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Twenty five cent discount in effect Taxi Association sees discount as a "reasonable start"

by Gail Anthony

On Monday, the 25 cent discount for students to and from educational institutions came into effect. Allan MacPhee, the President of the Fredericton Taxi Association says this discount is a step in the right direction.

"It's a reasonable start, at least I feel it is anyway, considering the discount was nothing just a few months ago," he notes.

MacPhee responds to the comments made by Kevin Bourque, President of the Student Union, in the last issue of *the Brunswickan*.

"The student discount that we are now offering is better than nothing, considering the increased fuel costs the taxi companies have to deal with. Kevin Bourque may not feel this is generous but he is not paying our bills," he says.

"I think instead of looking for favouritism he should look for fair and equal treatment. We will keep this matter under review," MacPhee adds.

He explains one of the immediate problems taxi companies have to deal with is the 12 per cent increase in fuel costs.

"It is almost an increase of a dollar a gallon. . . still in fact it is a lot of money considering a taxi cab will go through two complete tanks a day, seven days a week. It all starts to add up," MacPhee states.

According to him, the association will also have the problem of dealing with the GST.

"Yes, taxis have to charge the GST. Just how we are going to deal with this is still up in the air," he says.

MacPhee says if the city by-law for taxi services is passed this Tuesday, it will eliminate the shared taxi system. He explains that a taxi will not be able to pick up one customer, then pick up another enroute to the same location.

"The private car system will be much more expensive. We can't do much until we find out

what is happening there. If this bylaw comes into play, it creates a problem. Our costs will double to provide the same service," he states.

"Personally I find it less of an inconvenience to be held up for a few minutes to pick up another customer, than paying extra," he adds.

According to MacPhee the association is not unreasonable.

"We're not ignoring the students. The student discount was implemented at the first possible time. With increases in full costs, fares must go up," MacPhee explains.

"The student discount is a good start, and it is standardized across the board. . . The average fare to an educational institution is \$2.50, so we are offering a ten per cent decrease. It

sounds minor but a quarter is a quarter. Where do we stop, when does it become enough," he says.

"As I said before it is only a starting point. We would like to increase the student discount to 50 cents, but it takes time. We have to make sure the taxi companies are making a living. Nobody wins when nobody makes any money," MacPhee adds.

According to MacPhee, one taxi is not capable of handling students exclusively.

"You are not looking at 30 per cent of our market. We run 12 months of a year, not eight. It is impossible to take on students exclusively and maintain their current customer base," he says.

"Costs are going up, but we are still offering a discount,"

MacPhee adds.

According to him, the reasoning behind only offering the discount to and from educational institutions is because the system has received abuse in the past.

He admits students are at the lower end of the income scale but says there are a lot of other residents in the city in the same situation.

"Fredericton is 15 per cent below the national average," MacPhee states.

He admits there will be further increases in taxi fares.

"There has been no price increase for six years because of price wars. What you're paying today is the same as four years ago. The city has been very spoiled, and very lucky. It's been cheaper to travel by taxi than to own your

own car," he explains.

"I can see companies going out of business in the near future. I can see people receiving the same services as they are today. . . It's a little hard to picture until the by-law is nailed down," MacPhee adds.

He also owns a cab company, and explains some of the difficulties.

"We have not made a profit in a long time, but we have hung on. . . You are an entrepreneur and you have to stick with it. I'd be very surprised to see if any cab company turned over a profit last year. Just to break even is really nice," MacPhee says.

"We will continue to negotiate with all parties, in good faith and continue to keep a close eye on the situation."



Three Wheeled Winner:

Perry Delano squeezes in first place at the 16th Annual Coaster Derby which was held last Saturday. Behind Delano is second place winner, Trevor Neilson. See story page 6.

Photo by Randy Goodleaf

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