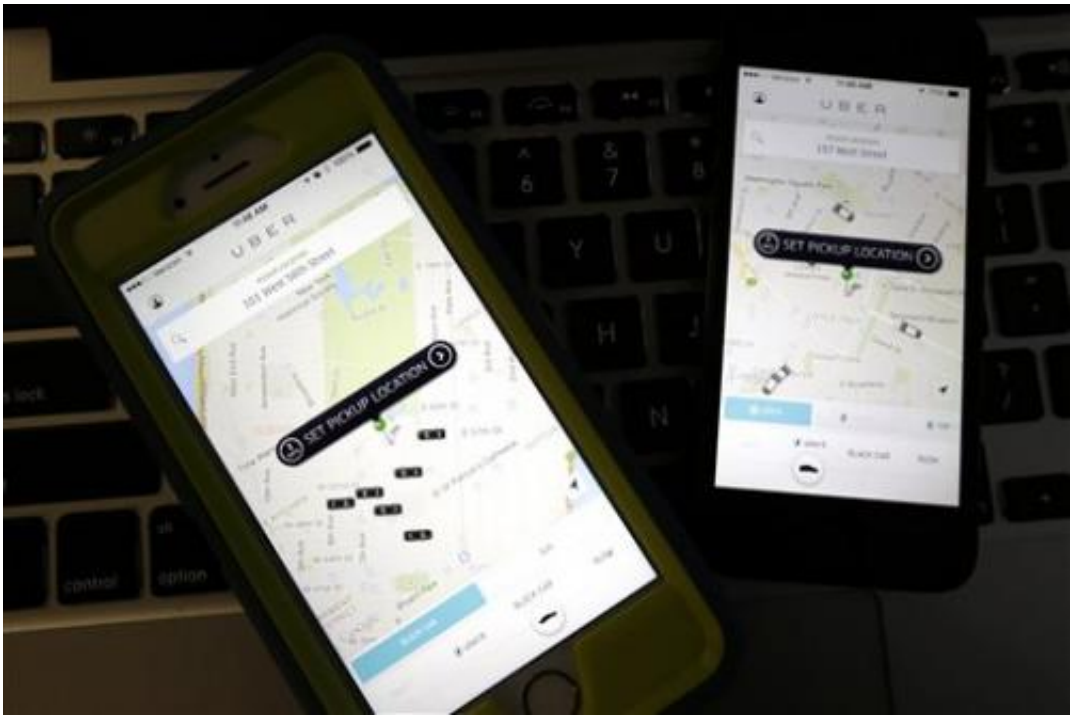
Beyond the Uber surge: How to get around on New Year's Eve

December 31 2014, byBarbara Ortutay



This Friday, Nov. 21, 2014 file photo taken in Newark, N.J., shows smart phones displaying Uber car availability in New York. The ride-hailing app expects this New Year's Eve to be its busiest night ever. Due to such high demand, and because it can, Uber is bringing back its surge pricing, a boon to drivers and a bane to passengers. Fares can increase by as much as sevenfold during the busiest time, which Uber says will be between 12:30 a.m. and 2:30 a.m.(AP Photo/Julio Cortez, File)

New Year's Eve: the day to overpay for everything from that glass of flat

Champagne to the impossibly-high heels you'll wear just once, to, once again, that ride home from Uber.

The ride-hailing app expects this New Year's Eve to be its busiest night ever. Due to high demand—and because it can—Uber is bringing back its surge pricing, a boon to its drivers but a bane to passengers. Fares can increase sevenfold or more during the busiest time of the night, which Uber says will be between 12:30 a.m. and 2:30 a.m.

— GET AROUND (THE SURGE)

To avoid spiking fares, Uber suggests booking a ride right after the ball drops at midnight, or wait until after 2:30. The app will notify users in advance if surge pricing is in effect, and full-price estimates are given before requesting a ride.

In addition to partying at home, taking public transportation or a cab, however, there are other options for revelers who, for whatever reason, think better of driving on New Year's Eve.

Riders who use rival Lyft will also see a version of Uber's price surge, called "Prime Time." The feature is turned on when ride requests "greatly outnumber available drivers." How much extra you'll pay, Lyft says, depends on demand. To check the rates, tap the Prime Time icon on the bottom right side of the app's home screen.

— BOOK WITH RIVALS

Flywheel, a much smaller competitor, is counting on sticker shock from surge pricing to win ever customers this year. From 8 p.m. on Wednesday until 3 a.m. on Thursday, the company is offering $10 rides in San Francisco, Seattle, Sacramento and San Diego, as long as the metered fare does not exceed $50. Rides that go over $50 will be

charged the metered balance, the company says.

There's also Sidecar, which promises "no surge surprises" on its website and lets users see the full price of their ride when they book it.

— DON'T DRINK AND DRIVE

A service called BeMyDD (that's designated driver) lets you reserve a driver who will drive your car home for you in case you are intoxicated. Two drivers will pick you up, one to drive your car and the other to give your driver a ride once you have arrived home safely. Pricing can vary depending on your location. In Palo Alto, California, for example, it's $25 for a car pickup, plus $3.75 per mile.

Both Uber and Lyft are donating a portion of their New Year's hail to Mothers Against Drunk Driving. Uber will donate $1 from every ride when users enter the promotional code "MADDNYE" on booking a ride. Lyft will donate $1 for everyone who makes a "pledge" to get home safe by visiting Lyft.com/NYE.

In some regions, partyers can also take advantage of AAA's "Tipsy Tow" program, which offers a free tow to members or non-members for up to 10 miles. To use the service from 6 p.m. Wednesday to 6 a.m. Thursday, call (800) 222-4357 (AAA-HELP) and ask for a Tipsy Tow. The service is available in Alabama, Arizona, Nevada, Northern California, Utah and other areas.

To see a full list of places where Tipsy Tow is available, visit newsroom.aaa.com/safety/holiday-safe-ride-program/.

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