**before the washington**

**utilities and transportation commission**

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| SPEEDISHUTTLE WASHINGTON LLC d/b/a SPEEDISHUTTLE SEATTLEComplainant, v.  SHUTTLE EXPRESS, INC.Respondent. |  | DOCKET TC-FORMAL COMPLAINT |
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# **Preliminary statement**

1.1 Speedishuttle Washington LLC d/b/a Speedishuttle Seattle, a Washington limited liability company, and files this Formal Complaint against Shuttle Express, Inc., pursuant to RCW 81.04.110, for violations of RCW 81.28.080 and WAC 480-30-391 and in support thereof alleges as follows:

# **Parties and representatives**

2.1 Complainant is Speedishuttle Washington LLC (“Speedishuttle”), a regulated auto transportation company, whose address is 1237 South Director Street, Seattle, Washington 98108. Speedishuttle is the holder of Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity C-65854, which authorizes door-to-door auto transportation service between SeaTac International Airport and points in King County.

2.2 Speedishuttle is represented by David W. Wiley and Blair I. Fassburg of Williams Kastner & Gibbs PLLC, which has an address of 601 Union Street, Suite 4100, Seattle, Washington 98101.

2.3 Respondent is Shuttle Express, Inc. d/b/a Shuttle Express (“Shuttle Express”), a regulated auto transportation company, with an address of 800 SW 16th St., Renton, Washington 98057. Shuttle Express is the holder of Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity No. C-975 authorizing door-to-door shared ride service and scheduled hotel service in the greater Tacoma/Seattle area.

2.4 Complainant is not yet aware of the identity of Respondent’s counsel with respect to this Complaint.

# **Statement of Facts**

**BACKGROUND OF SHUTTLE EXPRESS**

3.1 As set forth above, Shuttle Express is a regulated and certificated auto transportation company operating both scheduled and door-to-door airporter service in the greater Seattle and Tacoma areas under its certificated authority. Shuttle Express operates pursuant to Certificate C-975 and has operated an auto transportation company in the State of Washington subject to the regulatory authority of the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission at all times relevant to the instant Complaint.

3.2 Shuttle Express operates its door-to-door service on flexible fares, with minimum charges based upon the zip code and vehicle type.

3.3 Shuttle Express books reservations on its own behalf, and also maintains contracts with multiple ticket agents, each of whom may receive a commission for booking customer reservations on behalf of Shuttle Express.

**HISTORY OF SHUTTLE EXPRESS’ USE OF INDEPENDENT CONTRACTORS**

3.4 In providing services under its Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity, Shuttle Express has a long history of regulatory violations involving the use of independent contractors. In August 2004, Shuttle Express notified the Commission it would be using independent contractors in operation of vehicles in its auto transportation service under an owner-operator agreement. *See* Order 01, Docket No. TC-072228, p. 2. On November 4, 2005, Commission Staff notified Shuttle Express its use of independent contractors would constitute a violation of state law. *Id.* Nonetheless, Shuttle Express proceeded with its use of independent contractors in its business. In April 2007, Shuttle Express again notified the Commission of its intent to use independent contractors. The Commission, through its staff, commenced an investigation into Shuttle Express’ use of independent contractors in June 2007. *Id.*

3.5 After the WUTC’s investigation completed it issued penalties against Shuttle Express for violations of state law by use of independent contractors as drivers, and eventually, in July 2008, the Commission approved a settlement agreement between Shuttle Express and Commission Staff and imposed a $9,500 penalty on Shuttle Express for its use of independent contractor drivers. *Id*.

3.6 On May 1, 2013, the WUTC, on its own motion, brought a subsequent complaint against Shuttle Express in Docket No. TC-120323 alleging that Shuttle Express had again committed violations of WAC 480-30-213(2) by using independent contractors operating limousines and town cars to provide share ride services to customers when Shuttle Express’ vehicle was delayed or otherwise unavailable to provide timely transportation ( its “rescue service”) in violation of its previous settlement agreement. The Commission found such independent contractors had been used under Shuttle Express’ Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity on 5,715 occasions between October 2010 and September 2011. *See* Complaint, Docket No. TC-120323, p. 2.

3.7 On March 14, 2014, the WUTC issued Order 04, a Final Order by which the Commission found that Shuttle Express’ rescue service violated WAC 480-30-213(2) in its use of independent contractors and violated the terms of Order 01 in Docket No. TC-072228, which prohibited Shuttle Express from violating commission regulations, and issued penalties against Shuttle Express in the amount of $60,000.00. Order 04 further found that Shuttle Express’ violation of WAC 480-30-213 had been willful. *See* Order 04, Docket No. TC-120323, p. 11-13.

3.8 On November 19, 2013, Shuttle Express filed with the Commission a Petition and Request for Expedited Consideration in Docket No. TC-132141 by which it requested an exemption from WAC 480-30-213(2) and WAC 480-30-456 to authorize Shuttle Express to operate its rescue service and continue using independent contractors to provide service under its certificate during the holiday season.

3.9 Despite opposition by WUTC staff, which took the position Shuttle Express’ rescue service violated the requirements of RCW 81.68, Shuttle Express’ petition in that docket was granted with conditions and limited to a period of December 15, 2013 through January 15, 2014. Order 01, Docket No. TC-132141. Although granted, the Commission also noted “[w]e share Staff’s Concern with Shuttle Express’ history of disregarding these Commission rules and agree with the dissent of Chairman Danner on this point. The Company has a legitimate business interest in ensuring that all passengers to whom it has promised service receive that service, but we expect the Company, like all regulated companies, to comply with applicable legal requirements while pursuing that interest.” *Id.* at 3.

3.10 Subsequently, on June 17, 2016, Shuttle Express filed a Petition for Exemption for WAC 480-30-213 and WAC 480-30-456, Docket TC-160819, by which it again sought an exemption for use of independent contractors for the transportation of customers of its auto transportation company by use of limousine and town car, but in this instance rather than seeking permission for use of a rescue service, it sought a blanket exemption to use independent contractors for the operation of limousines and town cars in its regulated auto transportation operations. *See*,Amended Petition for Limited and Condition Exemption, Docket No. TC-160819.

3.11 On September 30, 2016, in a 2-1 decision over the dissent of Commissioner Rendahl, the Commission granted Shuttle Express’ petition for exemption, but it conditioned the exemption and limited it to a period of 10 months. *See*,Order 01, Docket No. TC-160819.

3.12 Despite the fact that Shuttle Express was penalized nearly $70,000.00 for thousands of documented violations of WAC 480-30-213 by use of independent contractors, to Speedishuttle’s information and belief, Shuttle Express continued to operate its rescue service through independently owned limousines and town cars, operated by independent contractors, doing so after its initial exemption expired and up until the time its new exemption was granted on September 30, 2016. Shuttle Express’ continued use of its rescue service in violation of WAC 480-30-213, by way of example, was admitted in a post by Shuttle Express on June 10, 2016 in response to a customer complaint on its Facebook page, a copy of which is attached hereto and incorporated by reference herein as Exhibit A.

**SHUTTLE EXPRESS’ USE OF UNLAWFUL REBATES AND COMMISSIONS**

3.13 Shuttle Express also has a documented history of unlawful rebates or commissions to unauthorized agents. Though there was no record of how many payments were made, such violation, by making payments to hotel bellhops, are documented in the Commission Decision and Order Granting Administrative Review; Modifying Initial Order; Assessing Penalties, in Docket No. TC-910789. In that Order, served January 6, 1993, the Commission found that Shuttle Express’ payment of commissions to bellhops violated RCW 81.28.080, and that Shuttle Express was being put on notice that in order to make commission payments it must secure an order from the Commission allowing payment, which must identify the terms of the agreement. Further, Shuttle Express was notified it was prohibited from making commission payments indiscriminately or in a manner outside the terms of an order granting Commission approval. Finally, it was notified the Commission could enter such an order when the terms of the agreement are clear and permissible, and when the class of contractor was clearly identified. *Id*. at 7.

3.14 To Speedishuttle’s information and belief, Shuttle Express has paid monthly commission checks to individuals and/or entities, including but not limited to staff at one or more Seattle area hotel(s), for reservations booked with Shuttle Express, despite such individual and/or entities not being authorized ticket agents for Shuttle Express. *See* Exhibit B, a true and correct copy of an email confirming such payments.

# **Basis for Complaint**

4.1 The information set forth in paragraphs 2.1 through 3.14 is incorporated by reference as if fully set forth herein.

4.2 As an auto transportation company, as that term is defined in RCW 81.68.010(3), Shuttle Express is subject to the regulatory jurisdiction of the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission pursuant to RCW 81.68.030 and must comply with Chapters 81.28 and 81.68 of the Revised Code of Washington.

**VIOLATION OF WAC 480-30-213**

**UNLAWFUL OPERATION OF ITS RESCUE SERVICE**

4.3 WAC 480-30-213(1) and (2) prohibit an auto transportation company from using independent contractors in the operation of vehicles or vehicles which are not leased to or owned by the auto transportation company for transportation of passengers under its certificate authority.

4.4 In addition to the prohibitions contained in WAC 480-30-213(1) and (2), Shuttle Express was specifically prohibited from violating WAC 480-30-213(1) pursuant to Order 01, Docket No. TC-072228.

4.5 Shuttle Express’ provision of rescue service (during periods in which no exemption was granted) by limousine, town car, or SUV operated by independent contractors constitutes a willful violation WAC 480-30-213(1) and (2) on each and every such occasion.[[1]](#footnote-1)

**VIOLATION OF RCW 81.28.080**

**UNLAWFUL COMMISSIONS**

4.6 RCW 81.28.080, prohibits an auto transportation company such as Shuttle Express from issuing a rebate or refund of any portion of its rate or fare except upon order of the WUTC. RCW 81.28.080 thereby prohibits the payment of commissions to unauthorized ticket agents.

4.7 Respondent’s conduct, in making payments to persons without first entering into a ticket agent agreement duly disclosed to and approved by the WUTC, constitutes an unlawful rebating or commission of fares in violation of RCW 81.28.080 and WAC 480-30-391.

4.8 Shuttle Express’ conduct, in violating RCW 81.28.080, constitutes a willful violation. In the private complained filed in *Everett Airporter Services Enterprises, Inc. v. San Juan Airlines, Inc. d/b/a Shuttle Express*, the Commission found that a commission paid to a bellhop by Shuttle Express without a Commission order on file approving such a ticket agent agreement (under former rule WAC 480-30-050(5)) violated RCW 81.28.080. *See* Commission Decision and Order Granting Administrative Review; Modifying Initial Order; Assessing Penalties, Docket No. TC-9170789. Consequently, Shuttle Express has actual knowledge its conduct violates RCW 81.28.080.

# **request for relief**

5.0 Speedishuttle requests the Commission issue an order directing Shuttle Express to cease and desist from engaging in payment of unauthorized commissions or rebates, and imposing the maximum allowable monetary penalty upon Shuttle Express for each and every occurrence by which Shuttle Express is shown to have acted in violation of law, as alleged in paragraphs 4.1 through 4.8, above.

5.1 Speedishuttle further requests the Commission now permit the full range of discovery as authorized by WAC 480-07-400(2)(b).

DATED this 30th day of November, 2016.

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1. The exceptions again being the periods of granted exemptions (between December 15, 2013 and January 15, 2014 and the 10 months following September 30, 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)