

Liberal Madison clashes with progressive ridesharing concept

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MADISON, Wis. — Ridesharing companies [Uber](#) and [Lyft](#) are increasingly popular with this liberal city's progressive young crowd.

Tori Krzykowski, a 22-year-old senior at the [University of Wisconsin-Madison](#), became a fan of ridesharing services while in Washington, D.C., for a conference in March 2014.

"The level of service they provide will keep them around in the future as long as the government will let them," Krzykowski said.

But will the government let them?

Long-serving [Mayor Paul Soglin](#), who won re-election this month, isn't exactly a fan. He beat City Council member Scott Resnick, who also does not consider himself "pro-Uber."

Soglin favors treating ridesharing companies like taxis, requiring them to operate around the clock and banning them from implementing surge pricing at any time. The mayor's proposal last year strictly regulating the companies failed to survive the City Council.

Soglin earlier this year said the business mode of rideshare companies like Uber and Lyft is "built on exploitation" and subjects drivers to a "16th century version of serfdom."

"I have no room for Ayn Rand free enterprise nonsense in this discussion," Soglin said, as reported by [MacIver News Service](#).

Krzykowski thinks leaders opposed to ridesharing companies are out of touch with the younger generation.

"It might just be political why they are opposed to it. I am not really sure. I'd like to give them the benefit of the doubt and say that maybe they are just trying to keep the population safe," she said.

[Matthew Feeney](#), a policy analyst at the Cato Institute, told Wisconsin Watchdog transportation network companies offer features that can make them safer than traditional taxis.

He said driving for a living is a dangerous job, but the two-way rating system offered by companies like Uber and Lyft is a good way to ensure the safety of drivers and the users.

“Ridesharing’s cash-free transactions and self-identified customers substantially mitigate one of the worst risks associated with traditional taxis: the risk of violent crime,” Feeney [wrote](#) in a recent policy analysis.

Krzykowski said she found standard taxi services unreliable. Wait times for ridesharing providers, so far, have been much shorter, she said.

“It’s in real-time on the app (on your smartphone). You can actually see where they are.”

State Rep. [Tyler August](#), R-Lake Geneva, has authored a bill that would put ridesharing companies on the same playing field throughout the state.

[Assembly Bill 143](#) has bipartisan support from co-authors Rep. [Cory Mason](#), D-Racine, outgoing Sen. [Paul Farrow](#), R-Pewaukee, and Sen. [Julie Lassa](#), D-Stevens Point. August said he wants to encourage innovation.

“I am pro-choice in the marketplace,” he told Wisconsin Watchdog. “I think we need to encourage this type of entrepreneurship around the state.”

While Uber and Lyft spokeswomen told Wisconsin Watchdog their companies support the bipartisan legislation, experts caution lawmakers against getting too friendly with the ridesharing companies.

[Matthew Mitchell](#), a senior research fellow at the Mercatus Center, told Wisconsin Watchdog he hopes the Wisconsin legislation is carefully written so it doesn’t discriminate against other competitors.

“There are other business models that we want to make sure we have an environment open to them, as well,” he said.

Similarly, Feeney said he’s for limited government and free markets, but he doesn’t want to be in the business of picking winners and losers.

“Someone out there probably has a better idea than Uber and Lyft, and I want them to be able to compete with Uber and Lyft,” he said. “We should seek out a regulatory environment, but also one that allows the smaller fish in the pond to get into the market.”

August said he has made sure his legislation allows new companies to enter the marketplace. He said his bill is simply “a reasonable set of standards to keep drivers and passengers on the road safely.”

Some experts think Assembly Bill 143, if passed, could result in a lawsuit.

The state government delegates a good deal of authority to local government, according to the Wisconsin State Constitution.

“I would imagine that if they pass this bill and the city of Milwaukee wants to deregulate even further and really let them (ridesharing companies) go wild or vice versa, they might have a

lawsuit in Wisconsin court challenging this law,” Andrew Kloster, a legal expert with the Heritage Foundation, told Wisconsin Watchdog.

Authors of Assembly Bill 143 argue transportation network companies are an issue of statewide concern, as it’s common for customers to take Ubers and Lyfts from one municipality to another, and it would be best for companies to follow a statewide standard.

August said he doesn’t see the constitutionality question as an issue.

The bill passed the state Assembly on a bipartisan, 79-19, vote Tuesday. It now goes to the Senate, where it will likely be taken up on the floor next week. If it passes there, Walker could have the bill by the end of the month.