



Mayor tightens reins on horse-drawn carriages

BY FRAN SPIELMAN City Hall Reporter November 13, 2013 10:28AM – Chicago Sun Times

Chicago's 25 horse-drawn carriages would pay higher licensing fees and jump through the same regulatory hoops as cabdrivers — including a test of city geography — under a mayoral crackdown proposed Wednesday that, critics contend, tightens the reins too much.

Six months after downtown Ald. Brendan Reilly (42nd) championed a requirement that carriages prominently display decals declaring temperatures under which horses can legally operate, Mayor Rahm Emanuel wants to measure the temperature at Northerly Island, instead of at O'Hare Airport.

Horse-drawn carriages are prohibited from operating whenever the temperature rises to 90 degrees or above or drops to 15 degrees or below.

To cover costs, the mayor wants the owners of horse-drawn carriage companies to pay an annual \$500 licensing fee, up from \$500 for the initial license and \$400 for renewal.

The mayor also wants to double the maximum fine for violating the ordinance — from \$500 to \$1,000 a day.

Applicants whose licenses are denied would have to wait 18 months to re-apply, triple the current requirement.

Like cabdrivers, carriage “chauffeurs” would have to pass a City Hall-administered test to demonstrate their “knowledge of the geography of the city” and the rules of the road.

That did not sit well with retired driver Dave Saunders, volunteer manager for the Illinois Horse Park Foundation that manages Historical Noble Horse, 1410 N. Orleans.

Saunders noted that carriages work “on a very limited basis” — essentially from the Chicago River to Fullerton and from Lake Michigan to Halsted.

“If they start giving us a test of geography, do we need to know where the Museum of Science and Industry is where we never go, or how to get to Foster and Lake Shore Drive?” Saunders said.

“Cabdrivers go 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This is a very seasonal business. Most of the drivers are students or teachers. It’s a part-time position. They’re going over the edge in trying to regulate a business that doesn’t need regulation. We give tourists rides downtown. It already takes months to get a license. We can’t get drivers now. To keep piling on more and more stuff will make it even worse.”

Reilly was equally surprised by the geography test “given that the area where these carriages operate is rather small . . . It’s not something I think is critically important.”

But Reilly said tying the temperature requirement to Northerly Island makes sense.

“There is a dramatic difference between the temperatures at O’Hare and the temperatures downtown during the summer months. That’s a fairness issue for the drivers,” he said.

“We want to make sure these horses are operating within the allowable temperature range. But let’s make sure we’re measuring the temperatures where the horses are operating.”

The mayor’s ordinance retains existing requirements that drivers pay a \$25-a-year licensing fee, be at least 18 years old and be fingerprinted, photographed and doctor-certified to operate a carriage and secure \$300,000 worth of liability insurance.

A requirement that they have a valid Illinois driver’s license would be relaxed to include licenses in other states. An advertising ban — on the horse itself and both inside and outside the carriage — would continue.

Three years ago, Chicago’s horse-drawn carriage owners raised a stink — and predicted a rash of Gold Coast accidents and worse-then-normal traffic jams — over a Reilly-inspired city regulation that forced drivers to stop and wash the street whenever a horse urinates.

Carriage horses were already required to wear diapers, an infamous legislative legacy of Reilly’s colorful predecessor, Burton Natarus.