

Mayor Bill Peduto Promises Ride-Share 'Fight' in Pittsburgh

While the Public Utility Commission attempts to cling to a "Jurassic Age of transportation," Peduto says communities must adapt.

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<http://www.govtech.com/local/Peduto-promises-ride-share-fight-in-Pittsburgh.html>

Pittsburgh Mayor Bill Peduto today reiterated his support for ride-sharing companies Lyft and Uber and said he will push for legislation similar to what Colorado has enacted, allowing ride shares.

"I will not let the governor and the Public Utility Commission shut down innovation without a fight. I am confident it is one that I and other supporters of new business models will ultimately win," the mayor said in a prepared statement. "Technologies like ride-sharing evolve with the times and state regulators must too. While the commission may wish for Pennsylvania to cling to a Jurassic Age of transportation options, people in Pittsburgh and other communities know our state must adapt or die in the global marketplace."

Ride-share companies Lyft and Uber match drivers and passengers via smartphone apps, enlisting drivers to use their own cars to transport customers.

A two-judge panel Tuesday [granted emergency cease-and-desist orders](#) against Lyft and Uber. The Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission's Bureau of Investigation and Enforcement requested the orders, saying that allowing the ride-share companies to operate without state oversight or certification was a serious threat to public safety.

"We are not blind or deaf to the public opinion, at least in the Pittsburgh area, that the transportation needs of many individuals are not adequately met by currently certificated carriers," the judges wrote in their decision. "However, the Commission is charged with a higher duty than just the public convenience. The Commission is also charged with ensuring the public safety."

The orders require both companies to stop operating immediately in Pennsylvania.

The mayor has been a supporter of the companies since they arrived in the area earlier this year.

"Many across our city and state support business growth and innovation, and a government that adapts to and rewards new technology and progress. We will fight together to find ways to promote entrepreneurship and modern transportation options while protecting the safety of riders and drivers alike," the statement said. "I know this because it has been done before. Just last month Colorado approved bipartisan legislation to allow ride-sharing in that ever growing and ever evolving state, and Pennsylvania must seize this leadership opportunity and do the same."

Unless the PUC overturns the cease and desist orders within 30 days, they will remain in effect. Only state legislation can alter the PUC's code and the rules around motor carriers, which require anyone offering transportation for compensation to have a certificate of public convenience.

Mayor Peduto said he would seek support across the aisle for legislation that would let Lyft and Uber operate.

"I will not let Pittsburgh's emerging status as a 21st-century technological hub be sacrificed by unaccountable bureaucrats clinging to the past," Mr. Peduto's statement concludes. "If the governor and the PUC are unable to adapt to the new, we will work with Republican and Democratic leaders in the Legislature who support free-market capitalism, innovation and technology instead."

Mr. Corbett's spokesman, Owen McEvoy, said Mr. Peduto had not been in touch with the governor's office today about the ride-share issue, and the mayor's statement came as a bit of a surprise.

"We are a little perplexed that the mayor did not consult with the governor's office before taking this action," Mr. McEvoy said of the statement, noting that the PUC is an independent agency and the governor is not involved in its actions against Lyft and Uber. But, he said, Mr. Corbett recognizes the importance of the issue.

"The governor understands that Lyft and Uber provide convenience to people in Pittsburgh, and we would support legislation that would allow these companies to operate."

In response, the mayor thanked the governor for his support of updating the law. "Pennsylvania needs to embrace innovation. With the direct engagement of the governor we can secure changes from the Legislature to allow these innovative companies to exist in the state," he said in a prepared statement.

The mayor added that he was talking with leaders in the Legislature to address the issue, and noted that he met with PUC Chairman Robert Powelson earlier this year on the matter. "He assured me he supported putting temporary rules in place that would allow these companies to operate," the mayor said. "We now know that is not the case."

PUC spokeswoman Jennifer Kocher said the agency has been in touch with legislators who are drafting legislation to address the issue. The PUC's preference, she said, would be to create a new category of transportation that would apply to ride shares.

"But until the Legislature acts, we are obligated to enforce the law," Ms. Kocher said, adding that if he chose to, the mayor could petition to intervene in the proceedings before the commission, but he has not done so.

"We appreciate how everyone feels about the action we are taking, but our hands are tied," she said. "We would be supportive of changes that would allow these companies to legally operate, but we have a responsibility to enforce the law as it stands."