

Testimony of Conan Freud, NYC Taxi and Limousine Commission

Chief Operating Officer

Vision Zero Initiative

City Council Transportation Committee

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Good Morning, Chairman Rodriguez and Chairwoman Gibson and members of the City Council Transportation and Public Safety Committees, I am Conan Freud, Chief Operating Officer of the Taxi and Limousine Commission (TLC). Thank you for the opportunity to talk with you today about what the TLC can do to support Mayor de Blasio's Vision Zero action plan. As we all know, streets are shared spaces used by pedestrians, bicyclists, drivers of private cars, buses, and taxis. We at the TLC can do more to make the streets safer for all users by improving policies that affect taxis and other for-hire vehicles, who often set the tone and the pace for all drivers on our streets.

Existing TLC policies and regulations were developed to ensure we license safe drivers and that TLC-licensed vehicles meet strict safety standards. We currently require drivers to complete a DMV defensive driving course and we are partnering with CUNY to revamp the taxi school curriculum to teach drivers how to navigate through complicated intersections since many roads now include lanes for buses, bicyclists, and automobiles. We will also pursue additional training for those who have been in crashes. In addition, all drivers must pass an annual drug test.

But make no mistake. We can do more.

Under Mayor de Blasio's leadership, we have partnered with the Police Department, the Department of Transportation, and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to develop the Vision Zero Action Plan. In the next few months, the Taxi and Limousine Commission will focus on passenger education, improve driver training and education materials, institute stricter enforcement, and explore new technologies.

Under an existing partnership with DOT, many taxis already feature 'Look!' stickers on passenger doors to remind passengers to be aware of passing bicyclists and

other vehicles when they exit the taxi. We will expand this program and create street safety public service announcements (PSAs) to run on the taxi TV screens.

Our drivers, by and large, are safe drivers. According to the last published report that analyzed crash data, taxi drivers and livery drivers were found to have been involved in fewer collisions per mile travelled compared to drivers of other vehicles. We want to commend those of our licensees who already drive safely for their safe driving and we plan to create a “driver honor roll” that will be available to the public on our website and on the Taxi TV screens. The logic being that passengers will reward safer drivers, and drivers will have an added incentive to drive safely.

Using existing in-taxi technology, the TLC can send messages to drivers through driver-facing information monitors. We already use these monitors to communicate traffic advisories and fare opportunities, and going forward, we’ll use them as a tool to send safety reminders as well. In addition, feedback from our stakeholders suggests that crashes are often caused by left-turning vehicles. As a result, we will design left-turn reminder stickers that can be placed in all vehicles in a location that is easily seen by drivers.

The TLC will also create a dedicated safety enforcement squad to carry out the goals of Vision Zero. This team would be equipped with new tools, such as radar equipment, to summons licensees for speeding. We can play a role in reducing the number of speeding drivers without using resources from the NYPD. In addition, the TLC will step up its enforcement against drivers offering for-hire vehicle services without a TLC license.

We’re also developing policy initiatives that will require longer-term planning and approval by the TLC Board of Commissioners before moving forward. We plan to pilot two new programs. First, TLC wants to explore the use of black box recorders, which are similar to data recorders on airplanes, and can provide valuable information on vehicle movements and speed in the event of a crash. Second, the TLC would like to explore technology that warns drivers and passengers that they are traveling over the

speed limit in hopes of preventing crashes. These are ideas to think about as we embark on a path to make our streets safer for everybody.

The TLC will seek to implement these policies and initiatives within its existing authority. However, the next couple of initiatives and policy proposals will need your support and the support of the state legislature.

We would like to work with the City Council to increase penalties for “runners” or drivers who flee TLC enforcement officers who are attempting to question them or issue a summons to them. Those who flee our enforcement officers pose a serious safety hazard for officers, other drivers, and pedestrians. The existence of criminal penalties would allow TLC inspectors to report the runner’s license plate number to the NYPD, who could then make the arrest.

Another initiative the TLC would like to implement would require the State Legislature to change the speed and bus lane camera laws to allow us to issue tickets to TLC-licensed drivers caught by cameras exceeding the speed limit or blocking a bus lane. Today, the state law prohibits the TLC from using the images collected by the cameras in our tribunals. Issuing a summons to drivers for this infraction would result in penalty points, which will be counted towards the driver’s potential suspension and revocation.

The next item we will seek your assistance with relates to consequences for drivers who commit safety-related violations, particularly those that result in serious injury or death. Under current rules, TLC drivers involved in deadly collisions involving dangerous driver behavior can remain licensed and on the road, a reality that we would like to see changed. In order to more expeditiously remove unsafe drivers from the road, TLC will pursue rule changes to increase the number of TLC points accrued for safety-related violations, including failure to exercise due care in circumstances resulting in a serious injury or death of a pedestrian or cyclist. In addition, we will seek City Council legislation to increase the number of DMV Critical Driver points associated with safety-related violations for TLC drivers. We will pursue adding “failure to exercise

due care” to the list of offenses for which a pre-hearing suspension can be issued, taking drivers off the road while potential charges are pending.

The final initiative would require Council approval to restructure the Critical Driver and Persistent Violator programs. These programs allow the TLC to remove drivers from the road who have accumulated either six or ten points on their DMV or TLC license within 15 months. Today, local law does not allow us to combine DMV and TLC points in order to suspend drivers with poor driving records even though points are often issued for the same infractions. The type of points issued is determined by who is writing the ticket at the time. Drivers accrue DMV points if found guilty for summons issued by NYPD officers and they accrue TLC points if found guilty for summons issued by TLC officers. This means a driver could accrue three DMV points and three TLC points, which, if combined, would meet the six-point threshold of either program and be subject to suspension. However, because we cannot combine the points of two different programs (issued for the same infractions), the driver would not trigger the suspension threshold until he accrued six points under only one program. We ask for your help to remove unsafe drivers sooner by changing the local law.

This concludes my testimony regarding the TLC initiatives for meeting the goals of Vision Zero. We look forward to updating and working with the Council on our proposed safety policy changes. Thank you for inviting me to speak today.