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## **Pittsburgh Along for Ride with Lyft, Uber, but PUC Not.**

Lyft users book a ride from an app and pay a suggested donation by credit card through a smartphone. Drivers use their personal cars with a pink mustache hooked on the front as identification for the car service.

The Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission is ready to take a razor to giant pink mustachioed cars that are offering rides in Pittsburgh.

The PUC said Wednesday the agency looking into complaints against Lyft, a driving service booked through a smartphone app, and other unlicensed transportation services and is “preparing to take action” to curb the practice.

PUC spokeswoman Jennifer Kocher said the agency has been made aware of Lyft’s operations in Pittsburgh, which began on Friday. She couldn’t say where the complaints originated.

“Generally speaking, we could file an internal PUC complaint or we can file criminally. Many times, we do both,” Kocher said. “The companies and drivers alike could be cited because (the drivers) are providing the actual service.”

“We’ll be heading in that direction.”

Lyft’s entrance to the Pittsburgh market reached the City Council Building this week when competitors, including Yellow Cab, asked the city to pass an ordinance authorizing police to cite unlicensed transportation services.

Jamie Campolongo, CEO of Pittsburgh Transportation Group, which owns Yellow Cab, was one of the people requesting the ordinance. Campolongo said last week Lyft’s operation is illegal and establishes an uneven business environment, because his company has to adhere to PUC rules and licensing. He could not be reached for comment on Wednesday.

Mayor Bill Peduto’s chief of staff, Kevin Acklin, said the mayor supports the new company and that it will provide needed competition to what he called “duopoly” among taxi services in the city.

“This is something we want to see. Other cities have adopted this,” Acklin said. “Whatever licensing happens is a judgement the Public Utility Commission has to make. We’re not going to make that judgement.”

Acklin said Peduto does not support having police ticket Lyft or other app-based driving services. He said the city would get involved only if the company did not pay the proper business taxes. Uber, a similar transportation service, lists Pittsburgh as one its operating cities.

“We’re not going to just come out of the box and say ‘no,’” Acklin said.

Lyft users book a ride from an app and pay a suggested donation by credit card through a smartphone. Drivers, who typically greet passengers with a fist bump, use their personal cars with a

pink mustache hooked on the front as identification for the car service. The tech-savvy company is based in San Francisco and offers services in 20 other cities.

“Despite being Lyft’s newest market, we have already seen a very positive response from Pittsburgh community members, who see Lyft as an additional transportation option that is safe, affordable and reliable,” said Lyft spokeswoman Paige Thelen. “By supporting innovation and technology, Mayor Peduto and the city of Pittsburgh are paving the way for providing sustainable transportation options that make our cities safer and better connected.”

Fights over state and municipal regulations are nothing new to Lyft. There have been clashes with traditional cab companies in Atlanta, Dallas and Seattle as government leaders grapple with how the company should be regulated.

BY BOBBY KERLIK, MCCLATCHY NEWS SERVICE / FEBRUARY 13, 2014

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