

San Francisco Taxi Workers Alliance / AFL-CIO

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San Francisco, CA 94124
415-534-5221



May 31, 2022

Director Kate Toran
Taxis, Access & Mobility Services
San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency
One South Van Ness Ave.
San Francisco, CA 94103

CC: SFMTA Board of Directors
San Francisco Board of Supervisors

Dear Kate:

We are writing to follow up on the public comments provided to the SFMTA Board of Directors on May 3, 2022, regarding delayed driver payments from the Flywheel taxi app. We're pleased driver Joe Ng was paid the following day, but many drivers still report they are owed money from Flywheel. In some cases, the amount owed exceeds \$1,000 and the wait for payment -- at least a year. Outspoken drivers who know how to reach the correct person at Flywheel Technologies and how to complain tend to be paid. Others have left the industry in disgust. Many others simply will not use the app because they can't afford not to be paid for weeks, months or years. Passengers have taken note and commented in online reviews (see attached). The situation can no longer be addressed in a piecemeal case-by-case fashion but demands a comprehensive review.

We call on the SFMTA to ensure that all drivers who believe they are owed money for rides provided through the Flywheel App have their cases investigated and resolved before Flywheel is permitted to dispatch rides originating from Uber. The results of our Flywheel App Driver survey will be shared with the SFMTA once a process has been set up. Izzy Aala and Hansu Kim have told us on two occasions that they are committed to paying all drivers by approximately mid-June.

We appreciate that both Izzy and Hansu have met with us over this situation. They have candidly admitted some drivers are owed money and reiterated their commitment to pay them. It is troubling, however, that both have admitted their company does not have enough money to pay drivers in full until Flywheel gets additional funding. We can't help but wonder what happened to the money passengers paid for their rides if it didn't go to the drivers.

Flywheel's poor reporting, particularly for drivers on the TaxiOS system, also complicates the situation. It has been challenging for drivers to track how much they've earned from the Flywheel App and to know which rides have been paid. Consequently, many drivers do not know how much they are owed; they know only that they have not been paid in weeks, months,

or perhaps years. To make matters worse, Flywheel representatives have informed us they cannot easily determine whether drivers have been paid for rides older than six or seven months. **For these reasons, we call for a disinterested third-party to be involved in this process.**

We understand that Flywheel has moved forward with a new driver payment-processing app called Lean. Thus far, only a small number of drivers have been invited to use the Lean system, but those who are currently participating report they are pleased and satisfied with the instant payouts.

We do, however, have some reservations about Lean for the record. The company is less than a year old, with an unproven track record, and an unknown number of other clients besides Flywheel and San Francisco taxi drivers. Lean raised \$6 million dollars from investors, but it is unclear whether it will become a sustainable company. It is also troubling to learn (through its website) that Lean may offer an interest-free advance up to \$1,000 to workers using its platform, which could potentially trap some drivers.¹

With those reservations in mind, we are still encouraged by the positive feedback and support ALL drivers being added to the Lean system before Flywheel is permitted to dispatch rides requested by Uber app users.

Although Lean may solve Flywheel's payment-processing challenges going forward, **we repeat our demand that all drivers who are owed money from Flywheel App trips in the past must be paid in full before Flywheel Technologies (a.k.a. CabConnect) is allowed to dispatch taxicab rides originating through the Uber platform.**

Sincerely,

Evelyn Engel
Executive Board Member, Secretary
San Francisco Taxi Workers Alliance

Enclosures: 1

¹ See Lean's website <https://www.withlean.com/> for information about their \$1000 advance.

Selected Flywheel App Reviews on Google Play

Shelley Costantini April 26, 2022

The drivers are great, but flywheel is taking advantage of them. After talking to several drivers it seems that flywheel punishes them in several ways. First, if the driver decides to reject a call they must do so within 1 minute. After one minute, they are blocked from receiving calls for 175 minutes. Second, they don't always get paid and when they do it can take 2-3 months. Sometimes the drivers have to call and Chuck on their money. This is crazy!

Sierra P. August 5, 2021

PAY YOUR DRIVERS!!! So grateful there is an app that lets me stick with the safety and regulation established with Taxi drivers! easy to use and understand. I'm no longer going to use it if you don't start paying your drivers that's very hard for me to say but every driver I talk to is owed hundreds and hundreds of dollars and some drivers are declining flywheel orders when this happens

Carmen Mejia August 16, 2021

I was happy to learn of the app. It's user friendly but it's certainly not fair to the drivers. It takes months sometimes for drivers to get their hard earned money from Flywheel. I want to give my business to cabs but not through an unfair app like this. I wonder if SFMTA is aware of this or if they even care but I am going to voice my concern either way. Respect workers!