

News

# Council directs staff to find ways to deregulate local taxi industry, level playing field with Uber

*No action taken on proposed regulations for Uber drivers*

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Staff Report (<https://www.kvia.com/meet-the-team/staff-report/53068839>)

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City Council votes on Uber regulation

EL PASO, Texas - City council voted Tuesday to direct city staff to work with the taxi companies to find a way to deregulate that industry and level the playing field with Uber.

City representatives opted for deregulation instead of adopting new rules for the ride-sharing service. Taxi company owners had been pushing the City for eight months to require fingerprint based background checks on Uber drivers. Uber has resisted the fingerprint checks, saying they already require their drivers to undergo thorough

background checks through a third party before being approved to drive for the technology company.

Instead of requiring more of Uber, the City Council is considering requiring less of taxis, essentially eliminating dozens of city fees, inspections, and permits.

City Rep. Emma Acosta proposed the deregulation of the taxi industry in El Paso. Acosta suggested charging Uber and taxi drivers a flat annual fee to let them operate within the city. She also wants taxi companies and Uber to file annual affidavits attesting to compliance with state laws, permits, licensing and insurance. Currently, a taxi company with 60 vehicles pays about \$26,000 to the City.

Joe Olivar, the owner of a local cab company Border Taxi, was disappointed with Tuesday's developments. He was pushing for stricter regulation of Uber drivers, including fingerprinting-based background checks.

"You guys are making a big mistake, no one operates with the same integrity. I hope the city council is accountable when something horrible happens," Olivar said, as he repeatedly brought up the issue of public safety.

"You wanted a level playing field, that's what we're doing," El Paso Mayor Oscar Leeser replied. Most of the council agreed that adding regulations was not the answer. "How many blockbuster stores do we have left" asked City Rep. Peter Svarzbein. "Could you imagine regulating Netflix? How do you regulate a technology," he said.

Olivar said the council's approach was "fullhardy."

Svarzbein defended Uber, even suggesting it could help the city curb a serious problem. "No one here can look me in the eye and say we don't have a drunk driving problem," Svarzbein said. He said there were "hysterics and misinformation" surrounding Uber. Svarzbein pointed out Uber's drivers undergo background checks, are equipped with a \$1million commercial liability insurance when driving for the app and the company provides a service accessible for disabled customers.

Dozens of people with disabilities spoke at Tuesday's meeting, saying they opposed Uber because its cars are not equipped with the infrastructure to pick up individuals who rely on a motorized wheelchair. "We're not against having options for people but if those options are equitable for everyone across the board," said speaker Josue Rodriguez to the city council.

The Council in its motion included direction to work with Uber to bring Uber Access to El

Paso which is an Uber service that works with third parties to pick up users who rely on a motorized wheelchair. Equipment to accommodate for the wheelchairs costs about \$12,000 per car, according to Uber officials. Uber's Policy Director Chris Miller told the council the company will not refuse a ride on the basis of disability.

representative Emma Acosta's motion to explore ways to deregulate taxi companies passed 7 to 1 with only Carl Robinson voting against.

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