
Uber judge, regulator contemplate one-year license with reviews

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A judge and regulator discussed limiting the length of Uber Technologies Inc.'s license to operate in London to as much as one year with independent reviews every six months.

At the second day of a hearing on Uber's ability to operate in the U.K. capital, Judge Emma Arbuthnot asked regulators about the suitability of a 12-month permit. Helen Chapman, Transport for London's licensing director, replied that in addition to the time limit, the company should face regular audits.

Uber is appealing a decision by TfL in September to strip the company of its license after finding safety and corporate governance issues left it no longer "fit and proper" to operate in the city. Arbuthnot said she would issue a ruling at 5 p.m. local time.

While it's become clear during the hearings that the regulator and Uber have largely narrowed their differences, Chapman expressed frustration at the process.

"We've had five years of a very difficult relationship where Uber has felt it hasn't required regulation," Helen Chapman told the judge Tuesday.

The September TfL decision sent shockwaves through the offices of businesses, city regulators, lawyers, employment unions, and media outlets worldwide. Dara Khosrowshahi was just weeks into his new role as Uber's chief executive officer when, following the license revelations, he flew to London and started the process of undoing what many onlookers saw as years of poor behavior on the company's part.

The court hearing will wrap up early after Uber argued it had done enough to assuage TfL's fears over safety, governance and its relationship with the regulator. TfL adopted a neutral stance, recognizing what the ride sharing app had achieved since September but sounded a note of caution as to how fast a company's culture can realistically change.

The transport agency had originally listed 25 concerns, most of which involved safety and regulatory issues. The Licensed Taxi Drivers' Association, which represents about 12,000 traditional black-cab drivers, and the GMB trade union, opposed the car

service's appeal on grounds that it's worked to avoid regulations that cover other forms of transport and doesn't offer job security.

"You're not looking at an Uber in sheep's clothing that has been presented these last few days," Gerald Gouriet, a lawyer representing LTDA said. "It's a defiant Uber."

(Bloomberg)