

Same suspects wanted in taxi attacks

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Road and Denison Street

Investigators believe the same suspect and an accomplice were also involved in a carjacking on Hwy. 400 near Hwy. 9 later that morning.

Coincidentally, just one day earlier, two passengers pulled a gun on a cab driver along Hwy. 400 heading toward Newmarket.

They stole cash and the driver's cellphone before leaving him on the side of the highway and taking his cab.

"Anytime anything like this happens, it concerns all of us, the community, drivers, all of us," Markham and Avenue Taxi owner Paul Mantas said.

But cab drivers becoming the victims of crime is nothing new.

Numerous taxi cab robberies have been reported across the region over the past few years, including several where knives

and guns have been used to threaten drivers.

Less than one month ago, four men tried to take off without paying a Whitchurch-Stouffville cab driver. When he tried to stop them, he was threatened with a brick and robbed.

"We don't have a lot of criminal activity... but I suppose times can change really fast, you never know."

Richmond Hill resident and Toronto cab driver Morteza Khorassan was stabbed to death on the job outside an apartment building at Don Mills Road and Lawrence Avenue last August.

Police have charged an 18-year-old Toronto man with second degree murder in that case.

None of the 65 Markham and

Avenue Taxi cabs have on-board cameras or Plexiglas shields to protect drivers, but most have been fitted with an emergency light system drivers can switch on to let others on the road know they're in trouble.

A flashing orange light alerts other motorists to call 9-1-1.

Drivers are also in constant computerized contact with dispatchers and most carry a cellphone, Mr. Mantas said.

"We are concerned about safety, but in York Region people are good," he said. "We don't have a lot of people running away from paying or a lot of criminal activity. Not in the five years I've been here, but I suppose times can change really fast, you never know."

If somebody tries to run without paying, Newmarket resident and Today's Taxi driver Sohali Mirza, he just lets them go.

"It's not worth getting stabbed," he said.

Today's Taxi cabs have no cam-

eras, Plexiglas or emergency indicator lights, but Mr. Mazoumi says York Region is safe enough they don't need them.

"Anyway, who is going to pay for all of that?" he said. "Not me."

Driver safety is important, but Mr. Mantas isn't so sure shields and cameras will do that much.

"What is a camera going to do? Take a picture. It won't help the driver when someone pulls a knife or a gun," he said. "And the shields? If somebody wants to rob you, they're going to find a way. Plus, if we put all those things in the cab it's going to give customers the impression this is not a safe place."

But Mr. Mirza said he still might be willing to foot the bill for installing a few safety measures in his own cab.

"I'm ready to pay," he said. "We have to make money, sure, but safety of the driver must come first."



STAFF PHOTO/MARTIN DERBYSHIRE

Markham and Avenue Taxi owner Paul Mantas sits on a cab with an emergency indicator light. If the orange light is flashing, you should call 911.

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