level playing field" that politicians have frequently talked about in the media.

We urge Council to find a way maintain the requirement for a provincial Class 4 driver license for taxi drivers and TNC drivers; that basic oversight by SGI ensures the driver is medically fit and has completed a knowledge test and successfully passed a road test conducted by an SGI driver testing professional.

Regina had a successful seasonal taxi license system that allowed the industry to flex up when demand increased. Two years ago Council changed that system to include a lottery. We estimate 10 - 15 seasonal lottery licenses were returned to the City and not in operation on New Year's eve. Service to the public suffered. With the advent of Ride-Sharing, the seasonal license system is all but dead

Then, the next casualty will be the wheel chair accessible license lottery winners, who will soon have to replace vehicles to meet the vehicle age requirements of the bylaw even if their taxi meets SGI vehicle standards. Who will spend thousands and thousands of dollars on a new vehicle? Some of those licenses may be returned to the City and service to the public will suffer.

The taxi industry has embraced new technology. All companies use computer-aided dispatch systems and have *apps* that allow customers to book taxi trips on-line via smart phones or computers. The *app* gives the customer the ability to track the taxi as it travels toward the pick up location. But taxis are not permitted under the bylaw from collecting the payment in advance. Council must remove the restrictions on taxi fares and allow the industry to compete on price.

TNC's have developed business models that skim the economic cream off the top of the taxi industry. If large TNC's set up in Regina, initially there may be a slight uptick in demand if they follow what has happened in other markets and offer free or low cost rides as an introductory offer. Experience in other markets shows aggressive pricing aimed at the strictly regulated taxi industry.

Offering free rides is not sustainable and what follows will be the price surge model with mandatory payment in advance, trip refusal, while not providing the other core services required to be a transportation provider for all citizens of Regina.

We strongly urge Council to consider safety and security as top priorities and not the lure of something shiny and new. Citizens want lots of things: lower taxes, better transit service etc. Just because citizens want TNC's it shouldn't be at the expense of the existing workers in an industry who provide service to all citizens of Regina.

The taxi industry will change immediately upon the Vehicles for Hire bylaw passing. The industry will continue to exist but there will be unintended consequences. The outcome will result in lack of service to the public particularly in late night/early morning hours, during severe weather conditions, lack of service to citizens without smart phones and credit cards, lack of service to people who travel in wheel chairs etc.

We request Council to find a way to maintain class 4 driver license requirement, open the taxi bylaw and make changes to the meter to allow taxis to compete on price, make vehicle and camera equipment requirements the same for both taxi and TNC's and ensure the criminal record check with a mandatory Vulnerable Sector Search is completed by Regina Police service.

Thank you.

Sandy Archibald

Regina Cabs

# Why Are Taxi Drivers in New York Killing Themselves?

Three taxi owners and five other professional drivers have died by suicide over the last year. It has prompted a flurry of legislation to improve working conditions for drivers.



By **Emma G. Fitzsimmons**

Dec. 2, 2018

A taxi driver named Roy Kim recently became the eighth professional driver to die by suicide in New York over the last year.

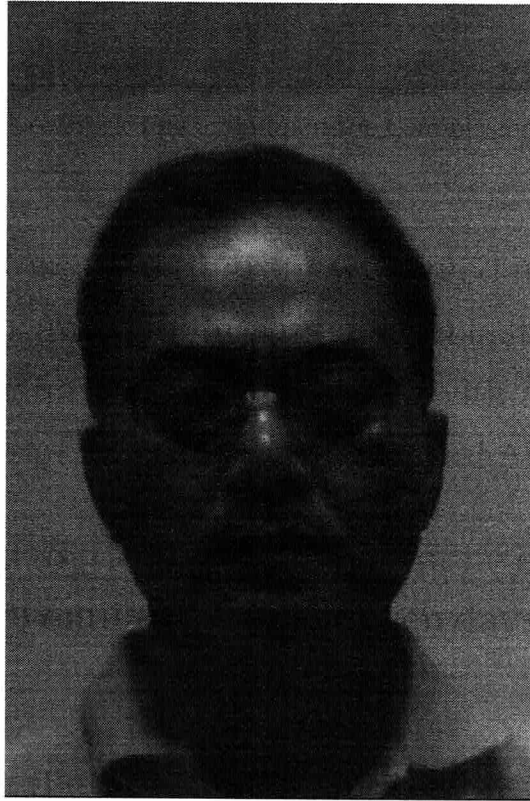
The city's taxi commissioner, Meera Joshi, has characterized the deaths as an epidemic. The stories have drawn attention to the economic despair in the industry and prompted the City Council to weigh new legislation to help taxi owners reduce their debt and to increase driver wages.

Each case is different and it is difficult to know why someone decides to take their life. Most of the drivers were immigrants in their 50s and 60s, some of whom had told friends and family that they were having a difficult time making a living as Uber began to dominate the ride-hailing industry.

Three of the drivers owned a taxi medallion — the aluminum plate required to drive a cab in New York that once sold for more than \$1 million. It is now worth as little as \$200,000.

Here's what we know about Mr. Kim and the broader crisis:

# Who was Roy Kim?



New York Taxi and Limousine Commission

Mr. Kim was a 58-year-old Korean immigrant who lived in Queens. He had driven a taxi for more than four years and bought a medallion last year for about \$578,000 — an occasion he celebrated by having a sushi dinner with a driver he met years ago while waiting for passengers at Kennedy International Airport.

But Mr. Kim had complained to friends this year that he could not find fares. He began working more often, eventually driving seven days a week. Still, his friends were surprised by his death.

“There’s no other reason but the financial aspect,” said Kyung Ryong Kang, a friend and fellow driver who had celebrated at dinner with him last year. “It was harder and harder to survive.”

On Nov. 5, Mr. Kim was found hanging by a belt from the doorway to his bedroom, the police said. He had an adult son who lives in South Korea. Friends have been unable to reach Mr. Kim's son.

A group of drivers recently held a vigil at Flushing Meadows Corona Park in Queens to remember him. Mr. Kang said he misses seeing Mr. Kim at the airport taxi lot.

"He was a generous person and always bought coffee for us," he said.

## Were the other drivers worried about their finances?



Kholood Eid for The New York Times

Two other drivers who took their lives also owned taxi medallions: Nicanor Ochisor, who was from Romania, and Kenny Chow, who was from Burma. Both told friends they were worried about paying off their debt.

In February, a black-car driver named Douglas Schifter killed himself with a shotgun in front of City Hall. He had written on Facebook that Uber had flooded the streets with vehicles and complained about having to work 100 hours a week to survive.

Drivers for Uber and other car services have also raised concerns about low wages. The other drivers who died by suicide were: Fausto Luna, an Uber driver; Abdul Saleh, a taxi driver who had leased his vehicle; Danilo Castillo, a livery driver; and Alfredo Perez, a livery driver.

“This tragedy underscores the importance of finding new ways for government, the industry and lenders to work in unity to address the financial challenges that are weighing so heavily on our licensees,” Ms. Joshi said in a statement after Mr. Kim’s death.

## **What is the city doing to help drivers?**

Taxi and Uber drivers gathered in October in northern Manhattan at a vigil for Fausto Luna, an Uber driver who killed himself. Demetrius Freeman for The New York Times

In August, the City Council approved a cap on Uber and other ride-hail vehicles — the first major American city to do so. The Council is considering a separate set of bills that would establish a health fund for drivers and create “driver assistance



centers” to offer mental health counseling and financial advice.

Corey Johnson, the Council speaker, said the city was also looking at options to help medallion owners saddled with massive debt, from a partial bailout to a hardship fund. The New York Taxi Workers Alliance, a group that represents drivers, is urging the city to work with banks and philanthropic groups to write off 20 percent of taxi owners’ outstanding debt.

At the vigil for Mr. Kim, the group’s leader Bhairavi Desai had a message for taxi drivers who are struggling: The city is finally addressing the problem and things will get better soon.

“We know change is coming,” she said.

After Mr. Ochisor’s death, his family raised more than \$30,000 to help pay off his medallion. An anonymous donor also contacted his son Gabriel Ochisor, wanting to help longtime drivers like his father. The donor sent him a batch of money orders, each worth \$1,000, to deliver to 217 owners who bought their medallion before 1990 and still drive their taxi.

Mr. Ochisor is trying to reach all of the drivers to mail the gifts, which will be sent with a letter from the donor.

“Please know that your 3 decades (or more!) of service are appreciated and that my life has been made better by your having worked the streets,” the letter says.

*If you are having thoughts of suicide, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 (TALK) or go to [SpeakingOfSuicide.com/resources](https://www.speakingofsuicide.com/resources) for a list of additional resources. Here’s what you can do when a loved one is severely depressed.*

Sangsuk Sylvia Kang contributed reporting.