

## DISCLAIMER

Electronic versions of the exhibits in these minutes may not be complete.

This information is supplied as an informational service only and should not be relied upon as an official record.

Original exhibits are on file at the Legislative Counsel Bureau Research Library in Carson City.

Contact the Library at (775) 684-6827 or [library@lcb.state.nv.us](mailto:library@lcb.state.nv.us).

Sunday, January 26, 2003  
Copyright © Las Vegas Review-Journal

**COLUMN: John L. Smith**  
**Cab company pressing change in seat belt law**

Brent Bell recalls it as the darkest day of his 17-year career in the cab business.

It was the day one of his drivers, transporting a couple from Tucson to a New Year's Eve celebration at the Hard Rock Hotel, made an ill-advised left turn and was broadsided by a speeding vehicle.

The impact flipped the cab and threw one of the passengers from the vehicle, killing her.

It was Dec. 31, 2000. And the life lost was that of Melody McMillin.

She was a 47-year-old mother of three and an attorney who had devoted much of her career to American Indian issues. She worked weekends as a Family Court judge and had helped establish a group home as an alternative to juvenile detention for troubled Tohono O'odham youth.

"She sounded like a really neat lady," Bell said one morning last week. "It was a sad situation that didn't need to happen."

Bell is still haunted by the crash, the only fatal accident involving a cab belonging to Whittlesea Blue Cab Co., the business Bell's family has owned since 1941. The driver pleaded guilty to charges of involuntary manslaughter and was given three years' probation.

Bell appears pained by the loss to McMillin's family and to those she helped in her work. He also is convinced that the accident shouldn't have killed her.

Based on the assessment of officers at the crash scene, the condition of the cab and an analysis of the accident, he believes had McMillin worn a seat belt, she probably would have emerged from the cab bruised but alive.

"The cabdriver walked away without a scratch because he had his seat belt on," Bell said. "Her (McMillin's) husband was in the vehicle with her and he was not injured. There was plenty of room in the back seat for her to survive."

It got Bell thinking.

"We all get in our vehicles every day and we're required by law to wear seat belts," he said. "Why shouldn't we be required to wear them when we get in the back of a taxicab? It makes no sense."

It's one of those inconsistencies in the law. Though cabs are required by statute to be equipped with seat belts, taxicab passengers are exempted from the state's seat belt law, as are passengers in buses and limousines.

Bell hopes to put some sense into the law by pushing a bill that would make seat belt use mandatory in taxicabs. The bill would also require that cab companies post signs in their vehicles informing passengers of the law and penalty.

The impact of such a law could be enormous.

Consider that seat belts improve by half a passenger's chances of surviving a crash and are the biggest single factor in determining whether a person survives an accident.

Then consider that Las Vegas taxicabs each year provided some 21 million trips. And last year there were 3,870 reported accidents involving cabs, two of them involving fatalities.

"Personally, I have to concur with Mr. Bell," said Joe Dahlia, the Nevada Taxicab Authority's acting administrator. "We handle thousands of accidents, (and) with more seat belt use, a lot of the injuries would be less severe than they are."

Bell is optimistic about the bill's chances in the upcoming legislative session. But he knows he needs the support of the valley's other cab companies.

He appears to have it.

"I think it would be a good law," said Jack Owens, general manager of Yellow Checker Star Transportation, which operates the valley's largest cab company. "I think the industry will support that."

Bell also knows there will be questions about enforcing the law.

Dahlia said the Taxicab Authority doesn't have the manpower to enforce a seat belt law. And Bell expects the same answer from other authorities.

However, just having the law on the books and a sign informing passengers of the law in every cab would be enough to encourage many to buckle up, he said.

"I think generally people want to follow the law," he said. "The signs alone will increase the amount of people wearing seat belts."

This, he believes, may have other effects that would make riding in cabs safer than it is now.

"I also think if a passenger decides to put his seat belt on, that might click with the driver a bit and he'll say, 'This person is really concerned with his safety,' and he might drive a little safer because he sees how concerned that person is."