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Los Angeles Times

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Published by The Times Mirror Company

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Shuttle Vans at L.A. Airport

Los Angeles Airport Commissioner Patricia Schnegg asserts that airport shuttle van users "are frustrated with the level of service" provided by unfettered competition ("Panel Seeks to Pare Airport Shuttle Firms," July 15). If the City Council acts to restrict the 40 operators now serving LAX to the big three (SuperShuttle, Prime Time and Xpress), small owner-operators will lose big, but consumers stand to lose even more.

The biggest, most complex operators have the highest coordination costs, and must charge the highest fares. In this case, they must also charge enough to pay a new \$1-million concession fee to LAX. The big three are always the first to suggest that eliminating their peppy, nimbler, less-expensive competitors would make airports better places.

Airport authorities must set the rules of this game, and they should take conservative steps first. LAX should do more to organize shuttle transactions and help operators to provide information to travelers. We should not begin with sweeping steps to eliminate passenger access to the lowest-cost operators.

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When I return to LAX I have noticed too many passenger vans on the lower roadway. I counted over 100 vans passing me while I was waiting for my Lot B van. The rental car and hotel vans were empty or held only one or two people. The proposal to reduce the number of passenger vans and van companies serving the airport would be a welcome relief for van congestion.

Unfortunately, the Airport Commission has not gone far enough. Other airports have one van service for all rental car companies. The L.A. City Council should prod the Airport Commission into consolidation of van service to rental car companies and airport-area hotels.

LARRY BURKS
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