

Getting Ready For Boston's Global Ground Game

If the city is chosen as the host of the 2024 Olympics, then operators will get more business than a political convention, Super Bowl and Ryder Cup combined.

By John M. Greene

January 2017, Peru: A press conference in a hotel lobby attended by members of the International Olympic Committee and members of the worldwide media.

"And the city chosen by the IOC to host the 2024 Summer Olympics is Boston!"

Watching on a TV in his Randolph, Mass., office, Johnny Greene, head of ETS International, leans back in his chair, lets out a deep breath and says to himself, "Now, it begins."

Those might not be my "exact" words upon hearing the news if Boston were selected, but the intent will be there. Because, if Boston gets to host the 2024 Summer Games, the global event will disrupt and reconfigure the city, for better or worse. Picture hundreds of thousands of spectators and athletes funneling into a city known to have traffic jams at 10 p.m., traveling in on just three main highways connecting the outside world to the Hub.

The U.S. Olympic Committee chose Boston on Jan. 8 as the American bid city over Los Angeles, San Francisco and Washington, D.C. In September 2017, the International Olympic Committee will choose the host of the 2024 Games among Boston and three other finalists. The deadline for Boston to submit its formal bid is September. But the city first has to work out a number of significant details, as well as reconcile opposing camps on whether the city should host the event. The U.S. has not held the Summer Olympics since the Atlanta Games in 1996.

Carmageddon?

Already the doomsayers are hard at work anticipating "Carmageddon" if the vote goes Boston's way. Their com-

ments are based on a worst-case scenario for Boston in 2015, and not seeing the big picture as it might be played out in 2024. A spokesperson for the Boston 2024 Olympic group said, "Transit and logistics for the entire period of the Games will be carefully orchestrated and planned in advance. Spectators are encouraged to ride public transit or walk and discouraged to travel by car or taxi. The result is a coordinated effort in which Olympic and Paralympic athletes and spectators as well as local residents are made aware of the most time-efficient means of getting from point A to point B, accounting for the movement of all people across the city's many modes of transportation."

If that sounds too canned and optimistic, consider Los Angeles when it hosted the Olympics in 1984, a city known for its maddening pretzel-like highways and impatient drivers. Ted Vollmer, who was then a metro reporter for *The Los Angeles Times*, remembers, "You could fly down the 405 like it was an empty country road. City officials encouraged carpooling and bus-riding. They made two-way streets into one-way speedways. Employers gave workers flex hours. And

shippers scheduled all truck deliveries for nighttime." Vollmer said collectively those small reductions enabled freeway motorists to "go from about 10 mph to free-flow at 65 or 70."

One clue may come from Boston hosting the Democratic National Convention in 2004. "There were a lot of people predicting gridlock and mayhem, and we didn't see that," says Tom Tinlin, who co-chaired the transportation committee for the DNC. "What you do is provide information to people so they can better plan their day. Those same strategies would work even better today, now that people have social media, traffic apps and smartphones. The ability to work around large-scale events is easier now probably than ever before, but not as easy as it's going to be in 2024."

Finally, if there is *any* doubt the city is taking its road preparation seriously, Richard A. Davey, the former state trans-



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portation czar, has recently been chosen to take over leadership of Boston 2024. He has vowed to make his priority overhauling Boston's roads.

Getting Ready

So, Boston gets to host the Olympics in 2024, the roads are better, and I am 10 years older but still looking good. Now, the question is, how does my limousine company and all others in a 100-mile radius of Boston, do its job and do it well?

First, there's no history to base it on, at least as it pertains to Boston, which has never hosted the Olympics. I had the opportunity to coordinate a lot of the ground transportation logistics at the Super Bowl in 2002 in New Orleans and the Ryder Cup held in Boston in 1999, but both events will pale in comparison to the worldwide magnet that is the Olympics. So there is really no way to judge how many people will need to be moved or how many extra vehicles will need to be added to the current fleet. One comparison, though on a somewhat lesser scale, was when Tampa hosted



the Republican National Convention from Aug. 27-30, 2012. Overall, about 35,000 to 40,000 delegates, attendees and media people converged during convention week.

Ken Lucci, CEO of Ambassador Limousine in Clearwater, Fla., says, "We were running about 150 vehicles that week: 50 fleet and 100 affiliate and rented chauffeured vehicles of all types."

Tim Crockett, a transportation consultant for AirComm Chauffeured Services in Chicago, who worked the Olympic Games in 2006, 2008, 2010 and 2012 says, "Even though the sponsors will take up a lot of cars through sponsorship deals with major automakers, there will be more than enough overflow to keep everyone busy, virtually around the clock. Be-

tween tourists and your own business relationships, you'll have plenty of traffic to handle, so you better be ready for it."

Should Boston get the nod, we'll probably start preparing ourselves by getting involved as much as possible among numerous committees to create more visibility down the homestretch. About six months to a year out, we'll set up a satellite office, start getting all permits in place, and look to take on extra vehicles, chauffeurs, dispatchers and accounting people — literally setting up a separate company just to handle the Olympics. As it has been said, the details are in the planning. But how to plan?

Olympic Victory

Kal Sanghera of Regent Limousine Service in Victoria, B.C., says when the Olympics landed in Vancouver in 2010, his vehicles were put to the test. "Our vehicles were running about 18-20 hours a day and



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we had two drivers per vehicle, to accommodate the long hours on each vehicle,” Sanghera says. “We were predominantly providing our Lincoln and Cadillac sedans, Lincoln Navigator SUVs, Mercedes-Benz Springer Vans, and our mini-coach. We also added on many more sedans and SUVs to our fleet to accommodate the Olympic rush. We did add six extra chauffeurs for the duration of the Olympics to accommodate the long hours our vehicles were running. We had all our extra vehicles ordered three months before the Olympics, and had all our paperwork and necessary documentation provided at the three month mark.”

Tara Grewal, Managing Partner of Griffin Transportation in Vancouver, agrees preparation is key. “The majority of our fleet was being used during the Olympics up to 12 hours a day, and we took on 15 extra drivers.”

This being said, with the expense of taking on extra vehicles and chauffeurs, setting up satellite offices, diving into a permitting process that often moves at a glacial speed and numerous late night committee meetings, it’s easy for someone to ask, “Is it really worth all the ag-

gravation?” And the answer is really quite simple, “Absolutely!”

The week we worked the Ryder Cup in Boston we grossed \$1 million in revenue. If the Olympics are the equivalent of the MLB World Series, by comparison the Ryder Cup is the Little League World Series, so do the math. “The biggest impact on our company was that we saw an increase in our revenue,” Sanghera says. Grewal adds, “Financially it was a huge success and the global exposure we received helped us gain future clients.”

Customer Priorities

It all sounds like a win-win scenario, but a word of caution before you decide to dive into the Olympic ground transportation pool. Don’t sacrifice clients you have nurtured over the years for 10 days of financial glory. Their world may not stop just because the Olympics have arrived and they may still need your services. If they can’t get their usual cars because you’ve earmarked them for tourists from England and Spain, you may discover that the tourists won’t be the only ones leaving you after the games. Allow enough vehicles to accommodate everyone (hence

the setting up of the Olympics-dedicated satellite office.)

Of course, forget everything I just said should the IOC announce in Peru in two years that limo companies in Rome, Berlin or Budapest shall inherit the headaches (and financial windfall) of moving many people around a major city.

But today, as a limousine operation based in Boston, we hope and pray that Boston will host the world in 2024, and that the world will fill our backseats. If the politicians do their jobs and prepare the highways and byways, and we do our job with vehicles and trained chauffeurs at the ready, then all will go smooth. Driving in and out of the city during the Summer Games in Boston won’t have to be its own Olympic sport. **LCT**

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