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New airport-shuttle firm GOing from Yellow to green

BY DAVID WETHE

STAR-TELEGRAM STAFF WRITER

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A new name has popped up in the world of airport shuttles, but its color scheme and even its claim to be the "world's largest door-to-door airport shuttle company" are being challenged by competitors, including one in North Texas.

GO Airport Shuttle, based in Chicago, launched its service Thursday at 110 airports worldwide, including Dallas/Fort Worth Airport and Dallas Love Field.

The company's vans, with a typical capacity of 15 riders, are showing up across the Metroplex via Dallas-based Yellow Checker Shuttle in an all-white paint scheme with green lettering and the "GO" logo near the back end.

GO consists of about 40 independent airport-shuttle companies that have joined to form a public brand name, hoping to get more business working together instead of fighting one another.

They're also looking to better compete with the giant in the shuttle industry, SuperShuttle.

Ten of the affiliated companies, including Yellow Checker, have an ownership stake in the shuttle cooperative. The other 30 pay a licensing fee to carry the GO name, officials said.

"This really shows the consumer that there is this one entity worldwide," said Jeff Finkel, president and co-owner of Yellow Checker.

"We expect to grow substantially," he said.

During the next six months, Yellow Checker plans to covert all 85 of its vans, now yellow and black, to the green and white GO livery. So far, three have the new look.

But Dallas-based City Shuttle, one of three shuttle companies competing at D/FW, hopes to stop the change.

The new GO look is too similar to City Shuttle's vans, which are white with yellow lettering, said Andrew James, public relations director for City Shuttle, which has 32 vehicles in North Texas, its only market.

"The only differential color on our van is we've got a yellow 'CS' on the door," he said.

"It's going to create confusion with our passengers. They're going to wind up with ours. We're going to wind up with theirs."

The city councils of Fort Worth and Dallas, the cities that own the airport and approve shuttle and taxi service there, will have the final say. Dallas approved the name and color change for Yellow Checker Shuttle about a month ago, Finkel said.

Fort Worth is expected to take up the matter soon, he said.

City Shuttle has challenged GO's color scheme in documents filed with the Fort Worth Transportation Department, James said. He said the company hasn't ruled out challenging the color scheme in court.

"You know there's going to be mass confusion," James said. "It's just an issue that we're ready to fight."

But Finkel said he's not worried about the competition.

"The reality is we operate a shared-ride shuttle service, and we market substantially," Finkel said.

"With regard to City Shuttle, they're just sitting on the curb, hoping somebody will walk up to them. And I have no idea why they would protest. If anything, they might get a little fallout because of it."

Ray Mundy, executive director of the Airport Ground Transportation Association, said the formation of GO is good news for the airport-shuttle industry.

"You actually improve the level of service by having fewer operators in this kind of a marketplace, because it depends on density and riders per vehicle," said Mundy, who is also a professor at the University of Missouri-St. Louis and considered by many a leading expert on the shuttle industry. "It's one of those things that sort of goes counterintuitive to what you thought was Economics 101."

GO's move helps the industry switch to a more standardized operation, with Internet reservations and one number to call.

The companies that formed GO were more loosely bound in the past, sharing the GroundNet reservations system.

But GO, unlike GroundNet, is a brand name marketed to the general public. In addition, there are stricter operational standards for companies using the GO name.

GO says its 3,765 vehicles will carry almost 29 million passengers a year.

By comparison, SuperShuttle, with more than 1,200 vans at 26 airports, carries more than 8 million people a year.

That's why GO says it's the world's biggest.

Still, SuperShuttle has doubts.

"I don't know how they substantiate that," said Ken Testani, vice president of marketing for



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Yellow Checker plans to covert all 85 of its yellow and black vans to the green and white GO livery.



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