

PRESS RELEASE

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Contact: Shari-Lynn Pringle, Secretary
(441) 525-2150
Email: BermudaTOA@gmail.com

BTOA Losing Patience with Transport Ministry

Taxi Owners and Operators have spent many years requesting actions from Government to improve our uniquely Bermudian, self-employed industry and the quality of our lives. Prior Administrations have held meetings with Government Ministers and met with success in a few areas. However, lingering for almost seven years has been the need for a pay increase which can only be placed on the meter.

Since November 21, the current Executive of the Bermuda Taxi Owners and Operators (BTOA) has had four meetings with Minister of Transport the Hon. Minister W. Lawrence Scott JP MP and his team. Each time, we have reiterated our need for a pay increase as well as an adjustment to the time the meter begins to pay overtime via a surcharge to the regular rate. In addition, we have sought clarification on the return of a fuel rebate from the Minister who referred us to the Minister of Finance who sent us back to the Transport Ministry.

We know there are members of the public who believe they know what's best for the taxi industry, but most have not served in the business outside of being a passenger. We are prepared for the criticism and/or pushback we may receive; however, we believe it is incumbent upon us to bring our issues to a public forum if we are to continue to provide the quality service that all owners and operators strive for.

Rate Increase

Unlike those employed by companies or other organizations, any increase afforded a taxi operator cannot be made retroactively. As each year passes without an increase, the Government is intentionally delaying providing a benefit that most receive automatically, and/or on a more timely basis, at their place of employment.

The last increase to metered rates was May 1, 2014. The increase prior that was in 2007. Annual licensing, insurance and payroll tax are required to be paid without delay if a taxi is to remain on the road. These costs are in addition to maintenance and fuel costs.

The BTOA is requesting a 20% increase on the meter in addition to assurances of a rate increase every three years. We are aware that there are dispatch companies using apps that are charging more than the regulated, legal rate, making it an unfair playing field. We hope that this can be normalized through initiatives the Ministry has considered through modernization.

Change to Rate 3 Start Time

In addition, the BTOA is requesting that the evening surcharge on the standard Rate 1 start at 9:00pm instead of 12:00am, thus reducing the number of hours a full-time taxi operator would have to work before earning what is akin to overtime and also encouraging more operators to work through the unsociable hours. For the record, the start time for Rate 3 was 10:00pm until it was changed to midnight in the 1990s.

Fuel Rebate

With many operators fueling up every or every other day, we are hurt most at the pump. We are grateful to the companies that currently offer us a discount when paying cash. However, we would like the return of a fuel rebate that is better geared toward reimbursing the person behind the wheel. This was a benefit taxi owners had previously received but was stopped due to internal issues. which we feel we can assist with a resolution.

Outstanding issues

The BTOA has reviewed the wish list provided to the Ministry as part of the 2018 Transport Green Paper (published in 2019) and prioritized and fine-tuned the items as requested by the Minister in December 2021. To date, few of the 31 items have been addressed or enacted.

The BTOA provided significant input to the Public Service Vehicle Modernization Consultation document and although we strenuously objected to some points put forth by the Ministry, we understand that some have gone to Cabinet for consideration.

Although we are appreciative of the Ministry's time and focus on improving the industry through modernization, there are several issues that need to be addressed before adding to the existing numbers in an industry where the department responsible for enforcing the laws governing the industry seems woefully understaffed.

We are extremely concerned by the inability of the Transport Control Department to identify and address the reason why approximately 50 taxis have been off the road for an extended period, some for years. A solution from the Minister is to allow a permit owner to add additional vehicles of any Public Service Vehicle (PSV) class under their existing permit. We feel that our infrastructure cannot sustain the number of vehicles this type of proposal would allow, nor does it provide an opportunity to the many Operators who wish to become first time owners. The last time a Minister of Transport made taxi permits available was 1988.

We are still trying to address the issue of ineffective island-wide taxi dispatching. Since 2010 and the debacle of the introduction of GPS, the industry has considered the establishment of a Central Digital Dispatch. We feel the time has come for a robust think-tank to see this idea to fruition. We are certain this would alleviate many of the inconsistencies potential passengers receive when trying to order a taxi.

The BTOA recognizes the four active dispatch companies, as the foundation of the taxi industry, but they are not serving the public nor the Taxi Owner/Operator as efficiently or effectively as they could. The four companies work for the 600 owners and in excess of 4,000 operators and not the other way around; as a result, we would like to play a key role in vetting the system to be used to strengthen the foundation and move our industry forward.

We hope that our Owners, in particular, will reach out to their MP and voice their opinions and concerns. We are asking all Owners and operators, whether a member of the BTOA or not, to submit contact details to BermudaTOA@gmail.com so that we can keep you informed about issues that affect your investment as a Taxi Owner and the developments within the Bermuda taxi industry.

The objectives and purpose of the Bermuda Taxi Owner and Operators Association (BTOA) is to provide a forum for and to represent Owners and Operators in matters relating to the operation of a Public Service Vehicle Taxi in Bermuda.