



A Times Editorial

Editorial: Regulators should ensure ride-share safety

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Hillsborough County's Public Transportation Commission on Wednesday will take another crack at bringing the unlicensed ride-share companies into the legal taxicab business. There is every reason to open up competition, but these companies must first comply with public health and safety standards.

The ride-sharing services Uber and Lyft have operated for months in Hillsborough without the necessary permits from the PTC, which licenses all for-hire vehicles in the county. The PTC is right that these services amount to the same thing as a taxicab, even if customers arrange their ride using a smartphone app and compensate the driver through an electronic pay wall.

The technology behind ride-sharing makes it a convenient and affordable option, but these drivers are still taking paying passengers on public roadways. The same safety standards that exist for taxi passengers must exist for those using ride-sharing services. The PTC needs to inspect these vehicles, conduct background checks on drivers and ensure that operators have adequate commercial insurance to cover accidents, injuries or damage. These are not onerous demands, just responsible ones. And if the ride-share companies won't comply, they should not be allowed to remain in business.

These requirements are aimed at ensuring that vehicles are safe, that drivers are not a danger to their customers or the traveling public and that operators will be held responsible for negligent acts that harm other people or their property. Other PTC rules guard against red-lining, which is the practice of refusing to serve poor and minority neighborhoods, where the lack of private automobiles makes taxi service almost essential.

The PTC is going off in the wrong direction by considering a regulatory framework for ride-sharing that only protects the traditional taxicab industry. One measure floated recently would set a \$30 minimum fare and brief wait time for ride-share. That is a concession from the \$50 base fare the PTC now requires for limousine service. But the PTC has no business setting a floor on prices. That's for the market to determine. The agency is making the issue more complicated than it is: The question is not what the ride-share companies should charge but how to ensure that the operations are safe and nondiscriminatory.

The PTC board should demonstrate Wednesday that it understands its legitimate but narrow role in the market. Obsessing over rates and classifications is not the PTC's job. It's public safety.

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