APPEARANCES:

FOR THE COMMISSION:

MEERA JOSHI, Chairwoman
LASHANN DEARCY, Commissioner
ELIAS AROUT, Commissioner
FRANK CARONE, Commissioner
LAUVIENSKA POLANCO, Commissioner
CHRI$ WILSON, General Counsel

SPEAKERS:

LETITIA JAMES, Public Advocate
CHRIS TORMEY, TLC
ASHWINI CHHABRA, TLC
GALE BREWER, Manhattan Borough President
NOQUEL MATOS, Council Member Ydanis Rodriguez
RONNIE ELLEN RAYMOND, United Spinal Association
JAMES WEISMAN, United Spinal Association
JULIA PINOVER, Disability Rights Advocates
EDITH PRENTISS
JEAN RYAN, Disabled in Action
SIMI LINTON
CRYSTAL RIVERA, BILS
GEORGE LASZLO

(Continued)
SPEAKERS:

ELIZABETH RAMOS, VIA
SUSAN DOOHA, CIDNY
ETHAN GERBER, GNYTA
GARY FARBEROV
JOSEPH RAPPAPORT, Taxis For All Campaign
MICHAEL O'LOUGHLIN, Cab Riders United
DAVID POLLACK, CTS
JOHN WALSH, Mobility Ventures
BHAIRAVI DESAI, NYTWA
PETER MAZER, MTBOT
RICHARD THALER, OMNI Media
CAROLYN CASTRO, Livery Roundtable
ERHAN TUNCEL, LOMOTO
JASON DASILVA, AXS Lab
JOE MARONE
OSMAN CHOWDHURY, United Taxi Drivers
Association
MARC KLEIN, Clean Energy
JOANNE SIMON, AHEAD
NICOLAE HENT
JEFF GROBMAN, Advance Mobility
VICTOR SALAZAR, NYTWA
(Continued)
SPEAKERS:

BILL LINDAUER, NYTWA
MOHAN SINGH, NYTWA
JOHN LOTAJ
CHAIRWOMAN JOSHI: Good morning, everybody. We're going to call the meeting to order.

We have a big agenda, not much time, and a full house, so I'm going to go a little bit out of order. We're going to skip over the Chairman's report, adoption of minutes and base applications to hear, first, from Public Advocate Letitia James, who's joining us this morning, to testify about the rules that are up for hearing and vote today, rules that would convert the fleet to 50 percent wheelchair accessible by the year 2020. So I'd like to welcome Letitia James.

MR. WILSON: And let's just note that it's just after 10 o'clock on April 30th. Thank you.

MS. JAMES: Good morning.

I'm happy to be here today as New York City takes an important step
forward in ensuring that the most iconic part of New York's streetscape, the yellow taxi, is accessible to all New Yorkers. For far too long, New Yorkers in wheelchairs have been shut out of the taxi system, and, as New Yorkers, we know that having access to taxis in New York City is so much more than simply hitching a ride. For millions of New Yorkers, taxis are an essential part of living and functioning in our city.

New York City has taken important steps on taxi accessibility. In 2004, we introduced our first wheelchair-accessible taxis to the city fleet, and the 311 service that dispatches wheelchair-accessible taxis has been a blessing for many people in wheelchairs who finally have access to the taxi network in Manhattan.
The rules put forward today in conjunction with other TLC initiatives will have a far more -- will have a more far-reaching and meaningful impact on accessibility than previous initiatives. With the recent sale of 400 wheelchair-accessible taxi medallions, the potential future sale of 1600 more accessible medallions over the next year or so, and the rules being discussed today that commit the city to making 50 percent of the taxi fleet wheelchair accessible by 2020, New York will soon be a national leader in accessibility. And this plan does it right, with every stakeholder, taxi owners, drivers, passengers and the city contributing their fair share. I applaud the TLC and Chair Joshi for the important progress we are making today.
Before I conclude, I would like to use this opportunity to share my input on this proposed rule change and other TLC-related issues. First, with respect to the rule change, I urge the Board to consider ways to address concerns by drivers that the 30-cent surcharge to fund the accessibility retrofits might adversely affect their tips. And so clearly, obviously, with information to the public, that will go a long way in addressing their concerns.

Second, we all know that for literally decades a job driving a taxi has represented an important first economic step for so many immigrant populations. My wish is that this important step be made available to more women as well. And I urge the Chair to use her tenure at TLC to more proactively recruit women as taxi drivers, as
we face the feminism of poverty in the City of New York.

In addition to that, as you know, I am concerned, obviously, about the lack of information with regards to all the curb cuts all throughout the City of New York, and it's really important that we address the issues with regards to mapping out curb cuts in the city for our drivers as well.

And finally, as the TLC's also an enforcement agency, I would like to remind the agency that discrimination against potential drivers based on their appearance or the neighborhood to which they want to travel is a real harmful problem. Like today's proposed rule changes, policing against this type of illegal activity against those in wheelchairs and those who are disabled is an issue in fairness and accessibility for New
Yorkers. So let us treat everyone with importance -- treat this with importance and with vigilance and treat all members of New York City regardless of their status with great respect.

And with that, I really want to thank the TLC and I want to thank the Chair for allowing me an opportunity to speak today. And I look forward to the issuance of today's rule, and I thank you for your leadership on this very important issue in the City of New York, if not nationally. Thank you. Have a good day.

CHAIRWOMAN JOSHI: Thank you very much.

We'll start quickly with a Chair's report. So I want to thank everyone. This is my first meeting, and so far the welcome has been very warm. I used to sit where Chris is sitting now, and
I've moved over a seat and it's a good view. So I look forward to working with everybody, and I want to especially thank the extremely dedicated staff of the TLC who make a job in leadership at the TLC very, very easy. So thank very much for all the Deputy Commissioners and for their staff who put together lots of reports and lots of information packets to make our job setting policy efficient.

Just quickly, I want to say, we are on a tight schedule today. We have another hearing in the afternoon on Vision Zero, so I'm going to ask that all the speakers respect the three-minute deadline.

We are going to give you a quick summary of what we've been up to in the last few months because it's been a few months since we had a Commission meeting. Our call
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center's been extremely active, handling almost 15,000 calls a month, reuniting people with lost property: a grandmother regained her prayer beads, young musician regained his guitar, and a passenger who lost a laptop and a blank checkbook, which is a real miracle in New York.

We got a new system in licensing, Q-Matic, which will automate the system for waiting in line to get your license. But I think what it will do, more importantly, it will measure for the public the real start-to-finish licensing time so people can understand how long the entire process takes, including paperwork and fingerprinting. And we've improved LARS, our license application and renewal system, so licensees can go online to update their contact information, which is
very important to us in case we need to get in touch with you.

We had a cadet class graduate two weeks ago of 16, and we have a new cadet class that will start in the summer of over 60 inspectors. And we hope to have another cadet class in the fall, which will greatly improve our enforcement efforts, and that is getting illegal straight plates off the streets and enforcing against people who do hails that are unauthorized to do hails, be they licensed liveries or greens in the yellow zone.

So with that, I want to just turn to the adoption of minutes, December 19th Commission meeting. All in favor?

(Chorus of ayes.)

CHAIRWOMAN JOSHI: And with that, the December 19th, 2013 Commission meeting minutes are
And next we'll go to base applications. Chris Tormey from Licensing will do the honors.

MR. TORMEY: Good morning. Good morning, Commissioner. This morning we have 16 new bases for approval and 3 denials. My name's Chris Tormey, director of applicant licensing with the Taxi & Limousine Commission.

CHAIRWOMAN JOSHI: All in favor?

(Chorus of ayes.)

CHAIRWOMAN JOSHI: With that, your recommendations are adopted.

MR. TORMEY: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN JOSHI: And now we can turn to I think the reason why the room is so packed today, and thankfully, and that is the rules that are scheduled for hearing that would make our fleet
50 percent accessible by the year 2020. I think this has been a long both policy and legal battle and I'm really fortunate, I think, to be at the helm of seeing it resolved and seeing it resolved in a way that brings about such access for so many.

Before I start, I do want to read one statement from Commissioner Gonzales, who was unable to attend today's hearing but did want to be here. And then after that we'll move to hearing public testimony from everybody who's here today, and from that we'll move to the vote -- I'll actually hold off on Commissioner Gonzales's testimony until after we've heard from the public.

Chris Wilson, Deputy General Counsel, will introduce the rule, and we'll get started with the hearing.
MR. WILSON: For our public hearing today is the Commission's rules to implement the proposed settlement with Disability Rights Advocates and convert the taxi fleet to 50 percent accessibility by 2020. The rules were published in the City Record on March 27th, 2014, with a comment deadline of April 28th, 2014. On April 25th, 2014, we posted on our website and sent to the Commissioners the final rule for action this morning, which included changes to the proposed rule as a result of staff comment, including changes resulting from numerous stakeholder meetings that the TLC has been holding on these issues.

We've received 27 written comments on the proposed rules through the comment deadline, copies of all comments have been provided to the Commissioners. The
principal changes to the rules as originally proposed are providing a process for annual review of the Taxicab and Street Hail Livery Improvement Funds, beginning in 2017, to assess the funding of the funds, including review of the cost the funds will help cover and whether the funds and the surcharges are adequate under the circumstances to cover such cost, based on actual experience. The review will include a recommendation whether the surcharge should be raised or lowered.

In addition, the rules were modified to provide for the possibility that the Street Hail Livery Improvement Fund can be used to fund the dispatch program.

I believe we have a presentation from TLC staff on these rules.
CHAIRWOMAN JOSHI: Ashwini Chhabra, Deputy Commissioner of Policy, will do a brief presentation on the rules and how they will operate.

MR. CHHABRA: Good morning, Commissioners. I'm Ashwini Chhabra, Deputy Commissioner for Policy here at TLC, and Happy New Year, since we haven't seen each other in a while. I will indeed keep this brief, as we've talked about this issue quite a bit. I thought it would be helpful to sort of sketch out in plain English for the Commission and for the industry just how this -- how these rules will work in practice and what the impact on the riding public and on the industry will be. So, and I will not speak to the economic justice and the civil rights components of these rules. I think there are plenty of speakers you're
going to hear from today who can
much more eloquently speak to
those. What I want to talk about
here is the mechanics of it and the
process over the next few years of
how this gets implemented.

So really quickly, what
we're going to do is go over what
we've been doing in the field of
accessibility and taxis in New York
over the last few years, briefly
sketch out the plan that these
rules set forward, and then talk
about what the next steps are for
implementation.

As you, no doubt, know, we,
New York City, was a leader in this
initiative. We sold the first
wheelchair-accessible-only
medallions starting in 2004. That
has gotten us, for the last few
years, a fleet of 231
wheelchair-accessible taxicabs that
are on the street. This represents
only 1.8 percent of the taxi fleet, which makes accessing this network extremely difficult for wheelchair passengers.

In 2008 we piloted a dispatch program that had -- that was a great learning experience for us in designing what will be -- what is now our permanent program that is currently up and running and has been for the last two years. As I've provided periodic updates to you, this program continues to grow. I think when we launched it, we were averaging about 50 to 65 trips a day. Most recently it's been averaging 150 trips a day, and we saw as many as 200 trips a day as recently as last month.

So it is a program that is giving people access to the accessible vehicle fleet, but it's still not immediate access in the
way that street hailing would
provide. And so that's something
that we're also addressing through
the sale of additional accessible
medallions. We've sold 400, 175 of
those are on the street. So, in
effect, in the last few months
we've almost doubled the
wheelchair-accessible fleet, and
that's in operation. And as more
of those cars come online, the
fleet will become increasingly
accessible to the point where after
we've sold those 2,000, about
15 percent of the taxi fleet will
be wheelchair accessible. So
that's where these rules come in.

And the first, the first
practical effect of these rules is,
starting this June, all new drivers
will receive wheelchair passenger
assistance training so that the
next generation of drivers is going
to be appropriately trained to be
able to provide trips in
wheelchair-accessible taxis, and
all existing drivers, following
their next license renewal, will
also be required to take this
accessibility training. So we're
well on our way to having a driver
segment that knows how to drive
these vehicles and to provide
passengers the appropriate
assistance to board and to use
these vehicles.

The next step that these
rules would implement is starting
in January of next year, a 30-cent
taxicab improvement surcharge would
be added to fares to help defray
the costs of the accessibility and
other initiatives that we're
talking about here today. This is,
the 30 cents -- I'll talk about in
more detail -- would go towards the
cost that owners bear to make their
vehicles accessible, and it would
go to defray driver costs in the
additional training and driving of
these vehicles. And that's an
amount that will start in 2015.
And then the actual provision --
the conversion of these vehicles
starts January 2016, or the earlier
of when there is a
hybrid-accessible vehicle, so that
there's a period in 2015 where
there is an accumulation of
funds so that -- and this we did
out of fiscal prudence -- did not
want the funds to ever face a
shortfall when it comes to funding
accessibility.

I just want to spend a
minute talking about the concept of
the fund because I know some people
have some questions about, well,
why do you do it through a fund, do
you have to do it through a fund.
And our reasons, really, are
three-fold. One is, and we'll talk
about sort of how we're selecting who's going to be accessible, but for independent medallions that are required to convert, the surcharge amount actually is not enough to pay for the upfitting and the maintenance of those vehicles. You really do need about two vehicles' worth of surcharge. And so pooling the funds centrally and dispersing it only to those folks who are putting accessible vehicles into service accomplishes that.

This, also, this avoids payment of -- collection of a surcharge amount by owners of wheelchair-accessible medallions. This is the 2,231 whose medallions indicate that you already have to have an accessible vehicle. Those who already have an accessible vehicle, there's no need for additional funding for those medallions. And then, also, the
goal here is to tie the funding to
the actual provision of the
service. And so not until a
medallion is required to provide
accessible service should there be
a payment, and in order to do that,
the surcharges need to be collected
into a fund and dispersed out from
there. And we can come back to
that concept as well. And then the
goal here with the conversions is
by 2020 you would have half the
taxi fleet being wheelchair
accessible.

So this is how we go about
selecting which of the vehicles --
this will be easy if it were a
100 percent or a zero percent rule,
but it's because it's 50 percent
that you add some complexity, but
it's necessary complexity. So I
appreciate you bearing with me.
And this is an effort to actually
simplify some of that complexity.
Many fleet medallions, as you know, are owned in pairs, it's pretty straightforward. One of each pair, the first retiring vehicle of a mini-fleet pair would be required to be accessible. Where it gets a little tricky is independent medallions, which are obviously not owned in pairs. What we'll do there is conduct a lottery to pick at random which vehicles need to convert and which don't in the first retirement cycle. And if you're not picked in the first retirement cycle, you'll need to convert on the second retirement cycle. So this provides the industry with clarity on here's who has to retire and when so they can plan accordingly.

The third aspect of this is, which is in the rules, is a concept of transfer period. And this is an acknowledgement that, as
government, we can pick one of every other medallion, or we can say one of each mini-fleet pair should be convertible, but that's not necessarily the correct business outcome. And so we leave it to the industry to determine amongst themselves who's the least cost-avoider and who's best able to bear this responsibility. So there's a transfer period, after we've designated who is required to convert, where the industry can come back and transfer that obligation. Along with that is the transfer of a grant amount that's received from the fund, such that, at the end of the process, you still have 50 percent of the fleet being required to be accessible, but it's the industry and it's the market that's determining who is going to bear the responsibility in which period.
This is just an illustration of what the phase-in looks like from now till 2020. Again, this assumes no early retirements, it assumes full compliance with these rules. But, as you can see, by early 2020, we should be at 50 percent.

Really briefly on the 30 cents, 25 cents of that surcharge adheres to the benefit of vehicle owners for the vehicle purchase. The delta between an accessible vehicle and a non-accessible vehicle, the additional operating expenses of operating an expensive vehicle, and the ongoing cost of potential days out of service due to the increased maintenance cost will be paid out of that 25-cent portion of the fund. There is a portion of the fund that goes to driver costs. Again, as I mentioned, additional training,
additional fuel costs associated
with the vehicles, and potential
impacts on income is funded out of
that.

One thing that's worth
mentioning here, you know, I've
heard from folks, well, 5 cents
seems pretty anemic. Let me just
translate what that actually means.
This is 5 cents coming out of every
fare in every vehicle. So there
are 175 million taxi trips every
year, that's 5 cents from each of
those goes into the fund. The
payout is not necessarily 5 cents.
We're going to have to do
subsequent rule making that
addresses the specifics of the fund
mechanics, but if you're saying one
of every two vehicles has to be
accessible, it stands to reason
that drivers driving inaccessible
vehicles gets the payout that's
collected from every vehicle. So,
as an illustration, you could be paying drivers 10 cents per trip. Again, doesn't seem like a huge number. That's about $500 a year. Think of it as a $2 reduction in the lease cap for a driver who opts to drive a wheelchair-accessible vehicle. So that's an incentive also for the drivers to drive the wheelchair-accessible vehicles.

This, I think, is important, to see what impact, if any, the surcharge has on taxi fares in New York compared to our peer cities. This is something you saw when we were considering the lease cap and fare increase. What happens with the surcharge is New York inches ahead of Los Angeles in terms of average fare, but it is still well behind London and several other cities. But what's also illustrative is the fact that New York would, at the end of this
process, have a 50 percent accessible fleet. And that really puts us in moving in the right direction on this issue.

This is important, and I know Chris had alluded to this, there is going to be an annual review mechanic that's starting in 2017. The staff is going to come back to the Commissioners with a full accounting for here's what money was collected, here's where that money was spent, here's who received it, so that there's full transparency around this. This is not, let's all readily acknowledge, this is not a small undertaking. This is a fund that will raise north of $50 million every year, and every penny of that has to be accounted for. And it has to go towards accessibility and there has to be clear transparency for everyone who wants to know, where
is my 30 cents going, and is it
going to accessibility and is it
being used appropriately.

Part of that review is also
determination whether that
surcharge needs to be modified. A
lot of folks have brought up the
idea of, well, there are tax
credits out there and what impact
does that have in the cost of
running an accessible vehicle, are
there alternate sources of funding.
So this is our commitment that
every year we're going to come back
with a full and complete assessment
for the Commission. And, at that
point, the Commission obviously has
the ability to modify the surcharge
and to revisit the amounts of the
grants that are made available.

Worth noting is that the
same 30-cent surcharge will apply
on street hail livery vehicles as
they do for yellow taxis. Same
split, the 25 cents/5 cents. Again, there does need to be a subsequent rule making that addresses the mechanics of the funds and will be forthcoming in the next few months. And so the next steps basically are these additional rules, the collection starting next year, the rules relating to SHLs as well, and then the periodic annual review.

I think that is probably it, and I'm happy to answer any questions, but I wanted to keep it brief so we could hear from folks who have more to share with you on that.

CHAIRWOMAN JOSHI: Thank you.

Are there any questions?
(No response.)

CHAIRWOMAN JOSHI: We have Borough President Gale Brewer present, ready to testify, so I'd
like to invite her to come up to
the podium now.

Thank you very much for
making time to be with us today.

MS. BREWER: Thank you very
much. I am Gale Brewer, the
Manhattan Borough President, and I
really appreciate the opportunity
to testify today in support of the
proposed rule changes that will
increase dramatically the
availability of
wheelchair-accessible taxis.

So I was in the Council for
12 years, as some of you know, and
I learned from all of our
constituents that navigating the
City of New York with a mobility
disability is not easy. And we
know that our entire bus fleet is
now wheelchair accessible -- I
thank then Council Member Ruth
Messinger for doing that -- and
currently just 110 of the city's
421 subway stations meet the ADA standards, and we all know Access-A-Ride. I'm not going to talk about that today.

But the city's taxi system, which is an invaluable part of our transportation fabric, could serve as an important resource for city residents who use wheelchairs. Unfortunately, even with the 300 new accessible medallions introduced last fall, fewer than 10 percent of the 13,237 yellow and green taxis are currently wheelchair accessible, and we all know the city could do better.

So I've heard lots of stories and we all know folks who have limited transportation options. So, limited transportation options are even more serious in an emergency. Wheelchair users have been stranded for hours -- we know people, I know
people -- in the middle of the night unable to find accessible transportation to visit a loved one in the hospital, for instance. And you'll also know that people have found getting away from the challenges of a hurricane, like Sandy, are also very, very challenging, and even in the aftermath is a challenge, or to a friend's home.

And so for all of these reasons, I am supportive of the proposed rule changes before the Commission to increase the number of accessible taxis to at least 7500 by 2020. This increase will bring New York into compliance with the settlement from last November's class-action lawsuit. It will improve service for the 90,000 city residents who use wheelchairs. The elderly, veterans, children, and I have many friends who are tourists.
who are in wheelchairs. So improving this accessibility will not only benefit New Yorkers, but everyone.

Increasing the accessibility of our taxi fleet is not only the right thing, it is also financially prudent. Under the federal Medicaid law, New York State is responsible for ensuring that Medicaid beneficiaries have access to health services. This includes, as you know, the costs involved with travel to and from healthcare providers. It's known as non-emergency medical transportation, NEMT. And according to several reports, reimbursements for a round-trip trip in a taxi or livery service costs an average of $20 per trip in New York City. A round-trip ride in an ambulette service is around $70. However, partly due to the
inaccessibility of our taxi fleet,
90 percent of NEMT trips occur via
ambulette rather than through the
less expensive taxi or livery.

In 2009, this translated
into an annual payment of over
$201 million for ambulette
services, only $5 million for taxis
and liveries. So Medicaid
beneficiaries who use wheelchairs
will be more likely to use the less
expensive if it was available.

So I know that there's
concerns surrounding the costs
associated with increasing the
accessibility of taxis. The
Greater New York Taxi Association
estimates the cost of upgrading,
each taxi will be about $14,000.
And there's obviously a 30-cent per
ride surcharge that could help.

So, I am supportive of the
plan before the Commission. I want
to just give you a couple of
concerns.

50 percent accessibility, number one. While the proposed rule changes will dramatically increase the number of wheelchair-accessible taxis, a fleet that is 50 percent accessible is still 50 percent inaccessible. Though an improvement, this will translate into fewer options and longer wait times for New Yorkers with mobility disabilities. While the plan before the Commission will make New York City a leader in accessibility, other cities around the globe have gone further. Luckily, we're not talking about San Francisco, we're actually talking about London. Every time I think of something, San Francisco's done it already. But here it is, it's London. They have 19,000 taxis.

Dispatch services, number
two. I applaud the recent creation of the dispatch service that allows individuals to request accessible taxis via 311. This service will become even more important, however, once our fleet offers increased options for New Yorkers who have wheelchairs. The dispatch service, therefore, should be improved and expanded. A central dispatch system for the green outer boroughs is needed.

In summary, New York is a world-class city with first-rate transportation. Unfortunately, however, New Yorkers with mobility disabilities do not have equal access to the system. However, if by 2020 we have at least 7500 wheelchair-accessible, yellow and green cabs circulating throughout New York, we will have moved closer to providing all of our city's residents with a first-rate
transportation system.

Thank for this opportunity.

Thank you very much.

CHAIRWOMAN JOSHI: Thank you.

Next we have Mr. Matos, who's here on behalf of Council Member Rodriguez, who's chair of the Transportation Committee.

MR. MATOS: Good morning.

Council Member Rodriguez was not able to be here, as he needs to proceed over the efficiency of our hearing taking place at City Council. So, I'll read:

"Good morning, Commissioner Joshi, members of the Hearing Committee, TLC officials and members of the public. As Chair of the Transportation Committee at City Council, it is my pleasure to testify before this Committee on the proposed accessibility rules. These rules promise increased
accessibility of our city taxis for
disabilities, and for that I
applaud the Commission. I also
want to again congratulate Meera
Joshi on her appointment to chair
the Commission.

"First, let me be clear in
stating that I absolutely support
the creation of more accessible
taxi for people with disabilities
and the goal of the rules to be
adopted here in relation to it. I
hope that this is the first step
towards 100 percent accessibility
of our city taxis for people with
disabilities. I only ask that,
since the implementation of the
accessibility rules will predate
the implementation of the
surcharge, which does not go into
effect until January 1st, the
surcharge be implemented under
these rules continue to be
evaluated for its necessity prior to that date.

"When it comes to such an important matter as this one, which will affect so many people, we have to make sure we undertake the maximum amount of diligence. We have to ensure that while we create more physically accessible taxi units for members of our disability community, this service still remains financially accessible to them as well.

"As the fleet becomes more accessible, the hope is that more people with disabilities will use this service, as they are often under-served by other modes of transportation. However, if the price is too high, the purpose is defeated because many disabled people live on fixed incomes. In fact, someone with a disability wrote to the Council expressing
this very same concern, that the cost of the accessible taxis and street hail liveries won't be affordable. Thus, it is with extremely -- it will be extremely important that the Commission continue to evaluate the proposed surcharge at all times and explore alternate means to pay for the added cost of an accessible taxi fleet.

"I thank the TLC staff for adding to the draft rules a mechanism to continue to evaluate the surcharge and seeing annually whether it is still necessary or can be lowered, or even eliminated. The surcharge should not be considered permanent. It would be very easy to think of it that way, but that should be, and apparently is not, the attitude that the Commission is taking."

"I commend the Commission
for taking this approach, and I
trust the Agency will continue to
maintain such an approach into the
future. I look forward to continue
working with the Taxi & Limousine
Commission to improve the quality
of transportation services in our
city."

MR. WILSON: Thank you.

We'll now call the remaining
speakers who have signed up to
speak. When you come up to speak,
I'll ask two things of you. First,
state your name for the record, and
if you're in here on behalf of an
organization, state the
organization's name as well;
second, because we have a very long
list of speakers today, I really
would ask everybody to stick to
three minutes. We have received
all of your written comments and
we've distributed them all to the
Commissioners.
The first speaker I have listed is Ronnie Ellen Raymond. Is Ms. Raymond here? UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yes, she's approaching.

MR. WILSON: Oh, okay.

MS. RAYMOND: It will take me a minute. Sorry.

MR. WILSON: It's all right.

MS. RAYMOND: Good morning, Commissioners, especially welcome to Commissioner Joshi. My name is Ronnie Ellen Raymond. My statement today is very simple and, I hope, short.

Reliable, accessible transportation changes my life. When I can be counted on to participate with my family, friends and colleagues, my life becomes full. I'm no longer relegated to stay home or to spend hours, literally, trying to get somewhere that takes everybody else
20 minutes, always arriving late, anxious and angry. I want to have a life that is meaningful, affordable and achievable.

Given my circumstances, which I did not choose, wheelchair-accessible taxis and liveries will significantly change my life. It is now time and within your authority to make this happen. Please help thousands of people like me. Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN JOSHI: Thank you.

MR. WILSON: And next I would ask James Weisman to come up and speak.

MR. WEISMAN: Good morning, Commissioners. Thank you. I'm very proud to be here on this historic day with you. I hope that you enact this rule.

My name is James Weisman.

I'm the senior vice president and
general counsel of the United
Spinal Association. United Spinal
Association used to be known as
Eastern Paralyzed Veterans
Association, and in that
capacity -- we've been
transportation advocates in both
capacities -- we've been
transportation advocates since the
1940s in New York City for people
with mobility impairments.

Since I've been the general
counsel, which seems like eons,
we've made buses and subways, at
least some subway stations,
accessible; only 81 are currently
accessible, going to a little over
a hundred by 2020, because that was
all right-thinking the most liberal
democrats would agree to in 1984.
So you can see, we've really
progressed. But because we've
created special transportation
needs by denying people access --
there's nothing special about the
desire to get from point A to point
B, the only thing that's special is
the inability to access vehicles --
MTA decided to use Paratransit,
Access-A-Ride, as its workhorse.
Mayor Koch said it would be
cheaper to pick up everyone in
limousines than to make mass
transit accessible. He predicted
you could use Paratransit only for
$9 million a year. This year's
Access-A-Ride budget is $575
million. Another $200 million, and
that's with 100,000 trips a month
on the bus by wheelchair users,
which has been a solid number, way
over 100,000, for over 20 years.

We were the first city in
the nation to have a 100 percent
accessible bus fleet, by the way.
But buses don't go into boroughs,
at least most of them, and New York
City Transit eliminated most of
those routes because they weren't productive routes for them financially because everyone uses the subway, except people with mobility impairments because there's so little access. So they call Access-A-Ride to change boroughs or make longer trips.

It's a difficult process to access a ride on Access-A-Ride with the advanced reservation, and the negotiated response times, and spontaneity is not possible, so the business travel, staying late after work, coming in early, all that stuff's out of question if you're an Access-A-Ride-dependant person. It limits your employability. But it still costs $575 million, and it's going up exponentially. Only ten years ago it was $200 million. They have to meet demand. ADA requires them to meet demand.

Nobody's pulling all these
transportation systems together
that people with disabilities
access. And great cost savings
will be achieved by you enacting
this rule. Medicaid is spending
$200 million a year just to get
poor wheelchair users to medical
facilities. Most times the doctor
receives less in payment than the
transportation provider, yet all of
those dollars are budgeted as
healthcare dollars. And it's just
the five boroughs, $200 million.

We're losing countless
tourists, business meetings. My
organization won't hold a meeting
in New York because it's too
difficult. You can't get out of
the airport. We're a national
organization with 40,000
wheelchair-using members. We can't
get people from the airport into
the city until now. Until now.

Things are changing
dramatically and quickly because the fleet turns over so quickly. I believe that this will -- you'll see Medicaid start load-shifting, and its riders, because case workers will do this. It won't be the result of great transportation planning, it should have been, but what will happen is people will take advantage of least cost alternatives. And the lowest cost alternative will be the taxi for the Medicaid transportation planner.

Access-A-Ride will load shift when it can and it's buying accessible taxis. It's reinventing the wheel. If you ask me, we've already got a taxi fleet in service. And if it were accessible, it could be Access-A-Ride's workhorse. But they are buying these accessible taxis themselves realizing the
This is a remarkable day. We'll be the first city in the country to do it. We changed the meaning of the word "bus." In 1980 the word "bus" meant inaccessible bus. Now there is not a single mass transit bus in the United States that is not accessible. So you don't have to say "accessible bus," "bus" means "accessible bus." "Taxi," if you do this today, 20 years from now, taxis in America will be accessible. Small towns will have them and they'll be taking people on medical trips and to work with disabilities. Suburbs will be using them to feed people to commuter rail systems and mass transit systems to get them into the city to work, and, of course, the cities will be operating them.

I have a letter here, which
you've already received, from Senator Harkin. Tom Harkin is a senator from Iowa that's a good friend of the disability community and the primary sponsor of the Americans With Disabilities Act in 1990. And he testifies before you today by this letter saying, look, in Iowa, things are different, I know that. And he almost is apologizing for telling people in New York what to do. But he says, you can't come here and not see these taxis.

He says, in a pertinent part, let me read you his exact words: "The bottom line is this: the rapid transition to an accessible taxi fleet will benefit everyone in this city. Taxi drivers will have an increased number of possible passengers, businesses will have new customers who will be happy to visit their
stores. And it would be easier for everyone, including seniors, to get in and out of a taxi. Families with young children will take their strollers into taxis, and, of course, people using wheelchairs, walkers or other mobility devices will be able to hail a taxi and secure a ride just as anyone else in the city. Accessible taxis will mean a better quality of life for everyone."

He goes on to say: "I urge the Commission to approve this plan and to make one of the key modes of transportation for New Yorkers available to all New Yorkers who live as well as visit your great city."

And on behalf of United Spinal Association, I want to thank you for the opportunity to be heard and thank you in advance for your positive votes on this measure.
Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN JOSHI: Thank you.

MR. WILSON: Thank you.

The next speaker is Julia Pinover.

MS. PINOVER: Good morning, Commissioners, and, Chairwoman, welcome. I'm Julia Pinover, I'm a senior staff attorney at Disability Rights Advocates. We represent the plaintiffs in the class action that brought this rule to the table today.

The rule that's on the table today is a direct result of the lawsuit, and, if enacted, it would mark the fruitful end to years of negotiation. The regulation has been carefully thought out by both persons with disabilities, the parties' lawyers and the city itself. The proposal is actually a carefully crafted compromise. In
fact, both the city and Disability
Rights Advocates compromised on the
number and the percentage of
vehicles to reach 50 percent. We
compromised on the period of time
during which accessibility will be
phased in, which is 2016 to 2020;
we compromised on allowing
inaccessible vans to remain on the
street while access is being phased
in under this deal. And this is a
very bold step.

The current Commissioners,
you, are in a very privileged
position because you have the
opportunity to make history today.
The reason to approve the rule is
that it's the right thing to do.
This is a rule that will give tens
and thousands of New Yorkers and
visitors the ability to travel
spontaneously. As Ms. Brewer and
Jim Weisman and several -- and
Ronnie Raymond have already
mentioned, traveling spontaneously is not just important day to day, which is very -- it's critical day to day, it's also important during crisis situations. It's important late at night to keep safe; it's important getting to the hospital; it's important to get to your kid's baseball game.

The rule phases in accessibility gradually so no vehicles will be required to be taken off the road before their time. The rule also takes into account the need for clean air and hybrids and allows for development of new and competitively priced accessible cabs. The rule is something that everyone, but most of all, the TLC, can be incredibly proud of and I urge you to vote Yes on accessibility today. Thank you very much.

MR. WILSON: Thank you.
MS. PRENTISS: Good morning.

My name is Edith Prentiss and I'm the Chair of the Taxis For All Campaign. This is an awesome day. I'm looking forward to the day when an accessible taxi will replace the inaccessible taxi as the symbol of transportation in New York City.

Ironically, 2020, when we'll have at least 50 percent accessible taxis, is also the same year that New York City Transit will make the 100 key stations, Lord willing. At this point, I'd be happy if you'd have a beauty shot of an accessible taxi. All the pages on the web that are about accessible taxis, what do you illustrate them with? Come on people, there's got to be a pretty taxi out there.

The Campaign has been working for accessible taxis in New
York City since 1995 when Bobby Levine rode in an accessible taxi in Boston. We've participated in dozens of forums and meetings with everyone under the sun, as you all know, ad nauseum, we've written testimony, we've had roll-ins, et cetera. And today is a really great day for us, and I certainly hope that the entire City of New York realizes what an important day today is as well.

Marvin Wasserman, who was one of the founders of the Taxis For All Campaign's late wife Sandra Schnur's comment was that she wished she had the freedom to travel anywhere, any time, in her power chair. Now, in those days, it wasn't even as accessible as it is now, pre-Access-A-Ride, pre-accessible buses, we're talking about pre-subways. Everyone traveled either in their own
vehicles or by ambulettes.

The lack of accessible travel is a very important factor in our community and in our lives. The disability community has a terrible unemployment issue, which a great deal involves such things as the inability to have sure, safe, accessible transportation. We look forward to some day people pointing to New York City and saying how we're 100 percent accessible as well. Thank you very much.

MR. WILSON: Thank you. Next speaker is Jean Ryan.

MS. RYAN: Hi. I'm from Disabled in Action, and we're members of the Taxis For All Campaign, too.

I've been involved in this for, like, 14 or 15 years. We're never giving up. We need transportation, and you know we're
never giving up. One of the reasons we need it is because we need to go places with our families. My six-year-old grandson made this poster (indicating). It says, "I need a taxi," and it's got his little childish drawing, because he knows that we can't take a taxi together, and it's really, really frustrating. And I didn't even ask him to make this. Obviously, you know, he made it from a scrap.

Okay. My testimony is partly for my friend, Maureen Green, who died last summer. But when her mother was dying, she was called in the middle of the night to come to the hospital right away because they didn't think her mother would last long, and she couldn't go because the bus wasn't running yet. And she had no other way to go. This is why we need
We need accessible taxis and accessible car services that we don't have to book the day before. You know, it's just insane. We can't live our lives. We can't get to funerals, we can't get to wakes, we can't go to anything spontaneous if we're stuck some place and we need to get someplace fast, like everybody else. We can't take cars -- a taxi. We can't go to the cemetery. If we book Access-A-Ride, we don't know when -- we have to tell them the exact time we need to come back. But do you always know? Of course not. So this is why we need spontaneous transportation.

It's really nerve-racking if we -- I've broken my ankle twice in the last few years and I couldn't get to the hospital, you know, by a taxi or a car service. Can you
imagine having to wheel to the hospital? I mean, it's just insane. But, you know, if I call an ambulance, they won't take my chair. What am I going to do, call an ambulance, leave my expensive chair in the street while I go to the hospital? That doesn't work either. So, you know, I'd have to be almost dead before I go in an ambulance and leave my chair, so, you know, like I wouldn't have a choice for that to happen.

But it's not only sad events that we miss. We miss births of our children and grandchildren. We can't get to the hospital on time. I have a two-month old granddaughter, and the way I got to the hospital while my daughter was still there and my granddaughter was I wheeled in the snow for a mile and a half. You know, I mean, I can't book a trip ahead of time,
you know, I can't take a taxi or
car service when there's no notice.
And my husband has had to go to the
emergency room and I couldn't even
go with him because if it happens,
you know, sometimes you might not
be able to get there for two days
because if you have to book a trip
by Access-A-Ride, you can't book it
until the next day and then you go
the day after that. That's
ridiculous, for the emergency room.
And I have that worry because my
husband's older than I am, and I'm
afraid that if something happens I
won't be able to get there.

But it's not just me, it's
everybody. We're all having these
kinds of problems, day after day.
So, you know, this is great that
we're getting 50 percent, but I've
heard "at least 50 percent" in some
discussions. I don't know if the
rules says "at least," but usually
when it says "at least," that means the bottom, that we only get the bottom number. We need 100 percent. We really need to have just as much a chance of getting a cab as everybody else. Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN JOSHI: Thank you. And I just wanted to clarify, the rule is 50 percent, it is not at least 50 percent.

MS. RYAN: Sometimes I hear people saying that, you know.

CHAIRWOMAN JOSHI: That would be a mischaracterization of the rule.

MS. RYAN: Okay. Well, we could use 100.

MR. WILSON: The next speaker is Simi Linton, and following Simi Linton will be Crystal Rivera.

MS. LINTON: Good morning and thank you for being here. My
name is Simi Linton. I'm one of the originally named plaintiffs in the suit.

Having an accessible taxi fleet is essential for my basic safety, everyday welfare and to engage equitably in my professional life. New York's inadequate taxi service affects me daily because I use a wheelchair. It is outright discrimination. For example, I attend meetings all over the city. I use buses, which are slow and inefficient to get from one destination to another. As a result, I am limited in the number of meetings I can schedule in a day solely because it takes so long to get from one place to another. Because there are so few accessible taxis in circulation right now, the call-in taxi system is not sufficiently reliable on short notice to accommodate a busy
I am frequently waiting at bus stops with empty, non-accessible taxis whizzing past. It is nearly impossible to spot an accessible taxi in advance to be able to reliably hail it. Moreover, even on the rare occasion that I spot an accessible taxi, they rarely stop for me.

Third, a specific incident. My husband was taken to the hospital in an ambulance. I could not ride with him because the ambulance was not wheelchair accessible. I also could not get an accessible taxi to follow him to the hospital. It took over an hour and a half for me to get there using two buses. In the meantime, he was laying sick and alone at the hospital, and I was worried beyond words about his safety. There were empty taxis on the street, but they
were useless to me because they
were not accessible. A couple of
days later he was told he had to
have emergency surgery. Again, it
took an hour and a half and two
buses to reach the hospital. I
missed seeing him before the
surgery. He almost died, but
fortunately made a full recovery.

Right now, only people who
don't use wheelchairs can travel
freely, even during an emergency.

To be clear, I'm not talking about
situations when it is rush hour or
a busy holiday weekend or in the
midst of a rainstorm, when it is
difficult for anyone to get a taxi,
I am speaking of situations where
there are plenty of available
taxis, but I cannot use them. My
livelihood and my well-being and
the well-being of my family depend
on being able to use taxis, and I
can't reliably do that.
I sincerely urge the Commission to pass this rule and establish equity in this city.

Thank you.

MR. WILSON: Thank you.

Crystal Rivera, and following that next speaker, George Laszlo.

MS. RIVERA: My name is Crystal Rivera and I'm providing this testimony on behalf of Bronx Independent Living Services, BILS.

I have had the pleasure of serving as BILS youth advocate since 2013. Bills is a nonprofit community organization dedicated to empower people with disabilities to understand and exercise their civil and human rights in order to live fully integrated rights and lives in mainstream society. Our vision is to see a barrier-free society that provides equal access and opportunity for people with
disabilities and all access of
community life. As an individual
with a disability, I have
experienced many challenges
throughout life, transportation
being one of the most frustrating.
Having to plan your travels in
advance often removes spontaneity,
the spontaneity that non-disabled
people experience.

Growing up in the Bronx, I
can recall wanting to find an
easier way to travel with less
hassle just to be able to go
without researching accessible
routes that usually take double the
time and you end up stranded
somewhere. I remember thinking how
cool it would be just to be able to
hail a cab like people in the city
often do. My friends and I often
brainstorm about owning and
operating our own accessible
transportation company, but back
then it seemed like only a dream.

I currently reside in Chinatown and cannot stress enough how much of a difference that availability of accessible taxicabs have been in my life. I can now book a taxi and travel the same day without having to worry about planning in advance, which is invaluable to me. I often find myself commuting from meeting to meeting in the city. I can now go to doctor's appointments without having to worry if I'm done on time, I can even get to work in a pinch. And forget about my social life, it has blossomed so much since this service has been available.

The importance of accessible taxi fleet cannot be measured. Taxis should be enjoyed by all New Yorkers. They are a trademark of the city and a valuable resource.
for everyone. They provide safety and, overall, freedom. The service has the power to change the lives of many, including mine, and the people I serve at BILS, as well as all New Yorkers with mobility impairments. Thank you for allowing me to speak.

MR. WILSON: Thank you.

George Laszlo, and following, Joseph Kaiteris.

MR. LASZLO: Good morning. Is it still morning by the way?

My name is George Laszlo. I'm coming to you as a resident of the city to discuss this particular proposal of these rules, and there are two things that I would like to talk to you about today that I'm very concerned about. One is how the program is paid for, and, second, how it's implemented.

First, let me say that I'm 100 percent for what you're trying
to achieve here, and, in fact, I would love to see if the mobility is 100 percent and not 50 percent, as many of the speakers have said already. I think that Gale Brewer brought up the City of London, where, in fact, that is the case, 100 percent of the vehicles are accessible, wheelchair accessible. They achieved that, by the way, over 11 years, but it's a reality today. So they're already ahead of us on that particular score.

So, Ms. Joshi, first, I wanted to congratulate you on being back over here. I did go to the hearing where you appeared in front of the City Council members, and I have to tell you, I got a kick out of your family being there. I thought it was really wonderful that they were there, and obviously shows the support that you get from them and the pride that they have
in you. But I also remember that when you talked in front of the Council that you said that you're very much in favor of the process that's followed, or having a rigid process followed. And I would like to specifically bring that up today because I'm concerned about the way that this particular set of proposals has gone down to achieve to be voted on today. So, and I think, maybe, it will be clear once I tell you what my issues are.

So, first, how it's paid for. From my perspective, this kind of proposal came out of nowhere. I know that a lot of people have been involved in it in the past, of course, and I know that it was negotiated to avoid more legal wrangling. But I have a problem with it because I think that the implementation that's in front of us has been poorly thought
out, and it's not -- it's somewhat contrary to the process methodology that I would expect from the TLC, and especially since you're going to vote on it directly today, if I understand things correctly.

So as a resident, I have to tell you that I'm totally opposed to any subsidies that you give to this industry. I don't think that they need to be supported. I would like to remind you that they willingly spent millions and millions of dollars, in fact, about a quarter billion dollars for their medallions, for 168 medallions that were just sold this year. And if the numbers are correct and you sell all 2,000, that means that there will be an income to the city of about somewhere between $1.6 and $2.2 billion, if I understand correctly, all of it going into the general fund. And maybe that's not
correct.

So by telling me, as a resident, that you're going to charge 30 cents to support this program -- which, by the way, is not a lot of money, and I think that's actually the issue at hand here -- that you're telling me that the city itself is not willing to use the money from the medallion sales to support anything having to do with this service, and you're also telling me that the industry who is willing to shell out $2 billion for medallions and can easily finance them, is not willing to pay for the cars, so, but somehow it's okay to tack on 30 cents that comes out of my pocket.

Now, I have to tell you that if you already have bills, like phone bills and cable bills, it's full of charges, surcharge this, surcharge this. I literally have
to pay $9 to Time Warner before I even turn on the TV set. So when does this stop? When do you stop taking money from my pocket, and, by the way, out of the pockets of the people who are in these wheelchairs, in order to fund this program?

So, I, basically, I'm for the program, but I would like you to reconsider how you're paying for it. I think that this industry can afford to do it. London did not give a single penny, or however they -- pound -- to the drivers or to the owners. And I'm also concerned about the drivers being shortchanged here because they've already complained to you about the tips -- is this going to stop at some point? No?

CHAIRWOMAN JOSHI: That's the time.

MR. LASZLO: Any case, so,
that's my first point, is that, really, I don't think this is the right way to pay for this program. I know it's the easy way out, because how many millions of New Yorkers are going to come out and tell you that I'm not paying 30 cents. In fact, they will.

They'll just accept it like everything else, like the 50-cent charge.

MR. WILSON: Can I ask you to summarize and conclude, because your way over your three minutes.

MR. LASZLO: Okay. Well, I mean, I think a lot of the speakers went over, I think, as well. So if you don't mind, just one more minute because my second point is my implementation point.

And if you take a look at the chart that I just gave you, I did do some homework before arriving here, and I think that you
will see from the chart that the problem that, as far as accessibility is concerned, is not even throughout the city. In fact, the biggest problem that you have is on Staten Island and in Brooklyn, which has that lowest and highest population in the city. And a lot of attention is being paid to yellow, which, as you know, basically operate in Manhattan, and even then, below 96th Street. In fact, the accessibility issue is not as great in Manhattan as it is anywhere else in the city.

So you need to, I think, consider that the way that you roll this program out, it's not easy just to say 50 percent all across the board, because that's not going to achieve, especially if it's only 50 percent, it's not going to achieve the kind of accessibility that you're looking for for all the
residents of New York City. That's five boroughs, not just Manhattan.

Okay. So thank you for you time.

MR. WILSON: Thank you.

MR. LASZLO: And I would like to ask you to please not actually vote on this today, but reconsider it and fix it and then come back and do it again. Thank you very much.

MR. WILSON: The next speaker is Joseph Kaiteris, and he will be followed by Elizabeth Ramos.

Mr. Kaiteris?

(No response.)

MR. WILSON: Then Elizabeth Ramos. And the next speaker will be Susan Dooha after Elizabeth.

MS. RYAN: No, Elizabeth Ramos is here. The first person you --

MR. WILSON: Yes.
MS. RYAN: -- mentioned isn't here?

MR. WILSON: Mr. Kaiteris?

Kaiteris?

(No response.)

MS. RYAN: Not here?

MR. WILSON: Doesn't seem to be.

Is Elizabeth Ramos here?

MS. RYAN: Yes, she is.

This is Elizabeth Ramos (pointing). She's having a breathing problem today, so I will read her testimony for her:

"I'm Elizabeth Ramos, and I'm a board member of Disabled in Action.

"Last August, of 2013, our family got news that my only brother was diagnosed with terminal cancer. Those four months were a very rough time of my life. My brother was in and out of hospitals. For me, getting to the
hospital was always complicated. I couldn't go see him unless I could make an Access-A-Ride reservation a day or two ahead of time. It was very hard because I never really knew when the van would show up or how long it would take to get there because they dropped off and picked up other people too. I would be so worried that he was going to die when I was on my way and would be dead when I got there. There were many times like that.

"Then when it was my minute to leave for the Access-A-Ride van, my ill brother would beg me to stay with him, but I couldn't or I would be stranded there with no ride and no oxygen. It would have been very good to be able to use a cab.

Thank you."

MR. WILSON: Thank you.

Susan Dooha.

MS. DOOHA: Good morning,
members of the Commission, and good morning, Chairperson. My name is Susan Dooha, and I'm the executive director of the Center for Independence of the Disabled in New York, CIDNY, founded in 1978. We're a civil rights organization dedicated to full integration and equal access for people with disabilities in New York City.

I have provided you with written testimony, but I want to add a couple of points today. I am a person with disabilities; you cannot see my disabilities. However, today, speaking before you, I am like you, a person with privilege; I can walk, I can hail a cab on the street, and they will stop for me. This is not the case for the employees of my organization and the members of my board of directors.

The majority of my board of
directors are people with
disabilities. Three out of four of
my staff are people with
disabilities, who are also
professionals -- attorneys, social
workers, paraprofessionals,
counselors -- with all kinds of
credentials; people who you would
be proud to employ; people who
struggle to get to work when the
elevator in the subway station
isn't working, if they can find
one; people who struggle to get to
work when the bus breaks down or is
too crowded for them to get on in
their wheelchair; people who have
to go out to meetings every day
with our many community partners;
and people who are constantly
called upon to appear before public
bodies on important matters of
public policy.

As an employer of people
with disabilities, it is absolutely
critical that we dramatically improve transportation options for people with disabilities. It is critical to me as a person who believes in civil rights that we make this important leap forward.

I hope that you will approve this rule today and help us make civil rights history here in New York City. It is not going the full distance, but it is an important step forward, a critical step, that you can take right now to make a difference. Thank you so much for listening.

MR. WILSON: Thank you.

The next speaker will be Ethan Gerber.

MR. GERBER: Good morning, Commissioners, and welcome to our new Chair, Meera Joshi. I'm Ethan Gerber, executive director of the Greater New York Taxi Association, a progressive taxi owners'
association that owns the vast
majority of wheelchair-accessible
taxi and has been the leader of
accessible initiatives since 2004.
We also pioneered hybrids, partners
with the Sergeants Benevolent
Association, provide safety
instructions for our drivers, and
with Memorial Sloan-Kettering, to
provide free healthcare navigation
services for our drivers.

Meera, in our various
meetings and dealings, my
impression of you has been one of
fairness and honesty. I hope your
appointment foreshadows a new era
of transparency and cooperation.

We agree with the intent of
these rules; wheelchair
accessibility has always been a
goal of Greater New York Taxi
Association. Some of the rules
show great wisdom, such as
universal driver training, which we
had been urging since 2008. That way, there will actually be enough drivers to operate the vehicles.

Having already been the leader in this field, we know that some of these goals will not be accomplished in the deadline set. These cars, if they are on the TOT, for example, are manufactured in Mexico, retrofitted in Arizona and then distributed. We have long waiting times now for these cars. This rule, unfortunately, is destined to not deliver what it promises.

I do want to point out one thing, though, that I didn't prepare, but I've heard about the "up to 50 percent," and I think it's fair to point out that the rules, as contemplated, will actually be over 50 percent because it only deals with non-limited medallion -- non-designated
medallions, not the ones that are already designated to be wheelchair accessible. So the numbers will actually be greater than 50 percent.

There are some problems with these rules. I think part of that arises because they were hastily reached and still arise from just one bad idea. That one bad idea, of course, is the Taxi of Tomorrow. About a year ago, there was a case in federal court, Taxis For All versus the Taxi & Limousine Commission. The disability advocates made a motion for partial summary judgement. The one issue in that motion was if the Taxi of Tomorrow, a Nissan Van 200 was a van, and if a van, would it be illegal is violative of the Americans With Disabilities Act. The city hired an expert at taxpayers' expense to argue that
the Nissan van was not a van, and
the federal judge was clearly
unimpressed by this opinion. While
that motion was pending, a
settlement was rushed to avoid the
obvious.

These rules are, therefore,
a result of that settlement, rushed
for one reason, a desperate attempt
to save the Taxi of Tomorrow. So
while we agree with the intent,
they do have some hasty and panicky
origins, they also contain some
illegal aspects and impractical
aspects.

As to the illegality, the
rules start with an amazing
declaration. They will go into
effect even if they violate the
law. The Accessible Conversion
Date, which is Section 4, Paragraph
A of the rules, states that it will
go into effect on the earlier of
either the date there is an
accessible vehicle that complies with Section 19-533, or January 1st, 2016. In other words, if there is no vehicle that complies with the law, 19-533, these rules will go into effect anyway on January 1st, 2016. That really is an amazing thing that I've never seen in legislation before in rule making -- can I continue please? -- the proposed rule actually says it will go into effect a year and a half from now, even if it violates the law. You even state in the rules what law you intend to break, 19-533. Thus, on its face, it's an illegal rule and you're voting to break a law and disregard the order of the court that already determined this issue as well.

As to the money, the 30 cents is a bureaucratic nightmare. Keeping track of the funds,
allocating the costs, et cetera, is going to create many, many issues. A simpler solution is simply raise the fare and allocate a portion to the driver --

MR. WILSON: Can I ask you to summarize and conclude, please, Mr. Gerber?

MR. GERBER: My conclusion is that the law is written, contemplates you violating a section of law, 19-533. It actually says it in the rule. It also is creating this fund in an unnecessary way. A much simpler way would be simply raise the rate of fare, have New Yorkers pay for the services that all New Yorkers need, and a growing population will need, and do it simply and cleanly. And let's do it right, the correct way. Thank you.

MR. WILSON: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN JOSHI: I just
want to respond to one point,
Mr. Gerber, on the alleged
illegality. I think it's sort of a
hypothetical illegality. Now,
there is a section of law, 19-533,
that says there must be a hybrid
option, and time will tell, on
January 1st, 2016, what the options
are and what 19-533 looks like.
And at that point, we'll be able to
judge the state of the rules as
compared to the Ad Code
requirements.

MR. GERBER: Right, except
that the Ad Code currently written
by the legislature and signed by
the mayor currently do require the
hybrid option. This was already
litigated in state court, you
already lost this issue in state
court. That issue was not
appealed, the second one was
appealed. So it is the law of the
land and it is currently the rule
in the Municipal Code.

So right now what you're saying in your rule is that we are going to pass this on January 1st, 2016, which is a year and a half away, whether or not it breaks the law or not. That is just a very strange and interesting thing to put into a law being passed today.

CHAIRWOMAN JOSHI: I think time will tell whether there's an illegality or not, but right now's it's a hypothetical.

MR. GERBER: It's a hypothetical that it won't break the law. Got it.

MR. WILSON: Thank you.

The next speaker is Gary Farberov.

MR. FARBEROV: Good morning, Commissioners, and Chair Joshi. Once again I want to applaud you on this proposed rule, and I hope that you will vote positively on this.
We believe that the City of New York absolutely needs every single cab to be wheelchair accessible. We know it's going to take some time for us to get there, but this is a very good start.

Once again I am appalled by what I hear here. Everything that we talk about is yellow taxis; everything that we talk about is the city of the New York, Manhattan. Once again the outer boroughs are being left out. I promise that there are more disabled riders in the outer boroughs than are living in Manhattan and we're not doing nothing about it.

I do -- on June 6, 2013, TLC approved 1200 green permits to be wheelchair accessible. How many of those cars are on the road?

CHAIRWOMAN JOSHI: There's over 400 wheelchair-accessible
street hail liveries on the road today representing about 9 percent of all the street hail liveries, which probably is a little higher percentage than the percentage of wheelchair-accessible vehicles in the yellow fleet. But there should be, there will be, when the rest of the wheelchair-accessible permit-holders hack up their vehicles, a total of 1200 wheelchair-accessible vehicles on the road. That will be 20 percent of the green fleet.

MR. FARBEROV: I represent 289 of those permits. We're only able to put 89 of those cars on the road. The reason for that is because TLC is hindering the process. There's indecision on every level, rule changes every single week --

CHAIRWOMAN JOSHI: I understand your concerns and I'm
more than happy to have somebody
from our Licensing Unit speak to
you on street hail livery and
accessible permits and any troubles
you may have in the efficiency of
that process.

MR. FARBEROV: It's not a
licensing issue at all.

CHAIRWOMAN JOSHI: Well,
we're more than happy to have
someone speak with you about that.
Today's rules are on the rules that
would make the yellow taxi fleet
50 percent accessible, so if we
could stick to testimony on that
issue, because many people are
waiting to speak, I'd appreciate
it.

MR. FARBEROV: Then I would
like to request a meeting with you
personally so we can discuss this.
Not one of the Commissioners and
not somebody from Licensing because
it never gets anything done. I
spoke with Mr. Yassky. He told me the same thing and nothing was done.

CHAIRWOMAN JOSHI: Somebody will speak with you in the back to arrange a meeting so we can discuss.

MR. FARBEROV: That's all I want. Thank you, Commissioner.

MR. WILSON: Thank you.

The next speaker is Joseph Rappaport.

MR. RAPPAPORT: I have several copies that I just wanted to hand to the Commissioners.

Good morning. I'm Joe Rappaport, and I have worked with the Taxis For All Campaign for the last decade, so this is a big day. I'm testifying today in support of the accessibility rules. Specifically, I'm testifying on behalf of several people, New Yorkers and out-of-towners, who
couldn't attend today's hearing. There are also a few other stories in an Op Ed today by Edith Prentiss in the Daily News, which has been a great ally. These men and women wrote us and submitted testimony about what a significant increase in accessible yellow taxis would mean for them. Here are excerpts from a few of their statements:

Madonna Long, a disability consumer advocate who lives in Pennsylvania and uses a manual wheelchair writes: "It is very frustrating to conduct business and even more so to be a tourist trying to see the sites of New York City if you can't use the average New York City taxi." She voiced support for the rules and adds that while she's been here many times for work, she would be more inclined to visit New York City if she new there were more accessible
Josh McDermott, who's a 23-year-old from Newburgh, north of the city, writes that he has used a power wheelchair his whole life. "I'm very independent," he writes, but he recounts the challenges of visiting his family here on the Upper East Side and in Chelsea. "As you know," he writes, "these locations are not walkable from one place to the other. The quickest way would be to take a cab. Every time I have done this in the past, I have to wait for 20 minutes, if not longer, for an accessible vehicle. This drives me crazy because while I wait, I see a bunch of empty cabs driving by."

Josh also describes canceled plans with friends and concert tickets unpurchased because of his worries about getting an accessible cab. He writes: "I would like to
be able to hail a cab just like
every other New Yorker in the
street," and he applauds the TLC
with moving forward with these
rules.

Anne Davis, a long-time
Taxis For All member and a
Manhattan resident who uses a
wheelchair, she writes about how
important getting an accessible
taxi can be. Her mom is 98, her
aunt is 100, in home hospice. She
visits them regularly to handle
their affairs, but she never knows
when she may get a call to get
there quickly, and an accessible
taxi would mean she could.

Debra Greif writes, from
Brooklyn, she writes about her
experience as a person with
disabilities, who is also the child
of a parent who has disabilities,
who used a wheelchair when she got
older. Her mother helped care for
her child, but could not pick up her son from school to take him to the doctor because there was no wheelchair-accessible taxis, and she had to do it. Even when she was sick, she had to pick up her son.

She also writes: "I knew of at least five families whose parents used wheelchairs who wished the taxis and car services were wheelchair accessible. Three of the parents were disabled vets."

Debra says she supports the accessible rules and believes that taxi, accessible taxi and car fleets will be financially advantageous for the city.

These New Yorkers and visitors support the accessibility rules and urge you to vote Yes today. Thank you.

MR. WILSON: Thank you.

Anthony Trocchia.
Good morning, Commissioners, good morning, Chair Joshi, and congratulations, Taxis For All. My name is Michael O'Loughlin. I am here on behalf of a group of New York City passengers who have come together under the name of taxi -- of Cab Riders United.

Ensuring that taxis are accessible for all New Yorkers is important. Therefore, it's important to get it right. Cab Riders United is prepared to strongly support the goal, and we do strongly support the goal, in making taxicabs accessible and
making them safe. Cab Riders United is prepared to support the proposed passenger accessibility surcharge provided that it aligns with the mayor's Vision Zero initiative, to reduce traffic-related deaths and injuries.

We strongly urge the TLC to protect the public by requiring that any TLC-approved vehicles, whether wheelchair accessible or not, that any TLC-approved vehicles must meet all federal crash occupant protection and EPA standards in the specification in which they are approved by the TLC to be placed into service.

The TLC, we would urge also, must require that all vehicles meet the durability requirements appropriate for New York City. By taking action to set these safety standards for the public, TLC will
be furthering the mayor's Vision
Zero goal of reducing
traffic-related deaths and serious
injuries and providing safety for
passengers, drivers and
pedestrians.

Every passenger in a New
York City taxicab, whether they use
a wheelchair or not, every
passenger has an equal right to the
highest safety standards in their
taxicabs. Thank you.

MR. WILSON: Thank you.
The next speaker is David
Pollock.

MR. POLLACK: Good morning,
Chairwoman Joshi and Commissioners.
My name is David Pollack. I am the
executive director of the Committee
for Taxi Safety. I want to begin
by congratulating the Chairwoman on
her well-deserved appointment. We
at the Committee look forward to
working with you and your staff and
being a resource when developing
and implementing taxi-related
policy.

The Committee is an
association of operators who
represent over 20 percent of the
taxi industry throughout the City
of New York. On behalf of our
Committee, I would like to suggest
changes to the proposed regulations
that we believe will make taxi
service more accessible to all New
Yorkers.

In the past you've heard
myself and others at the Committee
for Taxi Safety propose that
accessible service be tied to the
actual demand. Today, I'm not here
to tell you that your regulations
go too far, but that they do not go
far enough to provide the services
intended by these rules. We at the
Committee propose that everyone in
the private transportation industry
who receives a license from the TLC should have to provide 100 percent accessibility.

First and foremost, we accept the policy objectives of these rules and that all New Yorkers should have equal access to for-hire transportation. It should not matter if that access begins with hailing a taxi on the street, through a smartphone app or a phone call to a local base. This is one area of civil rights left for us to decide on the streets of New York. TLC's own data suggests that 97 percent of yellow taxi services are provided within the Manhattan Central Business District and the airports. We fail to see why only 50 percent of the segment of the industry be made accessible to New Yorkers or visitors who require accessible service. Residents who live outside the central business
district should have the full range
of accessible choices to meet their
particular accessibility needs.

A person in a wheelchair
from the Bronx or Brooklyn should
be able to get a ride through
additional hail, E-Hail, a
prearranged phone call to their
local car service without worrying
if the car arriving will actually
be able to accommodate their needs.
Thousands of New Yorkers in
wheelchairs experience inordinate
delays, inadequate vehicles being
dispatched, and, quite simply, a
lack of concern for their needs by
operators within the private
transport industry. There's no
longer a valid excuse in 2014 as to
why these inefficiencies should
continue.

Secondly, under the rules
you're currently considering, by
mandating that only 50 percent of
yellow taxis provide this service,
you are thwarting efforts to
provide greater accessibility.
Under the current rules, many of
these vehicles intended to provide
service will end up sitting in
garages as drivers migrate from
accessible taxis to non-accessible
taxi, both within the yellow taxi
industry and other service models
that your agency saw fit to
authorize over the last couple of
years. Currently, unless you act,
only 20 percent of the green taxis
are accessible. None of the
for-hire bases are even required to
have a single accessible vehicle.

To date, this inadequate
service requirement that is in
place for a base operation that is
of the size and financial backing
of Uber is ridiculous in that none
of their cars are required to be
accessible. If you call any base
within the City of New York, 
including Uber, for an accessible 
vehicle, you will be sent an 
ambulette between 45 minutes and 2 
hours of that call.

The choice that you have 
been given, that you must do this 
to provide service and settle a 
lawsuit, merely represents the 
limited mindset of the prior 
administration. Everyone well 
remembers the insensitive and 
insulting remarks of former Mayor 
Bloomberg when it came to issues of 
accessibility. The fact that this 
plan was left for you to fill in 
the holes is not surprising.

History can guide you in how 
to get out of the practical problem 
this plan creates. In the '80s, 
the MTA made a similar settlement 
with many advocates so that 50 
percent of the buses be made 
accessible. The MTA, realizing the
operational fairness, or rather lack of fairness, that some drivers would have to operate accessible buses while others did not, caused the MTA to pursue a better course. They ended the administrative nightmares created by a half-a-loaf solution. They ended the stigmatization of New Yorkers who needed an accessible bus option by deciding that every bus in their system --

MR. WILSON:  Mr. Pollack.

MR. POLLACK:  -- needed to be accessible.

MR. WILSON:  Can I ask you to summarize and conclude? Thanks.

MR. POLLACK:  Sure. Today you have the opportunity, you don't have to use the same timetable, but you can make every licensed vehicle 100 percent accessible so that every driver holding the TLC license has the responsibility to
service everyone in the City of New York. New Yorkers will not have to worry about how they get home.

We've also provided written testimony that you've received concerning our specific language to the proposed regulations. We need a simpler and more inclusive rule for our city. 100 percent accessibility is very possible and within our grasp. Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN JOSHI: Thank you very much. And I also want to acknowledge someone that is here today that I previously didn't acknowledge, someone who's been instrumental in today's rule. And that's Victor Calise, commissioner of the Mayor's Office for People With Disabilities. Thank you for all your help, Victor, and for your participation.

MR. WILSON: And the next speaker will be John Walsh.
MR. WALSH: I'm providing written testimony as well, but I will summarize.

Good morning, Chair Joshi and Commissioners. I'm John Walsh, representing Mobility Ventures, the manufacturer of the only factory-built, wheelchair-accessible taxi, the MV-1. I'm here today to testify in support of the accessibility rules on behalf of Mobility Ventures.

Congratulations to Chair Joshi on your appointment. Mobility Ventures looks forward to working with you and the Commissioners to help fulfill the TLC's goal of increased wheelchair accessibility for New York City's taxis. Mobility Ventures applauds TLC and Mayor de Blasio for moving swiftly and efficiently on developing the accessibility rules, allowing vehicles for taxi hire to
meet the federal safety standards
and the Americans With Disabilities Act.

The MV-1 is one of several TLC-approved accessible taxi options, but a very good one, and here's why. The MV-1 is the only accessible taxi that is factory built, which increases quality and reliability of the vehicle and results in lower maintenance costs. The MV-1 is the only accessible taxi meeting all federal motor vehicle safety standards and crash tested with no exceptions and no exemptions.

The MV-1 is a side-entry taxi making it safer and a more comfortable ride, allowing the wheelchair passenger the opportunity to enter the vehicle and sit in close proximity to the driver and the TPEP system so they can pay fares without assistance.
The MV-1 is a side-entry design, which allows for one passenger in a wheelchair plus an additional four passengers so the wheelchair passenger can travel with their family, friends, business colleagues, all in one taxi. The MV-1 side-entry design allows for a much faster boarding and the securing of a wheelchair passenger. Remember, the ADA was always intended for curb-to-curb service.

Mobility Ventures has a network of MV-1 dealerships in the New York City area with complete sales, service, parts so that owning and operating the MV-1 is easy and convenient. Mobility Ventures is now in full production and vehicles are ready at these dealerships for immediate delivery in yellow. Dealer locations are in Brooklyn, the Bronx, Manhattan, Inwood, Bethpage and Carlstadt, New
An optional compressed natural gas model is also available, which provides lower emissions and lower, much lower fuel prices. The MV-1 is very roomy with a low entrance and easy access for all passengers to enter, as well as those carrying luggage, large items and strollers. This taxi is for everyone, already proven and tested by New York City's Access-A-Ride system with over 150 in service, and, I'm happy to report, 250 more on order and in production. 400 MV-1 vehicles have been tested in Chicago's street hail fleets and have proven to be reliable, durable and very popular with the riders and operators alike.

I'd like to close by stating, Mobility Ventures supports the TLC, the proposed accessibility
rules, and thanking the Commission
for taking the necessary steps to
make New York City more accessible.
We look forward to working with the
TLC, taxi drivers, owners,
operators and the riding public as
the city moves forward to meet
these goals. We hope the MV-1 can
be part of the solution for New
York City. Thank you.

MR. WILSON: Thank you.

Bhairavi Desai?
(No response.)

MR. WILSON: Is Beresford
Simmons here?

MR. FROMBERG: She's in the
overflow room.

MR. WILSON: Oh, okay. I'll
give her a few seconds.

MS. DESAI: Good morning. I
am Bhairavi Desai, executive
director of the New York Taxi
Workers Alliance. Good morning,
members of the Commission, members
of the public and the industry.
And, Commissioner Joshi, it's great
to see a woman in that seat.

I'd like to say that, you
know, for all of these years, we as
an organization have actually
always been supportive of
accessible vehicles. When you
listen to the testimonies of the
previous speakers, and it just, it
says everything about why today is
so important and such a historic
achievement. I mean, we've been
working with Taxis For All, and
it's been one of the best parts of
my job in all of these years of
getting to know such amazing
activists who have really -- you
know, who have done just phenomenal
work to be able to achieve a day
like today.

In that spirit, what I do
want to raise is the issues with
implementation. 30-cent surcharge
is really, it's just a slush fund, really, for the fleet operators. First of all, it should not go directly, as one of the speakers had said earlier. It should be as a fund, but, you know, the meter is sacred for taxi drivers and we believe it should be preserved for driver income and not for anything else, and, so, particularly when there are alternative ways to finance this program.

I know Access-A-Ride has been mentioned, and, you know, we talk about it, it's almost just as rhetoric, but the reality is if those Access-A-Ride trips were converted to taxis, and once this rule passes we would be able to do that, because there would be more accessible taxis on the streets. That, it would save not only millions of dollars to the city and the state, but that money can
easily go to paying for the
conversion for the vehicles, and,
you know, and other issues. Let's
not even talk about the fact that
out of the 30 cents, I mean, 5
cents goes to the driver. It's
such an insulting amount, I
don't -- it's not even worthy of a
comment. But if the conversions
happen for Access-A-Ride, then the
money would be there to pay for the
classes for drivers, to pay for the
additional costs for gasoline,
which we were told earlier on that
that's partly what the surcharge
was supposed to cover, and then at
the end, really, all it's going to
cover are the expenses of mainly
the fleet owners.

There's also a lot of
concern in terms of the DOV
segment, where the drivers are
responsible for the maintenance and
the repairs. We want to make sure
that in any implementation,
wherever the funding comes from,
that it will actually go to the
driver/vehicle owner and not to the
agent who does not pay for these
to expenses. I mean, as Mr. Laszlo
said earlier, there's also the
money from the medallion sales.
There are alternatives here which
should be explored without dipping
into the metered fare, which is the
only source of income for all taxi
drivers in this city.

I also want to say that one
of the other reasons that we
strongly support the idea of a fund
and not just the money going
directly to fleet owners or to any
medallion owner is because it would
put an undue burden on individual
owner operators, who, if the fleet
owner is going to get the money
directly from the number of trips
that the drivers they lease to
complete, well, they're
double-shifting. That's a
different set of money compared to
an individual owner-operator who
may not even have a second-shift
driver.

And so, you know, if we're
going to be equitable about the
distribution, we do think the fund
is the way to implement it. But
where the money comes from, at the
moment, it's fundamentally wrong.
It should not come through a
surcharge, there are other means.

MR. WILSON: Ms. Desai, can
I ask you to summarize and
conclude?

MS. DESAI: Yeah, sure. The
last point I want to raise
regarding implementation is that
there is a real practical issue
here about the street. I have
examples with me today of drivers
who receive summonses when they
pull over to pick up passengers who may take a longer period of time to get into the taxi, either maybe because they're in a wheelchair, might be because of age or might be because of health issues. And if we're going to put more vehicles on the streets and have drivers, you know, fulfill their responsibilities of picking up all passengers, then there must be attention paid to the practical need for real space in the streets for taxi drivers to safely pick up and discharge all passengers. They should not be summoned for just completing their duties of a day-to-day job. Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN JOSHI: Thank you. And I just want to clarify one thing. There is a fund. So the 30 cents is collected from each trip, but then it comes to the TLC and then it goes into a fund.
There will be a second package of rule making which will describe how payments from the fund are made out and to whom they go. 5 cents is collected from each driver, it is not necessarily what is given back to each driver. That will be a subject of a second rule making package. And there's also an annual review process in this rule making package which will go through the adequacy of the surcharge and the adequacy of the fund.

So we're committed to finding alternative methods for defraying the cost of conversion. That's not an easy or swift accomplishment; we've been working on it for a while and still it takes time. But as those efforts come to fruition, that will be part of the review process when we decide whether or not every year
the fund is adequate or the
surcharge is necessary or is
directly adequate. So thank you very much
for your input.

MS. DESAI: Okay. Thank
you.

MR. WILSON: Our next
speaker will be Peter Mazer.

MR. MAZER: Good morning,
Commissioners. And a special
acknowledgement to our new Chair,
congratulations on your
appointment. MTBOT appreciates all
that you've done for the city and
looks forward to working with you
in your new capacity.

I am Peter Mazer, general
counsel to the Metropolitan Taxicab
Board of Trade, the city's largest
yellow trade association,
representing approximately 5,500
yellow medallion taxicabs spread
among 38 fleets throughout the
boroughs that directly employ
thousands of dispatchers, mechanics
and other personnel, and that lease
taxi to more than 20,000 drivers.

Today I'm urging you to vote
a cautious Yes to the wheelchair
accessibility rule requiring that
50 percent of the yellow taxi fleet
become wheelchair accessible by
2020. Our decision to support
these specific wheelchair
accessibility rules is a very
difficult one, one that was only
reached after carefully assessing
the groundbreaking weight of this
leap forward in accessible taxi
service with the real concerns that
we have with regard to cost,
durability and our ability to
continue to provide world-class,
affordable taxi service to our
750,000 taxi customers.

There are a number of points
that I want to make with regard to
these rules. And while I urge you
to ultimately pass these rules, we do have many concerns. Number one is that wheelchair accessibility is very costly. If the Taxi of Tomorrow mandate is upheld by the courts, it will be the only wheelchair-accessible vehicle that will be available for most purchases of New York City taxicabs and will result in a 95 percent increase in the purchase price of our taxicab today.

The operational and maintenance cost of wheelchair accessibility are widely anticipated to be very high, and we have a lot of concerns that have not been addressed yet, particularly with the new MV200, which is barely on the road: Will they last in 24/7 taxi operation? Will they last a full retirement cycle? How much will they cost to maintain? How much will it cost to
outfit garages with the parts and mechanic training necessary to fix these vehicles? How many more shifts will occur as a result of downtime? How well will they hold up in collisions?

We also believe that the 30-cent surcharge is inadequate. The TLC rules propose to offset the costs of accessibility through a 30-cent surcharge, 5 cents which will go to the driver, 25 cents which goes to the owner. While the TLC has attempted to anticipate the high operational costs of maintaining a wheelchair-accessible fleet, its calculations fail to fully account for the enormous costs to the industry.

Taxi owners already pay for accessible dispatch, and this year will pay $260 per medallion per year for that program.

There will be 2,234 yellow
taxicabs that will be accessible, either the existing ones and the ones that will be sold in the upcoming medallion sale, which are not included in this.

Lack of fairness. While this Commission voted to approve street hail liveries, it cited the lack of yellow taxi service in Upper Manhattan and the boroughs as a key motivating factor. Yet today, the Commission is only contemplating a mandate requiring that 50 percent of the yellow taxi fleet be wheelchair accessible, but not covering areas where the vast majority of wheelchair users live. Why is this Commission not contemplating an equivalent 50 percent mandate on street hail liveries and why is it not voting to strengthen and increase enforcement of Rule 59B-17, which requires liveries and black cars to
provide wheelchair-accessible service on demand? As a consequence of this inequality and inaccessible service, among other things, we fear a loss of yellow taxi drivers to the less-regulated industries where they will not contend with the obligations of wheelchair-accessible service.

The taxi owners will be required to rely on the fund, they can't use the surcharge directly.

Can I have one minute?

CHAIRWOMAN JOSHI: If could you sum up, we'd appreciate it, because --

MR. MAZER: Sure.

CHAIRWOMAN JOSHI: -- we're on a very tight schedule, at least 15 speakers who would like to --

MR. MAZER: I'm almost done.

Just a couple final points.

Another one is that wheelchair-accessible taxicabs may
not last the full retirement cycle. It's anticipated under the rule that they would have a full year retirement, we don't know if that will work. Also, the existence of the surcharge makes it less likely that there will be an appropriate fare increase and lease cap adjustment, which would benefit both drivers and owners in the future.

We have great confidence that the TLC understands the complicated economics of this issue and how wheelchair accessibility affects these economics. We believe this rule, while far from perfect, at least partially addresses the economic reality. With passage of these rules, you will be creating the largest fleet of wheelchair-accessible taxicabs in North America and among the largest in the world. We hope that
by doing so you will still continue

to maintain New York City's status

as having the most affordable taxi

service in world-class cities. I

thank you for your time and for

giving me the opportunity to

testify.

MR. WILSON: Thank you.

MR. MAZER: Thank you.

MR. WILSON: The next

speaker is Richard Thaler.

CHAIRWOMAN JOSHI: So I just

want to make one general comment.

Since we are on a very tight

deadline, if there are people,

several people signed up that

represent -- on behalf of one group

where comments would be

duplicative, if we could have one

representative come up on behalf of

the group.

MR. THALER: Chair Joshi and

Commissioners, I've summarized,

I've shortened my comments that I
just submitted in writing.

A consideration of the cost benefits of alternatives to this proposed operating plan designed to achieve the highest standards of wheelchair-accessible service appears to be totally absent. At the proposed taxi fleet accessibility requirement of 50 percent, given the report of 485,000 medallion trips per day, in principal, 242,500 trips under this rule, hypothetically, could have been available for wheelchair-user service. But according to the accessibility report data of March 13th of last year, the average daily number of wheelchair trips was 56, or .02 percent. But we just heard from Mr. Chhabra that this year, for the first time, he announced that that number of .02 percent would be about .06 percent of the number of trips
taken under this rule.

While the highest priority must be given to ensure equivalent service for all taxi users, the efficiency and in the manner the industry is organized to provide the highest standards for on-demand accessible service with minimum response time will have a major impact on the industry's capital investment, operating costs, and on the city's environment, due to the heavyweight, more rapid-running gear component wear and low-fuel economy of accessible taxis if the actual percentage of accessible trips per accessible taxi is very small, as will be the case with this proposed plan; a major setback against the city's green objectives.

Accordingly, a cost-benefit analysis must begin with the best utilization taxi and livery
resources can be best deployed to achieve cost-efficient, accessible-service standards. The proposed rule completely ignores the enormous resources of the city's approximately 500 livery bases. For example, Metropolitan Area Service's order for model year 2015 MV-1 CNG OEM crash tested wheelchair-accessible vehicles, and their adoption of the industry's most advanced location-based dispatch management and fare payment system with integrated passenger mobile prearrangement and payment app. If, for example, Metropolitan Area Service is permitted to take over dispatching to wheelchair-accessible taxis, it has also solved the problem for wheelchair passengers who can't reach the passenger monitor in accessible taxis for fare payment by providing passengers the eMobile
secure payment app.

Before the number of wheelchair-accessible taxis is arbitrarily and blindly ordered, a fully coordinated plan for service should be developed which includes the role of livery, together with a numerical justification, for the number of required wheelchair-accessible medallion taxis to meet service standards. Metro Dispatch program would no longer be needed for the dispatch because the dispatch function would be returned to New York City at no additional dispatch charges to the passengers or medallion owners, whether or not a taxi or livery is dispatched.

While the ultimate goal should be to return taxis to street hail service, taxi dispatch will necessarily need to be continued, but supplemented with livery
service in Manhattan until
experience determines the number of
wheelchair taxis that must be
available for street hail. If no
accessible taxis are available
within the distance to the pickup
location -- just a minute, I'm
almost finished -- to the pickup
location equal to or less than the
average reported taxi --

CHAIRWOMAN JOSHI: If you
wouldn't mind just summarizing now
so that others that are waiting can
also have an opportunity to speak.

MR. THALER: I have less
than -- just a minute -- a couple
of sentences.

-- of cruising miles of 39
percent -- blah, blah, blah -- be
located and dispatched to the
Manhattan caller, would pay the
taxi-metered fare provided by
installed taxi meters for this
purpose. When it's determined that
additional accessible taxis are required, a medallion owner would be permitted to sell their medallion and repurchase or bid on a new accessible medallion at a reduced price efficient to provide the cost of vehicle accessibility and enhancement, operating cost incentives analogous to the licensing cost incentives given to accessible SHL buyers.

The alternative would make more taxis available for street hail, reduce taxi driver distraction in order to focus on their normal street hail business, especially if no accessible taxis would be dispatched during the morning and afternoon busy hours --

MR. WILSON: I really need to ask you to conclude.

MR. THALER: Last sentence.
The annual accessibility charge to medallion owners and passenger
surcharges would no longer be required to support this.

And, by the way, I'm really optimistic that you bring a new dawn to the Taxi Commission, especially in enabling a real consulting and collaboration with all industry segments in the formulation of policy. Thank you.

MR. WILSON: Thank you.

I have two speakers listed for the Livery Roundtable. If I could just ask them to deliver their comments together, Avik Kabessa and Carolyn Castro.

MS. CASTRO: Good morning, Commissioners. Avik is actually not here, so I'll just be speaking for everyone.

MR. WILSON: Thank you.

MS. CASTRO: Good morning, again. Once again we would like to congratulate Chairwoman Joshi --

MS. RYAN: Can't hear well.
MS. CASTRO: Oh, you can't hear? I'm sorry.

My name is Carolyn Castro, and I'm the executive director at the Livery Roundtable. I am here to convey my board's thoughts and concerns in the proposed accessibility rules for the street hail liveries. Here is what we don't understand with the proposed rules as they are currently written. We are a technology and advanced industry where SHL vehicles have debit and credit card readers that work with contracted vendors on the back-end, collecting and analyzing data. Thus, these vendors are ideally situated to collect the 30-cent surcharge. It is incomprehensible that the Commission would seek to place the onus on the base to collect the 30-cent surcharge.

TLC must amend its rules to
include the collection of the surcharge so that it is managed by the vendors that currently accept all electronic forms of payment for the SHL. And here is why this method makes sense to us: it cuts the base out altogether. It makes no sense for the base to shoulder this burden. Approved vendors are already contracted with the city and the TLC to collect debit and credit card information and pull payments per trip; thus, it is logical that the TLC would select these vendors to collect the surcharge as well and direct it to the fund.

Drivers disaffiliate and affiliate faster than the TLC can monitor. Drivers disaffiliate and affiliate with bases as well as change bases all the time. How is the TLC going to keep track of these affiliations and
disaffiliations in a timely manner so that bases aren't given erroneous summonses when the driver affiliates with another base and the base is no longer responsible in collecting the driver's surcharges? The TLC can't prevent it.

The point here is to make this process easier than harder for everyone involved. We strongly encourage the Commission to investigate other options that they have in place to work with the vendors and have them directly pull the surcharge and forward it to your fund. Working directly with the vendor is the best and only logical way because it's the immediate and secured collection of collecting the surcharge. It also secures that money collected will reach the fund. It does away with the unnecessary summonsing,
appearances at OATH, days spent
hearing cases that yield no profit.

We hope the Commission will
take a moment to consider the
recommendations before placing any
votes. Thank you for your time.

CHAIRWOMAN JOSHI: Thank
you.

Next we have Erhan Tuncel.

MR. TUNCEL: Good afternoon,
Chairwoman Joshi, Commissioners.
My name is Erhan Tuncel. I'm the
managing director of the League of
Mutual Taxi Owners. Thank you for
allowing me to testify today.

Commissioner Joshi, on
behalf of the members of the League
of Mutual Taxi Owners, welcome. I
would like to congratulate you and
welcome you as the new Commissioner
of the Taxi & Limousine Commission.
We would like to thank the mayor,
you and your staff for the efforts
made to create a meaningful
dialogue with LOMTO and the rest of the industry when establishing the rules which are put before us today.

We accept our responsibility to comply with the law and are prepared to work within the rules to expand the accessibility of taxis to serve the needs of the wheelchair-using community. We support these rules which put forward a much needed detailed plan to support the owners and the drivers who are chosen by the lottery to buy and drive accessible vehicles under the Bloomberg Agreement for 50 percent accessibility. We appreciate the grants that will be issued to participants of the accessible dispatch program and agree that restricted accessible medallions should not receive these funds.

Owner-drivers of the
independent medallion taxis have
always been at a bit more
disadvantage than the owners who
are able to set themselves up as a
fleet operation. The cost of
operating a taxi -- the vehicles
cost more when purchased one at a
time. Cost of maintenance is high
when an owner depends on retail
shops for repairs.

The disadvantages of
operating a single medallion will
only increase with the
accessibility mandate. The
owner-drivers are allowed to keep
their vehicles longer than four
years; however, the benefits from
the fund for the maintenance of
accessible vehicles will cease
after four years. This means they
will have to operate without any
help from the fund the last couple
of years of the vehicle's lifespan,
historically when the maintenance
The rules go a long way to compensate the taxi industry, but as carefully planned as they are, they're geared more towards the needs of an owner who operates more than one taxi. There are only about 600 true, single-shift owner-drivers, according to TLC. These owner-drivers tend to be older drivers with many years of experience both in driving and in life. The single-shifting owner-drivers will be affected the most by the 50 percent requirement, even with the plans as put together as carefully as this one. Exempting this group of owner-drivers will have almost no effect on the number of the accessible vehicles because, according to the law of averages, 300 would not be accessible anyway.

Therefore, we respectfully
ask for an exemption for
independent medallion owner-drivers
who single-shift their vehicles.
Thank you for your time.

MR. WILSON: Thank you.

The next speaker will be
Jason Dasilva, please.

MR. DASILVA: Hi. How are you doing? My name is Jason
Dasilva. I run the nonprofit
organization called AXS Lab, and we
serve people with disabilities
through media and technology.

I'm just here to tell you
today a little bit about my
personal story dealing with the
wheelchair-accessible cabs over the
past ten years, growing up in my
20s.

So growing up in my 20s, it
was fine, you know, until I became
disabled. Then all of a sudden I
was dealing with
wheelchair-accessible cabs, trying
to get to things like business meetings. I missed a flight at LaGuardia. Always, it would be going 20 to 45 minutes late for a date or two. You know how difficult it is to find somebody if you're going on a date and show up late every time.

So, lo and behold, somehow I got married. I married my wife, Alice in my early 30s. A little bit -- we moved to Brooklyn, and what was happening then was it was becoming even more difficult to get a wheelchair-accessible cab. So I was unable to actually go with her to -- she had troubles, she had a miscarriage -- I was unable to go with her to the hospital, to the ER, to be a part of her poor experience.

After that, we were actually able to have a kid the next year, and we -- I actually wasn't able to
go with her to the hospital there, 
but, of course, I wanted to see my 
first child's birth, so I had a 
couple friends carry me into a 
regular livery cab and take me to 
the hospital just so I could 
experience that. Now, finally we 
moved back to Manhattan, and, yeah, 
we have wheelchair cabs that are 
available. It's still a problem, 
though. Still, it's up to 20 to 
45 minutes of getting a cab. 

Now we have a wonderful son, 
Chase, and I just wonder, as the 
years progress, am I going to be 
able to be with him, be with him 
spontaneously, and go to things, 
like his baseball game or going 
with him to an art gallery. 

So, yeah, I just, I think 
it's great that by 2020 we are 
going to have 50 percent of the 
fleet accessible, but I dream of a 
world where, you know, it's
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100 percent accessible, you just hail a wheelchair cab just like everyone else. Thank you.

MR. WILSON: Thank you.

The next speaker is Joe Marone.

MR. MARONE: Thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak. My name's Joe Marone. I'm an owner-driver for over 40 years.

Commissioner Arout, I'd like to wish you the best. I read somewhere that you're retiring soon. You've seemed to be a very fair commissioner over the years.

MR. AROUT: Not yet.

MR. MARONE: What? No? I'm wrong?

MR. AROUT: No, it's okay. You misunderstood it.

MR. MARONE: Oh, sorry. I'm sorry.

MR. AROUT: I have one more year to go.
MR. MARONE: Okay, I'm sorry.

I could empathize with the people in wheelchairs and their situation. I believe this proposal goes a bit too far in trying to accommodate them. The green cabs are called for 20 percent, so I don't know why that's -- we have to do 50 percent, doesn't seem equitable to me.

Someone mentioned the 30 cents and they don't want to pay it, fine, but our rates are not high in New York, especially the drop, initial drop on the fare. It's very low, has been low for a long time. And I work 70, 80 hours a week just to pay my bills. Regardless of what the medallions sell for, I still have to go out and work 70, 80 hours a week, okay? These are financed -- the vehicle finances the purchasing of the
medallion, et cetera.

Owner-drivers generally are long-term drivers, and, because they've chosen this profession as a career, and a lot of us use or have used the vehicle as our personal car with our families. I personally don't think I would like driving the vehicles I've seen that are wheelchair-equipped, not that I wouldn't want to service the people, but it's just -- would seem very onerous to drive.

Single-shifted vehicles like myself only account for about 600 cars on the road now, and obviously we're on the road for 12-hour shifts, as opposed to fleets, which are 24, and we're less able, which has been said previously, to deal with the cost of purchasing the vehicle and the extra maintenance. So what many consider to be the best drivers and best-maintained
vehicles might leave the industry
if the aforementioned rule will be
enacted without an exemption for
single-shift owner-drivers. Thank
you.

MR. WILSON: Thank you.

The next speaker is Osman
Chowdhury.

MR. CHOWDHURY: Hi, good
afternoon. My name is Osman
Chowdhury. I'm with United Taxi
Drivers Association at NYC, Inc.

Today I'm testifying, would
like to solve the previous comment
where no problem. The problem is
that when I'm driving the regular
car, the disability car, we make
less fare because we need to make a
cautions with loading and unloading,
make more time and make less money
that are needed, the driver, a
steady and need a guaranteed
income. Don't punish us because
we're immigrant people that working
7-, 12-hour shift. This is our thing.

Also, some people are not able to pull the -- the mobility (indicating) because they are have serious back pain. When ill person, old man, they cannot do that. Even nighttime, it's dangerous. One of friend, he got in accident because he went to Bronx, to get to him, he unloaded, and some guy hit the gun with the head. He fall down, then he call the cops because it upset him. That's the situation. We need to put up the driver. Never did they could catch him. That's also need.

Also, the more medallions comes, the more competition. They will need a steady income because more 2,000 medallions on the street, now 15,000 cab in the city, they don't have enough fare. Even LaGuardia, they get more summons.
What about a driver go to LaGuardia and get a summons. There's no room there.

And also, Second Avenue, Ninth Avenue, new traffic burden, the bike lane, and they make no drop off and pick up the passengers. Every passengers get in accident. We need a care.

Thank you very much.

MR. WILSON: Thank you.

The next speaker is Marc Klein.

MR. KLEIN: Hi, good morning, and congratulations to the new Chair.

My name's Marc Klein. I'm the vice president of Airports Nationwide for Clean Energy Fuels. We're the largest provider of natural gas fueling stations in North America for fleets. Congratulations on your leadership, and hopefully other cities across
the United States will follow your lead.

My message is really simple. Wheelchair-accessible taxis don't have to run on dirty, expensive gasoline. Instead, they can operate on clean-burning, domestic, less-expensive CNG. Right now, we're selling CNG to taxis for about $2 less per gallon than gasoline. That means taxi drivers save more money.

As you proceed to implement these rules and future rules, I encourage you to incentivize taxicab vehicles that provide the maximum benefits to society. So accessibility is half the battle, but potential runaway gasoline fueling prices are the other half of the battle. Having taxicab vehicles that are both 100 percent accessible and 100 percent alternative fuel provide the best
of both worlds for New Yorkers and
the people that visit New York
City.

The TLC has made great
progress with green taxicabs in the
past, and there's no reason that
air quality has to suffer by the
addition of wheelchair-accessible
taxi. We just opened our latest
New York City JFK Airport CNG
station and have plans to expand
across the five boroughs.

As a sidenote, I brought the
wheelchair-accessible London taxi
to the TLC and Matt Dawes in 2004.
And this is a picture of Terry
Moakley from United Spinal and the
prototype MV-1 (indicating) --

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah,
Terry.

MR. KLEIN: -- in 2006. So
the industry has really come a long
way. And just like your
smartphone, it now does things you
could never imagine it would do. These taxicab vehicles have improved over time to prioritize benefits to society and the passengers and the environment and air quality. So if our wheelchair-accessible taxis can use zero gasoline and be 100 percent alternative fuel and be 100 percent accessible and save the taxicab drivers' money, then everybody wins.

Congratulations on your leadership.

MR. WILSON: Thank you. The next speaker is JoAnne Simon.

MS. SIMON: Good morning, Commissioner Joshi, Commissioners. It's been a pleasure to be here today. My name is JoAnne Simon and I'm excited to be a New Yorker today and I'm honored to be here on what I hope will be this historic
occasion in which the Taxi & Limousine Commission will approve the taxi access rules.

I'm here today to speak on behalf of the Association on Higher Education and Disability. I'm a founding member, a former board member, and currently their general counsel. AHEAD is the premier professional association committed to full participation of people with disabilities in postsecondary education. We do this through education, through advocacy, and participation in legislative and rule making processes. We have been leaders in including the returning veterans to our American campuses who suffer from a variety of disabilities.

We also have regional and national trainings. We hold a conference, an annual conference, every year for the past 35 years.
We've been doing that in every city except New York. And there's a fundamental reason for that, and that is it's impossible to hold a conference such as ours in New York. We have roughly 1500 attendees, a large percentage of them are people who are wheelchair users or have other mobility impairments. And while New York is a place we'd love to visit and we've been to every major city in the country, both on the east and west coasts, older cities, newer cities, New York City is one place that everybody, I know, would love to come. And we have always had to dismiss New York as a conference location out of hand because of the lack of access. Our members are primarily professionals, but also students.

We also would like to speak a little bit about higher education
as part of the fabric of the city. Institutions of higher education are microcosms of society, and we have students and faculty and workers from all across the spectrum of New Yorkers in all the boroughs, so it's not just Manhattan. We were talking about there's a lot of educational institutions and students and faculty who need access to those educational institutions throughout our great city. And we seek and we know that the background on the environment in which higher education takes place is extremely important to the students' experience. Education extends far beyond the classroom, and the lack of access to transportation has deterred students, both undergraduate and graduate and professional students, from coming to New York and participating in
New York's institutions in the way they should have.

I know that I speak for many of us in higher education when we say that we are just delighted to envision the possibility of accessible cabs in New York City. And I thank you for your leadership in this area, and I look forward to your vote. Thank you very much.

MR. WILSON: Thank you.

The next speaker is Jeff Grobman.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: He's coming.

MR. WILSON: Is Nicolae Hent in the room?

MR. HENT: Yes.

MR. WILSON: Okay, I'll let you speak while we're waiting for Mr. Grobman to come in.

MR. HENT: Good afternoon. Good afternoon, Chairman; good afternoon, Commissioner. My name
is Nicolae Hent. I am a cab driver in New York City since 1988. I want to touch some problems which nobody touched here, except a little bit, Bhairavi Desai. I am a owner-driver. The problems start with the cars, the cars which are being built in the factory not converted. I think it's important, the safety.

Second, I didn't hear any advocate for the wheelchair mention about the space, when we are going to work with them, loading and unloading. We're going to have a station for the taxi, like the bus, or you'll be allowed to use the bus station? The problem with this is the rules, which (inaudible) create the rules, like 1111-c for the bus lane, which is like four pages. And it's important to underline that line (pointing), which says: "4-12(m) and 4-08(a)(3) of Title 34
of the Rules of the City of New York." Would you like to translate? If someone can after this, you know, four pages, you know, blah, blah, blah. And what's important is this (indicating).

I would like the Commissioner from Queens if can take these problems and tackle, because I try with David Yassky, with Allan Fromberg a few times. I provide all the summonses, which I got from the camera, dropping off and picking up, with the receipts and the same time and seconds. Then the cops, with the, you know, bus lane camera. I dismiss them in the court, all of them by myself, but I cannot be in the court every day. Nobody pays for my day in court even if I'm not guilty.

I would like the media, if they're going to print out in the newspaper on the front page, like
they print, "Taxi Bandit," do they all say, "Government Bandits"? I don't know who the -- one of the commissioners was make it about a year and a half ago -- I'm sorry, I'm shaking a little bit -- the commissioner was very nice and polite. We had a little bit of an argument at the location, but I remember her lines, "Why we argue? We're not getting married."

So this is the problem which I would like the wheelchair advocates to take it and solve it because this law with the bus lane has to be amended in Albany, not in New York City. And I talk with my senator from Queens, Joe Addabbo, I talk with Councilman Elizabeth Crowley. I was at least three times in her office and his office. They blew me off. So I would like this to be solved by somebody.

I'm an owner-driver. And
other problem is if you make my
owner-driver, you know, car
accessible for wheelchair, it's
okay, but they are going to be only
12 hours on the streets, so nobody
going to call me at home to wake me
up. The problem with this, you
know, thing, if you make my car
accessible, abolish the rules,
owners must drive. So I heard
about this where I won like 500s.
I don't know what's going to
happen. Thank you very much for
giving me a chance to speak, and I
hope will be hopeful.

MR. WILSON: Thank you.

Has Mr. Grobman come in?

MR. GROBMAN: Good morning.

I apologize for being late. It was
a little difficult to get here and
for the parking also.

I'm the general manager of
Advance Mobility in Brooklyn, New
York, and we do conversions for the
accessible taxis. And my issue
and, also, as a person with
disability, the TLC, actually,
didn't promise, but they said that
1200 accessible vehicles will be on
the road. We'll do -- we do our
best to put these vehicles on the
road, but the issue is the permit
holders. They can't afford them.
And even though we get the grants
assigned to us, it's coming in very
slow. And so far there's only 500
vehicles on the road.

And I recently broke my leg
and I'm unable to drive, so, and I
speak for everybody who's disabled,
I'd like to come out on the street
and hail a taxi. And we can't, we
can't do it, and that's why I'm
bringing up this issue, to speed up
the process, if it's possible.

How can we do that, how can
we work together with TLC and make
this happen, because the year two
is coming out as well, and I believe there's more wheelchair-accessible taxis supposed to be on the road, but I don't see this happening soon enough. Thank you very much.

MR. WILSON: Thank you.

The next speaker is Beresford Fitzsimmons.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: He's not in attendance.

MR. FROMBERG: Not here.

MR. WILSON: Not here?

Victor Salazar.

MR. SALAZAR: Good afternoon, Commissioners. My name is Victor Salazar. I'm a taxi driver for a long time, about 20 years. Currently I'm mostly working at Taxi Workers Alliance. I'm one of the outreach coordinators.

And the issue for us taxi drivers mainly, most importantly,
is about the 30 cents. Everyone in
the field comment, in LaGuardia,
Kennedy Airport, taxi drivers are
discontent with the 30 cents. We
strongly believe that the 30 cents
is another -- more income for the
taxi fleets. And taxi fleets are
already millionaires, they have
plenty of money; they can finance
easily the cost of a car. They
have good deals with the -- in auto
parts with dealers and everything.
And we already have a 50-cent
surcharge. We believe that our
meter is been economically hostage
with a surcharge of this kind.

And, strongly, we would love
to comply with the rules for
wheelchair accessibility. It would
be great for us to have more fares
on the road. We always comply with
the TLC, and we welcome all the
passengers who are in wheelchairs.
We will be very glad to do you
service and take you safely to your destinations.

However, this 30 cents for us will be an economical hostage on the meter. We believe that there are other options that TLC and the City of New York can explore to finance the cost of implementation and this particular 50 percent of the cars' conversion into wheelchair accessible. That's all I have to say. Thank you.

MR. WILSON: Thank you.

Our next two speakers are Mohan Singh and Bill Lindauer, who I believe are also with the Taxi Workers Alliance. Are you testifying on the same matters?

Can we --

MR. LINDAUER: I'll keep it brief. Congratulations to Meera, and I applaud the persistence of the disability community. They've achieved a great victory. And Taxi
Workers Alliance is for, 100 percent, wheelchair accessibility. But the plan to pay for it is wrong.

Peter Mazer almost brought me to tears about the plight of the ridiculously rich, nine-million-dollar-a-year garage owners. He said that already a song about a lease increase and he says the 30 cents is inadequate, and the TLC itself said it's subject to modification. It's not going to be lowered, the 30 cents, it will be raised.

The meter should be sacrosanct. Instead, it's usually being used to pay everything, for the MT -- bail out the MTA, now the wheelchair accessibility. Maybe it will be used to pay for electric cars in Central Park or something. I predict that in the not-too-distant
future, if this keeps up, more than 50 percent of the meter will be going to other things other than drivers' earnings, you know. This is ridiculous. Even the Daily News says this is ridiculous.

To quote the March 27th lead editorial, "Taken for a Ride," an app title: "The lords of the taxi industry -- the medallion owners -- will reap the bonanza. Key among the beneficiaries will be the fleet owners, a politically wired group that was a particularly important election supporter of Mayor de Blasio."

Now, they make $2 to $9 million a year, according to the TLC statistics. And while they sleep, the value of their medallion which was bought for bupkis soars to new heights. So, their tears are crocodile tears.

Think of the drivers and
think of the public. Why should
the public keep paying to bail out
the MTA, pay for this, pay for
that? This gets absurd. Thank
you.

MR. WILSON: Thank you.

And our last speaker is John
Lotaj. Is Mr. Lotaj here?
(No response.)

Mohan Singh, are you here?

MR. SINGH: Good morning,
everyone. I am Mohan Singh. I am
DOV, means, I drive a cab which is
owned by me and leased, the
medallion is leased from the Booker
(phonetic).

As you are saying that
14,000 will go to the cost of the
car, so we want to know that
whether they are going to pass it
to us or whether we have to pay
that. And then 16,000 will go for
the cost of the maintenance. I
don't know whether they are going
to handle it for us or if we are going to take care of the cars. So we are happy to help accessible -- access the people, but we want something in our hand also.

And other things, when we are traveling on the streets, one side, the bus lane, and other side the -- so how can I pick up the passengers? You cannot imagine how difficult at this moment and how many tickets we get just for picking up the passengers because they say you are obstructing the traffic, you are doing this. There are three tickets or four tickets given to us at a time. But nobody's taking care of it. And even we ask the police, we should be taking care for this.

And even on Pennsylvania, there are a lot of passengers, and we go and pick them, and they gave us tickets for picking in the
second lane because one lane is always blocked.

We have too many difficulty with passengers, we have to suffer with the passengers. So you should take care of this also that we shouldn't get too many tickets. And even roads should be safe for each and every person, and we should be given some time to pick up the passenger also. So we are -- this is our job and we are serving the people and we are happy to serve the accessible rides also. And if it's possible, it's good.

And other thing that, that 12,000, 20,000 green cabs, you can put accessible taxicabs, and it would work in outer borough, which will help all other people also. So instead of making green cabs, make their departments accessible so that they could work with all the other peoples, so it will be
better that each and every person

can get the license. And thank you

very much for hearing this.

MR. WILSON: Thank you.

Mr. Lotaj.

MR. LOTAJ: Good afternoon, everyone. I'm here actually

representing myself as a person

that hails taxicabs, as a rider.

And I'm going to actually use some

math or some actual figures as to

what makes sense.

Most of the concerns I had

were already addressed, so I'm not

concerned about that. There's one

issue that hasn't really been

addressed, and that's simply put,

one medallion that the city sells

is about $1 million, or more or

less. $1 million can outfit or

supply at least 50 or 100 with

accessible taxis. 10 medallions

can supply about 100, and 100 can

supply about 1,000. And they're
proposing to sell 2,000 with accessible medallions. And you can figure out how many can be retrofitted.

The fare is already built in there, of course, so there's no reason whatsoever to use this word "surcharge," or whatever it means, you know, in addition to the actual fare. It's not fair, it's not a fare, it's not part of the fare, and it doesn't really make sense. It's usually on the part of the riders. It doesn't really benefit the people that need wheelchair accessible because the money's already coming from the fare. Of course, when you sell a medallion, it's the fare, the actual fare, that pays for it, so it's a double charge, if you really look at it. And those are the numbers, so thank you.

MR. WILSON: Thank you. So
that's all the speakers.

CHAIRWOMAN JOSHI: So we're now going to move to a vote. And I'm first going to have Chris Wilson describe the rule that's up for vote. And, Commissioners, if you'd like to say a few words before we go to the vote, I want to give you all the opportunity to do that, and then we'll move to the vote.

MR. WILSON: So the rule was posted on our website on April 25th. It was somewhat different -- it is described in Mr. Chhabra's presentation earlier. It provides the mechanism and the fund. We made several changes to the rules originally proposed, including providing for an annual review and specifying for the collection of the fund, on the street hail livery side, that it's collected by the base rather than the licensee, as
it's been in the prior draft.

We received 27 written comments. We've had many -- much testimony this morning. And I believe the Commissioners wish to...

CHAIRWOMAN JOSHI: So I'd like to just go around, and anyone who'd like to make a comment before we go to vote. We'll start with Commissioner Arout.

MR. AROUT: I just want to say, it was very good hearing pros and cons of what we have up here, but my only statement at this time is that this has been a milestone agreement that I am very proud to support. Once again New York City leads the way in public service and caring, and I really, really believe that. And I don't think you want to hear me talk about everything else, you've heard everything on the floor. So I'll
just leave it all to the other commissioners.

CHAIRWOMAN JOSHI:
Commissioner Arout, I'm actually going to change my order. Instead of voting afterwards, I'm just going to ask that you vote now.

MR. AROUT: Yes, I vote for it.

CHAIRWOMAN JOSHI: Thank you.

Commissioner DeArcy.

MS. DEARCY: I'd like to first start by congratulating persons with disability, their advocates, their counsel, the staff of the TLC, my fellow commissioners, not the least of which is Commissioner Frank Carone, for all of their efforts, which, I think in collaboration, led us to this vote today.

As I made my way here, I had the opportunity to read an Op Ed by
Edith Prentiss. You heard her speak today. She's the chairman of the Taxis For All. Her Op Ed read in today's Daily News, and it talked about the significance of today's proposed rule making. "In closing," she stated, "soon I will be able to lift up my hand and yell 'Taxi!' and have one actually stop. Maybe that's an ordinary act for you, but I can't wait."

Ms. Prentiss' words resonated with me. As a black woman, her words spoke to me in a way that perhaps is unique to those who hold membership in groups who have suffered historically from unequal treatment.

Prior to my tenure on this Commission, I was an ardent supporter of TLC's efforts to extinguish fare refusals of blacks and other people of color, which went on for far too long. And not
to diminish the problems that were faced by blacks and people with color with regard to fare refusals, as I read Ms. Prentiss' Op Ed, I was keenly aware that what we faced was different. What drove the sentiment that drove any particular driver to not pick me up or my family members up on the street, that was their individual sentiment. What people with disabilities face in this city or have faced are systematic barriers which have prevented them from virtually having any access to our taxi system. That is very different.

So today with this rule making, we say no more; today we say that, as a Commission, we will no longer be complicit in denying members of our community fair access to a mode of transportation that is all too
important to this city.

Now, with my vote today,
which will be in favor of the
proposed rule making, I am not
unsympathetic to the concerns that
have been raised at this hearing, I
am not unsympathetic to some of the
issues that some people have raised
with regard to cost. However, I do
believe that our fund, which will
be funded by the surcharge, will
adequately address, at least
immediately, the concerns that are
raised with regard to cost. And
let us not forget, we have provided
for a mechanism for us to revisit
the surcharge to determine whether
or not it is adequate.

Other concerns were raised.
Mr. Laszlo and Mr. Pollack raised
concerns today about access in the
outer boroughs. There were
communications regarding
unloading and in loading
passengers. Those are important. But what is happening today is the beginning, it is the start of a process, and we should not let those concerns at all delay a Yes vote for today's rule making.

So, with that, I will tell you that I am proudly voting Yes for the proposal.

CHAIRWOMAN JOSHI: Thank you.

I'd also like to read a statement from Commissioner Gonzales, who's not able to be here today to vote. So, he says:

"Dear Chairwoman Joshi, fellow Commissioners, TLC staff and representatives from the riding public, drivers, and the taxicab and for-hire industry, thank you for providing the opportunity to publicly state my support for the accessibility rules before the Commission today."
"While I'm unable to attend today's meeting, I would like to say that although it's been a long journey for the Commission to get to this point, it has been a longer journey for the riding public. Should the rules pass today, I sense that the real work ahead of us in implementing accessibility may be daunting at times, but with the combination of the high-caliber staff here at TLC, mixed with a little patience, we will get through the challenge as expeditiously as possible.

"You have my commitment to making accessibility a reality for New York City's taxi and for-hire vehicle-riding public. Thank you. Commissioner Ed Gonzales."

And I'm also going to vote Yes today. It will be my first official vote as Chair of the TLC, and I wanted to just quickly,
briefly, go through my experience
with this issue.

I joined the TLC in 2011 and
I've been part of the legal and
policy debates surrounding
wheelchair accessibility since the
day I joined. I've learned a lot.
I've learned what is and what isn't
required under the ADA with respect
to taxis and regulators, and I've
learned that sometimes wins in this
area are sometimes hollow.

I've learned that you can --
more than I ever cared to know --
about the mechanics about how to
cut a car and make it wheelchair
accessible, and I'm not sure I
still understand completely. But I
think the most important thing I've
learned is the personal struggles
of each of the advocates as they
came to meetings and as they
unsuccessfully and sometimes
successfully tried to go about
their day-to-day business, that was
meeting friends, seeing family,
getting to the hospital. And
hearing those stories individually
on a regular basis was probably the
most persuasive piece of
information I've gotten in this
entire debate.

So the complexities of this
issue have paralyzed the agency for
years, and today we've moved beyond
arguing over the mechanics of how
and are taking action towards the
greater goal, equalizing access for
our iconic taxi system.

I've heard a lot of the
points that people have raised
about imperfections of the rule,
and there is time to work on
perfecting. We will definitely
work closely with NYPD and DOT on
the issues surrounding loading and
unloading passengers and many of
the other issues that people have
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raised. But I think that we need
to take a moment to appreciate what
a great step we have all together
made today in bringing this rule to
a vote. So I vote Yes.

MS. POLANCO: Well, first I
want to congratulate Chair Joshi on
your appointment. I really look
forward to working with you and I
know that you will do a magnificent
job.

I really want to share with
you that -- I appreciate the
personal stories shared by some of
you, some of the riders in
wheelchairs. It pains me, at the
same time makes me angry, that you
had to endorse so much hardship in
order to get a taxi. In way until
today, basically, in order to --
for us to be here and been able to
achieve some type of solution. But
I'm happy because after the
cooperations of members of the taxi
industry, because we all have to work together, owners, drivers, advocacy groups, city officials, everyday riders, and with the assistance of the TLC staff, who have done a superb job in drafting these rules, and I have to say it's a reasonable rule, not a perfect one, it's a reasonable solution, and I am here to say that I vote Yes on taking a first step to address a need that has been known for too long. And today's vote exemplifies what good government should be about. So I vote Yes.

MR. CARONE: Well, moment of truth. Thank you, Chair.

I join the comments of my fellow commissioners, particularly Commissioner DeArcy, whose eloquence, as usual, motivates us all.

I thank Council Member Rodriguez, Public Advocate James,
and Borough President Brewer for their comments, and as well as JoAnne Simon, who's an elected official as well, although she did not introduce herself as one, and I thank her as well. And I acknowledge Commissioner Calise, who's been a sounding board for myself, and, as issues have been raised, has been a real friend to me, the Commission, and the city as a whole.

I point out that Borough President Brewer raised a concern, and her concern was that a city that is, and I'm quoting, "50 percent accessible is still 50 percent inaccessible." And I agree with that observation. And I agree that the goal of this Commission, as well as the city, should be one day 100 percent. And I hope that's sooner rather than later.
I am happy to see Chair Joshi, and if your work as general counsel is any indication of your bonafides, then the Commission is certainly in great shape. And I think the rule, which we are here for today, is indicative of your consensus-building approach. Focus on substantive issues where all stakeholders have a meaningful chance to comment and work together is more evidence of your great talent.

Well, just when I thought I had ample reason to support the rule, I listened to James Weisman and I learned something new, and I have even more reason to support the rule. And although James spoke about Senator Harkin, and, representing him here, Senator Harkin did provide written testimony -- and I think it's only appropriate that I highlight
another paragraph that James did not highlight. I don't know if many of you know that Senator Harkin was one of the original architects of the American With Disabilities Act, and he writes in a paragraph that I think sums this up very nicely:

"The current lack of accessible taxi service means that New Yorkers and visitors to New York City who have disabilities cannot participate in the ebb and flow of the city in the way that those without disabilities do. They are treated as second-class citizens. Actually, it is worse. They are barred from one of the key economic and social mechanisms of life in the Big Apple." And I agree with that sentiment from the Senator.

I'll end with just a small observation. It took me a little
longer today to get here, I was stuck in traffic. There's always traffic, but today was a little worse, and I was lamenting to myself and complaining. And when I heard Ronnie Ellen Raymond speak, I felt a little embarrassed and I reminded myself that I take for granted what I should not take for granted, the freedom to flow around the city and move about, which those in this room and throughout this city cannot.

I'm complaining about a little bit of traffic, and I'm hearing Ms. Raymond talk about the hours it takes just to get around with basic needs and necessities.

She said, when she opened her remarks, this rule "will change my life." I think that sums it up, so I vote Yes.

MR. WILSON: So, with that, with five votes for the rule, the
rule passes.

Next on the Commission agenda is a resolution to extend the Staten Island Inspection Pilot for an additional year, until March 31st. You approved the pilot a little over a year ago -- actually, you approved it earlier than that, there were delays in implementation as a result of Superstorm Sandy -- and the staff is recommending that we extend the pilot for another year so we can continue to assess the conduct of inspections for Staten Island-registered vehicles. We posted the final resolution on our website on April 25th and we sent it to the Commissioners on that date.

This is not a public hearing, it's just for Commission action. And I guess I can call for a vote.
MR. AROUT: Motion to accept it.

MR. WILSON: All those in favor?

(Chorus of ayes.)

MR. WILSON: So the resolution passes unanimously.

There being no other business, I move to adjourn.

CHAIRWOMAN JOSHI: The meeting is adjourned. It's 1:00 p.m. And I want to thank everyone for a new start.

(Time noted: 1:01 p.m.)
STATE OF NEW YORK  
)  
) ss.:  
COUNTY OF NEW YORK  
)  

I, MARGARET CRANE, a Notary Public within and for the State of New York, do hereby certify:

I reported the proceedings in the within-entitled matter, and that the within transcript is a true record of such proceedings.

I further certify that I am not related to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage and that I am in no way interested in the outcome of this matter.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this 4th day of May, 2014.

__________________________________  
MARGARET CRANE
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