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Taxi Fare Hike Likely After Rudy Hails Plan

Proposed 23% jump would be first since '96

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STAFF WRITER

With the blessing of Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, the city appears headed for a hike in taxi fares — the first rate increase in nearly six years.

A proposed increase of 23 percent has been submitted to the Taxi and Limousine Commission by the Metropolitan Taxicab Board of Trade, an industry group representing some of the city's largest fleet owners. Average fare, based on a 2.64-mile trip, would climb from $6.85 to $8.45 under terms of the proposal, which also seeks to increase the Kennedy Airport-to-Manhattan flat rate from $35 to $49.

Those price increases could be scaled down somewhat before they are adopted by the TLC, which will hold a public hearing Dec. 27 before voting on the issue.

An increase of some form seems likely, particularly given the support of Giuliani, who appoints members of the nine-member TLC. Giuliani has suggested implementing a two- or three-tiered system that would charge a higher rate for new, roomier taxis now in production and possibly an even higher rate for minivans.

"It's not a done deal," TLC Chairman Matthew Daus said yesterday during a news conference outside City Hall. "We will listen to what the feedback is from the public."

The fare increase is needed to attract more cab drivers, who were in short supply even before Sept. 11, Daus said. Since then, drivers have watched their income plummet by 40 percent, according to some estimates.

"All this money is going into the driver's pocket," Daus said. "People who do not have employment right now, if they want to come to this industry and be drivers, this is the time to do it."

A rate increase also would offset the costs of upgrades and other operating expenses incurred since the last fare increase in March 1996. One of those costs is the "stretch" Ford Crown Victoria, a new taxicab model that was the centerpiece of yesterday's news conference.

'Historically, a fare increase is given every five or six years. It's just about that time.'

— Taxi and Limousine Commission Chairman Matthew Daus

The $24,220 cab provides backseat passengers an extra six inches of leg room. The first model hits the streets this week, and within five years, all 12,200 city taxis will be replaced with new, roomier cars as the older models are retired.

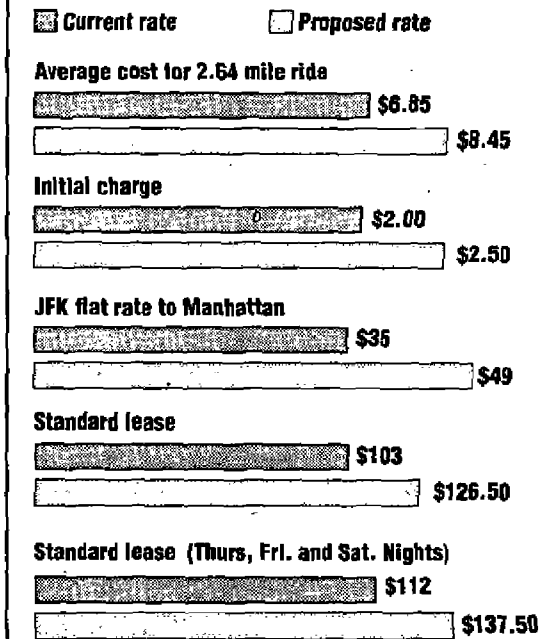
To those who would grouse about the fare increase, officials pointed out that in a recent study of cab prices in 11 major cities, New York's were the lowest.

Besides, wasn't it bound to happen sooner or later?

"Historically, a fare increase is given every five or six years," Daus said. "It's just about that time."

A Fare Mark-Up

A look at the fare increase proposed by the Metropolitan Taxicab Board of Trade.



OTHER INCREASES

- Charge $0.30 for each one-sixth of a mile instead of the current one-fifth.
- An extension of the $0.50 night surcharge to include all weekends and holidays.
- An increase in waiting time charge from 90 seconds (at rate of $0.20 per minute), when the taxicab is not in motion or traveling less than 10 mph, to 60 seconds (at rate of $0.30) per minute.

SOURCE: Metropolitan Taxicab Board of Trade

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