

**Testimony of Ashwini Chhabra, Deputy Commissioner, Policy & Planning
NYC Taxi & Limousine Commission**

INTRO 923, in relation to allowing the Taxi and Limousine Commission to replace hybrid electric vehicles with electric vehicles or any other vehicle model which has fewer emissions than electric vehicles.

INTRO 929-A, in relation to posting information on the exterior of vehicles for hire.

INTRO 930, in relation to reporting of data regarding taxi and for hire vehicle inspections by the Taxi and Limousine Commission.

**City Council Transportation Committee
November 26th, 2012**

Good morning, Chairman Vacca and members of the City Council Committee on Transportation. I am Ashwini Chhabra, Deputy Commissioner for Policy and Planning at the New York City Taxi and Limousine Commission. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today regarding three bills affecting the City's taxi and for-hire industries.

The first proposed item of legislation is Intro 923, which would permit owners of "alternative fuel medallions" to use Commission-approved electric vehicles as taxis. Currently the City's Administrative Code specifically restricts these 273 "alternative fuel medallions" to use with hybrid-electric or CNG-powered vehicles. As electric vehicles are becoming increasingly commercially viable, and as the charging infrastructure expands to make their use a practical option, we may decide that they could be used as taxis. In that event, this bill will give the owners of alternative fuel medallions the option of going electric. The Commission wholeheartedly supports this bill, and looks forward to testing this new technology in the hopes that it will provide another sustainable option for taxi owners.

The second item of legislation I'd like to address is Intro 930, which would require the Commission to report to the Council, on a quarterly basis, average wait times for taxi and for-hire vehicle (FHV) inspections. It is important to understand that while taxicabs and for-hire vehicles are both required to be inspected every four months the

process for the two types of vehicles is different. Taxicabs have a pre-set inspection schedule every four months during the course of the year and all inspections are done at the TLC's facility in Woodside. The time and date of the next scheduled vehicle inspection is given to the driver at each vehicle inspection. We can share the schedule with you, as it does not change.

In contrast, for-hire vehicles are only required to be inspected at our Woodside facility prior to initial licensure and then at the start of each renewal cycle, or once for every two year license cycle. After their initial inspection is performed at our Woodside facility FHV's are also then required to be inspected once every four months but these inspections can be done at any local DMV inspection facility. We do not track vehicle inspection appointment statistics for FHV's, as it is administratively burdensome to collect and analyze, and would distract staff from the more important work of actually processing these applications, but we did generate data on this for this Committee in February. As we reported at that time, an applicant will receive an inspection appointment date within three business days of completing all the necessary paperwork and notifying the TLC they have received their DMV plates and the total process, from the date the application is filed until their actual inspection appointment date for FY2013 is currently averaging only 10 calendar days. In addition, segments of the process are outside of the TLC's control so this process can, of course, take longer when applications are found to be incomplete or to contain errors that the applicant needs to rectify, or if the applicant takes longer than necessary to obtain plates from the DMV.

Given the foregoing, the Commission does not believe that collecting, analyzing and reporting this data every three months is an efficient use of staff resources. Commission staff would be better deployed to process these applications and to further reduce processing times. For that reason, we respectfully oppose this legislation.

The last proposed item of legislation – Intro 929-A – would require the rate of fare and the word "taxi" to be placed on the exterior of every vehicle authorized to accept a street hail. Respectfully, we disagree with the requirements of this bill. While the Commission shares the motivation behind this legislation – the education and protection

of consumers – this bill fails to achieve that goal. Instead, other current and planned innovations will better accomplish this goal than the alteration of door decals.

As you certainly know, all New York City taxis are already a uniform yellow color and have identical markings. They also all have distinctive rooflights which display the taxi medallion number specific to that vehicle, and a medallion affixed to the hood. All of these features readily mark them as New York City taxis. This combination of uniform color, uniform markings and distinctive rooflight turn an otherwise nondescript Ford Crown Vic or Toyota Prius into that iconic symbol of New York City – the New York City taxicab. And no one seeing one of these unique yellow vehicles from a block away can have any doubt that it is a New York City taxicab.

The New York City taxi is one of the world's most identifiable brands and its iconic nature is a key element to the industry's success. But more than this, the yellow taxi is a ubiquitous presence in the City; particularly in the Manhattan Central Business district, where taxicabs are often a large percentage of the vehicles on the road. And in that environment of persistent messaging and visual clutter, simplifying and cleaning up the markings on 13,237 taxis can make a real difference. In 2007, the TLC introduced new exterior markings for the first time since 1970, which included a modernized fare panel and a bold "T" in a circle followed by "AXI". Building upon those changes, we again engaged design professionals to help improve the taxis' iconic appearance. Based on their counsel, we recently replaced the words NYC TAXI on the side doors with a smaller NYC and the letter T; and we simplified and reduced the fare information that was posted on the door of the taxi. We have not had increased complaints from passengers – neither residents nor visitors – that this change has made it harder for them to discern a New York City taxi from the sea of vehicles on our City's streets. And we have not had any discernible increase in complaints from passengers that they didn't know the taxi fare before entering the cab.

Now in contrast, cities such as Los Angeles, San Francisco and Washington, D.C., require the word "taxi" to be on the door of the vehicle. Having the word "taxi" is a useful tool in these cities where taxicabs are a variety of color combinations depending

on the particular taxicab company. In New York City, that is simply not the case. The 'yellow' exterior of a taxi makes it easy to distinguish from other vehicles on the road.

On the subject of displaying the rate of fare on the exterior of the taxi, this is certainly one of those ideas that made sense at one time but no longer does. Back when the fare was simply an initial fare (the "flag drop") with an additional amount per distance traveled or time elapsed, it may have made sense to enumerate that for passengers. However, the fare structure today is more complicated, with the rate of fare varying depending on the time of day and the destination. When you ride a taxi today, you can expect to pay:

- \$2.50 upon entry; plus
- \$0.50 MTA tax; plus
- \$0.50 for each one-fifth of a mile when the cab is traveling at 6 miles an hour or more, or for every 60 seconds when the cab is not in motion or traveling at less than 6 miles an hour; plus
- a weekday peak hour surcharge of \$1.00 between 4PM and 8PM from Monday to Friday; plus
- a night time surcharge of \$0.50 between 8PM and 6AM daily;
- plus tolls.

In addition, there are different rates for trips that leave the five boroughs; different rates for Newark airport fares; and a flat fare between Manhattan and JFK airport. This increased complexity – while necessary in the calculation of the fare – is potentially confusing if posted on a taxi door. Indeed, prior to this most recent change to the exterior markings, much of this fare information, in order to fit on the door, had to be presented in a size that rendered it less than useful.

The fact is, we now have technology aides that we didn't have back when the exterior fare markings were originally conceived. Each of the 13,237 taxis is equipped with a passenger-facing TV screen, and each trip begins with a display of the rate of fare on those screens. In addition, passengers have the option, at any point during their trip, to read a more detailed onscreen explanation of the various rates of fare, and to

learn about the various components of each rate of fare. This does more to educate and protect consumers than any exterior decal, glimpsed briefly prior to entering a taxi, possibly could.

And the taxi screens also provide pop-up passenger alerts whenever an out-of-town rate has been activated, or when a toll has been inappropriately charged. It is important to note that in recent instances of overcharging by drivers – in one case, activation of the out-of-town rate for in-town trips, and in the other case, improper collection of toll amounts – listing the fare on the vehicle's exterior would not have prevented the overcharging. In both those instances, it was the GPS and the taxi screen which are part of the TPEP system, that allowed us to identify the instances of overcharging, to notify passengers of its occurrence, and to prevent it from happening again.

As for the numerous visitors who fly into either JFK or LaGuardia airports, the Port Authority distributes fare cards to inform them what the cost of their trip could be. As you know, trips from JFK are a flat fare of \$52 to Manhattan and the rate card lists estimated fares to other areas of the City. Tourists who travel from LaGuardia also have rate cards available to them that provide estimates of how much trips typically cost to various areas in the City. This is all information that is more helpful than what could be contained on the door of the cab.

In simplifying the information on the exterior of the vehicle – the decal still informs prospective passengers that they are entitled to pay a metered fare, and that there is a flat fare between Manhattan and JFK – we are not alone. All of our “peer” cities – London, San Francisco, Chicago, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Boston – require the fare to be posted on the interior of the taxi, not the exterior.

However, based on the Council's advocacy on this issue – in particular, in response to inquiries from Chairman Vacca and Council Member Garodnick – we are making one significant change that we believe will further assist passengers in making sure they are being charged the correct amount. With the next generation of TPEP systems beginning in February, we will require that the taxi screens give passengers the

option of viewing their own itemized fare information at any time during the trip – including the drop, the MTA tax, the time and distance portion of the fare, and any tolls or surcharges. Currently, this information is only visible at the end of the trip. With TPEP 2.0, this information will be available on demand.

This concludes my testimony regarding the bills being considered today. I would like to thank you again for the opportunity to testify before the Council about these proposed items of legislation. And at this time, I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.