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New Ride-Sharing Service "Digicab" Set to Revolutionize Transportation in the Virgin Islands

Addressing commercial transportation issues, Digicab aims to offer a secure and efficient ride-sharing service via a mobile app in the U.S. Virgin Islands

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A new way to get from point A to point B is coming to the Virgin Islands: “Digicab is a duly licensed...ride sharing company that I am attempting to start in the Virgin islands,” said Patrick Farrell, during an online presentation on Thursday.

“I’ve been working on this for about a year and a half,” said Mr. Farrell. “It’s time for it to go out to the community.”

Digicab fills a need that has existed in the territory for some time. “St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix, we have a commercial transportation issue whether we want to realize it or not,” Mr. Farrell argued. “It’s good in some parts, but it definitely has some issues that we need to fix as a community.” As the operator of a limousine company on St. Thomas, Mr. Farrell has firsthand knowledge of some of the industry’s challenges.

The service will operate via a mobile application, similar to more widely-known ride-hailing companies. According to Mr. Farrell, since drivers and passengers alike will need to share sensitive financial information (bank details and card numbers), the online platform will operate with a huge emphasis on information security, with partners such as ADP and Amazon Web Services already lined up to provide secure hosting and onboarding.

Ensuring the personal safety of both drivers and passengers has also been prioritized by the Digicab app. Mr. Farrell says both parties will have access to a button on the app that connects them directly to 911. When connected, even if the individual is unable to speak freely, the vehicle they are in will be tracked until they are able to communicate their safety to the 911 dispatchers, or until emergency responders converge on their location. “This button is one of the things that’s going to set us apart from other applications trying to do the same thing,” Mr. Farrell said, highlighting the care and attention to detail that has gone into development of the Digicab app. The cashless nature of the app also helps with personal security, as there is no incentive for would-be thieves to target drivers.

The service is expected to transform the taxi and transportation industry in several ways. One of them, Mr. Farrell says, is the introduction of complete pricing transparency. “We have heard so many stories...about prices being changed,” Mr. Farrell said, despite the existence of standard tariffs for various routes. With Digicab, pricing is displayed to both driver and passenger even before the ride is booked and confirmed.

A second way would be to provide transportation services to communities that are currently underserved. “I know that there are certain parts of each island that some transportation for hire companies would not go,” Mr. Farrell said, citing Mariendal on St. Thomas as one of them. “This is very troubling for some of those families, especially those that have school children because...school buses don’t even go in these areas.” The Digicab service, he implied, would give people living in these areas another option for safe, secure transportation to where they need to go.

The last hurdle Digicab needs to navigate before it can be launched to the public is the question of insurance. “I’ve had conversations with a commercial entity” about covering Digicab drivers with a similar insurance product that utilized by taxi drivers, Mr. Farrell noted.

Other features of the app include booking rides in advance, affording passengers peace of mind for important trips. Mr. Farrell says that after the app has been in operation for the first year or so, vehicles on the platform will have a standard cutoff age limit of seven years, to ensure that quality standards are maintained. This will be paired with an inspection program for older vehicles, which could be admitted on a case-by-case basis, he noted.

Executive Director of the Taxicab Commission Vernice Gumbs questioned Mr. Farrell on the size of vehicle he would include in the service. According to him, high-capacity vehicles such as safari jeeps or 15-seater buses would not “make financial sense” on the platform. As such, vehicles would be limited to 7-passengers or less.

Expressing confidence that Digicab will be a major boon to the territory's transportation sector, Mr. Farrell nevertheless acknowledged that the introduction of the service would ruffle some feathers. "I know that it will be a fallout between Digicab and many taxi drivers," he said. However, he argued that taxi operators themselves acknowledged that their numbers are not sufficient to accommodate the demand for rides throughout the territory.

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