

Accessible Dispatch RFI



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1.0 Introduction

Given the lessons learned from the Taxi and Limousine Commission's (TLC) recently concluded Accessible Dispatch Pilot Program (the "Pilot Program") and the challenges around TLC Rule 6-07(f) (as described in the report "Closing the Accessibility Gap: A Report on the TLC's Wheelchair-Accessibility Policies and Recommendations for Improving Accessible Taxi and For-Hire Vehicle Service in New York City" which can be found on the main page of the TLC website here or here:http://www.nyc.gov/html/tlc/downloads/pdf/accessible_dispatch_pilot_report_final.pdf), TLC is pursuing an improved, centralized, citywide dispatch system for the five boroughs of New York City. We believe such a dispatch system is an achievable goal that would materially improve transportation options for wheelchair users, in the absence of a fully wheelchair-accessible taxicab fleet. We believe this dispatch system should have the following characteristics:

- *Centralized dispatch service.* We favor the creation of a single dispatch service to provide wheelchair-accessible, point-to-point service generally equivalent to the service generally offered by taxicabs and livery bases to non-wheelchair users, but acknowledge that there may be benefits to two dispatch systems (one for medallion taxis and one for FHVs) working in parallel.
- *Utilize existing infrastructure.* The new system would take advantage of the current set of 240 wheelchair-accessible yellow taxicabs. These taxis would be required to respond to dispatch calls received through this dispatch service. In addition, the dispatch service would need to secure the availability of sufficient additional wheelchair-accessible FHVs in diffuse locations in order to meet response time standards (see below).
- *Service standards.* The Pilot Program suffered, and TLC Rule 6-07(f) suffers, from a lack of enforceable service standards. The new system must incorporate standards for response time and fare, to ensure that wheelchair users have access to equivalent service. We propose that the dispatch provider would be required to meet or exceed the following standards for response time (meaning the time from when a dispatch call is accepted by a dispatcher until the vehicle arrives at the pick-up location): 30 minutes or less for 50% of trips; 45 minutes or less for 75% of trips; and 60 minutes or less for 100% of trips. As to price, the dispatch provider would be required to provide trips at a metered fare, using the same fare structure as yellow taxicabs.
- *Driver subsidy.* It is evident from the levels of driver participation in the Pilot Program that drivers are not appropriately incentivized to make accessible dispatch trips. Specifically, we believe drivers should be compensated for the "dispatch" or "deadhead"¹ portion of a trip in order to

¹ "Deadhead" is the portion of the driver's trip after acceptance of the dispatch and prior to pick up of the passenger.



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ensure that drivers of wheelchair-accessible taxicabs participate in this new service.

- *Increased enforcement.* Simultaneously, additional enforcement will be necessary in order to avoid the driver non-participation and non-compliance issues of the Pilot Program. Both, the refusal to accept dispatches and the failure by medallion owners to have appropriately trained drivers in these vehicles must be penalized regularly and sufficiently in order to ensure sufficient and effective supply.
- *Driver Training.* All medallion vehicle drivers would be required to receive the necessary training to drive wheelchair-accessible vehicles.
- *Additional training.* As demonstrated by the Pilot Program, yellow taxi drivers are accustomed to the street hail model, and so additional training may be necessary in order to overcome any resistance to the dispatch model.
- *Funded by a fee.* Both operation of the dispatch service and the provision of subsidy for the “dispatch” portion of yellow taxi trips will require funding. We propose funding this service through a fee imposed on all owners of medallions and the FHV industry.

This Request for Information (RFI) seeks information from interested parties, passengers, drivers and advocates on how to address the needs of persons with disabilities who are in need of better transportation options, through a dispatch system.² It also provides the agency an opportunity to gather more specific knowledge on evolving technologies, costs associated and the true demand throughout the system.

2.0 Information Being Requested

Please provide responses to as many of the questions below as possible. In your response, please provide clear reference to the question you are answering.

2.1 Dispatch

2.1.1 Dispatch Process Map

The TLC regulates wheelchair-accessible vehicles in multiple industries but lacks a way of matching wheelchair users with these vehicles. Recognizing the best way to dispatch these vehicles in order to provide fast, efficient and safe service is of utmost importance.

Create a detailed, step-by-step process map outlining how a dispatch trip should work. The process map should include all dispatcher, driver and passenger interactions/communications, from the point at which the passenger calls the dispatcher to the end of the trip and payment of the driver for the trip

² This RFI only relates to accessible dispatch and in no way pertains to the Taxi of Tomorrow RFP.



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(including payment of the driver subsidy). Take into account all variables, including all instances of passenger and driver error, refusal, lateness, etc., with particular focus on the following six areas:

- 2.1.1.1 How should the dispatch provider ensure that a driver accepts a dispatch call?
- 2.1.1.2 Other than response time, can you suggest other ways of insuring equivalent service?
- 2.1.1.3 What should the dispatch provider do if a driver doesn't show up or is late?
- 2.1.1.4 What should the dispatch provider do if a passenger doesn't show up or is later than the allowed wait time? How long should the driver be required to wait at the pickup location for a passenger?
- 2.1.1.5 Where should the passenger wait for a ride (e.g. indoors, outdoors)?
- 2.1.1.6 What, if anything, should a driver do if a passenger isn't in a wheelchair (e.g., the driver gets to the location and the person doesn't appear to need a fully wheelchair-accessible vehicle)?
- 2.1.1.7 In the process map, the respondent should give details of all instances of communications between the following parties:
 - 2.1.1.7.1 Dispatcher and passenger
 - 2.1.1.7.2 Dispatcher and driver
 - 2.1.1.7.3 Dispatcher and TLC
 - 2.1.1.7.4 Driver and passenger

2.1.2 Dispatch and Reservation Technology

- 2.1.2.1 What should the dispatcher ask of the passenger at the time of reservation? How much detail is necessary to ensure that the driver and passenger are able to find one another?
- 2.1.2.2 Should passengers be permitted to arrange trips in advance, and if so, how far in advance could they schedule a trip? Should they be able to schedule regularized trips?
- 2.1.2.3 Should there be an automated system to take passenger calls?
- 2.1.2.4 How should the dispatch provider decide which vehicle to send for a pickup?



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- 2.1.2.5 What sort of technology should be used for dispatch (e.g. smartphone, TPEP system, other)?
- 2.1.2.6 Should there be a smartphone application or website that allows a passenger to schedule a trip or see where her/his vehicle is?
- 2.1.2.7 How should the dispatch provider ensure that the trip has been completed?

2.2 Service Standards

When considering a new accessible dispatch system, it is important to consider what service standards will be necessary for the program to function properly. With that in mind, the respondent should address the next set of questions as to what they believe the dispatch provider should be able to perform.

2.2.1 Standards

- 2.2.1.1 What performance indicators should the TLC and the dispatch provider use to monitor the performance of an accessible dispatch system?
- 2.2.1.2 Given the number of accessible vehicles that the TLC regulates (230+ medallion taxicabs and approximately 6 for-hire vehicles), are the possible mandated response times set forth in Section 1.0 attainable in all parts of the City? Should response times be even less in certain parts of the City (e.g. the Manhattan Central business district south of 60th street)? What percentage of trips should the dispatch provider be able to service in each of those three time frames?
- 2.2.1.3 How should the dispatch provider service the airports?

2.2.2 Fare

We've assumed that a meter is the best way to create equivalent service in the city as it standardizes fares for all service, rather than creating a new system for accessible service. We solicit this feedback knowing that this assumption may not be the only option, and are open to hearing suggestions from the industry.

- 2.2.2.1 What is the best way to structure the fare?
 - 2.2.2.1.1 For yellows?
 - 2.2.2.1.2 For FHV's?
 - 2.2.2.1.3 Should there be one structure for both?



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2.2.3 Driver Incentive

We believe that the fare alone may be insufficient to persuade medallion taxi drivers to participate. Taxi drivers are unused to a dispatch model and are unaccustomed to being required to travel to pick up a fare. Accordingly, we think that medallion taxicab drivers will require compensation for travel following dispatch to a pickup location (the deadhead portion of the trip). We assume that drivers will need regular payment of the subsidized portion of the trip, and that such payment must occur at least weekly, if not more often. It is anticipated that these costs will be subsidized by a fee on medallion owners and the for-hire vehicle (FHV) industry.

2.2.3.1 How should the dispatch provider pay the medallion driver's "deadhead" portion of the trip?

2.2.3.2 Is subsidization of the "deadhead" portion of a trip enough of an incentive for medallion drivers of accessible vehicles?

2.3 Program Promotion

One deficiency of the Pilot Program was the lack of general knowledge of and information about the program available to the public. We believe that it will be essential to the success of a future dispatch program that a substantial and ongoing amount of outreach is undertaken by the dispatch provider. Responders to this RFI should take into consideration that publicity will have to be significant and sufficient to let the disabled community know of the availability of the service, and this responsibility will fall largely on the dispatch provider's shoulders.

2.3.1 How should the dispatch provider advertise this program when it is first established? How should they continuously advertise this program?

2.3.2 Who are the critical partners that can help ensure the public knows about the service?

2.4 Costs

In this section, in addition to answering the questions, the respondent should create a table outlining the costs, and level of service associated with each cost, that the TLC should require of the chosen dispatch provider. This should include costs for providing dispatch service, promoting the program, guaranteeing that service standards are met throughout the five boroughs of NYC (including by obtaining participation of sufficient number of wheelchair-accessible FHV's to provide service to augment those provided by taxicabs), and incentivizing drivers to participate. It should be understood that all



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costs will be ongoing for the lifetime of the dispatch program, including those funds that are dedicated to the promotion of this program, in order to ensure that it is fully utilized by the disabled community.

2.4.1 Considering the following list, how much do you estimate it will cost to operate and maintain the aforementioned service standards? In your answer, please include considerations for multiple levels of service standards.

- 2.4.1.1 Deadhead
- 2.4.1.2 Dispatch operations
- 2.4.1.3 Additional vehicle acquisition or affiliation costs
- 2.4.1.4 Promotion/outreach
- 2.4.1.5 Quality assurance
- 2.4.1.6 What other costs should be considered for a dispatch system?

2.5 TLC Policy

As part of this program we are contemplating amending our rules to ensure reliable and predictable wheelchair-accessible service. We welcome suggestions on how best to address issues that cannot be addressed solely by the dispatch system (e.g., penalties for non-compliance).

2.5.1 Enforcement

- 2.5.1.1 How should the TLC best enforce against the dispatch provider in cases of infraction or lack of service?
 - 2.5.1.1.1 What level of monetary penalty should be considered?
 - 2.5.1.1.2 Should the TLC require a bond?
- 2.5.1.2 How should the TLC best enforce against the drivers?
- 2.5.1.3 What other types of enforcement are necessary in order to ensure the success of this program?

2.5.2 Driver Training

- 2.5.2.1 What type and amount of training should be required for drivers? What type and amount of training should be required of dispatchers?

3.0 Instructions For Responding To This RFI

3.1 Who may respond

The TLC invites responses from any and all interested parties. We hope to receive responses specifically from government agencies and municipalities, service providers, private industry, passengers, drivers and advocates.

3.2 How to respond



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Respondents should send their electronic submissions of their comments to Seth Melnick at the following email address: accessibledispatchRFI@tlc.nyc.gov.

TLC requests that all responses to this RFI be received at the above address by **February 14th, 2011**. Any questions regarding the RFI may be directed to the email address listed above.

3.3 RFI Response Contact

TLC requests that parties responding to this RFI designate a single contact within the organization (if applicable) for receipt of all subsequent information regarding this RFI.

3.4 Reimbursement

TLC will not reimburse respondents for any costs in connection with their responses to this RFI.

3.5 Review Process

This RFI is being issued with the intent to explore accessible dispatch further. The issuance of this RFI does not guarantee that the TLC will adopt rulemaking or initiate procurement or contracting for suggested dispatch systems. TLC will review and consider all responses to this RFI as part of an exploratory exercise.

3.6 Clarification

To fully comprehend the information contained within a response to this RFI, the reviewing group may seek further clarification on selected areas of the response. This clarification may be requested in the form of brief communication by telephone; written communication; electronic communication or a presentation of the response at a meeting of the TLC reviewing group.