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As Lyft Debuts in Minneapolis, City Threatens Ticketing and Impounding.

A West Coast car-sharing service is facing off against Minneapolis City Hall, and regulators say they are prepared to ticket and impound cars they encounter after the service launches Thursday.

Lyft's unique model relies on regular people essentially becoming chauffeurs in their own vehicles, picking up passengers who request a ride through the mobile app. The service — known for its signature pink mustaches on the front of the participating cars — is already up and running in more than 20 cities, including St. Paul.

Minneapolis officials told the company several months ago that city ordinance defines Lyft as a taxi service. That requires the vehicles and drivers to be licensed and inspected as taxis, which clashes with Lyft's business model.

Lyft spokeswoman Paige Thelen said Tuesday that the company planned to start Thursday after talking with city leaders and coming to the conclusion that Lyft's peer-to-peer operation was not considered a taxi or for-hire business. "We feel like we're in a good place to move forward and launch in Minneapolis and continue conversations with them to find a solution that would be permanent," Thelen said.

But the city's head of business licensing, Grant Wilson, said the city will enforce city taxicab regulations if it sees Lyft cars operating around town. The city has already towed three vehicles operated by UberX, a similar company that Wilson said launched about a month ago in Minneapolis.

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