



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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STITA announces lawsuit against Port of Seattle for airport taxi contract

Cab drivers rally Monday

SEATTLE, Wash. – Today the Seattle-Tacoma International Taxi Association (STITA) announced a lawsuit against the Port of Seattle to stop the Port from unfairly awarding its airport taxi contract to Yellow Cab (Puget Sound Dispatch).

On Friday, STITA filed a complaint asking the court to halt the Port from signing a contract that violates state law. STITA seeks a fair and legal proposal process in which all bidders can compete on a level playing field.

“If you think it’s difficult to hail a cab in Seattle now, wait to see what will happen if STITA cabs are put out of business,” said **Jesse Buttar**, STITA cab owner. “We’re trying to make sure that doesn’t happen. We’re asking the Port to reconsider and allow us to fairly compete for the airport contract. We’re sorry this has come to legal action, but we STITA members are ready to fight against what we feel was an unfair process by the Port of Seattle.”

In 1989, STITA – a non-profit co-op with the greenest cab fleet in the country – was created by the Port of Seattle to exclusively serve the airport and provide reliable service to airport users. Now, after an unfair proposal process, STITA and its approximately 450 members and drivers will essentially be put out of business.

“People tell us to go work for Yellow, but we can’t,” said **Kanwarjit Bassi**, who followed in his father’s footsteps and drives a STITA cab. “We don’t have Seattle for-hire licenses and it’s nearly impossible to get one. We were prevented from expanding service outside of the airport by the Port and now it’s telling us to go away. But, there’s nowhere to go.”

In its lawsuit, STITA contends the Port's bidding process violated the state Airports Act because the Port discontinued its prior practice of charging fees to taxicabs based on the airport's actual cost of services provided to the cabbies. Instead, it required bidders to commit to pay an unfair concession fee of at least 10 percent of their airport-based revenues. This violates the Airports Act, which says airport concession fees must be based upon the Airport's actual cost of operations and be reasonable and uniform.

STITA contends the Port's bidding process caused a predatory bidding war among taxi companies which not only was illegal but will be financially devastating to the King County taxi industry.

STITA's lawsuit also contends that the Port's new concession fee violates the King County Code, which requires the King County Council to set the taxi meter rate at a level that is "just and reasonable." The Port's new concession fee cuts directly into the county's taxi meter rate and prevents cab operators from receiving the gross receipts that they legally are entitled to receive.

"I've driven a cab for 35 years – mostly seven days a week," said **Patty Stephens**. "It wasn't an easy living, but at the end of the day I barely made enough to feed my family. And I could take care of sick children or go to their soccer games without getting fired. It's the only life we know; my daughter and son both drive a cab too. We're all out of jobs if STITA loses this contract."

Despite notice from STITA protesting these glaring problems with the process and proposed contract, the Port of Seattle declined to re-do its flawed proposal and said it would sign an agreement with Yellow Cab. STITA had no recourse but legal action.

STITA's complaint will go before a King County judge on Thursday.

STITA BY THE NUMBERS

Cabs: 216

Owner-Operators: 283

Total number of drivers, including owner-operators: approximately 450

Founded: 1989 as non-profit association

Revenues to Port

STITA, 2004 – 2008: \$10.58 million

Number of on-demand taxi trips at Sea-Tac Airport

2004: 578,259

2005: 639,751

2006: 648,275

2007: 732,694

2008: 740,867

2009: 676,010 (estimate)

Declining trips in 2009 do not reflect new light rail service to the airport and how it will likely decrease future cab demand.

Current per-trip fee paid to Port for airport pickup:
\$3.05 in 2009;
\$1.80 in 2010.

Current STITA contract ends August 31, 2010.