



Late Night Ride Home Stands: Calgary, AB

Streamlining Taxi Service

Taxi service is the primary transportation alternative to personal vehicles used by nightlife patrons in the City of Calgary, Alberta, Canada. Yet several obstacles impeded safe and efficient provision of taxi service in the nighttime economy, including reluctance by drivers to pick up nightlife patrons, as well policy challenges. As part of a coordinated effort to improve public safety and late-night transportation, the City of Calgary established Late Night Ride Home Stands (LNRHS) – also known as “taxi stands.” LNRHS are designated areas where taxis can line-up and wait for customers in the evening and late-night hours. As of September 2011, thirteen have been installed in Calgary's Centre City. They operate every Thursday, Friday and Saturday night between the hours of 10:00 p.m. and 3:00 a.m. Conveniently located near restaurants, theatres and bars, the goal is to ensure Calgarians can come and go from the Centre City safely.

Problem Statement

Like many North American cities, Calgary's public transportation system is oriented to daytime users (i.e. commuters). However, there is an equal or greater demand for services after 10:00 p.m. due to sporting events, nightlife venue closings, nighttime employment, etc. Patrons can arrive to nightlife districts using public transport, yet they are forced to find alternative means to exit the district because hours of operation end prior to bar closing time, when thousands of patrons are in need of rides home. Some people risk driving under the influence due to limited nighttime transit options.

Taxis are the primary alternative to personal vehicles. However, the late-night demand for service often exceeded the capacity of available supply. Further, some taxi drivers chose not to provide service to nightlife patrons due to concerns and perceived risks, such as language abuse by unruly, intoxicated passengers, physical assault, robbery, and misbehaviour in the form of vomiting, urination and/or defecation – any of which would force a driver to take their vehicle out of commission for sanitation and cleaning.

Many did not feel the perceived risks were worth the gain. No empirical evidence existed, however, to validate the frequency or circumstance for such incidents. Beyond these perceived risks, taxi drivers who did provide service in nightlife districts faced service delivery challenges.

Several obstacles inhibited safe delivery of taxi service, which in turn, generated public safety impacts:

- Insufficient locations for taxicabs to queue.
- No legal, safe area for taxicabs to drop off and pick up passengers.
- Traffic would come to a standstill on 17th Avenue because taxi drivers were forced to drop off and pick up passengers in the travel lanes of the roadway.
- No designated area off limits to taxicabs for emergency vehicles to access individuals in need.
- Passengers queue-jumped the lineups for taxis, which resulted in fights and increased aggression.
- Public, private and government stakeholders within the City of Calgary identified the need to overcome barriers in taxi service, augment taxi supply, establish central locations for taxi stands, and develop staging/queuing areas to encourage a steady supply of cabs.

Stakeholders

The LNRHS program was developed as a cooperative effort among the City of Calgary, the taxi industry and the nightlife business community.

A stakeholder alliance was formed between the Business License Department, Bylaw Agencies, Calgary Police Service, Parking Agencies, Calgary Transit, Calgary Roads - Traffic, Calgary Parking, Transportation Planning, Compliance Services (Livery Transport - Taxi Inspector and Chief Livery Officer), as well as major taxi companies.

Process

Concept Development and Launch

The LNRHS initiative is part of a larger effort by the City of Calgary to take a proactive approach to ensure the Centre City continues to be a vibrant and safe place to work, visit, live and play during the evening and early morning hours. The establishment of strategically placed LNRHS is a key component of Calgary's nighttime mobility management (i.e. ease of transport) strategy in Calgary.

Several meetings were held among key stakeholders to determine the feasibility of the LNRHS. These included representatives of BRZ's (Business Revitalization Zones a.k.a. Business Improvement Districts), Business Licence, Calgary Police Service, Calgary Transit, Calgary Roads – Traffic, Calgary Parking Authority, parking agencies and taxi companies. The Centre City Implementation Team took the lead in initiating implementation of the project.

The initial plan was to launch only two or three stands, yet the taxi inspector suggested implementation of a dozen stands to make the maximum impact for the trial period. Centre City representatives met with businesses to gain approval for locating stands in front of the most popular venue locations. Walkabouts were then conducted with traffic engineers and technicians to take on-site measurements for designated taxi stands and to determine

whether poles had already met the allowable sign capacity, or if they could take additional signage for the LNRHS.

In order to keep costs down, it was decided that existing infrastructure would be utilized as much as possible. For example, locations with poles that still had capacity for additional signage were selected so that additional poles would not need to be erected. In all stand locations, a regulatory sign was placed to inform drivers that parking was prohibited between the hours of 10:00 p.m. and 3:00 a.m. due to use as a taxi stand. Where possible, a marketing sign was placed to explain the purpose of the stands.

On December 16, 2010, twelve LNRHS were launched in the proximity of restaurants, theatres and bars in the Centre City. The Stands serve as designated areas where taxis lineup and wait for customers in the evening and late-night hours. They operate every Thursday, Friday and Saturday night between the hours of 10:00 p.m. and 3:00 a.m.

The LNRHS were also considered a tool to promote safety. Compliance services had an on-going safety program underway to work with drivers on driver safety. Taxi inspectors worked nightshifts to work in the field to support drivers and address their safety issues.

The guiding principle behind this initiative was simplicity and raising awareness via a marketing/communications strategy that relied on media interest and developing some media/information tools.

Promotional Campaign:

The City of Calgary utilized various media channels to promote the LNRHS.

A public launch occurred on December 16th, 2010, where the media was invited to the first unveiling of the LNRHS. Media followed the story very closely, and subsequent follow up stories and interviews were held. These were supplemented by blog posts (www.centrecitytalk.com) and updates at community Focus on Safety Meetings.

A 30- and 60- second television spot was developed called the "Report to Calgarians." Now available via YouTube.com, the report reached an audience of 860,800 people between March 21-27, 2011. Radio clips were also recorded, which received major airplay on local radio stations. Media releases were distributed to the press, and the website, www.CentreCityTalk.com was regularly updated with information about the LNRHS. A staff person was assigned to monitor the blog and respond to questions and comments.

Letters, notices and mini map cards were distributed to the taxi industry, tourism and business agencies (BRZ's), adjacent businesses and entertainment establishments over the holiday season to help spread the word to nightlife patrons.

The Victoria Park, Calgary Downtown Association and the Uptown 17 BRZs, in cooperation with The City, helped promote the LNRHS. Uptown 17 BRZs will be hanging about a dozen decorative banners on 17th Avenue (a major thoroughfare and nightlife destination) to

indicate where the four LNRHS are in that district. Other BRZ's have also expressed willingness to support and promote the location of new LNRHS in their hospitality zones.

To reinforce marketing campaigns, "commissionaires" (via Corporate Security) were hired to educate patrons and businesses in the particularly popular LNHRHS during the first few weekends of the program's launch to ensure a consistent message was getting out and that the mini maps and notices were distributed to patrons, drivers and business owners.

Because the LNHRHS launched prior to the holiday season, they received significant attention and usage when they debuted.

Updates to & Future Plans for the LNRHS Initiative

Since the initial launch date, an additional location has been added (for a current total of thirteen), with two to three more planned to launch in other Centre City locations.

Updates that will be considered in the future include the following:

- Painting a stripe on the sidewalk to make the LNHRHS location more visible.
- Using Edmonton (Whyte Avenue) as a model, arrange for tow trucks to start towing at 10:00 p.m. sharp.
- Perhaps extend the taxi stand hours to commence earlier at 6:00 p.m. in locations that are busy in the early evening.
- Train and certify entertainment establishment staff so they can put out temporary traffic control devices (pylons) out in the LNRHS spots to reserve them earlier for cabs commencing at 9:00 p.m. or so as vehicles vacate the spots (prior to the stand opening at 10:00 p.m.).

Outcome

- Response from the business community, nightlife patrons and city government has been overwhelmingly positive in support of the LNRHS.
- Increased perception of public safety.
- More efficient traffic flow on 17th Avenue, as taxicabs no longer impede traffic.
- Passengers can now safely board or disembark from taxicabs curb side (instead of into the travel lanes of the roadway, which endangered their lives).
- Marked increase in taxi supply during the evening and late-night hours in the Centre City, which has been attributed to added convenience of taxi-stand locations.
- Safe queuing areas added for taxicabs.
- Significant drop in altercations and disputes on the street at establishments with stands in place.
- Safer and more convenient locations for taxis to access passengers; no need to double park or load in traffic.
- Increased goodwill and trust with industry and drivers, reinforcing The City's (Compliance Service's) commitment to driver safety.
- Detailed quantitative results assessing ridership and use of the stands have not yet been collected due to the recent launch of the initiative (9 months as of

September 2011). However, a plan is in place to evaluate effectiveness of the stands using the Mio Vision system, which conducts pedestrian and vehicle counts. Benchmarking data was collected prior to implementation of the initiative, and will be assessed at the year-mark.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Non-compliance with signage regarding parking restrictions in LNHRs locations during the stands' hours of operation (10:00 p.m. – 3:00 a.m.) has proven to be a challenge. Parking tickets were given during the education phase of the process, then parking officials began to tow cars away (e.g. 605 vehicles were seized in the first six months), which resulted in hostility directed towards City officials.

Ongoing education and awareness campaigns will likely continue to be necessary during operation of the LNHRs. To deter patrons from parking in the taxi-stands, bar staff who have received Temporary Traffic Control Device Training from Calgary Roads are able to place cones, pylons or portable signs to block off the taxi stand. (Read more in the Related Projects section).

Ideas that were considered and abandoned:

Although hiring supervisory staff for taxi stands was considered, key decision makers decided not to pursue this option in order to keep the stands simple and the budget minimal. Further, portable (i.e. sandwich board) signs were also considered instead of more permanent signage attached to poles, but this was decided against due to the public safety risk and to minimize sidewalk clutter.

Advice for Cities Interested in Pursuing a Similar Initiative:

- Get the major players on board – the BRZs (BIDs), taxi operators, nighttime venue operators and city enforcement agencies.
- Develop a strong media campaign to promote awareness of the taxi stands.
- Strategize in advance about how violations of new parking policies will be enforced during the initial education phase (e.g. tickets only), then the normalizing phase (e.g. towing vehicles). Expect resistance to enforcement.
- Have a drop-dead date when enforcement will increase from ticketing to include towing.
- Consider having certified professionals available to start blocking off the taxi zones earlier using pylons and cones so that they are free to be used by the taxis.

Jurisdiction

The thirteen LNHRs are located in the Centre City's main commercial corridor featuring the largest concentrations of nightlife establishments.

Funding

The budget (not including in-kind) was approximately \$10,000 for the LNRHS' signage, print material, etc. (not including staff time). Funding came from three primary sources (in no particular order): (1) The Calgary Roads Business Unit, which provided personnel and signage; (2) Livery Transport Services; and (3) Centre City Implementation, Land-use, Planning and Policy.

Spin-off Projects

Taxi Parking at Fire Hydrant

In June 2011, City Council approved Taxi Parking at Fire Hydrants in the Centre City. Taxis are allowed to park in these stalls while the driver is loading/unloading their taxi or while in their vehicle; drivers are not allowed to leave their vehicles in case of a fire or emergency.

Benefits include:

- Increased public parking space.
- Improved emergency access to fire hydrants due to better protection from illegal parking by other cars.
- Greater access to taxis for the public throughout the downtown.
- Efficient use of street space as fire hydrant space is infrequently used.
- Reduced driving for taxi drivers to seek customers.
- Bar Staff's Temporary Traffic Control Device Training

A spin-off initiative that has helped deter patrons from parking in the taxi-stands shortly before 10pm has been Temporary Traffic Control Device Training through the Traffic Safety Act. Interested bar staff are trained as contractors by Traffic Operations in the safe placement, monitoring and removal of temporary traffic control devices such as cones, pylons and portable signs in the road right of way. They block off the parking spaces for the LNRHS's use approximately an hour prior to 10pm. That way, the parking spaces can be reserved prior to operation as taxi stand.

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