

Testimony of Commissioner David Do
New York City Taxi & Limousine Commission
Before the City Council Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure
PRELIMINARY BUDGET FOR FISCAL YEAR 2024
March 9, 2023

Good afternoon, Chair Brooks-Powers and members of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure. Thank you for inviting me to update you on TLC's preliminary 2024 budget

It is a pleasure to be here. I am joined today by our Deputy Commissioner for Operations, People, and Innovation, Evan Hines.

Before I talk about our recent efforts to ensure the safe and timely delivery of more than a million for-hire trips a day, I would like to thank this committee for the tremendous support it has shown for one of TLC's most successful endeavors this year—the Medallion Relief Program.

Back in October, when I last had the privilege of briefing you in person, MRP had provided just over \$240 million in debt relief to eligible medallion owners, many of them hardworking drivers.

Committee members, I am happy to inform you that this number is now almost \$370 million.

This has transformed lives, brought hope to individuals and families that were being crushed by predatory loans and runaway debt. It has been nothing short of a lifeline for an entire sector of our industry.

The support of this committee and this administration, the New York Taxi Workers Alliance, and private sector firms like Marblegate and PenFed, have brought meaningful relief to almost 1700 medallion owners.

Thanks to this and other efforts, the taxi sector continues to recover.

Taxi trip volumes are now about half of what they were before the pandemic—over a 1,000% increase from their pandemic low point—and trip volumes continue to grow as taxis and drivers return.

Almost 8,000 taxis were in service in December, the highest number since before the pandemic, and nearly four times the pandemic low point.

We continue to see recovery in other sectors as well, with black car and livery trips at 64% of pre-pandemic levels, and high-volume Uber & Lyft trips up at 88%.

The City's efforts to regulate minimum driver pay have been integral to these recoveries. Drivers should not be overextending themselves behind the wheel to keep up with rising expenses and the profit demands of app-companies.

In such a working environment, a safe and healthy industry is impossible.

When it passed a Local Law in 2018 directing TLC to regulate minimum driver pay standards, the City Council did the right thing.

As the committee knows, in December TLC raised the taximeter rates for the first time in over ten years. As a result, drivers are now able to weather increased inflation and operating costs.

So far, we have seen no significant impact on trip numbers.

During the same month TLC also voted to raise the minimum driver pay for Uber & Lyft drivers.

Uber, however, immediately sued to block this pay raise.. We fought them in court, and the judge ruled that we needed to provide a more detailed explanation of our rate calculations.

So we did exactly that. We introduced a new rule increasing minimum driver pay, providing significantly more background on our calculations—just like the judge had asked.

Yesterday the Commission voted unanimously to pass that rule. We get stuff done.

We sincerely hope that there will be no more attempts to interfere with this much needed pay adjustment, and we will continue to regulate driver pay in way that ensures our industry is healthy, humane, and sustainable.

“Sustainable” also means doing our part to reduce carbon emissions. We will soon be releasing 1000 Electric Vehicle licenses—the first to be released in two years.

This will help encourage development of the City’s charging infrastructure, and they are just the beginning of a broad initiative that Mayor Adams laid out in his State of the City Address—the full electrification of the City’s high-volume fleet, Uber & Lyft, by 2030.

As the Mayor stated in his address, Uber and Lyft share this goal with TLC.

We are working on the specifics and will be announcing more details of this plan very soon.

Accessibility & Vision Zero

Over the last year, TLC has also been working diligently on perennial, ongoing missions, such as increasing accessibility.

We share this committee’s commitment to increasing accessibility. Last year, we added more than 1300 wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAVs) to our taxi fleet, while our high-volume WAV fleet increased by more than a third, to nearly 4000.

TLC leads the nation by requiring that 80% of Uber and Lyft WAV trips have wait times of 15 minutes or less.

Approximately 90% of FHVWAV trips requested through Uber and Lyft had a wait time of 10 minutes or less.

We will continue building up our accessible fleet and ensuring that accessible vehicles are dispatched to those in need as quickly as any other for-hire vehicle.

We will also keep supporting our partners in transportation at the MTA, which runs the Access-A-Ride program.

Our role is limited to the fact that MTA uses TLC-licensed drivers and vehicles to fulfill some of the Access-A-Ride requests.

This is done through brokers and private apps that dispatch to TLC-licensed vehicles.

We do not regulate these drivers as they relate to MTA's program, but TLC is always here to support our partners in transportation, and I have met with Chris Pangilinan (*pan-go-lee-nan*), Vice President for MTA Accessibility, several times in the last few months to help MTA reach its goals in providing better service to its customers.

Increased accessibility is a never-ending mission, as is our mission to improve driver, passenger, and pedestrian safety.

As a Vision Zero agency, we work with DOT, NYPD, and advocacy groups to raise awareness of how to drive safely in our city.

Per miles driven, TLC drivers continue to be the City's safest drivers, and safety is the primary component of TLC driver-training and licensing. We recently participated in both the Dusk and Darkness campaign and the annual holiday awareness events.

We continue to enforce fatigued driving prevention rules, which were designed to increase safety by warning drivers and bases when their schedules exceed 10 hours in any 24-hour period, and more than 60 hours in a calendar week.

If they continue to violate the rules, they can be issued a summons.

I know that this committee, like my agency, also supports the safe operation of commuter vans, which play a vital role in our city's transportation ecosystem.

We support the legislation in Albany allowing commuter vans to accept street hails, and we continue to facilitate dialogue between state officials, van operators, and insurance industry representatives, to establish safer and more economical commuter van operations.

Budget Breakdown

Now I'd like to share with you our preliminary budget for Fiscal Year '24. TLC's total expense budget for 2024 is \$51.3 million.

The budget reflects a vacancy reduction of \$3.8 million for 56 positions – TLC's share of the citywide Program to Eliminate the Gap (PEG) program. Authorized headcount for Fiscal Year 2024 is now 505.

Our top goal is to recruit and train new enforcement cadets after being unable to hire a full class of new officers over the past three years.

We are actively recruiting for more enforcement cadets and will continue hiring new officers in the coming fiscal year.

TLC is working closely with OMB to navigate the citywide limitations on hiring and meet our staffing needs by backfilling critical positions.

Conclusion

In summary, as TLC continues working to stabilize the City's for-hire transportation industry, prioritize driver well-being, and honor our core missions of safety, equity, and accessibility, we are also looking towards a better future: one in which the world is not only reversing humanity's effect on global warming, but one in which this agency has directly contributed to a more livable and enjoyable city.

Thank you for this opportunity to share TLC's recent work. I would also like to thank my fellow commissioners at the TLC for their dedication and public service.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have.