

November 16, 2016

Taxi Soft Meters in BC

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Q&As—Taxi Soft Meters in BC

1. What is a “taxi soft meter”?

A “taxi soft meter” is a smartphone or tablet (with a touchscreen) that a taxi operator uses as a taximeter. Soft meters may use technologies such as GPS or on-board diagnostics (OBD) to calculate distance rates.

2. Is a soft meter a ride hailing app?

No. A taxi soft meter is a standalone piece of equipment inside a taxicab. They are not ride hailing apps or payment systems.

3. What is a GPS meter? What is an app meter?

Some jurisdictions refer to taxi soft meters as “GPS meters” or “app meters.” A GPS meter is a type of soft meter that calculates distance with GPS technology. An “app meter” is essentially another label for a soft meter. Despite the use of different terms, the Board refers to these devices as taxi soft meters.

4. Should taxi soft meters use OBD or GPS technology?

Taxi companies decide what type of soft meter technology they want to use. The Board requires that any technology must make the soft meter as accurate and reliable as taximeters that are used now.

5. Do taxi soft meters talk?

Yes. The Board is requiring that taxi soft meters have a “fare announcer” function. This will assist persons with vision impairments as well as those travelling in the back of wheelchair accessible vans who may not be able to see the meter.

Taxi companies must agree to install a fare announcer within 6 months of notifying the PT Board of their intention to use soft meters.

6. Why is the Board giving companies 6 months to have a “talking meter” function?

This technology may not be available immediately on taxi soft meters. If a taxi company sends in notice to use soft meters when the fare announcer is not available, it must include a letter from the taxi soft meter manufacturer that such a function will be available in 6 months.

7. What models of taxi soft meter can be used in BC?

Taxi licensees can use any model of taxi soft meter as long as it is as accurate as a traditional (mechanical or electronic) taximeter.

8. What Board requirements apply to taximeters that are not soft meters?

A traditional (mechanical or electronic) taximeter must be produced by a recognized taximeter company and adjusted to calculate accurately the current Board approved metered rate.

A taximeter in a vehicle is considered accurate if:

- a) on a road test, the distance computed by the taximeter is within 2% of the actual distance travelled; and
- b) on a time test, the time computed by the taximeter is within 2% of the actual time.

A taximeter in a taxicab must:

- a) be capable of calculating and displaying a fare based on time and distance; and
- b) have a fare display that a passenger with normal eyesight seated in the rear of the taxicab is able to read at all times.

These requirements are set out in the Board’s [Standard Rule for Taxicab Rates](#).

9. Do taxi companies have to install taxi soft meters?

No. This is an option for taxi companies who want to modernize their dispatch systems and fleets.

10. Do taxi companies have to do anything before installing a taxi soft meter?

The first thing a taxi company should do is read the Board's [Taxi Soft Meter Rule](#).

It should evaluate taxi soft meters against the requirements in the Board rule.

11. How can a taxi operator evaluate a taxi soft meter against these benchmarks?

A few options exist.

1. **Existing Certificate of Conformance.** A taxi soft meter that has received a Certificate of Conformance by an [NTEP-authorized lab](#) satisfies the system performances and tolerances in the Board's rule. Certificates for taxi soft meters may be posted by New York or California. Certificates for traditional taximeters can be viewed at the [NCWM website](#).
2. **Arrange Third-Party Testing by an Engineer.** Hire an engineer with qualifications to give you a written evaluation of the taxi soft meter's performance against established standards and tolerances for taximeters.
3. **Documentation from the Manufacturer.** Review documentation provided by the soft meter manufacturer regarding the testing and evaluation they have undertaken on soft meters. **IMPORTANT:** Licensees are responsible for ensuring that soft meters meet Board requirements and should read manufacturer's material very carefully.

12. What if another taxi company has a soft meter installed? Can I use the same make and model?

That depends. The Board rule says that licensees must be able to give evaluation documents to the Board or Branch if asked. A licensee who is not able to provide evaluation documents may be fined or ordered to remove the soft meters until the documentation is obtained.

13. Does the Board have a list of taxi soft meters that can be used?

No. Taxi licensees must take steps to evaluate the taxi soft meters before they use them.

14. What standards are used to evaluate taxi soft meters?

A taxi soft meter must be evaluated against the standards and tolerances established by the U.S. National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) in [Section 5.54](#) (“Taximeters”) of its [Handbook 44](#).

15. Why can't I just use any soft meter that's available?

Taxi companies may use soft meters that comply with the Board rule. The rule is designed has safeguards to ensure that meters are secure, accurate and reliable.

16. How does the Board ensure that taxi companies use soft meters that meets requirements in its rule?

Taxi companies must give the Board a declaration that they will comply with the requirements set out in the Board's Taxi Soft Meter Rule. They also must have documentation on hand that shows that the soft meter model was evaluated and shown to meet those requirements.

17. How will the Board know if a soft meter does not comply with the Board rule?

The Passenger Transportation Branch monitors enforcement and compliance activities. Complaints from passengers may trigger an investigation of a taxi company and the soft meters that they are using.

18. Is there a difference between taximeter inspections and taximeter evaluations?

Yes. Evaluations of taximeter *models* are more precise and subject to more rigorous tests. The focus is on technical design and the capability of a model to accurately calculate taxi fares. For example, overage of taximeter distance calculations cannot exceed 1%.

An inspection checks that a taximeter unit in a vehicle is calibrated properly. Inspections are quick, simple, and less rigorous. For example, the overage of a taximeter cannot exceed 2%.

19. Is a trip map required on the receipt?

Maps are optional and easier to provide with electronic receipts. Although maps are not required, the start and end locations and times are.

20. How do taxi soft meters get sealed?

Taxi soft meters must be:

- programed remotely by an authorized representative.
- password protected.
- physically secured in vehicles.

Taxi drivers may not access or program soft meters in their taxis.

21. How is the public is protected from unauthorized rate changes?

A number of safeguards are built into the rule. Taxi soft meters

- must generate a detailed trip receipt at the end of each trip (electronically or printed). Receipts will enable a person to determine what rates were charged and whether they comply with Board-approved rates.
- may only be changed by an authorized representative with central password access to the system.
- must produce a persistent audit trail that records all rate changes and who made them.

22. Do local governments have a role in the regulation of taximeters?

It depends. A number of cities in BC have bylaws with taximeter requirements. These may relate to approval, placement in the vehicle, testing, inspection, sealing, and posting rates.

23. Does compliance with Board taximeter and soft meter requirements meet local government bylaws?

No. Talk to your local government before installing new taximeters or taxi soft meters. Licensees are responsible for making sure they meet any local government requirements.

24. Where can I get more information?

Rules and related information are posted on the Board's [mobile apps webpage](#).