

Testimony of Meera Joshi
NYC Taxi & Limousine Commission Commissioner/Chair
PRELIMINARY BUDGET for FISCAL YEAR 2019
City Council Committees on Finance & For-Hire Vehicles
March 8, 2018

Good afternoon, Chairs Dromm and Diaz, and members of the Finance and For-Hire Vehicles Committees. I am Meera Joshi, Commissioner and Chair of the New York City Taxi and Limousine Commission. Thank you for inviting me here today to present TLC's Preliminary Budget for 2019. We are a small agency with a big mission: to ensure that every day, approximately one million passengers receive safe, reliable for-hire transportation, and to set and enforce the ground rules for the over 180,000 licensed drivers and 130,000 licensed vehicle owners and thousands of business owners that provide this transportation. In the face of rapid industry growth, I continue to seek a constructive relationship with the Council, so that we can work together to ensure that this vital transportation sector thrives.

I would first like to discuss improvements the TLC has made and our continuing work to strengthen performance of our core functions, including licensing and enforcement of local law and TLC rules.

Under local law, all drivers and vehicles that operate for hire in New York City must be vetted and licensed by the TLC. This means they have passed a review of their driving record, criminal record and have been fingerprinted and drug tested. These are fundamental public safety standards that cannot be sacrificed. With the increasing volume of applicants, we have focused on identifying efficiencies in the licensing process to decrease the time to review applications while also improving customer service. Many licensing processes have been moved

online, so that drivers do not have to make in-person visits as they did in years past. In 2017, we unveiled “TLC UP”, a platform for both driver and vehicle license applicants that allows them to complete almost all application requirements from their smart phone.

We also now allow vehicle owners to schedule their own appointments at times and on dates that work best for them, rather than having to work around a predetermined date and time. We hope to expand this system this year so that applicants can self-schedule vehicle inspections at our Woodside facility. Additionally, licensing staff visit drivers while they are completing their training to answer questions in person about the licensing process.

TLC drivers make roughly one million trips every day, and our goal is to ensure consumer protection and safety standards for every passenger. To that end, the TLC regularly visits bases, taxi stands, the airport holding lots, and other locations to update drivers on important initiatives and traffic safety strategies. To recognize and encourage safe driving, the TLC honors the safest drivers at its annual Safety Honor Roll. In 2017 we honored a record number of 420 drivers who had no crashes involving a fatality or injury, no traffic violations, and no violations of TLC safety-related rules for four years or more. We thank Council Members who have attended over the years, including councilmembers Gibson, Rodriguez and Dromm, and Chair Diaz, we welcome your participation and other members of the For-Hire Vehicles Committee in this important Vision Zero event.

Consumer protection and safety standards cannot be effective unless paired with enforcement, and so I want to reiterate a few points from the February 12th hearing. The goal of our enforcement action is to stop dangerous and unsafe behavior. As you heard from a member of Families for Safe Streets on February 12, safe driving can literally make the difference

between life and death. And I urge you to view our video “Drive Like Your Family Lives Here,” which is now shown to all MTA bus drivers and City drivers, as it graphically brings home the value of enforcing against unsafe drivers. For this reason, we prioritize our enforcement efforts on violations relating to traffic safety, such as speeding and distracted driving, and unlicensed activity. An example of this is our operations combatting unlicensed van activity, particularly in Brooklyn, Queens, and lower Manhattan. In total, the TLC completed nearly 300 van enforcement operations in 2017, which resulted in more than 1,300 summonses to unlicensed drivers and vehicles.

At the same time, we have taken several significant steps to ensure TLC regulations and penalties set by TLC rules match our safety goals. And we have done this without reducing the high safety and consumer protection standards that set New York City apart. For example:

- Local law requires us to suspend TLC licenses when drivers get too many DMV points. Since 2015, TLC allows many drivers to take safe driving courses that reinforce the rules of the road prior to the hearing and avoid penalties that would put them out of work for extended periods of time. This reinforces safe conduct and allows them to continue making money, safely and legally.
- Since 2015, following a meeting including industry stakeholders, TLC does not pursue TLC red light camera summonses if a driver has paid the underlying Department of Finance summons.
- In 2017, we amended our rules to allow drivers whose TLC licenses expired to renew and reopen them within six months and get back on the road without having to apply for a new license.

- In 2016, TLC commissioners adopted a penalty review rule package that reduced over 30 penalties.
- Starting in 2017, rather than issuing summonses for minor equipment violations, such as burnt out light bulbs, officers generally issue a Notice of Violation that allows drivers to fix the problem rather than issue a summons.
- Further, we've heard concerns from drivers about receiving field summonses in the mail instead of during a car stop, and I'm pleased to say that since January 2017, we have reduced the percentage of mailed summonses from 60% to 15%.

I am proud of the work we have done to reduce regulatory burdens and fines and encourage the Council to work with us in reviewing those penalties set by local law that can only be changed through Council action.

Finally, as part of our outreach initiatives, we have begun to hold open houses for drivers throughout the City where drivers can ask TLC Enforcement and Prosecution staff specific questions about open summonses and their rights at a hearing. We held one session in Jamaica, Queens last week and two sessions in the Bronx in late 2017. These are in addition to our regular driver outreach at events across the City, including last Saturday's Lunar New Year's celebration in Elmhurst where we met with drivers in Chair Dromm's district. We invite council members to contact us if they believe their constituents would benefit from these events.

I am happy to report that the TLC has made major gains this past year to make for-hire transportation in New York City truly accessible, a priority for this administration. In January, we officially launched the citywide expansion of our Accessible Dispatch Program. It began in 2012 and was limited to pickups in Manhattan, but now New Yorkers in all five boroughs can

request accessible taxi service at the metered rate of fare by calling the dispatch center directly or booking a trip online or through an app. The program also provides drivers greater economic opportunities as they are paid an amount over and above the metered rate of fare based on the distance they travel to the pickup location. In the beta launch period, roughly 2,300 drivers received dispatch payments of at least \$10 per trip above the metered rate.

We have also been working closely with the MTA to improve Access-A-Ride service. Since the beginning of our collaboration in 2016, Access-A-Ride customers have prearranged more than 122,000 taxi trips by phone or online, and in November 2017, the MTA launched a program to test the use of smartphone apps to help customers access real-time, on-demand service in TLC-licensed vehicles. Moving forward, we hope that TLC-licensed vehicles will continue to accommodate a greater volume of Access-A-Ride trips.

Now I'd like to preview the TLC's Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2019, which is \$60.9 million, broken down into \$39.8 million in personal services (PS), and \$21 million in other than personal services (OTPS).

Our Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2019 represents a \$3.5 million increase from Fiscal Year 2018. The budget increase is due primarily to a reinstatement of funds from a hiring freeze and delays this past year, as well as funding for accessible street hail liveries. In Fiscal Year 2018, we experienced delays recruiting staff to perform safety and emissions inspections at our facility in Woodside, Queens. As we head into the new fiscal year, we will continue working to recruit staff, and believe that through close coordination with DCAS we'll make progress to meet our needs. Technology has greatly changed the industries we regulate and we need to continue investing in technology to ensure we can meet our strategic goals with the best analytic tools. Outreach and engagement are also priorities as the number of drivers and business entities

we regulate increases. We'll continue working to improve our ability to communicate with licensees about new rules or programs, and update our communications systems to reflect today's reality that drivers are most accessible through their smart phones.

Overall, TLC's projected Fiscal Year 2019 revenue budget is \$57.3 million, not including \$107 million of projected revenue from medallion sales. We are in discussion with OMB about the medallion revenue, and it will be re-evaluated for the Executive Budget. TLC's projected revenue excluding medallions reflects the fact that in January 2016 we extended the license cycle from two years to three so we do not expect to receive revenue from license renewals under the new timetable until January 2019, and therefore, revenue from license renewals will be down the first half of FY2019. We will monitor licensing revenue during the year and work with OMB on any adjustments to the projection.

In the midst of a greatly transformed industry, the TLC continues to advance our key goals: safety, consumer protection, driver welfare and accessibility. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today, and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.