

## As tourism increases, Spyridon looks at taxis, black-car services

By E.J. Boyer

November 27, 2013

Nashville set a new record in October for the number of hotel rooms sold during one month, topping 600,000, but the city's transportation supply may not be able to keep up with a growing demand from locals and tourists.

New legislation that could put more black cars on the streets and an ordinance change that could make taxis more accessible are being pursued. With tourism projected to increase in 2014, Nashville Convention and Visitors Corp. CEO [Butch Spyridon](#) said it's imperative to get changes done before the next fiscal year.

"We know from visitor and in our case personal experience that taxi service is inadequate," Spyridon said. "I'll say two things: we need more taxis on the street and we need more readily available black-car service."

The two services, though, have often been at odds in Nashville, operating under the assumption that what's good for one business is bad for the other. Sticking points are current requirements levied on black-car livery services, including a \$45 minimum fare and requirements that cars be dispatched from the place of operation. Taxi services argue the regulations enable them to stay competitive, while black car services argue the opposite. The regulations are, in part, what's blocking the app-based car service [Uber from entering Nashville](#).

Local black car companies took the regulations to court, but lost in January 2013. The CATO Institute, a D.C.-based libertarian think tank, summed up the fight in a [summer 2013 brief](#) titled, "Nashville's anti-competitive black car regulations," which also looks at where Nashville stands on transportation regulation compared to other cities.

The new legislation easing requirements on black-car services will be introduced at the next Metro Council meeting, Dec. 3. The bill changes the dispatch language to specifically include and allow third-party arrangement, like Internet-based apps. It also lowers the minimum \$45 fee, but keeps some protection for taxis: "The initial charge for using the livery shall be no less than three times the maximum rate for activation of a taximeter charged by taxicabs," the bill reads.

"It will still be higher than taxis, we want to make sure taxis have an advantage, but not make it so exorbitant that we don't have these services," Spyridon said of removing the \$45 flat fee.

Taxi permits, meanwhile, have increased by nearly 30 percent over the past few years, and could put 170 new taxis on Nashville roads. But Spyridon said new taxi permits aren't enough on their own. He is recommending a complete rewrite of taxi ordinances that changes some of their fee structures. It's a

move, he said, that will protect consumers by guaranteeing pick-up for even short-distance rides and taxi company revenues.

"Sometimes [taxis] don't want to take people from the Music City Center to the Sheraton, so we need some special event fares, some zone fares ... we need to make it profitable for the taxis to do that," he said. "Put a minimum within the downtown area, put in a rate for special events. We need to get cars moving and people moving."

Rewriting ordinances could take several months, said Spyridon, and it would require approval by the Metro Transportation Licensing Commission. And, safety regulations would be imposed on any new black car service entering town. Still, he's adamant action needs to be taken.

"We have got to have it," he said. "Next year is going to be a really busy year, a lot of pressure on transportation, with the number of large conventions in town."