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Perspective: the Virgin Islands Needs Uber, and We Need It Now

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I had taken it for granted but never considered its significance until one morning on my way to work. Seeing an empty bus stop on the side of the road caught my attention. For many Caribbean residents, this is an iconic part of our community. The pre-meeting destination before setting out on individual travels. Although I pass these structures every day, what made seeing the bus stop so profound was an article that I read later that day.

"UBER CELEBRATES 5 YEARS IN PUERTO RICO!" The headline, as apparent as the empty bus stop, emoted a cackle and prompted me to wonder, "Why hasn't the Virgin Islands adopted Uber or similar ride-sharing systems?"

This question may be related to the theme of progress versus tradition, a theme that often appears in decisions made by a territory. If we hold onto what we know, will we lose out on progress and opportunities, or can we achieve progress by implementing systems that reflect the times?

Considering that Puerto Rico has the same characteristics as the United States Virgin Islands (USVI): it is a melting pot of cultures, a popular tourist destination, and its economy relies heavily on tourism, shouldn't the Virgin Islands adapt ride-sharing services to meet the needs of our economy?

There are those who argue that the idea is too American-based and will take away from existing local transportation services. To improve upon what we currently have, we can benefit from adding supplemental services instead.

The vast majority of taxi/safari drivers are available between regular business hours. It accommodates the needs of people who have to commute to work, attend school, or do other domestic activities. Regular business hours also allow people to get home from work and school on time.

An Uber-like service would benefit the community greatly. A rideshare service can be used for more than just getting to a destination; it can also be used to get to medical appointments, voter registration, food deliveries, the airport, etc. Knowing you will be picked up as requested can significantly reduce the inconvenience of waking up a few minutes earlier to get to our bus stop to wait for a bus.

Residents who use a ride-share service will be able to meet their transportation needs without having to be concerned about their safety. It will prevent or assist intoxicated drivers, incapacitated drivers, and those needing additional assistance who cannot operate an automobile by themselves.

However, restrictions, similar to what is done in Puerto Rico, can be implemented such as blackouts to Uber service at the airports or to certain destinations on the islands. When ride-sharing services were implemented, car accidents dropped by about 10% and DUI tickets dropped by almost 9% in many jurisdictions.

Considering this is an election year, the time Uber has celebrated its existence in Puerto Rico would be equal to the time the Virgin Islands will spend under a new administration. Is it better to be dependent on the existing taxi services or do we want to progress and make use of modern advancements?

Submitted by: Troy Williams, a senatorial candidate in the 2022 Democratic Primary Election.