

Testimony of Commissioner Meera Joshi

Committee on Transportation

Oversight Hearing: Evaluating the TLC's Street Hail Livery Program

June 9, 2014

Good afternoon Chair Rodriguez and members of the Transportation Committee, I am Meera Joshi, Commissioner and Chair of the New York City Taxi and Limousine Commission. Thank you for this opportunity to speak today about the Street Hail Livery program (SHL), also known as boro taxis or green cabs. Your hearing is timely; it falls almost exactly on the anniversary of the first issuance. On June 12, 2013, the first permit was sold to a Bronx resident who I spoke with just two weeks ago at a Vision Zero Town Hall in the Bronx hosted by Chair Rodriguez. And we have much to report on the program's operation since that first permit was sold.

The goal and purpose of the program is simple: to replace an illegal hail system prevalent in the boroughs with one that provides customers and drivers with a safe and legal means of obtaining and providing for hire service. This goal has been met. Since inception, SHLs have completed over 5.8 millions trips for approximately 6.9 million customers. Prior to the creation of SHLs, yellow taxis were the only vehicles that were permitted to pick up street-hailing passengers and 94% of all yellow taxi pick-ups occurred in Manhattan or at the airports, leaving Northern Manhattan, the Bronx, Queens, Brooklyn, and Staten Island without any meaningful legal street hail service.

Today SHLs are completing over 43,000 trips per day and are providing much needed hail service in the boroughs. In Northern Manhattan they made 1.8 million trips closely followed by Queens with 1.6 million trips, and Brooklyn with 1.4 million trips. In the Bronx, SHLs made 600,000 trips and 1,600 trips in Staten Island. A large majority of these trips start and end in the same borough. For example, of the 1.6 million trips starting in Queens, 1.4 million of those trips also had a destination in Queens. SHL trips are taking place all across the boroughs and are not limited to certain areas. As more SHLs come into service, we are seeing more and more trips spreading across Northern Manhattan, the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, and Staten Island.

And SHLs are bringing benefits to passengers and drivers beyond simply getting from point A to point B. Borough hail passengers can get a car that will charge a regulated metered fare, is equipped with a credit card reader, and whose passenger trips can be identified through GPS. These features

allow the TLC to monitor payment data for potential overcharges, let passengers use credit cards for payment, a feature over 39% of passengers are using, and allow us to reunite passengers with lost property. These are critical benefits yellow cab passengers have long enjoyed.

SHLs have also created a small business opportunity for permit owners to legally provide service that they had been providing illegally for many years. Apart from the increased earnings they have reported, permit owners have also been quick to share their excitement about the benefits associated with small business operation. They have gone from simply having a job to owning a tangible stake in our city, and in their own future. Their pride of ownership is apparent, and others want to join them, so much so that we currently have over 6,300 prequalified licensees on the second-issuance wait list. That's more than the number of permits that will be available.

We learned a lot from the first wave of 6,000 permits that were issued. And as we begin the next issuance, we are cognizant of the fact that we need to continue and increase enforcement against illegal operators and increase outreach about the program to our licensees and the riding public.

Part of how we promote safe and reliable service for the public is by protecting licensees who play by the rules and provide service within the scope of their licenses. Today, we have 171 inspectors and we plan to add 50 more this summer. Our enforcement team, together with our unlimited towing capacity, gives us the necessary tools to remove illegal operators from our streets. In this calendar year, we have issued over 4,600 summonses for illegal street hails and we have seized over 3,600 unlicensed vehicles. Seizing unlicensed vehicles ensures that only licensed drivers who have passed drugs tests and vehicles that have passed inspections are offering service to the riding public. We are also enforcing against SHLs that pick-up in the Exclusionary Zone (South of West 110th Street and East 96th Street and at the airports). In this calendar year we have issued over 870 summonses to drivers and owners for picking up in the Exclusionary Zone.

Additionally, in response to confusion about where passengers can hail an SHL, we are considering a door decal clearly defining the no hail zones. Going forward, we will continue to focus on unlicensed operators and SHLs making illegal pickups in the exclusionary zone.

In terms of outreach, because the Vision Zero Town Halls have proven to be so helpful and informative, we will be holding similar town halls throughout June and July as one method of educating the public on the benefits of using legal transportation and an opportunity to review for potential

purchasers the ins and outs of permit ownership and operation. We welcome all drivers and members of the public to attend.

In addition to enforcement and outreach, we are also working on a plan to improve accessibility options. Before we move forward with the next issuance of SHL permits, we will be submitting the Disabled Accessibility Plan (DAP) to the New York State Department of Transportation for its review and consideration by June 12. And we look forward to City Council's input on our draft DAP before it is submitted.

The DAP is required by the State HAIL law, the law authorizing the creation of the Street Hail Livery Program, and must be approved prior to selling additional yellow wheelchair accessible taxi medallions. The DAP provides a framework for dramatically improving wheelchair accessible taxi service and wheelchair accessible for-hire vehicle service in all five boroughs. Right now 1,200 wheelchair accessible SHLs permits have been issued and 400 additional wheelchair accessible taxicab medallions have been sold. Once approved and implemented, the plan will facilitate the creation of more than 16,900 accessible vehicles (approximately 8,800 yellow taxis and 8,100 SHLs) operating for hire in New York City, making it one of the largest fleets of accessible taxis in the world. This means that ultimately, 54% of all hail-able vehicles in NYC will be wheelchair accessible, offering passengers with wheelchairs true access to spontaneous for-hire transportation. I would like to thank the advocates and the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities for working with us to reach this goal.

In closing, we believe the SHL program has gone far in filling a transportation gap in areas underserved by mass transit with safe and legal service. And we recognize that continued growth requires continued discussions with and feedback from Council, passengers, drivers, and owners. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.