

Taxi drivers stage peaceful protest against Uber on the Strip

By RICHARD N. VELOTTA and RICARDO TORRES LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL May 29, 2015 - 12:24pm

Union cabdrivers for Yellow Checker Star, the second-largest taxi company operating in Clark County, staged a peaceful protest on the Strip that even company management praised.

Dozens of drivers marched with signs on Las Vegas Boulevard near Caesars Palace for a little more than an hour Friday to protest the Nevada Legislature's approval of the regulation of transportation network companies, including Uber.

Uber, a company that enables consumers to hail rides with their smartphones, has been battling to re-enter the Nevada market since shutting itself down in November after losing a court case.

Lawmakers approved two bills that enable Uber to operate in the state. Gov. Brian Sandoval signed them late Friday. One of the bills would place the regulation of transportation network companies under the Nevada Transportation Authority, which regulates limousines, buses, tow trucks, moving companies and taxis outside of Clark County.

Cabdrivers are furious with the prospective entrance of Uber into the market because they fear driver numbers would be unregulated and cabbies and their owners expect Uber to try to flood the market with cars.

There are around 3,000 cabs regulated in Clark County by the Nevada Taxicab Authority. Uber has indicated it would try to get between 10,000 and 15,000 contracted drivers on the road in Southern Nevada.

Yellow Checker Star managers were on edge after previous confrontations with the Industrial, Technical and Professional Employees Union Local 4873, which on Thursday called for a work stoppage and demonstration on the Strip.

Shaun Sohacki, 36, drove other cabbies to the protest on his day off.

"I'm supporting my brothers in arms against Uber," he said. He acknowledged that the service implementation is imminent and worries that "they're going to kill our business."

Sohacki noted that he initially supported Uber as a service for locals until he realized they would eventually operate like regular taxis, he said. "It takes time to become a cabdriver and money."

Previous protests by union drivers resulted in streets being blocked and other civil disobedience, but Friday's demonstration was orderly and without confrontation.

"It was one of the union's finest hours," said Bill Shranko, chief operating officer of Yellow Checker Star.

"It couldn't have gone any better and I couldn't have been more pleased. They made the points they needed to make about Uber without giving Las Vegas a black eye," he said.

Shranko credited Local 4873 President Dennis Arrington, union steward Sam Moffitt and local union leader Ruthie Jones for leading a responsible protest that called attention to the issue without harming the city's tourism economy.

Shranko said the company made it clear to drivers that company management didn't condone any actions that would lead to traffic disruptions while acknowledging that they had the right to demonstrate. He added that there would be no disciplinary action taken by the company or the Taxicab Authority for those who protested.

The protest was staged along the sidewalk in front of Caesars Palace.

Pedestrians on the sidewalk were allowed to pass without confrontation by the drivers, carrying signs that said, "Help keep Nevada roads safe," and "Protect our jobs. Protect your safety."

At one point, some drivers chanted, "No Uber," while others responded, "Not needed."

Cars along the boulevard honked their approval.

A mobile billboard truck driver stopped in front of the protest and held a "Go Uber" sign. Other pedestrians asked each other what Uber was while some shouted in support of the service: "I love Uber," one said.

Union officials say Uber operates unlicensed with less insurance than cabdrivers and aren't as scrutinized as cabdrivers in background checks.

They also criticized Uber's policy of dynamic pricing — called "surge pricing" by critics — of raising rates when drivers are busier.

Cabbies also fear that an oversupply of Uber drivers on the streets would result in fewer fares for all drivers and the inability to make a good wage.

Fewer than 100 protesters were present and Sohacki said he wished more would have been there.

"We have to band together," he said while pointing at cabs riding along Las Vegas Boulevard.

"We need to be a lot stronger."

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Taxis on Strip go idle in protest of Uber

Taxi cab drivers gather on the Strip in front of Caesars Palace to protest Uber, the competing ride sharing program trying to break into the Las Vegas market on Friday, May 29, 2015.

By *Conor Shine*

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Dozens of taxi drivers parked their cabs and instead took to the Las Vegas Strip sidewalk today to protest the arrival of Uber and the disastrous effect drivers said it would have on their livelihoods.

The demonstration started at 2 p.m. on a day when the temperature peaked at 99 degrees, but tourists looking to catch a ride to avoid the heat weren't impacted as the work stoppage did little to disrupt the supply of available cabs.

Taxi lines at casinos were short for patrons and there were even cabs from Yellow Checker Star, whose employees were participating in the protest, queued to pick up passengers.

The protest was organized by drivers from the Industrial, Technical and Professional Employees Union Local 4873 and took place on a sidewalk in front of Caesars Palace for about two hours. Most drivers parked their vehicles at a nearby union office and then bussed to the site. The protest was called off an hour early due to the heat.

Tourist reactions

At the Paris and Bally's, a steady flow of taxis streamed in and out of the front entrances.

Tourists had no trouble getting rides despite the anti-Uber protest across the street.

Michael Dixon, who is visiting Las Vegas to celebrate his sister's 21st birthday, said many of his friends use Uber. He said he wouldn't hesitate to use the app.

Seth Holehouse, a business owner in town for the Las Vegas Antique Jewelry and Watch Show, said he's a big fan of Uber mostly because it is far more modernized than taxi services.

"The taxi industry hasn't changed," Holehouse said. "With the Uber app, you can see the photo of the driver and rate them."

He added that not only does he like the diversity of the employee pool, he also enjoys the app's accessibility.

"I can use it in Miami and also in Hong Kong," Holehouse said. "It has a big global aspect to it."

— Julie Ann Formoso

Although many drivers who participated were on the clock and supposed to be on the roads, they won't be subject to discipline from Yellow Checker Star because the protest is protected as a union-related activity.

"We don't condone the demonstration ... but they're allowed to do it," Yellow Checker Star Chief Operating Officer Bill Shranko said. "I think it's an issue where drivers are fed up."

Whether to allow Uber in Nevada and how to regulate the popular ridesharing company has been one of the most heavily-lobbied issue at the Legislature this year.

This week, the Legislature approved a pair of bills that allow transportation network companies like Uber, which connect drivers and riders through a smartphone app, to operate in Nevada.

The bills, which still await the signature of Gov. Brian Sandoval, would create new regulations for the ride-hailing companies, including background checks and insurance requirements that would be enforced by the Nevada Transportation Authority.

With Uber's arrival imminent, taxicab drivers today said they were speaking out to let the community know about the damage they think Uber will do.

"I believe it's going to directly impact the safety of Las Vegas streets," said Mike Kilgo, a Las Vegas cab driver for 15 years.

Kilgo said that adding potentially thousands of new Uber drivers onto Las Vegas streets will cut into earnings for cab drivers and could lead to a competitive environment for fares that encourages reckless driving. It's also unclear where Uber drivers would pick up riders on the Strip, whether it's in a casino taxi line, a parking garage or on the street.

"Our income is going to drop. The pie isn't getting any bigger," said Kilgo, who makes about \$32,000 a year working five 12-hour shifts per week. "It's going to cause confusion and chaos."

Others at the protest also criticized the bills for not subjecting Uber to the more-extensive background checking, drug testing and training programs cab drivers must adhere to.

"Uber drives people from point A to point B for hire," said Yellow Checker Star driver and union shop steward Dustin Qualls. "If they want to come out here and work, they should follow the same rules."

If the bills are signed by Sandoval, Uber and other ridesharing competitors could begin operating in Las Vegas later this summer once they go through a licensing process with the Nevada Transportation Authority.

Sun reporter Julie Ann Formoso contributed to this report.



Taxi drivers protest, governor signs ride-sharing bill

<http://www.news3lv.com/content/news/story/Taxi-drivers-protest-governor-signs-ride-sharing/iwmib81VI0qhm4BoH1VaxQ.csp>

LAS VEGAS (KSNV News3LV) – Gov. Brian Sandoval signed a bill Friday authorizing ride sharing companies such as Uber and Lyft.

The signing came in spite of a protest earlier in the afternoon on the Strip by dozens of angry Las Vegas taxi drivers.

Their message: No Uber. It's not needed.

Steven Bernay has been driving a cab for 20 years.

His argument against Uber is simple: Nevada doesn't need it.

"You have 2,700 cabs on the road, not counting sedans, limos and fun busses why is it necessary for Uber?" Bernay asked.

That's not the case when you ask local residents such as Ashley Jordan, who says getting a cab outside the Strip corridor can be difficult.

"Las Vegas isn't just about the tourists it's about the locals also," Jordan said. "It's a lot easier to get around if you have other options besides taxis. Because a lot of times you can't even get a taxi because of all the tourists."

Bernay responded that people need to properly plan when they need a ride.

"If you're out in the outlying areas and you need to come to the Strip on a Friday or Saturday night to do an activity, all you have to do is plan in advance," the driver said. "Everybody takes reservations and we'll be there."

Curtis Rajczak, a visitor from South Carolina, said when it comes to getting a ride, cabs are a thing of the past.

"It's just not quite the same as Uber. It's easier to access and it's more hassle free."

The cabbies protesting on the Strip were hoping Gov. Sandoval would not sign a law passed by the Legislature that would authorize ride sharing services such as Uber in Nevada.

Sandoval gave final approval to AB175 and AB176 on Friday, the same day that cab drivers in Las Vegas staged a protest against the companies.

AB175 sets up a regulatory framework for ride-hailing companies and imposes a 3 percent fare tax for taxi and Uber rides. AB176 places ride-hailing companies under the jurisdiction of the Nevada Transportation Authority.

Drivers for Yellow Checker Star said Uber has unsafe standards for its drivers. Cab drivers have to submit to background checks before being allowed to drive. Uber drivers don't.

The demonstration, which did not last as long as planned, caused no apparent traffic tie-ups.

The protest, however, ended about an hour shorter than expected.

Cab drivers rally in protest of Uber

By Karen Castro | kcastro@8newsnow.com

LAS VEGAS

On a daily basis, tourists who try to catch a ride from McCarran International Airport have to deal with long lines and wait times. So, many people are hoping ride-sharing companies like Uber will soon be able to operate locally.

Nevada legislature approved legislation giving companies like Uber and Lyft the green light; now these companies are just signature away from operating in Nevada. Something local cab drivers aren't too happy about.

On Friday, in a last ditch effort to prevent Uber's arrival to the state and the Las Vegas valley cab drivers walked off the job Friday. They were hoping the rally at the intersection of Las Vegas Boulevard and E. Flamingo Road would influence the governor's decision to legalize ride-sharing companies like Uber.

"We don't want to stop working; we love our job; we love our city and communities, but enough is enough. If you want them to come, regulate them just like you do with the rest of the companies that's all we ask for," said L.D. Willis, cab driver, Yellow Checker Star.

Cab drivers say Uber and companies like Uber isn't safe because it doesn't require background checks or driving safety classes.

According to Uber's website, their drivers undergo a background check and have liability insurance.

When 8 News NOW asked a few tourist what they thought about Uber, the reaction seemed to be mixed.

"I like with Uber," Neb, a visitor from Los Angeles resident said. "I like that people can make a living and they dont have to worry about working for a big company."

"I've always been a fan of cabs, but I've never tried the Uber," said Rachell Allen, visiting from Florida. "I'm just afraid cause you never know who has been in an accident, or if the car is running right, or if it's going to die on the side of the road. I always think of that."

It's been an uphill battle to getting Uber this close to doing business in the state. Drivers for the company did have a short stint in Las Vegas, but they were stopped by the Nevada Taxicab Authority. Shortly after, Uber was sued, and an injunction by the court injunction stopped all its services.

However, Uber never gave up the fight, and the company lobbied in the legislature for months. Apparently, it paid off because now there are two pieces of legislation sitting on the governor's desk that would regulate ride-sharing companies and implement a 3 percent tax on fares.

It's expected to generate tens of millions of dollars, including funding for a new medical school at UNLV.

Uber said their focus is to provide transportation for under-served areas away from the busy Las Vegas Strip and the airport.

"Tens of thousands of Nevadans demanded the return of Uber to the Silver State -- and their collective voices were heard loud and clear," said Steve Thompson, General Manager. "Thanks to Governor Sandoval and the bipartisan support of the Nevada legislature, riders and drivers can soon get back on the road, with greater access to transportation choices and flexible income opportunities."

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Las Vegas Strip taxis to stay parked to protest Uber

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(FOX5 FILE)

LAS VEGAS (FOX5) -

A labor union says several hundred taxi drivers will be protesting ride-sharing company Uber on Friday afternoon rather than looking for fares on the [Las Vegas Strip](#).

A union representing drivers for the Yellow Checker Star taxi [company](#) said Thursday it would protest Uber's safety standards and surge-pricing practice that charges riders more during peak times.

The demonstration is 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. Friday on Las Vegas Boulevard.

An Uber spokeswoman did not immediately respond to a request seeking comment.

Approved legislation allowing ride-sharing companies such as Uber and Lyft to do [business](#) statewide and be regulated by the Nevada Transportation Authority is awaiting the governor's signature. Uber had a short-lived ride in Nevada last year before taxi companies and transportation regulators put a stop to the company's operations.

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Read more: <http://www.fox5vegas.com/story/29184642/las-vegas-strip-taxis-to-stay-parked-to-protest-uber#ixzz3bXG85mo1>