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## State regulator says Uber meets Florida insurance requirement



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TAMPA — Ride-share outfit Uber is one step closer to operating legally here now that the Florida Office of Insurance Regulation says the company's policy provides legally binding coverage that meets state requirements.

The company's \$1 million commercial insurance policy has been a major point of contention in the fight to bring the service to the Tampa Bay area. The Public Transportation Commission, which regulates for-hire vehicles in Hillsborough County, has opposed the ride-share company since its launch here in April, citing concerns about insurance and licensing, along with insufficient background and vehicle checks.

In recent public meetings, PTC chairman Victor Crist and executive director Kyle Cockream have said they would defer to the state regarding insurance issues. Cockream forwarded a copy of Uber's policy to the Florida Office of Insurance Regulation for review.

Monte Stevens, the office's deputy chief of staff, said in an email to Cockream that the policy is legally binding and provides coverage typical of taxis or other for-hire services. Stevens also said the \$1 million liability limits are more than what is required of for-hire services.

"The policy appears to follow the typical business auto policies that are used by licensed and admitted carriers in Florida to provide coverage for commercial autos," Stevens wrote. "The policy provides first-dollar coverage while the auto is being driven by the Uber driver and when the auto is providing the livery services as recorded through the Uber application."

Stevens elaborated on the email this week, saying Uber is permitted to do legally binding business in the state and that the policy covers passengers.

"As far as we're concerned ... it meets the requirements of the insurance code," Stevens said.

Uber spokesman Taylor Bennett said he hopes these statements help change the PTC's approach toward ride-share companies.

"What the regulators are saying here confirms what we have said all along," Bennett said. "We've demonstrated that our insurance policy is best in class and has set a new standard for the transportation industry in terms of coverage and what we offer."

Uber and similarly structured competitor Lyft connect smartphone users with nearby drivers who use their own cars. Riders pay by credit card directly through the app. In some areas of the United States, the companies are presenting significant competition to taxi and limousine services.

Stevens deferred to the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles on whether the policy, when combined with a personal auto policy held by the driver, would provide the coverage necessary under the Florida Financial Responsibility Law. That law requires owners to be financially responsible for damages they cause in a crash.

Highway Safety spokesman John Lucas said until there is a determination as to whether Uber is operating as a for-hire vehicle, the department is unable to answer questions regarding its coverage.

"Under the provisions of the law, insurance companies are responsible for notifying the department of the coverage for the vehicles they insure," Lucas said. "When the vehicles are not covered, the individual's driver license can be suspended or a hold can be placed on the vehicle registration."

Stevens said it is also up to the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles to determine whether a policy can be issued by a surplus lines carrier as opposed to a member of the Florida Insurance Guaranty Association, as is required by the state statute. James River Insurance Co., which issued the Uber policy, is not a member.

Cockream said he still has some concerns, despite the statements from the Office of Insurance Regulation, and is waiting for other state agencies to weigh in.

"If all of the governing bodies over Florida insurance regulation say their insurance is legal, then their insurance is legal," Cockream said. "It just means that the insurance is no longer an issue, but that's only one grain of sand on the beach. There's still a lot of other issues."

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