

Airports and TNCs – It's *DIFFERENT* at Airports!

Airports are special places when it comes to ground transportation. Unlike cities and some states that regulate taxi, limo, and some bus and shuttle operations from all points to all points within a city's or state's geographic boundaries on public streets, airports regulate all modes of ground transportation from and to a single point, and they do it on private, crowded airport roadways with very limited, or sometimes no parking space. Unlike a city that is concerned with ensuring that their citizenry has a mixture of stable public and privately provided ground transportation options to choose among through trial and error with varying operating models and types of services at a large range of costs, airports are different! City officials can assume that through trial and error and word of mouth, locals will be able to choose among many ground transportation providers. Airports, however, must assure the traveling public that these services will be there whenever airplanes are landing and taking off, that their fares be reasonable, and that the airline traveling public is offered safe, reliable, and fully insured quality ground transportation service. Airport officials cannot and do not assume their arriving passengers know that much about their ground transportation operations. It is for these reasons that airports often tend to develop operating agreements with one or more ground transportation carriers to ensure that the level and quality of desired services are there for all users of that airport.

The relatively new concept in ground transportation – that of using private automobiles, driven by their owners as independent contractors, and arranged for through smartphone apps offers the possibility of yet another ground transportation option for cities and airports -- an option that may offer lower fares and the amenities of the private automobile and part time driver. However, the type of regulations and operating rules adopted by cities or states do not automatically transfer over to airports, given their different objectives and existing airport operating agreements with ground transportation companies which could be greatly affected by this new type of competitor.

Airport officials have been slow and cautious in permitting TNCs to pick up at their airports for good reasons. They recognize that deregulating entry into the taxi market to thousands of new vehicles and unknown drivers is relatively easy for a city to do, but operationally difficult for an airport to administer. Therefore, there is the general tendency by these officials to treat TNCs not as taxis but as prearranged vehicles and to move slowly through six months or a year's trial to see what effects these operations have.

Airport officials are also waiting to see if the source of this lower cost alternative - that is, the use of private cars, unknown independent drivers, and personal automobile insurance are ultimately going to be legal and therefore permissible to operate in their current form. Of serious concern to airport officials is when a TNC driver turns off their app and picks up an airport "personal" trip. In this case there is no insurance of passenger, driver, vehicle, airport, or others involved in an accident. Finally, there is the concern that this open entry approach will result in a "race to the bottom" for fares and service as more and more TNCs jump into this young, and as yet not clearly defined, transportation service mode. After all, it was the lack of quality in taxi and van services that led many airports to develop their own requirements and contracts/conditions for the services that exist today.

Nowhere is this difference between city and airport interests more different than in the necessity of police fingerprint background checks for drivers of commercial vehicles on airport property. The threat of terrorism is only one reason for airports to require such background checks, but also the personal safety of arriving passengers must be considered. Since these drivers are authorized by the airport to pick up arriving passengers, the passengers have the right to assume that their drivers have been thoroughly vetted through a thorough background check. Inbound passengers rely on the airport to have properly screened any individual that is offering commercial services to the traveling public.

Safety concerns are very important to the airline visitor who may not be familiar with American ground transportation companies. All commercial passenger drivers, even so-called part-time TNC drivers, need to have a police fingerprint background check before being permitted to operate from airports - exactly like that required of all taxi drivers and most prearranged ground transportation drivers. There should be no distinction

between the two. The TNC claims that their background checks are better than those of official police fingerprint background checks are simply false and misleading...so much so that the City of San Francisco has sued California TNCs making such claims.

The fact that these TNC dating service type background checks are greatly inferior to real police background checks has been well documented by several recent studies. There are considerable differences between what a general public background check reveals vs. that of a police, or regulatory agency background check. Public background checks can only provide what is available in public records and only for the name and address provided. For example, they contain only convictions and only for the past 7 years. Additionally, the public records do not record likely aliases and often contain inaccurate information. Police fingerprint checks match the individual to the correct record over 99% of the time, thereby ensuring accurate information as to both convictions and arrests! Consider for one example, the case of DUIs or "Driving Under the Influence" citations which are pleaded down to a speeding or lesser offense and therefore may escape any public records review. Alternatively, a police check would show the ultimate plea but the original arrest citation as well. Finally, many juvenile records are sealed from the public background check but are open to official police background checks.

Airport officials should simply ignore TNC arguments that these police background checks are too onerous, costly, and time consuming. All commercial ground transportation and taxi operators in many states have to undergo police fingerprint background checks in order to pick up passengers at airports – there should be no consideration by airport officials to forego this public safety necessity for both the passenger and the airport's liability sake. Again, airline passengers depend upon airport officials to use the highest degree of judgment, ensuring that only qualified persons are permitted to carry on commercial ground transportation service activity at the airport. To require less by TNCs could be considered not only utilizing poor judgment, but also negligence when there is such overwhelming evidence that TNC public background checks are vastly inferior to regular police fingerprint background checks.

Therefore, it is the policy of the Airport Ground Transportation Association that police fingerprint background checks should be required of all commercial ground transportation providers serving our nation's airports. Airport officials and airline passengers need to know who is driving them and that they have passed a true criminal background check!