

Radio Cabs—How Do They Work in Delhi?



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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	3
Acknowledgements.....	4
Introduction.....	5
Inception of Radio Cabs.....	6
Radio cabs Business Models.....	8
Snapshot of Radio CabsBusiness.....	8
Franchise Model.....	9
Attached vehicle Model.....	9
Rent-a-Cab Model.....	9
Sectors of Radio Cabs.....	10
Cab driver as an employee.....	11
Role of the Government in the radio cab business.....	13
Conclusion and Proposals.....	16
Bibliography.....	18

Abstract

Radio Cabs cater to the major chunk of the commuters of Delhi from/to airport, railway stations etc. Addressing the concern of safety and hassled fares, radio cabs entered the Delhi transportation sector half a decade ago. Even though the charges are higher unlike those of local taxis and public transport the service delivered by radio cabs is highly reliable. My study examined the Radio cabs market in Delhi through various interviews with people associated with radio cabs. Interviews were conducted with the tourist taxi services also who see the radio cabs to be their contenders. These interviews widened my knowledge scope about the cabs market. Also, I got a clear picture of the norms followed and transactions amongst the driver, company and the customer discussed later in the paper. The role of government is minimal, deals only with the licensing system of the new cab company, registration of the cabs and provision of the electronic meters based upon the category to which the cab company would fall. There are certain problems mentioned customers during the interviews. Therefore, I have proposed solutions to address those issues in the conclusion section of my paper.

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Introduction

Public transport in Delhi has not turned out to be quite reliable both in terms of safety and efficiency. Taxi transportation system in Delhi is characterized by a scarcity of reliable taxi services, well-behaved drivers and proper fare processes both for local residents and tourists. As the government did not address the taxi problem appropriately, private players identified the high potential market for the “radio cabs” and captured it quite efficiently. The demand for such cabs have been increasing at a high rate in the metros and other big cities as the corporate executives, software professionals, tourists and the moneyed strata of Delhi looks for faster and effective transport system even though they have to pay a little higher.

70 lakh working people in Delhi and NCR lose nearly 42 crore man-hour every month while commuting from home to office and vice versa through the public transport.¹ Today, radio taxi service has solved this problem to a laudable extent and is providing satisfying cab services to the frequent travellers. The herculean task of calling a taxi to get to the airport is turned out to be just a click away in the radio cab’s booking website or a call away by dialing the number.

The radio cabs business has emerged as one of the fastest growing businesses in the Indian transportation sector.² The business is booming in a huge way in India with versatile private operators both national and international investing tremendous money in setting up the call centers, acquiring fleets of new cars, and incorporating latest technologies in their vehicles. The drivers are provided with rigorous training for interacting with the customers from the good institutes such as Institute of Driving and Training Research (IDTR) and Hubert Ebner (HE).³ It has proved to be the win-win situation for government, radio cab companies, chauffeurs and the most importantly passengers. Radio Cabs has filled in a gap in Delhi’s transport system.⁴

¹Government issues, *Traffic snarl snags 42 Cr man-hour from Delhi, NCR workers*, 2008

² Transport-Radio A Cab http://www.ibef.org/download/Radio_Cabs_050209.pdf

³ Mega Cabs website

⁴ CCS internship paper, *Public Transport in Delhi: Tragedy of commons; yet again!*, 2008

Inception of Radio Cabs

State Tourism Minister Arvinder Singh Lovely announced on August 29, 2006 that the Delhi Tourism and Transportation Development Corporation would introduce a radio taxi system to promote tourist activities and improve transport facilities for national and international tourists. A brand new air-conditioned radio taxi service was launched on December 8, 2006 giving the people a viable option to avail service “anywhere and anytime” round the clock on the roads at the rate of approximately Rs. 15/km.

Carzonrent India Private Limited, the sole licensee for Hertz International in the country, launched its radio taxi service in Delhi on December 28, 2006. With 250 radio taxis equipped with state-of-the-art technology, "EasyCabs" was the largest city taxi service in the Capital.⁵ This was acclaimed as the step towards the reliable transport system by Delhi Transport Minister Haroon Yusuf. It was then, that big players like Metro Cab, Hertz and Mega Cab were issued Letters of Intent by the government. Initially, Metro Cab had introduced Tata Indigo Marina vehicles for the service. It estimated an increase in the number of vehicles on the service to 500 by March 2007 and 3,000 by 2010.

Meru Cabs with the revenue of Rs300 crores, has become the largest taxi service in India, growing from zero to 5600 vehicles within five years. Meru Cabs has raced ahead of competitors such as EasyCabs and Mega Cabs and also claims to be the world’s largest cab company. Meru cab’s success parameters are; a clean car, a knowledge driver, non-negotiable fares and a tamperproof meter.⁶

Table 1: Major Private Players in the Radio Cab Market in Delhi

Serial No.	Taxi Name	Fare (per km)		Launch year (in Delhi)	Waiting charges	Partners if any
		Day time	Night time (Midnight to 5.00 am)			

⁵Staff Reporter, “The Hindu”, *New air-conditioned taxi service launched*, December 29, 2006

⁶Preethi Chamikutty, *After establishing radio taxi business, Meru Cabs to offer exclusive services to its customers* ET Bureau Feb 8, 2012.

1.	Mega Cabs	Rs. 20/km	25% extra charges (from 2300 hrs to 0500 hrs)	2001	As by the rules of State government authorities ⁷	Out Of Home (OOH) Media Pvt Ltd.
2.	Meru Cabs (V-Link Taxis, is the parent company operating Meru) ⁸	Rs. 20/km	Rs. 25/km	2008	Nil	MTS as an internet provider inside the cabs.
3.	Delhi Cabs	Rs. 20/km	Rs. 25/km	June, 2007 (Not in existence anymore)	NA	NA
4.	Quick Cabs It provides logistic solutions to companies such as IGATE, V Serve business Solution Pvt Ltd, , Polaris Pvt Ltd, Sapient Pvt Ltd, and Air India SATS Pvt. Ltd	Rs. 100 for first 10kms and Rs 10/km thereafter. Additionally Rs 50 as the booking charges and Rs. 10 as AC charges.	25% extra on top of day charges.i.e, Rs. 12.50/km.	NA	For first 15 minutes no charges and Rs.50 for every half an hour thereafter.	Mango Cabs
5.	Mango Cabs ⁹	Rs. 10/km and Rs.50 as booking charges, additionally Rs.10	Rs. 12.50/km.	2004	For first 15 minutes no charges and Rs.50 for every	Quick Cabs

⁷Mega Cabs Website, *Waiting charges*

⁸BineshKutty, [Radio cabs: Challenges en route.](#) 05 July, 2008..

⁹Source: Mr. Jacob James, Quick Cab driver(HauzKhas area), July 10, 2012

		for AC.			half an hour thereafter.	
6.	EasyCabs ¹⁰	Rs. 20/km	Rs. 25/km	Jan, 2007	Rs. 50 per 30 minutes.	1.Kingfisher Airlines 2.State Bank of India 3.Makemytrip.com

Mobile Tele System (MTS) in partnership with Meru Cabs had announced its plan to provide free High Speed Mobile Internet in the Meru Cabs on 14 February, 2011.¹¹

Radio Cabs' Business Models

Snapshot of Radio Cabs' Business

The radio cab business functions on various distinct business models.¹²“Radio cab companies” are 100 percent business ventures. There is not any central monitoring system for all the radio cab companies and even the GPS tracking is managed individually by all the companies.¹³

The Radio Cabs' market works both on pure B2C (Business to Consumer) model i.e, the services are provided directly from the cab company to the customer and B2B (Business to Business) model i.e, the cab company provides its services to the corporations which further provides it to their employees.

The companies are becoming more popular and profitable by incorporating “the franchise model”.¹⁴

All the cab companies work on the mixed models such as a mixture of

- a. Company owned cabs
- b. Franchise model
- c. Attached vehicle model
- d. Rent-a-Cab model

¹⁰EasyCabs website ,*EasyCabs Tariffs*

¹¹MTS,*MTS Partners With Meru Cabs To Roll Out High Speed Mobile Internet For In-Transit Customers*, New Delhi, 14 Feb 2011

¹²Ibid 2

¹³Source: Mr. Ajay Vinayak, Owner New Delhi Cab Service, 3 July,2012

¹⁴Ibid 2

Franchise model

In franchise model, the cab driver himself is the cab owner and he associates with the radio cab company to get the brand name and increase his business. The driver pays certain daily/weekly/monthly fee in return to the radio cab company. Following this model, the radio cab company gets rid of the responsibility of maintenance of the vehicle, and parking area costs and the driver has the incentive to keep his vehicle well-maintained. The fee paid by the franchisees(drivers) is used to train and support the franchisees, market and advertise the brand, improve the quality of goods or services, and widen the market. Benefits for the franchisees (drivers) includes the better chances of getting daily business, higher income, power of a known brand and simultaneously having the options of getting the passengers directly.¹⁵

Attached vehicle model

Each cab associated with the cab company is supposed to get at least some minimum business per day as per the company's norms, for which in return they pay certain fee weekly/daily/monthly. The vehicle working under such procedure is called "attached vehicle". The cab company promises some minimum fixed number of trips to the cab drivers for the paid duration.

To own the attached vehicle, driver has to sign a contract for certain time period with some fixed amount of investment and he is allotted one of the 500 registered cabs by the company after a completion of the duration.

Rent-a-Cab Model

The following are the characteristics of the relationship between driver and the company at EasyCabs, as described by the driver in an interview.¹⁶

1. The cab drivers have to pay a security deposit of around Rs.20,000/- to the company.
2. The driver should have a commercial driving license.
3. He is supposed to pay a daily rent to the company of approximately Rs.1100 per day for the cab and whatever he earns beyond that belongs to him.

¹⁵ Author's interview with Mr. Jacob James, Quick Cab driver(HauzKhas area), July 10, 2012

¹⁶ Source:EasyCabschauffeur, Interview: 07 July,2012

4. He has to pay for the CNG out of his pocket and the maintenance of the vehicle is paid by the cab company itself.
5. The monthly income of the cab driver is approximately Rs.25000/-.
6. The minimum qualification of the cab driver is matriculation. But in some cases if the driver is experienced enough then eighth pass are also hired.
7. If the cab driver wants to avail a leave for a day or so, he is still liable to submit the fee of Rs.1100 to the cab company and same applies on weekends too. If he happens to take a leave on some particular day, his cab is assigned to somebody else and on returning he is reassigned a cab which might or might not be the same.
8. Therefore the cab drivers have the incentive to work as much as they can even though there is no compulsion from the cab company. On an average they work for 12-15 hours a day. The cab driver did not mention any problems posed by the cab company.
9. The cab driver said there was no harassment from the police.

Overall the cab driver seemed to be quite contented with the rent-a-cab solution. Being associated with the Easy Cab he earned a decent amount of livelihood.

Sectors of Radio Taxis

To get a license to start a radio cab company, the minimum number of cabs is 10 and company must reach the strength of 500 vehicles within 2 years. In order to avail a license, on an average 25-30 lakhs (which includes unofficial charges) are spent by a small cab company. **There are three categories (also called “sectors”) of radio taxis:**¹⁷

- i. A sector
- ii. B sector
- iii. C sector

Table 2: Sectors of radio taxis

A sector	B sector	C sector
This sector consists of high end radio taxis and it works on a	This sector consists of low end radio taxis. The vehicles belong	In this sector, the cars availed on rent by the tourists. They are

¹⁷ Author’s interview with a person who wished to remain anonymous and who had worked closely with the radio cab companies. 06 July, 2012.

franchisee model. Such radio cab companies comprise self-owned vehicles and attached vehicles.	to somebody else and somebody else drives it. Companies under this category, also have a combination of owned vehicles and attached vehicles.	individual cars such as Indica, Innova etc.
<i>Examples:</i> Meru cabs, Delhi Cabs, Mega cabs, EasyCabs, Wyn Cabs	<i>Examples:</i> Quick Cabs, Supercabz, Economy Radio Cabs, Mango Cabs	<i>Examples:</i> Rent a Cab, NCR Taxi, Carzonrent

The cars under “A” and “B” categories are dispersed over a large area, GPS tracked and the number of trips per day by each car is recorded. As per the contract between the radio cab company and the cab driver, each cab is given a number of trips per day. Sometimes the driver has to work for extended hours in order to reach the number of trips. In rent-a-cab model, the cab drivers take their pay directly from the traveller’s charges after paying the rent to the cab company.

Cab driver as an employee!!

Driver drives either the company’s car or his own to earn his livelihood. In either case the car is associated with the company and is GPS tracked. The driver details are maintained in the company database. The driver works for approximately 12-15 hours a day and earns around 40-45 thousand per month.¹⁸ The business model appears to be quite profitable for the driver also.

Why and how does the driver get into the radio cab business?

Driver gets higher number of customers by being associated with the trusted brand. Even though associated with the cab company he still has the opportunities of carry customers on road when free. He gets into the business by signing the company contract and paying some amount of fee such as Rs.3000 to 4000 in case of Quick cabs and Mango Cabs (both are partners).¹⁹ In Delhi and Mumbai, now some of the cab drivers even get twice their previous incomes. Some of them take bank loans to put in their share of the initial investments.²⁰

How does the actual transaction amongst company, driver and the customer take place?

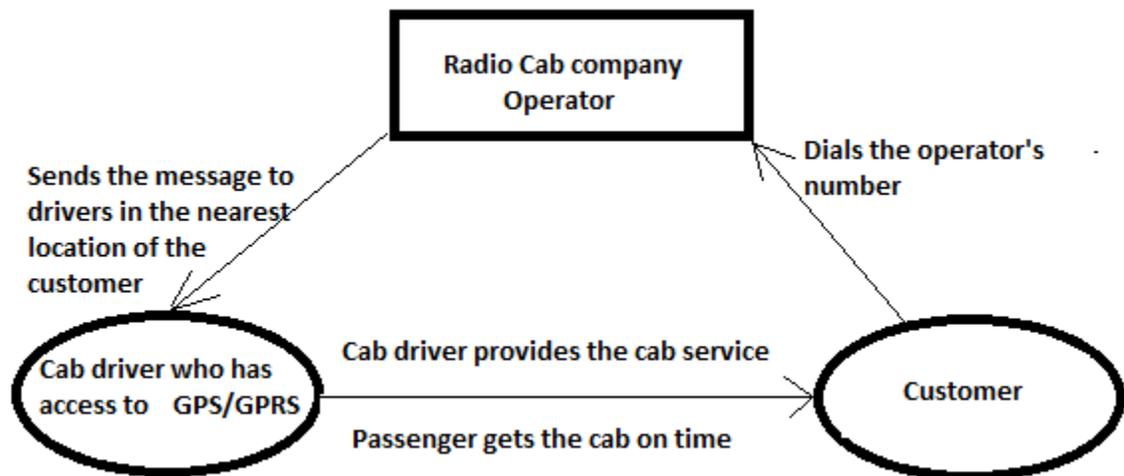
¹⁸Source: Mr. Jacob James, Quick Cab driver and owner(HauzKhas area), July 10, 2012

¹⁹Ibid 17

²⁰Ibid 2

Radio Cab business works round the clock and the customer can book the vehicle a day or two in advance. If customer books the cab just an hour before from the actual travel time, the fulfillment of his request is subject to availability. As soon as the customer calls the cab operator to request for the cab, the operator checks for the available cabs in the nearby areas and sends all of them the customer's "request message". The "driver" also called a "subscriber" by certain firms, meanders throughout the city keeping a sharp ear for any messages via a cellphone which is tracked through Global Positioning System (GPS) or the General Packet Radio Service (GPRS). On receiving the "request message" from the operator, if the driver replies back with "YES" then the operator checks driver's record in the database and intimates it to the customer via a text or an email, simultaneously provides the customer's details and vehicle request to the cab driver. Thenceforth, the driver and customer communicate amongst themselves.

Figure 1: Flowchart for each entity of the process



Customer's center of interest- fare and safety!!

The fares are fixed by the government based upon the category of the cab company. Customer can pay by the cash/credit/debit cards and is provided with the receipt at the end of the journey. The electronic fare meters are digital and tamper-proof which are allotted to the registered radio cabs during the licensing process. Since the cabs are tracked by the call centers through GPS, the customers feel safe to travel at any time.

Role of the Government in the radio cab business

Grants of permits to prospective operators of radio taxi networks are considered under section 74 and other provisions of Motor Vehicle Act, 1988. Characteristics of the Radio Taxi Scheme-2006²¹ as follows:

I. A company interested in applying for a license to start a radio cab company should have following profile:

1. The licensee has to be either a company under Companies Act, 1956 or a society under the Societies Registration Act, 1860.
2. The licensee has to be financially sound in order to run and manage the radio taxi operation in Delhi.
3. The licensee is expected to have experience and intimate knowledge of transport business preferably in the running of motor cabs.

All the matters related to registration, issue/cancellation of permits, inspection and issue of certificate of fitness in respect of radio taxis are administered in Delhi Transport Department's Auto Rickshaw Unit in Burari.²²

II. Operational Infrastructure

1. The licensee has to demonstrate possession of adequate parking space for all taxis and office space (minimum of 1000 sq. ft.) for accommodating the control room with radio communication and ten telephone lines.
2. Necessary infrastructure for maintenance of the vehicle has to be available.

III. Fleet Size For Licensees

1. The minimum fleet size per license would be 500 (Five hundred) motor cabs, which has to be achieved by the licensee within one year of the commencement of the operation.

IV. Vehicle Profile

1. Every motor cab has to be brand new at the time of induction.
2. The motor cab has to be driven on clean fuel.

²¹Transport Department, Govt. of NCT of Delhi-Radio Taxi Scheme, 2006

²²Citizens Charter (May 2009), Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi Transport Department, 2009

3. The vehicle has to be of engine capacity of 999CC or above, JEEP type vehicle like Gypsy etc. is prohibited.
4. The vehicle has to be equipped with the temperature control devices such as air conditioning and heating and has to be maintained in proper working order at all times.
5. The motor cab has to be fitted with electronic fare meters on the front panel(dashboard) and maintained in a proper working order.
6. On the roof of the vehicle there has to be a LCD board to display that the vehicle is a radio taxi; the dimensions of the LCD display panel must conform to those prescribed by the State Transport Authority from time to time.
7. The vehicle is allowed to carry advertisement in such a manner and to the extent that it doesn't become hazardous or disturbance to the safe traffic and shall be strictly in accordance with the guidelines issued by the STA in this regard from time to time.
8. The vehicle has to be fitted with GPS/GPRS based tracking devices which has to be in constant communication with the Central Control unit while the vehicles are on duty.
9. The vehicle has to be equipped with a mobile radio fitted in the front panel for communication between driver and the main control room of the licensee.
10. The vehicle must be equipped with the first aid box containing material to be specified in DMV rules 1993.
11. The vehicle has to be replaced on completion of eight years with a brand new vehicles meeting the prevailing emission standard.
12. Photograph of driver, license particulars of driver and details of the licensee will have to be displayed on the dashboard of the vehicle.
13. *The vehicle approved for commercial taxis like Ford Ikon, Opel Astra, Mitshubishi Lancer, Fiat Palioetc shall also be allowed to be registered as radio taxi, provided they are fitted with appropriate CNG kits by approved retrofitters.*
14. *The color scheme of the radio taxi is white with different color strip of one foot on both of the panels of the car differentiating each licensee.*
15. Licensees of radio taxis, on request, will be considered for grant of Inter State Permit under the relevant provision of Motor Vehicle Act, 1988 up to 100% of their fleet only for the National Capital Region.
16. Transport help line number should be prominently displayed inside and outside of motor cab as prescribed.

V. Working Conditions

The licensee must adhere to the provisions of Motor Vehicle Act, 1988 and the terms and conditions prescribed by the transport department from time to time. Working hours of drivers is to be limited in accordance to the Motor Transport Workers Act, 1961.

VI. Driver Profile

1. The driver must have a driving license of the appropriate category for at least five years issued by an authority in the NCT of Delhi.
2. The driver should at least be matriculate (namely, passed board examination of 10th or equivalent).

Conclusion and Proposals

The way radio cab business is running today, is highly impressive. It is acting as an intermediary between the customer and the taxi drivers, both customers and the drivers pay the company for the services respectively and that's how companies earn their profit. Change in the people's mindset has been the greatest factor in the growth of radio cab market. But there are certain other aspects which are acting as the obstacles in widening the radio cab market such as high fares, Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) caps on the SMS and the unavailability of parking area.

On Dec 8, 2006 Delhi Transport Minister Haroon Yusuf said that, taxi service would also make travel safer for the passengers as the taxis would come equipped with a "panic button". The button would set off an alarm in the control room and provide for quick help.²³ The panic button idea is still an idea.

The airport is being used as the parking area. According to the Radio taxi scheme-2006, the number of vehicles by any radio cab company has to be 500 which should be achieved within a year's time. I firmly believe this would create the problem of parking space in the city of Delhi. Road capacity is not increasing but the number of cabs being parked at roadside is increasing exponentially. Due to lack of regular curbs of parking space by the Delhi Transport Department the parking problem is going to be very critical in the radio cabs market in coming time. Delhi transport department should encourage multi-level parking in order to solve the parking problems.

I found a discrepancy in the actual data collected from the field and the radio taxi scheme-2006 regarding the renewal of the licenses after widening the fleet size. According to the scheme, fleet of 500 vehicles has to be maintained by the end of year whereas the number is not reached even after two years.²⁴ How does the Delhi transport department ensure that the same cab (driver's own car) is not counted to be one amongst the fleet of the company? Meru Cabs in Delhi are green in color, even though there is a specific color code as mentioned in the radio taxi scheme. Therefore, I suggest building an "umbrella department" to have the regular curbs on all the radio cab companies and if any discrepancies are found appropriate measures should be taken.

²³Staff Reporter, "The Hindu", *New air-conditioned taxi service launched*, December 9, 2006

²⁴ Author's interview with a person who wished to remain anonymous and who had worked closely with the radio cab companies. 06 July, 2012.

As mentioned in the Radio Taxi Scheme in the section of company profile that the licensee is expected to have experience and intimate knowledge in transport business but the criteria for the same is not mentioned specifically anywhere.

On talking to various cab customers, the common questions were:

1. Where should the customer go if we are overcharged for the services? Sometimes we call up for the cab just an hour prior to the travel time, if the cab doesn't have the AC working we still have to travel by the same cab as there is no time for another one and we are charged for AC as well.

Sometimes (not usually) the cab drivers behave very irresponsibly and come later than the actual travel time. Where should the customer complain about such inconvenience?

2. If in certain cases, a customer is overcharged then what are the reimbursement methods adopted by the cab companies apart from being sorry?

Therefore, I strongly believe there should be complaint booths setup at regular distances where the customer can file a complaint for any kind of inconveniences driver himself being the proof of it (by signing in the complaint filed by customer) and necessary action should be taken within 24 hours. This can be adopted either solely by the radio cab company or as a public private partnership wherein complaint booth's infrastructure can be provided by the govt. and services being provided by the company.

Talking about the drivers who are associated with the company should be given all the benefits such as health insurance plans both for him and his family, regular medical checkups, certain number of paid leaves and other perks to keep his life stress free. Most of the cab companies have mentioned about "rigorous training for the drivers", but not much is mentioned in detail. In certain cab companies the drivers are overworking (more than eight to ten hours) in order to pay the rental charges and simultaneously earn sufficient amount of money for the day. I strongly feel that there should be some cap on number of hours the drivers should work and not whenever the company asks them to. There should be some specific duration within which the driver should be provided with the promised number of trips by the company. Currently, GPS is also cab companies specific, there is no central GPS system to monitor all the cab companies. There should be a central GPS system to locate all the empty taxis in particular zones of Delhi not just the radio taxis, to maximize the utilization of the available resources.

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