

**Testimony of Taxi & Limousine Commission
Commissioner/Chair, Matthew W. Daus**

**Before the City Council Transportation Committee
February 7th, 2008, 11 AM**

**Oversight Hearing-Taxi of the Future: A Review of the Design Trust for
Public Space's Taxi Plan**

Good Morning Chairman Liu and members of the Transportation Committee. My name is Matthew Daus, and I am the Commissioner/Chair of the New York City Taxi and Limousine Commission. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the *Taxi 07: Roads Forward* publication.

In 2007, the Taxi and Limousine Commission celebrated the 100th Anniversary of the metered cab. To mark this occasion, we partnered with organizations such as the Design Trust for Public Space to celebrate our past and design our future through an initiative we call Taxi '07. This initiative not only included the *Taxi '07: Roads Forward* document but projects like Garden In Transit, which placed flower decals painted by New York City children on several thousand taxi cabs throughout the fall, as well as an exhibit at the New York International Auto Show hosted by the Design Trust that included visionary engineering and design components. In fact, it was at the Auto Show where we introduced the new taxicab external design logos that are now on most taxicabs. The Taxi 07 celebration also sparked our exploration into the "Taxi of Tomorrow".

The efforts of Taxi '07 have helped to expand the vision of what the taxicab vehicle as well as what the riding and driving experience can and should be. It

also brought riders, operators and regulators together with the design and engineering community to foster ideas that are now being explored and implemented. One of the most significant efforts is the “Taxi of Tomorrow” project, which is a collaboration among users, providers, and the automotive industry to design an iconic taxicab that meets the needs of the taxi industry and all passengers. The project’s vision is to identify and develop the characteristics and specifications of the ideal New York City taxicab. This includes manufacturing a taxicab that is environmentally friendly and fully accessible to the riders. Our next step is reaching out to the auto manufacturing industry to explore what they can build for New York City, how much it will cost and when it will be ready. The TLC plans to begin its outreach this month with the release of a “Request for Information” directed to the auto manufacturing industry.

As you can see, the general premise behind the entire Taxi ‘07 initiative is to acknowledge and celebrate the Centennial of the metered taxicab, and bring about the next generation of taxicabs that will better serve our changing city and its population by designing better, more sustainable vehicles with input from our many constituents.

The TLC is actively working internally and with partner organizations to move quickly towards the “Taxi of Tomorrow”. Many of the ideas discussed in the *Taxi ‘07: Roads Forward* document are already being researched and in several cases implemented. Before I speak specifically about the *Taxi 07: Roads*

Forward document, I want to acknowledge the work of the Design Trust for Public Space, its Executive Director Deborah Martin and the six fellows who created this document, as well as the efforts of TLC staff. The *Taxi 07: Roads Forward* document helps facilitate the realization of an iconic taxicab by opening up a dialogue about the taxi system's past and future, and serves as a useful primer detailing the history and economics of the New York City taxi industry. *Roads Forward* examines the guiding principles behind the industry, provides an illustrated guide to the taxi system, and recommends strategies for improving the taxi system.

The overarching principles of the document include offering safe, comfortable, efficient, and environmentally-sustainable taxi service of good economic value. These are principles that the Commission has worked towards for many years and are the core changes I introduced during my tenure as Chair of the Commission. As you know, hailing a taxicab is not quite as simple as putting your arm in the air and yelling "taxi". There are numerous steps that must take place before the taxi hits the streets of New York City. I would recommend reading the illustrated guide to the taxi system section to better understand how the actual taxi system works and balances these principles.

The comprehensive analysis presented in *Roads Forward* includes the many unique interests and needs of the New York City taxi system which are essential to understand to pave the road for the taxi industry's future. If I were to highlight

one area of this document, it would be the many suggestions that are brought up in the “Strategies for improving the taxi system” section. This section is based on looking at the taxi system from all perspectives; from drivers to owners, from the riding public to pedestrians, and from city residents to visitors.

Although the TLC does not necessarily agree with every specific concept, idea or suggestion presented in the publication, there are many exciting proposals that we have already begun to implement. We have aggressively moved towards increasing the usability and sustainability of the taxi system. One of the most widely-known projects that we have undertaken is the use of credit cards in all of our medallion taxicabs, which will increase the payment options for passengers and the usability of taxi service. Almost 68% of our taxicabs now take credit cards, and we are rapidly moving towards 100%. Many of these systems are also installing RFID readers that allow for “tap and go” payments currently being tested in the New York City Subway system.

The *Roads Forward* document also suggested increasing usability by moving towards the ideal accessible vehicle for all passengers. Although the “Taxi of Tomorrow” exercise seeks to create a safer and more comfortable environment for the driver and passenger through redesigning the vehicle, there are several communities that require our immediate attention to make taxicab service more available. Many passengers who use wheelchairs have a difficult time hailing a taxicab because the current vehicles do not accommodate their unique needs.

We are increasing service to passengers in wheelchairs by auctioning more medallions for sole use on wheelchair accessible vehicles. I would like to thank the City Council for its assistance in obtaining the authorization to sell these medallions. We have one more accessible medallion sale this spring and this will bring our total accessible taxi fleet to 231 vehicles – more than any other U.S. city.

We are also very excited about the new accessible dispatch pilot program. All wheelchair accessible vehicles will participate in a dispatch system. The system seeks to connect passengers who use wheelchairs with wheelchair accessible taxis through the 311 system. Another requirement of the dispatch system is for drivers to obtain special training on how to work the accessibility features on the vehicles and sensitivity training so that both the driver and passenger may have a safe and enjoyable ride.

The TLC is very committed to many of the general themes throughout the *Roads Forward*. One of the most significant themes in the book is to increase the sustainability of the taxi fleet. Although we hope to develop a vehicle in the “Taxi of Tomorrow” exercise that is a more sustainable and purpose-built taxi, we believe that action needs to be taken immediately. To this end, the TLC has promulgated groundbreaking regulations requiring minimum miles per gallon standards. Last year, the TLC passed rules that require all newly-licensed

taxicab vehicles to achieve 25 miles per gallon by October 2008 and 30 miles per gallon by October 2009.

The *Taxi 07: Roads Forward* document does a tremendous job of painting a clear picture of all the obvious and not so obvious features involved in providing the best cab service in the world. The document also presents some topics, goals and ideas for discussion that may make the system even better. We really enjoyed working with the Design Trust and look forward to continuing our collaboration on the best design of our iconic New York City taxi.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak about this exciting project. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.