



# Seattle-King County WAT Association

TO: Port of Seattle Commissioners  
Tom Albro  
Bill Bryant  
Stephanie Bowman  
John Creighton  
Courtney Gregoire  
Port CEO Ted Fick  
Aviation and Ground Transportation Division Staff

DATE: September 7, 2015

RE: **Wheelchair Accessible Taxi Operations at Sea-Tac Airport**

The Wheelchair Accessible Taxi Association of Seattle-King County is dismayed that the Ground Transportation reports and options presented to the Port Commission do not reflect our repeated requests. WATs have participated in each and every meeting of the Ground Transportation review and analysis process.

To reiterate:

- WATs are the only legally recognized operators licensed and trained to transport wheelchair passengers.
- WAT operators have very precise and extremely high requirements - far above other taxi operators and vastly superior to anything required of For-Hire-Vehicles or other private transportation services.
- The unique services of WAT vehicles and operators are such that the cost of operating a WAT are much, much higher than for regular taxicabs

## **Our request for services at SeaTac Airport**

- For the purposes of serving ADA customers, WAT operators shall not be tied to any dispatch company, regardless of which Dispatch Company is operating under contract at the Airport.
- WAT vehicles MUST have full access to the Airport *without fees*.
- To serve ADA customers effectively, WAT vehicles *must* attain special WAT stands curbside in the baggage claim area, rather than expect already-burdened ADA customers to navigate a long commute to the 3rd Floor Parking Garage.
- We seek special signage and wayfinding throughout the Airport for ADA customers.

Under the current taxi contract, WAT operators must pay the same fees to the Airport as regular taxicabs. In order to improve ADA access for Airport customers, WAT operators pay fees amounting to \$7,956.00 per year.

Further, the Airport must waive the \$1.00-per-trip fee assessed on taxicab customers using WAT vehicles.

We appreciate the Port of Seattle's commitment to serving all customers, but hope the Port recognizes the challenges of customers needing improved access. WAT operators provide dignified, responsible and safe transportation for people using wheelchairs and other mobility devices.

**BACKGROUND:**

The City of Seattle and King County, in order to provide cost-effective, efficient access to transportation for people using wheelchairs and other mobility devices, engaged a Demonstration Project 2007-08. Government agencies involved in the project included the City of Seattle's Consumer Affairs Unit; King County Records and Licensing; King County Metro Accessible Services; WAT operators; with funding from WSDOT. Metro initially loaned eight accessible vans.

A regulator structure was implemented following the demonstration project.

WAT operators must have a significantly higher level of experience and increased standards for driver safety, as well as conduct and compliance, and passenger relations. WAT operators were not allowed to transfer or sell their WAT license for five years; required to drive at least 30 hours per week for 40 weeks.

The project proved that operating a WAT is significantly higher than operating a taxicab:

- 50-60% higher initial vehicle cost
- Installation cost of wheelchair ramp
- Increased mechanical cost for heavier shocks, brakes, etc.
- Dramatically increased fuel cost

To assist WAT operators with the increased cost of operations, the annual \$1,050.00 license fee was waived.

More information and the full report, released November 24, 2009 is available at the City of Seattle's Consumer Affairs Unit, Financial & Administrative Services.

Sincerely,

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