

European taxi protest: Transport tech upheaval

June 11 2014, by Lori Hinnant



Taxi stand still at Parliament Square in central London as thousands of London black cabs blocking the streets to protest over new technology they say endangers passengers, in London, Wednesday, June 11, 2014. The strike action by taxi drivers hit many European cities, Wednesday, sparked by fears about the growing upheaval in the travel and transport industry, largely due to digital technologies. Big Ben's clock tower back centre. (AP Photo/Sang Tan)

Roads snarled in London, Paris and several other major European cities Wednesday as [taxi drivers and train workers protested](#) new technology

they say endangers passengers and gives upstart enterprises an unfair advantage.

Drivers of London's famed black cabs refused to pick up fares and drove at a snail's pace through Trafalgar Square—creating nightmarish gridlock—and travelers in France were hobbled not only by the taxi slowdown but also by strikes on the national train network and Paris commuter lines. Madrid, Barcelona and Berlin were hit as well.

The strike action was sparked by fears about the growing upheaval in the travel and transport industry, largely due to digital technologies that have made things easier for travelers but that have caused workers to raise concerns about safety—and the future of their jobs. These are some of the changes and the debate surrounding them:

PRIVATE CAR SERVICES

Services like Uber and Chauffeur Prive, the crux of Wednesday's taxi strike, allow passengers to hail a ride from a mobile app. Taxi drivers, who can pay tens of thousands of dollars (euros) for their training and their medallions, complain that it's unfair and that drivers of the private services don't face the same requirements. Uber has been banned in Brussels, and come under scrutiny in Spain, but the European Union is pushing for acceptance, saying it benefits consumers. Apparently timed for the strike, Uber released an app directed at London customers, offered free rides to some customers in Paris and half off in Berlin.

AUTOMATED SUBWAYS



Police move in as demonstrators try to block the way while another pours water on a car, suspected to be a private taxi during a 24 hour taxi strike and protest in Madrid, Spain, Wednesday, June 11, 2014. The taxi drivers were protesting against unregulated competition from private companies, in particular, Uber, an international company that puts people in contact with each other to share cars or pay for short journeys in private vehicles within the city. (AP Photo/Paul White)

Subway lines are increasingly run by semi-conductors, and not human conductors. Two metro lines along Paris' Seine River are automated, but creating driverless systems required extensive negotiations with the unions, followed by an advertising campaign to persuade passengers of its safety, which included hiring musicians for two days to offer their interpretation of a song composed in honor of the computerization. About 40 supervisory jobs were available to the 250 drivers who worked on one of the lines.

RENT A ROOM

Airbnb pioneered the idea of linking up homeowners with travelers, allowing people to rent out a room or an entire home for considerably less than hotel rates—especially in expensive, heavily visited cities like London, Paris and New York. The company that made a commodity of couch-surfing has come under criticism from the hotel chains that are its main competitors—they are subject to health and safety inspections that people who list their homes on Airbnb don't face. Landlords are also watching closely because subletting is often barred under leases, and city governments have filed complaints that the service could be violating local laws regulating zoning and transient housing.



A taxi leads a demonstration during a 24 hour taxi strike and protest in Madrid, Spain, Wednesday, June 11, 2014. The taxi drivers were protesting against unregulated competition from private companies, in particular, Uber, an international company that puts people in contact with each other to share cars or pay for short journeys in private vehicles within the city. (AP Photo/Paul White)

ONLINE AIRLINE TICKET SALES

Online travel booking has devastated the jobs of travel agents. Since 2000, their numbers have been cut in half in the U.S., from about 124,000 to 64,000, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. It's projected to decline by 12 percent in the next decade. It happened with hardly a protest, largely because most travel agencies—both in Europe and the U.S.—tend to be smaller, non-unionized companies. "The fact is that digital technology is changing many aspects of our lives," Neelie Kroes, the European Union vice president in charge of digital affairs, said of Wednesday's protest. "We cannot address these challenges by ignoring them, by going on strike, or by trying to ban these innovations out of existence."

© 2014 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: European taxi protest: Transport tech upheaval (2014, June 11) retrieved 17 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-06-european-taxi-protest-tech-upheaval.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--