

# Cab company poll shows Calgarians happy with service

BY TAMARA GIGNAC, CALGARY HERALD NOVEMBER 13, 2009 8:01 AM



Taxis line up for passengers at Calgary International Airport Wednesday, April 30.

**Photograph by:** Stuart Gradon, Calgary Herald

CALGARY - Calgarians who use taxis--even during busy times and in frigid weather--are happy with the service they receive, a new poll suggests.

A survey commissioned by the city's cab companies asked 300 people to rate their ability to hire a taxi. Most -- 71 per cent -- considered the response time either "good" or "very good." Of those who sought a cab after midnight or during holidays and in the winter, some 82 to 85 per cent reported a pleasant outcome.

The results "fly in the face" of recent reports, said independent pollster Bruce Cameron.

"People who have used the taxi service are positive about it. If you just went by what some of the other groups are saying, you would conclude the opposite is true," said Cameron, the founder of research consultancy Return on Insight.

The poll's findings differ wildly from a similar survey conducted last summer by Voters for Taxis, a local consumer advocacy group lobbying for changes to the city's taxi policies.

Many who responded to Voters for Taxis' online queries rated the availability of cabs as poor or fair.

Cameron said the earlier survey can't be considered scientifically valid because it doesn't reflect random public opinion. Disgruntled riders would deliberately seek out such a study, he noted.

Sandy Jenkins disagrees. The spokesman for Voters For Taxis argues Calgarians are so fed up with their inability to get a cab, many have given up completely and now seek alternative transportation.

He would like to see sweeping changes to Calgary's taxi regulations to improve wait times and allow more cabs on the road. The city is conducting a two-year review of its taxi bylaw, and Jenkins believes deregulation is the best way to bolster service.

"There are cars out there that aren't getting trips on a busy Friday or when it's cold, but when people phone, they can't get through. It's a real failure of the dispatch system, not taxi demand," said Jenkins.

But taxi companies say there are more than enough cabs to meet the needs of the city as the busy holiday season approaches.

Many big corporate clients are cancelling Christmas parties or opting for smaller, less-boozy affairs, said Len Bellingham, chairman of the Calgary Livery Association.

It comes at a time when there are 30 per cent more cars on the street than business often warrants between the hours of 11 p.m. and 3 a.m., he said.

"Instead of customers looking for cabs, it's cab drivers looking for customers."

The industry isn't perfect, Bellingham acknowledged.

The shortage of cabs for late-night revellers in the entertainment district is a problem, he said, one that taxi companies are trying to resolve by pushing for designated taxi stands in neighbourhoods populated with bars and nightclubs as well as outside sporting events.

The Return on Insight poll also asked people to rate the cleanliness of cabs and driver professionalism, with most respondents describing their experience as "good" or "very good."

[tgignac@theherald.canwest.com](mailto:tgignac@theherald.canwest.com)

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