

For Immediate Release

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PSC Gives Ride-Sharing Company Lyft the Green Light

Helena, Mont. – The Montana Public Service Commission voted 4-1 today to approve the license of Lyft, Inc., making it the second authorized Technology Network Carrier (TNC) in the state.

A similar license was granted to Raiser-MT, LLC (Uber) in December of 2015 after changes to state law earlier that year paved the way for app-based, ride-sharing companies to operate in Montana.

“In the past, existing operators held what amounted to a competitors veto over newcomers,” said Commissioner Travis Kavulla, R-Great Falls. “That is no longer the case, and today, any firm can compete, so long as they can demonstrate that they are a ‘fit’ operator.”

During the 20 day protest period last spring, the PSC received a single objection to Lyft’s application from Carrie Pintar, the owner of Amazing Taxi in Livingston. At a June hearing, Pintar called into question Lyft’s “fitness” to operate on the grounds that the company could not meet its legal obligations related to insurance.

By law, TNCs are required to carry minimum insurance coverage of \$50,000 for death and bodily injury per person, \$100,000 per incident, and \$25,000 for property damage. When a driver is engaged in a pre-arranged ride, the requirements go up to \$1 million for death, injury, or property damage as well as uninsured motorist coverage.

Pintar argued that Lyft’s insurance could be inactive in instances where a driver loses connection to the digital network while driving through a cellular dead-spot.

Upon questioning by the Commission, Lyft witness, Timothy Burr, testified that contrary to Pintar’s claims, “gaps in cellular service do not impact insurance coverage, as coverage exists from the moment the first passenger enters the vehicle until the last passenger exits during a prearranged ride.”

“The Commission is satisfied that Lyft has met all of the statutory requirements established by the Legislature, and is a fit, willing, and able operator,” said Chairman Brad Johnson, R-East-Helena.

Commissioner Bob Lake, R-Hamilton was the lone dissenting vote.

“As a regulator, my job is to ensure that essential services are there when they are needed most. Unlike existing regulated motor carriers, out-of-state corporations like Uber and Lyft operate with very little oversight from the PSC and they are not obligated to serve the public. I’m concerned that if these firms are allowed to squeeze out mom and pop taxi companies, critical portions of our population could be left without essential transportation services,” he said.

The approval of Lyft’s license is effective immediately and allows the company to begin operating right away.

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Made up of five elected commissioners, the PSC works to ensure that Montanans receive safe and reliable service from regulated public utilities while paying reasonable rates. Utilities regulated by the PSC generally include private investor-owned natural gas, electric, telephone, water, and sewer companies. In addition, the PSC regulates certain motor carriers, and oversees natural gas pipeline safety and intrastate railroad safety.