

# Tyler Morning Telegraph

## Ride-booking apps reduce drunken driving deaths, arrests

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As Tyler officials continue to study ride-booking apps such as Uber and Lyft, evidence mounts that the services reduce drunken driving deaths, and are a safe alternative - or rather, a safe addition - to traditional taxis.

“A new paper that examined the effect Uber had on crime in 150 cities and counties from 2010-2013 reveals that Uber lowers the rate of DUIs and fatal vehicle crashes,” the Cato Institute reports. “This is not an especially surprising finding given that Uber, like other ridesharing companies, offers a convenient way for those who’ve had a few drinks to get a sober ride home.”

Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) is on board; that agency co-sponsored a study with Uber that measured the statistics in Seattle, and found “Using publicly available data and a simple econometric model, we discovered Uber’s entry into the Emerald City was associated with a 10 percent decrease in DUI arrests. The results were robust and statistically significant...”

That’s supported by Texas officials, as well.

“During debates on ridesharing in Austin, Travis County Sheriff Greg Hamilton noted that while the causal relationship between Uber’s arrival and a reduction in DWI arrests ‘requires more study,’ DWI arrests had fallen 16 percent in 2014, the year after Uber came to Austin, and in 2015 DWI arrests declined by 23 percent,” Cato noted.

Now, Uber and Lyft have had rocky rollouts in some cities, and much of that is their own fault. The companies spent millions of dollars in Austin to fight Proposition 1, which would have required that Uber drivers be fingerprinted.

Their reasoning was that their business model depends on a lot of part-time, casually committed drivers filling the need for rides; the fingerprint requirement would be a hassle that many of their drivers wouldn’t want to bother with.

But as much for the heavy-handed way the companies fought Proposition 1 as for the requirement itself, Austin voters approved the measure, and Uber and Lyft abruptly left the city.

What happened next was predictable; less safe alternatives emerged to fill the obvious need. Micro-entrepreneurs such as “Arcade City Austin/Request a Ride” are offering rides through Facebook and other social media sites. They lack the safety measures Lyft and Uber employ to ensure the drivers are valid, safe and insured.

The point here is that the genie won't go back into the bottle. Ride-booking apps are just one aspect of a technological revolution we can neither deny nor delay. They're coming.

There's no doubt that Jamal Moharer, owner of NDMJ, the parent company of Tyler Taxi and Tyler Car Service, has been a valuable corporate citizen. He continues to give free rides to those in need. Moharer has expressed concerns about the safety of Uber and Lyft and other apps.

But what the studies are now clearly showing is that ride-booking actually increases safety, by reducing drunk driving accidents and deaths.

That's something Tyler officials should bear in mind as they develop a new set of ordinances to govern ride-sharing apps when - not if - they come to Tyler.