



Free to Ride and Free to Earn

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By: *Graham Renz*

I recently spoke to an Uber driver who was arrested and booked for dropping a customer off at Lambert International Airport. Unfortunately, more Uber drivers may suffer the same fate in the near future, and ridesharing could come to a screeching halt in St. Louis.

A [forthcoming decision](#) from a St. Louis County Court could restrict the ridesharing company Uber from operating in the region. The Metropolitan Taxi Commission (MTC) is [seeking a restraining order against Uber](#), and Uber claims the MTC has breached anti-trust law. A decision could be issued this month.

In short, [the MTC is trying to stifle competition](#). Firms like Uber and Lyft provide innovative services consumers [overwhelmingly](#) prefer to traditional taxis. In an effort to save their own skins, taxi companies are trying to impose on ridesharing firms the same outdated, burdensome regulations they comply with (rather than push for a reform of current regulations).

But the MTC and taxi companies aren't alone. [Some commentators](#) claim firms like Uber (and others in the so-called '[gig economy](#)') are bad for consumers and workers alike, threatening not just public safety, but also the financial well-being of ordinary workers. Despite the lack of evidence for either of these claims (see [here](#) and [here](#), respectively), there is a more fundamental question these detractors ignore: Why shouldn't people have the right to choose to ride or work with Uber?

And by the way, if Uber is dangerous, why are Missouri cities without it [continually pressuring regulators to bring it to town](#)? If Uber is bad for workers, why is [the President of the Saint Louis NAACP urging the MTC](#) to let it operate, so as to provide jobs for those with fewer economic opportunities? If Uber is so terrible that the MTC is trying to bar it from operating, why are consumers calling out for it?

Economists estimate that [Uber produces nearly \\$7 billion in social value](#) annually. It's time regulators step out of the way and let riders and drivers in St. Louis get a piece of that pie.

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- [3] http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/crime-and-courts/st-louis-taxi-commission-files-suit-to-block-uber-from/article_63e2590d-2dbf-5b5d-8e55-37c77a6b0a07.html
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- [12] <https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2016-09-08/computing-the-social-value-of-uber-it-s-high>

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