



NEW YORK CITY TAXI & LIMOUSINE COMMISSION

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TLC NEWS | TESTIMONY

TESTIMONY OF NEW YORK CITY TAXI AND LIMOUSINE COMMISSION SPECIFIC TO THE FISCAL YEAR 2004 PRELIMINARY BUDGET

Delivered March 20, 2003 Good afternoon, Chairman Liu and members of the City Council Transportation Committee. My name is Matthew Daus, the Commissioner/Chair of the New York City Taxi and Limousine Commission (TLC). Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to present testimony specific to the Fiscal Year 2004 Preliminary Budget for the Taxi and Limousine Commission.

The TLC continues to achieve its mission of ensuring public safety through its effective and innovative policies of licensing, regulating and enforcing regulations governing conduct in the taxicab, for-hire vehicle, paratransit and commuter van industries.

The TLC's actions and accomplishments are confluent with its goal of ensuring exemplary levels of customer service through the provision of safe and comfortable vehicles, and well-trained and courteous drivers who are knowledgeable of the streets of New York City and the rules of the road. The agency's initiatives, reforms and policies are proactive and attuned to the pulse of both its regulated industries and the riding public.

The agency's Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2004 is \$23,154,578. Of that amount, \$18,242,724 is for Personal Service (PS) and \$4,911,854 is for Other Than Personal Service (OTPS). This Preliminary Budget provides for an authorized headcount of 422 full-time employees. These employees are responsible for licensing and regulating 12,187 taxicabs, 46,914 for-hire vehicles, 408 commuter vans and 2,222 paratransit vehicles. In addition, the TLC licenses and regulates over 100,000 drivers, 688 for-hire vehicle bases, in addition to paratransit bases, medallion brokers and agents, taximeter shops and commuter van authorities.

As requested by the Committee, today I will report on several operational issues and initiatives. As you are aware, legislation authorizing the City of New York to issue and sell up to 900 additional medallions has been introduced into the State Senate and Assembly. The Mayor's Office has been designated by the City Council as lead agency, and the TLC has completed its review of responses to its Request for Proposals to conduct an Environmental Impact Study, which is necessary prior to issuing additional medallions. Earlier this week, the TLC made a recommendation for award of a contract to the consultant of choice. I am pleased to report that the agency is well within its prescribed timeline for completing the Environmental Impact Statement, targeted for September of 2003, and has set the operational wheels in motion to meet its legislative deadline, in which a bill could be signed by the Mayor before the end of 2003. This would allow for the sale of additional taxicab medallions during Fiscal Year 2004.

Through its Operation Street Hail, the TLC continues to make progress in curbing illegal street hails. While it has a strong public safety component, a principal reason of Operation Street Hail's existence is to relieve traffic congestion and enforce the laws pertaining to for-hire vehicle operation. This operation has inspectors working undercover to identify and issue summonses against violators. Under the program, inspectors have issued 4,114 summonses from the inception of the program in November 2001 through the present.

The TLC appreciates its responsibility to ensure that taxicab drivers fulfill their obligation to transport passengers to any destination within the City. Accordingly, the TLC's Uniformed Services Bureau conducts Operation Refusal, an undercover mission in which inspectors pose as potential fares to ensure that medallion drivers stop when hailed. Of the 2,453 refusal tests conducted during Fiscal Year 2003 to date, 2,282 or 93% of the drivers were found to be in compliance, accepting all prospective passengers as required, and agreeing to transport them to their chosen destination.

The TLC views driver safety as a paramount goal, and to this end, has mandated the installation of partitions or cameras in taxicabs and for-hire vehicles. Surveillance cameras in medallion taxicabs and liveries have been a very successful safety measure in many cities, and New York is no exception. In the latter half of 2000, the TLC presided over the installation of over 5,000 cameras in for-hire vehicles. In addition, there are cameras in 424 medallion taxicabs. The TLC works with the New York City Police Department (NYPD) in downloading relevant data from these cameras after crimes occur, which has resulted in 31 downloads of data to date by the TLC and more by the NYPD. Recently, as reported in the Daily News on March 13, in-vehicle cameras helped identify the man who assaulted and robbed three livery drivers in the Bronx that previous weekend.

The partition has proven to be an effective deterrent to crime, as illustrated by the fact that there has not been a job-related homicide of a medallion taxicab driver since January 1997. Also, robberies of both medallion taxicab and livery drivers have been on a consistently downward track for over a decade, from a high of 2,701 in 1992, to 339 in 2002, an 87% decrease. With regard to Global Positioning System (GPS) technology in New York City livery vehicles, should owners and drivers feel its installment would add an enhanced dimension of confidence and safety to their work, they are presently permitted pursuant to TLC rules and regulations to install such technology as an added safety measure.

The TLC, a veteran of doing more with less, has done so most notably through its effective use of the latest in technology. This is most evident in the variety of on-line and electronic services the TLC has placed at the disposal of its applicants and licensees, in the interest of minimizing processing time and providing the utmost in customer service. As part of its commitment to its customers, the TLC initiated a series of service enhancements in Fiscal Year 2003 to reduce waiting times and to streamline operations at its Tribunal, formerly characterized by long lines and crowded waiting rooms. Several procedural improvements were made, including: waiving the requirement that a licensee post a cash bond equaling the potential fine amount prior to the hearing, opening a new customer service window to expedite the processing of guilty pleas, streamlining adjournment procedures and consolidating data entry functions to reduce processing time for decisions once a hearing has been completed. As a result of these reforms, waiting time for respondents appearing at the Tribunal has been reduced from an average of three hours to less than thirty minutes in most cases. The TLC will expand its focus, in Fiscal Year 2004, on eliminating the need to visit the TLC through broadening the ability of licensees to interact with us via the TLC's website.

One example of this expanding use of technology is the electronic rate card service that the TLC began providing during this fiscal year. The TLC maintains records of drivers authorized to operate particular taxicabs to assist in identifying drivers in the event of reports of lost property, accidents or consumer complaints. Previously, a taxicab owner or agent was required to appear in person at the TLC to record each new driver of record. Under the TLC's new procedures, the owner or agent may file online by visiting the TLC's official website, thereby eliminating the need to appear in person. This innovation, made available through applied technology, has helped reduce the number of persons transacting business in person at the TLC's Medallion Unit by at least 35%, and has also reduced waiting time for other visitors to the TLC.

Another interactive use of the agency's website has been the ability of medallion taxicab owners to submit online the Financial Disclosure form required of them annually. This convenience results in significant postage savings for the agency, while facilitating submission of a required document for licensees.

LiveScan, another benefit of the TLC's maximization of the use of advanced technology, was introduced at the TLC earlier this year. The TLC is now able, through the purchase and installation of specialized equipment, to electronically transmit fingerprints of applicants directly to the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) for analysis. LiveScan, through which the TLC has processed over 2,500 prints to date, will reduce the time necessary to complete the criminal background investigations of applicants, thereby reducing the time to process license applications.

Moreover, in 2002, each base owner, taxicab agent, and fleet was required to furnish the TLC with a current e-mail address. This has enabled the Commission to better communicate with its licensees to distribute critical information. Use of this e-mail system will continue to improve communication with our licensees as well as reduce postage costs when sending out agency correspondence such as Industry Notices.

During Fiscal Year 2004, the TLC will continue to expand the ways in which licensees may communicate interactively with the agency via its website; we will build upon the abilities already in place for licensees to tap into the TLC's database to obtain up-to-the minute information regarding the status of their license and that of their affiliated drivers.

As always, the TLC, despite the City's economic situation, continues to maintain priorities that allow all of our core services to be effectively provided. The Management Accountability and Productivity Program (M.A.P.P.), modeled after the NYPD's widely-acclaimed COMPSTAT program and the Department of Correction's TEAMS concept, has been instrumental in making managers and staff accountable for the attainment of ambitious goals. Through the critical and analytical eye of M.A.P.P., the agency has been able to pro-actively streamline processes while ensuring that essential operations are efficiently conducted. The benefits of M.A.P.P. are pervasive in the agency and include the achievement of reductions in overtime and improvement in the rates of employee lateness and absence. The TLC will continue to use M.A.P.P. as a tool to enhance productivity and target areas for innovative and challenging goal setting.

Through the collaborative and creative efforts of our staff, the TLC has further improved the condition formerly known as "March Madness." Last year's annually recurrent increased licensing volume was handled smoothly, and without significant waiting time, due to the appointment program put into place via the utilization of a bank of fax machines. This year, our service to our customers includes the ability of our licensees to make appointments for transactions via e-mail, creating an even more efficient and paper-free environment. I am proud to say that with these innovations, the TLC appears to have seen the last of "March Madness."

To conclude, while my testimony, due to space constraints, must be less than comprehensive, it is indicative of the direction of the TLC, and its ability to continue to achieve in a challenging environment. The TLC will continue to challenge itself during this time of shared economic sacrifice, and will keep its operations and policies apace with the needs of the riding public and the TLC's regulatory responsibilities. In addition, we will continue our proactive stance toward innovation and excellence in customer service.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to responding to any questions you may have.

