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Editorial Uber and Lyft should be able to operate at LAX — but it isn't that simple

By THE TIMES EDITORIAL BOARD

AUGUST 25, 2015, 5:00 AM



Los Angeles International Airport has become the latest battleground in the war between taxi drivers and app-based ride services like Uber and Lyft. At stake is one of the most lucrative driver-for-hire markets in L.A. The taxi industry has strenuously lobbied the City Council to reject a plan adopted by the Board of Airport Commissioners that would allow app-based companies to pick up passengers at the airport.

Uber, Lyft and the others should be allowed to operate at the airport. LAX offers few convenient public transit options, forcing thousands of arriving passengers each day to pay for pricey rides in taxis, limos and shuttles. Customers deserve abundant transportation choices, which should include these smartphone-based ride-hailing services. But the City Council should not allow the pick-up plan to take effect until the Board of Airport Commissioners has addressed all the complicated issues involved.

What is the best way to screen drivers? The app-based companies are required by the state to search for criminal records and serious driving offenses using an applicants' Social Security number. Taxis, however, are regulated by the city, and their drivers must have their fingerprints run through the FBI criminal records database. Each group says its search is superior. Legislators ought to adopt a single standard to ensure the safety of consumers who get into a stranger's car. Can city officials do more to get lawmakers to settle this dispute quickly?

Should Lyft and Uber drivers, as well as taxi and limo drivers, who serve the airport be covered by the airport's living wage and health insurance requirements? The city requires companies that do business at LAX pay at least \$11.17 an hour for employees with health benefits and \$16.04 for those without. Most of the cabbies and chauffeurs who serve LAX are independent contractors exempt from the wage mandate. App-based drivers are also considered independent contractors, although drivers filed a class-action lawsuit against Uber and Lyft arguing that they are employees who should receive basic employment protections. L.A. officials, who have championed minimum wage mandates, should at least discuss the income and economic implications for drivers of the sharing economy.

Lastly, the taxi industry has raised legitimate complaints that the city's tight restrictions on

cabbies create an unlevel playing field with the more loosely regulated app-based industry. Some council members have, correctly, called on the Department of Transportation to develop a plan to streamline taxi regulations. The app-based companies — along with taxis — are an increasingly important part of L.A.'s transportation portfolio and can complement the region's growing public transit system. But city leaders should aim to make the system as safe and fair as possible.

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L.A. Now

California: This just in

Uber driver is arrested after guns and drugs are found in Glendale home, police say

By ALENE TCHEKMEDYIAN

AUGUST 21, 2015, 10:48 AM

A 23-year-old Uber driver was arrested Tuesday after police reportedly found five guns, hundreds of prescription pills and nearly \$20,000 in cash at his Glendale home, police said.

Earlier this month, Glendale police received a tip regarding a prescription drug dealer operating out of a home in the 1100 block of Thompson Avenue, Glendale Police spokeswoman Tahnee Lightfoot told Times Community News.

While conducting surveillance on Tuesday afternoon, detectives reportedly witnessed the man, identified as Artak Avakian, conducting a drug transaction, Lightfoot said.

While serving a search warrant at his home, detectives reportedly seized three rifles, a shotgun, a pistol, more than 450 prescription pills, 20 ecstasy pills, 13 small bags of cocaine, an ounce of psilocybin and a small bag of methamphetamine, along with a digital scale, cash and a cellphone with text messages referring to drug sales.

"During the investigation, detectives learned that Avakian was employed as an Uber driver for two years and it is suspected that he used the position as a cover to sell drugs," Lightfoot wrote in a news release.

Avakian was released after posting bail and is due in court in November, Lightfoot said.

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