

GCLA Gets Fired Up For Negotiations On Green Policy

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ABOUT PHOTO: A partial view of the packed house Tuesday night at the Holiday Inn SFO as GCLA lobbyist Gregg Cook updates operators on legislative measures affecting the industry. Photo by Eric Sabroff.

SUMMARY: A vocal town hall meeting Tuesday night stirs up action and support for an industry effort to curtail drastic green vehicle rules at the San Francisco International Airport.

SAN FRANCISCO — Leaders of the [GREATER CALIFORNIA LIVERY ASSOCIATION](#) exhorted operators statewide Tuesday night to set aside competitive differences and join forces in altering a pending airport policy that could potentially ruin hundreds of livery business in the state and set a precedent for similar anti-business actions at major airports nationwide.

The GCLA is marshalling industry strength to prepare for what it hopes are negotiations with SFO administrators to ward off a green vehicle policy that dictates all livery vehicle entering airport property as of Jan. 1, 2012 must meet strict emissions and mileage rules or else operators will be subject to much costlier access fees. The policy, adopted in 2000, would raise the cost of a trip ticket from \$3.50 to \$14 for a non-green livery vehicle, i.e. a typical combustion engine Lincoln Town Car Executive L sedan, entering airport property.

SFO's policy is an attempt to incentivize the use of CNG and propane fueled vehicles by ground transportation providers servicing SFO so the airport can lower its carbon emissions as the state government pressures local governments and state-and municipal-funded facilities to combat alleged global warming. But the GCLA contends such a policy is too much, too soon and already is inspiring other airport authorities to pursue similar, misinformed and anti-business measures.

[PREVIOUS LCT ARTICLE ON SFO POLICY AND ITS EFFECTS.](#)

In the case of SFO, operators say a triple-hike in the fee could not be passed on to clients in a competitive marketplace that is subject to downward or flat pressure on rates during a weak economic recovery and

slow-growing business travel. Furthermore, the costs of green vehicles and green conversions of luxury limousine vehicles are still far too high for most small- to medium-size operators, and likely will remain so in coming years as affordable green auto technologies take a long time develop.

Close to 100 operators and supporters from across the state gathered at the Holiday Inn San Francisco International Airport Tuesday evening to hear the series of brief pitches and presentations geared to uncork financial support for the GCLA's legal and lobbying efforts needed to bolster negotiations. A substantial number of operators had wanted to attend the town hall but were deterred by the high cost of last minute round-trip airfares from other cities in the state.

The GCLA gained several new members and at least several thousand dollars in commitments toward a legal retainer for its attorney, [RENE GAMBOA](#), of Lewis, Brisbois, Bisgaard & Smith LLP of San Francisco. In addition to Gamboa, the GCLA is tapping the expertise of its lobbyist, Gregg Cook of Government Affairs Consulting in Sacramento, who also will be meeting with SFO officials.

Appearing before a banner with the slogan "Is Going Green Too Mean For the Livery Industry at SFO?", GCLA President Alan Shanedling made it clear to the gathering that airport officials are willing to negotiate and that the GCLA leadership believes talks are the most constructive approach to resolving the issue. However, Shanedling emphasized that a viable airport policy would have to be "affordable, voluntary, and not cost you a damn penny or your clients a damn penny in penalties."

As part of the presentation, Ian Lipton, chief operating officer of Toronto-based Green Ride Global, the industry's foremost authority and consultancy on green vehicles, green policies, and carbon emissions reduction, detailed findings of studies showing how CNG and propane vehicles actually generate minimal, if any, reductions in carbon emissions and fuel savings. Lipton's testimony in 2008 before the New York Taxi and Limousine Commission helped derail another policy similar to SFO's that would have required NYTLC-licensed for-hire transportation fleets to operate only vehicles that get a minimum of 30 mpg per gallon, and then eventually 35 mpg. Since no such practical luxury vehicles exist, the proposal was abandoned amid a flurry of opposition and outrage.

"By mandating clean fuel vehicles, [SFO] is not anticipating the unintended consequences of CNG and propane," said Lipton, who later added that hybrid engines hold out the most green potential but still need time to catch up to the performance requirements of large vehicles. Lipton recommended a voluntary approach to green compliance because it actually can yield more results than a forced-march to ineffective, nascent energy technologies that are still problematic and unproven.

The strongest warnings came from Christopher Quinn, a Sacramento operator and GCLA board member, who spoke without a microphone and gestured before the gathering in the manner of a soapbox rabble rouser: "What you don't have your eye on, the bureaucrats in Sacramento and Washington, D.C. do. . . The government is now looking for ways to pay for the programs they want to put in place. . . You can't just go your own way. We have to band together or we do not exist."

Shanedling reminded the operators, "If they think we are dealing in weakness, they will take advantage of us and try to walk all over us."

— Martin Romjue, LCT Magazine

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