

BOOKING A CAB RIDE SHOULD SHOW YOUR GREEN SIDE

With all the changes that have been happening within the cab industry over the past few years, many can be excused for not having climate change as the first thing on their minds. However, with new environmental regulations being imposed not just by local councils but world governing bodies too, now is the time to think about what we can do to act.

Transportation is widely recognised as a global sector where CO2 emissions could easily grow. It is however also a sector that has significant potential to both lower its carbon output and increase sustainability. Indeed, at a UN climate conference in Paris over a year ago, 195 countries adopted the first-ever universal, legally binding global climate deal to reduce the damage by human induced climate change by 2020. It also placed a spotlight on initiatives to bring electric and other sustainable types of power to the transport sector, which will inevitably affect taxis. Various initiatives supported by industry players including Tesla Motors, Michelin and Nissan-Renault were advanced. Tesla Motors has thus far been at the forefront of the push for cleaner energy with the use of electro-mobility – seemingly the most popular route within the industry. However, different methods of powering vehicles including hydrogen and other emerging technologies appear to be on the rise.

Undoubtedly, politicians and civic leaders around the world will be judged on their ability to lead these changes. There is an ever growing awareness of air pollution worldwide, particularly within urban areas, putting increasing pressure on cities to lower emissions. The severe situations in developing world mega cities such as New Delhi and Beijing, as well as the Volkswagen emissions scandal, have heightened concerns that not enough is being done to protect local residents from the dangers of dirty air. Because of this, there is now a pressing call for the transportation industry to switch to a cleaner source of energy.

The taxi industry is already facing the impact of technology and structural changes, especially online. While lowering operating costs or increasing service quality are a means of dealing with this change, it won't solve all of the competitive pressures that the industry is facing or defend the current operating model. Investment and partnerships are also key to finding a role for the existing market players.

Major cities want to be seen as centres for economic vitality, as well as green and attractive spaces. Yet there is also the necessity to provide the local population with proficient transport choices such as public transport, taxis and private vehicles. To provide a balance, many cities are turning to congestion zones, car free areas, increased cycle priority routes and other policies. Rather than seeing the emerging change to sustainable mobility as a threat by regulators and government, the taxi and private hire industry could see this as an opportunity to invest in part-



Leaders showing their green side at the United Nation's Paris Climate Conference in December 2015

nerships with cities. Such partnerships could allow the industry to develop itself as a core part of a sustainable and decarbonised transport system. These advances would support city based initiatives in other transport sectors such as bus transport, zero emission zones, car share schemes as well as publicly accessible charging points.

So why aren't we seeing a radical agenda coming from the cab industry to meet the climate challenge, and partnerships developing with vehicle manufacturers and cities? The cab industry has, if anything, had a relatively easy path through the climate debate considering that, unlike private cars which sit idle for up to the 90 per cent of the time, taxis are by nature almost constantly in use. However, these issues have been allowed to be sidetracked due to media coverage on the perceived disruption of e-hailing apps such as Uber. Furthermore, the cab sector has not traditionally invested in cutting edge technology or equipment. Yet the growth of platforms such as minicabit and Uber – albeit with very different business models - indicates that a shift in private hire behaviour is necessary.

Two key areas for the cab industry to explore are zero emission vehicles and a move towards fully autonomous operations. The industry has to ensure that it leads the way in enforcing environmental change, rather than being forced by local authorities. It should be seen as a mark of market differentiation and not a reluctant regulation. It should allow the cab trade to enable itself to stand as core innovators in the life of a city.

Current progress seems to be slow and hesitant and more about a conservative view of market economics and short term operating costs. Before government mandates it, it is time to see the cab sector collaborate more with the car manufacturers and transport industry to propose the rollout of the zero emission cab fleet.

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