NYC 9/11 Public Portal Document

Car Restrictions' Ripple Effect

By Tom Incantalupo and S. Mitra Kalita
STAFF WRITERS

A few expect to pick up new business, but most people who make their living moving passengers and goods on the streets of New York say that if the new driving restrictions alleviate congestion, that in itself will be a help.

Truckers, limousine operators, taxicab companies and the managers of parking garages in Manhattan said the past two weeks have been a nightmare of bogged-down traffic, wasted time and lost revenue because of closures and security checks.

For limo and taxi operators, that has come on top of a slump in their airport business as Americans frightened by Sept. 11's terror attacks have deserted the airlines, whose planes are flying barely half full.

"It hurts us and it hurts the drivers," said Bill Kaufman, whose Long Island Yellow Cab has seven offices. He said his business is off by 25 percent because fewer people are going to airports and fewer are traveling to the city by train. His drivers lease cars from him, pay for gasoline and keep what's left. "If he's moving, he's making money," Kaufman said of cabbies.

Jorge Castillo, deliveryman for Seatide Fish Market in Corona, wonders how much longer his employer can keep him on the payroll. "Things that used to take me 40 minutes take me three hours," Castillo said.

Todd Virga, who with a cousin runs CEO Corporate Limousines of Valley Stream and Boston, said his business, which includes many trips in the city and to the airports, is off by 90 percent. Plus, the severity and unpredictability of traffic in the past two weeks have made it difficult to schedule cars so that customers are picked up on time.

Like Kaufman, Virga isn't counting on an increase in clientele from the new restrictions on single-occupant passenger cars entering parts of the city, but he said, "They'll ease things a bit. The traffic won't be as bad."

At Utog Transportation, a Long Island City-based fleet of 300 cars, limos and vans, dispatcher Dino Corradi does expect more business, however, from companies wanting to transport workers who formerly drove alone. "They're going to be calling us," he said. "It's going to start to pick up again."

It's not clear whether many companies will opt to do that, though. Media giant Viacom, for example, plans to simply form workers into car pools on an as-needed basis, spokeswoman Susan Duffy said.

Manhattan parking garages expect the restrictions may hurt their business, already smarting from fewer visitors to the city.

Henry Mclean, manager of the Carlton Garage on East 43rd Street, said of the restrictions, "This will make it worse. A lot of my customers, it's only the driver" who normally is in the car, and so now would be banned.

Castillo and other workers who deliver for a living said they thought security, tightened up on Sept. 11, would have eased by now. Instead, they said, it has gotten worse. Federal sources said police must scrutinize all trucks after learning that a suspected terrorist had obtained training for vehicles handling hazardous materials.

In the past two weeks, Castillo's blue van has been stopped twice in Manhattan and once on the Long Island Expressway, searched by police and sniffed by their dogs.

Businesses downtown, already suffering from slow sales, said they no longer expect to receive their deliveries on time because of traffic and checkpoints. At Liberty Gourmet, manager Dipak Banik said "it takes a long time" to receive deliveries. "It's like starting your business over again."

Staff writer Elizabeth Sanger contributed to this story.

NEWSDAY, THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2001

CITY_21MC100_01183028I

NYC-WTC_000412863