

Washington takes on Uber with its own taxi app

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Taxi drivers park on Pennsylvania Avenue in protest against ride sharing services such as Uber X and Lyft on June 25, 2014, in Washington, DC

Washington is developing a smartphone app to enable its taxis to compete head-on with Uber and other ride-sharing services, the US capital's taxi commission said Friday.

Beta testing of the Universal DC TaxiApp is scheduled to begin in March, and if all goes well it could be fully in service by late spring.

"We are the first in the country to have a universal taxi cab [app](#)," DC Taxi Commission spokesman Neville Waters told AFP.

"This is not targeting Uber per se," he said. This is a result of what consumers have been demanding—and it enables taxis to compete on a level playing field with other private operators."

All 7,000 licensed taxis in Washington will be obliged to make themselves available on the app whenever they are out on streets and on duty.

Drivers and taxi companies will be free to keep using alternative taxi-hailing apps alongside the Universal DC TaxiApp, Waters said.

Consumers, meanwhile, will still be at liberty to opt for Uber, Lyft, Sidecar or other ride-sharing services in lieu of a conventional cab.

While the DC Taxi Commission is developing the app, it will be up to an taxi industry cooperative to maintain it and set user fees.

In New York, the city council is considering a bill that would not only create a similar app, but also enable [taxis](#) to be called using Uber, Lyft or other third-party apps.

"Instead of making new technologies illegal or regulating them out of business, we should provide a level playing field with fair competition so that companies, drivers and riders all win," said New York councillor Ben Kallos, the bill's sponsor.

A darling of Silicon Valley, Uber has disrupted the taxi industry enough to trigger bans in Spain and Thailand and lawsuits in some big US cities.

It is currently prohibited from operating in New Delhi after a passenger

alleged she had been raped by one of its drivers late last week.

Six months ago, several hundred [taxi drivers](#) in Washington snarled downtown traffic to condemn smartphone car-hailing services—mirroring protests in several global cities.

Hailo, a privately-run taxi hailing app, pulled out of Washington in October. It still operates in nine European and Asia-Pacific cities, as well as in Ireland.

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