

...Uber wins in 3-2 City Council vote

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the vehicle for the protection of drivers and passengers. The new ordinance also got rid of the City's mandate that 20 percent of vehicle fleets be wheelchair accessible. And it imposed a new rider fee of 50 cents per ride to pay for enforcement — which Novick acknowledges has been less-than-robust in the past.

The ordinance mostly followed the recommendations of a citizen task force Novick launched in January. Portland is alternately praised and ridiculed for its tradition of public process. Normally, all stakeholders are given some representation on city task forces and committees that affect them; they're supposed to hash out differences and come up with proposals everyone can live with. But for the Private For-Hire Transportation Innovation Task Force, Novick appointed members who had little familiarity with the industry they were about to overhaul. Taxi drivers and companies were specifically excluded, which prompted protest from a coalition they formed — the Transportation Fairness Alliance. Immigrant rights advocate Kayse Jama of the Center for Intercultural Organizing was the only member

on the 11-member task force who ostensibly represented the interests of working people. And Jama found himself a minority of one on the business-heavy committee. When the committee issued preliminary recommendations, he wrote a dissenting minority report, which was ignored.

Sparks fly at City Council

Over several months, Portland's five-member City Council spent dozens of hours in hearings about the TNC issue, but the sides stayed the same: At each stage, Novick, Hales, and Dan Saltzman sided with TNCs, while Amanda Fritz and Nick Fish voted against them.

"I never thought I would see the day that Portland City Council would operate like the Republican-dominated Congress in Washington, D.C.," Fritz declared before her final vote. "Congress is known for allowing industry to write its own regulations, rather than legislators acting on behalf of their constituents in the public interest. Sadly, that day has arrived here in Portland today."

Fritz also blasted the process used to draft the ordinance: None of the workers most affected had a seat on the task

force, and TNC lobbyists had multiple private meetings with Hales and Novick, while taxi representatives did not.

"I feel so sad for my friends in Union Cab, supported by the Communication Workers of America Local 7901," Fritz said. "You worked so hard to win approval. You offer dozens of immigrant families not only a chance at the American Dream, but an opportunity to belong to an American union, part of the united American Federation of Labor movement. You achieved the dream, in winning approval of your franchise. And now the majority of council is telling you you're an expendable casualty in the free market — the free market that is grinding the working class and the middle class into the servants of the billionaire corporations."

Since April, when Portland allowed TNCs to operate in a test run of full legalization, TNCs have taken a majority of the private for-hire transportation market, though the market has also grown quite a bit. Uber's new Portland general manager Bryce Bennett told City Council the company had facilitated 1 million rides as of November, and has nearly 5,000 active drivers and an office in

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— Portland Commissioner Amanda Fritz

the Lloyd District.

Seattle ordinance letting Uber drivers unionize to come

On Dec. 14, Seattle City Council passed by unanimous vote an ordinance that gives TNC drivers a way to engage in collective bargaining — even though as independent contractors they're not covered by the National Labor Relations Act. The ordinance — backed by Teamsters Local 117 and the King County Labor Council — makes the City list of licensed TNC drivers available to groups that want to

organize them, and then requires city-permitted TNCs to bargain terms and conditions if drivers vote for representation.

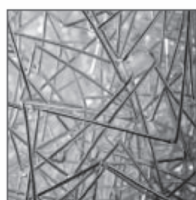
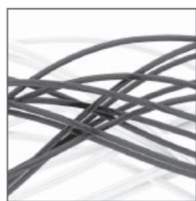
"That strikes me as a really groovy idea," Novick told the Labor Press by phone Dec. 11, before the vote. "I promise you that by September I will introduce an ordinance on collective bargaining modeled on Seattle's."

But Novick said his attention will shift first to getting a gas tax passed, with funds to be dedicated to fixing Portland streets and making them safer.

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www.mcmorgan.com

Mark Johnson | Partner
mjohnson@mcmorgan.com | (503) 523-7777

Patrick Worley | Partner
pworley@mcmorgan.com | (206) 498-7729



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