

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON  
TRANSPORTATION AND  
INFRASTRUCTURE

jointly with the

COMMITTEE ON MENTAL  
HEALTH, DISABILITIES, AND  
ADDICTION

and the

COMMITTEE ON AGING

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Friday, February 24, 2023

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HELD AT: Council Chambers

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Linda Lee, Chairperson  
Crystal Hudson, Chairperson

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## A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Richard Davey  
President  
New York City Transit

Chris Pangilinan  
Vice President of Paratransit  
New York City Transit

Jaibala Patel  
Deputy Chief Financial Officer  
Metropolitan Transit Authority

Christina Curry  
Commissioner  
Mayor's Office, People with Disabilities

Emily Sweet  
Mayor's Office, People with Disabilities

Judy Ortiz  
New York Community for Change

Jean Ryan  
President  
Disabled In Action, Metropolitan New York

Iris Kelly  
Access-A-Ride user

Cara Liebowitz  
Advocacy Coordinator  
Brooklyn Center for  
Independence of the Disabled

Dr. Sharon McLennon-Weir  
Executive Director  
Center for Independence  
of the Disabled New York

Liam Blank  
Associate Director  
Permanent Citizens Advisory  
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Daniel Ross  
Senior Staff Attorney  
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RueZalia Watkins  
Access-A-Ride user

Gian Carlo Pedulla  
Access-A-Ride user

Michael Ring  
Disabled In Action of Greater New York

Kathleen Collins  
Disabled In Action of Greater New York  
and Downstate New York ADAPT

Yolanda Lee  
Access-A-Ride user

Florence Ferguson  
Access-A-Ride user

Fay Hill  
District Leader  
Assembly 31B

Khalia Hayslett  
Access-A-Ride user

Edward Funches  
Advocate for Disability Community

Beverly Parker  
Access-A-Ride user

Brianna Paden-Williams  
Communications and Policy Associate  
LiveOn New York

C.N.  
Access-A-Ride user

Minister Dr. Diane Rose  
Aging Gracefully In The City

Eman Rimawi-Doster  
Executive Director  
Harlem Independent Living Center

Glen Bolofsky  
Citizen of New York

Jose Hernandez  
President  
New York City Chapter of United Spine  
Association

Lyric Thompson  
Citizen of New York

Ruth Lowenkron  
Director, Disability Justice Program  
New York Lawyers for the Public Interest

Sharon Suggs  
Access-A-Ride User

Tashia Lerebours  
Center for Independence of the Disabled

Yasmin Campbell  
Access-A-Ride User

Zay Zay  
Access-A-Ride User

COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE with  
COMMITTEE ON MENTAL HEALTH, DISABILITIES, AND  
ADDICTION and the COMMITTEE ON AGING

7

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning everyone and  
welcome to today's New York City Council hearing for  
the Committee on Transportation jointly with Aging  
and Mental Health. At this time, we ask that you  
silence cell phones and electronic devices to  
minimize disruptions throughout the hearing. If you  
have testimony you wish to submit for the record you  
may do so via email at [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov).  
Once again that is [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov). We  
thank you for your cooperation. Chairs, we are ready  
to begin.

CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Good morning and  
thank you for joining today's joint hearing of the  
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, the  
Committee on Aging and the Committee on Mental  
Health, Disabilities and Addiction. I am pleased  
that I'm joined today by my colleagues, Chair Hudson,  
and Chair Lee. Today we are going to talk about a  
service hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers rely on  
Access-A-Ride. As New Yorkers, we value diversity,  
diversity in race, ethnicity, age, and abilities. We  
also recognize our responsibility to ensure every  
member of our diverse communities can live and move  
throughout our city with dignity, including older

1 adults, and those living with disabilities. That  
2 means ensuring everyone has access to affordable  
3 public transit service. However, our transit  
4 infrastructure is not built to be accessible. Just  
5 27 percent of our subway stations have elevators or  
6 ramps. Even when stations are equipped to be  
7 accessible elevators and escalators at the stations  
8 are frequently plagued by outages and delays, making  
9 their availability unpredictable for riders in need.  
10 Buses are not much better. While all MTA buses are  
11 wheelchair accessible, we hear frequently from  
12 constituents that drivers do not know how to operate  
13 the bus lifts and ramps that allow riders to board.  
14 We also hear about safety concerns at the bus stops  
15 themselves. Street traffic can create dangerous  
16 conditions for boarding and exiting buses, as can  
17 street impediments like trash piles and snow banks,  
18 and I'll add double parking. It is because of  
19 inaccessibility in our subway and bus system that we  
20 need a competent paratransit service in New York, one  
21 that provides our older and disabled residents  
22 service comparable to that which the rest of the  
23 system provides. This is a legal obligation under  
24 federal law, but it also is a moral obligation and  
25



responsibility to ensure every New Yorker can get  
around the city with dignity.

Since July 1993, the MTA has been responsible for  
the operation of Access-A-Ride. Access-A-Ride was  
created after the passage of the ADA, which required  
the city to provide paratransit to individuals with  
disabilities and ensure a level of service and  
response time comparable to the service for non-  
disabled passengers. Access-A-Ride operates 24 hours  
a day, seven days a week throughout the city, and  
includes shared ride service, origin-to-destination  
service, and feeder service for those who will  
complete a trip partly by bus or subway. After a  
two-prong test is conducted, those who are determined  
eligible are assigned to one of several categories,  
including continual, temporary, or conditional  
eligibility. There are currently 170,000 eligible  
Access-A-Ride customers. Once eligible, a customer  
receives an Access-A-Ride MetroCard allowing them to  
use mass transit or Access-A-Ride with cars with  
customers making reservations through MTA's call  
center or through their mobile app. MTA contracts  
with private carriers to provide paratransit service,

2 with paratransit vehicles being equipped with lifts  
3 and ramps.

4 In addition, private taxis livery services, black  
5 car services, green and yellow accessible taxis, and  
6 standard taxis are also utilized to provide this  
7 vital service. Although the MTA has said publicly  
8 that riders satisfaction with Access-A-Ride is up,  
9 that data is contradicted by the stories each of us  
10 on this day is have heard from our constituents.

11 Moreover, that data is contradicted by findings  
12 released last fall by the United States Department of  
13 Justice, which, prompted by rider complaints  
14 undertook an investigation of Access-A-Ride and found  
15 that Access-A-Rides failing to meet its obligation  
16 under the Americans with Disabilities Act. The DOJ  
17 found that the New York City Transit Authority has  
18 failed to provide paratransit services at a level of  
19 service comparable to the level of service provided  
20 to individuals who use the fixed route system.

21 I want to recite a few of the Department of  
22 Justice public findings, which raise serious concerns  
23 regarding the program's compliance with the ADA.  
24 First DOJ found that the MTA uses a standard for  
25 determining whether an Access-A-Ride drop off is

2 late, that differs from the standard recommended by  
3 the federal government, and that under the  
4 recommended federal standard, which requires drop  
5 offs occur by the requested appointment time, 13.9  
6 percent of drop-offs were late.

7 The Department of Justice also found that nearly  
8 40 percent of drop offs were unreasonably early,  
9 occurring more than 30 minutes prior to the requested  
10 appointment time, and thus, also out of compliance  
11 with the recommended federal standard.

12 The Department of Justice also found Access-A-  
13 Ride travel times to be excessive for 78 percent of  
14 trips, originating in Brooklyn, 91 percent of trips  
15 originating in Manhattan, and 72 percent of the trips  
16 originating in Queens.

17 These findings indicate that the program is not  
18 meeting the needs of its customers.

19 Today's hearing should be focused on how  
20 accessorial can better meet those needs. I want to  
21 understand what changes Access-A-Ride has made to  
22 limit the number of late drop off and extremely early  
23 drop offs, what it is doing to reduce travel time for  
24 trips originated in Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Queens.  
25 And whether it has adopted the recommended federal

2 standards for assessing timeliness and duration of  
3 trips. I want to understand how Access-A-Ride is  
4 ensuring compliance with the ADA. I am also  
5 interested in learning about how Access-A-Ride can  
6 expand its services. Several years ago, Access-A-  
7 Ride permitted a select group of 1200 riders to use  
8 the E-Hail app to secure rides, a pilot program that  
9 was met with great enthusiasm as it obviated the need  
10 for Access-A-Ride riders to book cars days in advance  
11 and let them hail cars at the time a trip would be  
12 taken.

13 Since its launch however, the program has not  
14 expanded. I know MTA has promised to at least double  
15 its size in early 2023. Today, we will discuss the  
16 commitment and prospects for further expansion. This  
17 includes expanding the number of drivers who can  
18 participate in this program as well, such as Yellow  
19 cab medallion owners. Above all, it is critical that  
20 New York City's paratransit service not merely comply  
21 with the ADA as it must, but that it exceeds the  
22 baseline legal requirements and provides high-quality  
23 service to older adult and disabled residents.

24 Finally, we will discuss Access-A-Ride's funding  
25 structure. Just this month the governor released her

2 fiscal 2024 state executive budget, which calls on  
3 the city to contribute 100 percent of paratransit  
4 costs to the MTA. In the past, the state and city  
5 have shared the cost of the program.

6 From 1993 to 2020, pursuant to an agreement with  
7 the MTA, the city paid a third of the program's net  
8 operating expenses. Annual increases to the city's  
9 share were capped to no more than 20 percent from the  
10 amount the city had paid in the prior year. In 2020,  
11 the state imposed a new mandate, requiring the city  
12 to pay 50 percent of the paratransit costs. This  
13 change impacted the city's budget by more than \$100  
14 million annually, and it is expected to cost the city  
15 \$242.9 million in calendar year 2024. Now, if the  
16 budget passes as is, the city would be required to  
17 reimburse the MTA \$485.7 million dollars in calendar  
18 year 2024. The city's obligation will continue to  
19 grow reaching \$573 million in calendar year 2026.

20 Today, we will explore what the city's role  
21 should be in funding this service, a service operated  
22 by the state. I look forward to hearing from the MTA  
23 and the city, and discussing how we can make Access-  
24 A-Ride work better for New Yorkers, and I want to  
25 thank the advocates, and members of the public who

2 have joined us today. We will hear today from users  
3 of Access-A-Ride, those who can speak firsthand about  
4 the shortcomings of this service. I am grateful they  
5 are here today to share their stories. The work we  
6 do to improve this service must be guided by the  
7 experience of its users.

8 I thank my staff and committee staff for their  
9 hard work, Samuel Breidbart, counsel to the  
10 committee; Kevin Katowski, senior policy analyst;  
11 John Basile, principal finance analyst; Jorge Munez  
12 Reyes, communications; Jack Siegenthaler, my policy  
13 and budget director; and Renee Taylor, my chief of  
14 staff. I also want to thank my Co-Chairs and their  
15 staff. We will now turn it over to my Co-Chairs for  
16 their opening statements. Councilmember Lee?

17 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much Chair Brooks-  
18 Powers. My name is Linda Lee, and I am the Chair of  
19 the Committee on Mental Health, Disabilities, and  
20 Addiction. I'd like to begin by thanking both of my  
21 colleagues, Chair Hudson from the Committee on Aging,  
22 and Chair Brooks-Powers from the Committee on  
23 Transportation and Infrastructure for holding this  
24 important hearing today, and especially thank you to  
25 all the advocates, as well as the folks from the MTA,

1 and I see Commissioner Curry is here with us, so I  
2 want to thank all of you for being here with us  
3 today.

4  
5 New York City is home to approximately 1 million  
6 disabled individuals. In fact, 21 percent, or one in  
7 five New Yorkers, have a functional disability which  
8 affects their mobility, cognition, independent  
9 living, hearing, vision or ability to administer self  
10 care. Additionally, adults with disabilities in New  
11 York City are more likely to experience greater  
12 health disparities, higher rates of unemployment, and  
13 significant barriers to finding affordable and  
14 accessible housing than people without disabilities.

15 In my district in Queens, we are already faced  
16 with living in what is known as a transportation  
17 desert, so we have no railways, subways, or Long  
18 Island Railroad in the district. So we rely heavily  
19 on buses and services provided to us like Access-A-  
20 Ride, and are truly they are a lifeline for many of  
21 our neighbors that, like the rest of us, need to go  
22 from point A to point B on a regular basis.

23 And services like Access-A-Ride or I have to say  
24 I learned today it's sometimes called Stress-A-ride  
25 because it stresses people out. You know, it impacts

1 people's ability to get to and from work, doctor's  
2 appointments school, which impacts their education,  
3 and this has a significant economic security, and  
4 health, and well-being impact that is often  
5 predicated on being able to get from point A to point  
6 B as I mentioned earlier, and it's important to note  
7 that, you know, daily living, various appointments,  
8 as well as cultural social activities in a safe and  
9 timely and dependable manner are what we should  
10 strive for and what should be the standard.

12 Today, we look forward to hearing from the  
13 advocates and asking members of the administration  
14 what can be done to improve Access-A-Ride which  
15 serves as an integral part of our community's health  
16 and well being. I want to thank everyone for being  
17 here today to testify, and I look forward to learning  
18 more about the city's plan to improve Access-A-Ride  
19 and how this council can best support these efforts  
20 going forward. And in closing, I'd like to thank  
21 committee staff, Committee Counsel Sarah Sucher, and  
22 Senior Policy Analyst Christie Dwyer for their work  
23 on this hearing, as well as my own staff.

24 And I will now turn it over to Chair Hudson to  
25 deliver her opening remarks.



1  
2 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much, Chair  
3 Lee. Good morning. I'm councilmember Crystal  
4 Hudson, Chair of the Committee on Aging. I want to  
5 thank transportation infrastructure committee Chair  
6 Selvena Brooks-Powers, and Mental Health,  
7 Disabilities, and Addiction Committee Chair Linda Lee  
8 for agreeing to hold today's hearing.

9 While the city's subway and buses can be very  
10 convenient. It's not always so easy for the 1.1  
11 million older adults, aged 65-plus, who live in New  
12 York City. Certain age-related issues may make it  
13 more difficult for some older adults to go up or down  
14 subway stairs, travel to a subway or bus station, get  
15 on, ride, and exit a subway or bus, and/or  
16 independently ride or navigate the bus or subway  
17 system. It could be that an older adult is  
18 recovering from surgery or has a long-term condition.  
19 Whatever the case, as the older New Yorker population  
20 increases and grows older, it is critical that the  
21 city's public transportation system also grows to  
22 meet their needs. The MTA's Access-A-Ride service a  
23 paratransit option for people who cannot use the  
24 city's subway or buses, picks up eligible commuters  
25 and drives them to their destination. In order to

2 become an AAR customer, they must prove they have a  
3 need for it. This includes scheduling an assessment,  
4 submitting an application, and attending a physical  
5 assessment. Once approved, participants must reserve  
6 their ride one to two days in advance online or by  
7 calling Access-A-Ride. Rides must be canceled at  
8 least two hours before the scheduled pickup time.

9       However, AAR customers complain about slow and  
10 inefficient service and accessible vehicles and  
11 drivers who are poorly trained in working with  
12 passengers with disabilities. Moreover, there are  
13 restrictions placed on the number of rides one may  
14 book. Given their unique needs accessible,  
15 affordable and convenient public transportation  
16 services are critical to allowing older adults to  
17 live independently.

18       Thank you to the advocates and members of the  
19 public who are joining us here today. And thank you  
20 to representatives from the MTA and the  
21 administration for joining us. I'd also like to  
22 thank my staff, Casey Addison and Andrew Wright,  
23 Aging Committee staff Christopher Pepe, Chloe Rivera,  
24 Ostrom Chan, and Kelly Welch. And I'll now turn it  
25

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2 back to Chair Brooks-Powers to proceed with the  
3 hearing. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you Chair. I'd  
5 also like to acknowledge our colleagues who are in  
6 attendance today. We are joined by Councilmembers  
7 Lewis, Narcisse, Carr, Kagan, Hanif, Cabán, Schulman,  
8 Farías, and Stevens. Thank you. And now I'll pass  
9 it over to Committee Counsel.

10 COUNSEL BREIDBART: Thank you. I'm Sam  
11 Friedberg, Counsel to the Transportation and  
12 Infrastructure Committee of the New York City  
13 Council. So we're going to call on our first set of  
14 witnesses from the MTA, Richard Davey, president of  
15 New York City Transit, Chris Pangilinan, VP of  
16 Paratransit for New York City Transit, and Jai Patel,  
17 Deputy CFO of the MTA, and we will swear you in. If  
18 you could raise your right hands.

19 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth  
20 and nothing but the truth before these committees,  
21 and to respond to honestly to Councilmember  
22 questions?

23 ALL: We do.

24 COUNSEL BREIDBART: You may begin.  
25

1  
2 MR. DAVEY: Thank you. Well, good morning,  
3 everyone. Good morning to the folks here in the  
4 room, our riders, and our customers in particular. I  
5 want to thank the City Council for having us here  
6 today to discuss our paratransit program,  
7 particularly to Chair Brooks-Powers, Chair Hudson,  
8 Chair Lee. Nice to meet the both of you. I  
9 appreciate you having us here and for the opportunity  
10 to discuss how we are making improvements to the  
11 service for our customers with disabilities.

12 This is my second time appearing in front of the  
13 City Council, and the fact that I was invited back  
14 must be a good sign. So I appreciate the opportunity  
15 to once again talk about the important work that we  
16 together do the city and the state to move New  
17 Yorkers across the city in the region.

18 As mentioned, I am joined by Vice President  
19 paratransit, Chris Pangilinan, and our MTA Deputy  
20 Chief Financial Officer Jai Patel, to help answer  
21 questions you might have.

22 I want to emphasize how important Access-A-Ride  
23 is to the MTA. We consider it equal to our bus and  
24 subway services, and as a result last year, made the  
25 head of paratransit reporting directly to the

2 President of New York City Transit to make sure that  
3 paratransit has an equal seat at the table within New  
4 York City Transit. We moved it out of the bus group,  
5 because we felt it should have equal attention, and  
6 its customers deserve equal consideration.

7 I'm thrilled to be here today, but I'm not the  
8 person you want to hear from. Before I pass the  
9 baton over. Let me tell you a little more about  
10 Chris, who has been driving the driving force behind  
11 some of the positive change at AAR since he arrived  
12 last year.

13 Chris came to the MTA to oversee paratransit,  
14 leading the team that provides nearly 30,000 rides  
15 per day to people who have difficulty using the bus  
16 or subway system due to a disability. Chris has  
17 dedicated an 18 year career in public transportation  
18 to enable people, especially those with disabilities  
19 to live their lives to the fullest. In his previous  
20 role, he was the leading public transportation and  
21 access accessibility policy manager at Uber. He also  
22 held several roles at Transit Center, New York City  
23 Transit, the San Francisco Municipal Transportation  
24 Agency, and the US DOT.

1  
2 Now, when I joined New York City Transit now 10  
3 months ago as President, we made a commitment to put  
4 customer satisfaction first. We often call it our  
5 Northstar at New York City Transit. Now, we  
6 certainly have more to do in that regard for all  
7 modes, bus, subway, and paratransit. But I do want  
8 to emphasize that we are growing ridership and  
9 paratransit while improving our key performance  
10 metrics across the board, including customer  
11 satisfaction. Now, let me turn it over to Chris to  
12 who has led these extraordinary improvements over the  
13 last year to provide an update on all things AAR and  
14 then to take the Council's questions. But again, I  
15 appreciate the opportunity to be with you today.  
16 Chris?

17 MR. PANGILINAN: Sure. Thank you Rich. And  
18 thank you Councilmembers for having us here today to  
19 share with you some of our successes and challenges  
20 in administrating the Access-A-Ride program, with the  
21 hope that we will be able to provide the best  
22 experience for our customers moving forward.

23 Here in New York Access-A-Ride the lifeblood for  
24 many of our fellow New Yorkers, including myself,  
25 enabling all of us to access all of the great

2 opportunities that this city has to offer. I'm  
3 honored to be here before you today, because I can  
4 confidently share that the team had access right has  
5 made monumental improvements to the services we  
6 deliver during a tumultuous time for public  
7 transportation, and we have several initiatives that  
8 we're taking on to address a lot of long standing  
9 issues with our service, some of those that you  
10 mentioned in your opening remarks.

11 I'm also honored to speak with you today because  
12 not only am I the vice president of accessory ride,  
13 but I'm also a regular customer, a wheelchair user  
14 with cerebral palsy, and a disability advocate. And  
15 I believe that I am the first one to be leading this  
16 great organization. As such, I know firsthand how  
17 frustrating it can be to have a late pickup, to be  
18 left behind on the sidewalk and your vehicle not pick  
19 you up, or to go on a long shared ride. But I also  
20 know how magical it can be to have this service  
21 available, and to be able to get anywhere in the five  
22 boroughs with a few clicks of the MTA app or a phone  
23 call, and I'm excited about where we're going and  
24 heading for our future.

1  
2       So to begin my remarks, I would like to start  
3 with an overview of what paratransit is, and then  
4 discuss how we're doing today, and finally end on  
5 where I see us going into the future before we get  
6 into questions.

7       So first, what is ADA paratransit, and why does  
8 it exist?

9       With the passage of the Americans with  
10 Disabilities Act in 1990, Congress created a mandate  
11 for paratransit as a quote/unquote "safety net" for  
12 individuals who are unable to use the fixed route  
13 system due to disability. Paratransit is governed by  
14 these regulations of the United States Department of  
15 Transportation as they implement the ADA. These  
16 regulations strictly define who is eligible for  
17 paratransit service, how the service should function,  
18 including the reservation window, service levels, the  
19 service area, the fare structure, and many other  
20 aspects of the service. And like all transit  
21 agencies across our country, our mission has  
22 historically been to develop and operate a  
23 paratransit service that meets these regulatory  
24 requirements.



1           So our paratransit service here in New York,  
2  
3       better known as Access-A-Ride, provides  
4       transportation for 170,000 customers within the five  
5       boroughs, as well as we have a three quarter mile  
6       corridor beyond the fixed route service of MTA  
7       bordering Nassau and Westchester Counties. Customers  
8       may book their trips online on our app, or can call  
9       in before 5 p.m. the previous day to schedule their  
10      trips for the next day, or the day after. And  
11      although the ADA in the US DOT allow transit agencies  
12      to charge double the fixed route fare, which in New  
13      York will be \$5.50, Access-A-Ride fare is \$2.75, the  
14      same as the bus and subway. We also operate without  
15      regard to trip purpose and will take you anywhere in  
16      the five boroughs you want to go whether that be  
17      going to the bar, seeing your friends, going  
18      shopping, or if you do need to make that medical  
19      appointment. Our monthly performance goals meet or  
20      exceed industry standards, including measures such as  
21      94 percent on time performance for a 30-minute pickup  
22      window, and 95 percent of our calls into the call  
23      center answered within 60 seconds.

24           Now over the past three years, the onset of and  
25      the continuing recovery of the COVID 19 pandemic led

2 to much upheaval for New York City Transit, including  
3 Access-A-Ride, the associated shocks of the stay-at-  
4 home orders created a multi-year period of adjustment  
5 for Access-A-Ride customers, employees, and our  
6 service providers alike. This was especially true  
7 towards the end of 2021 when driver shortages and  
8 surging demand for travel within the city combined to  
9 produce subpar service for our customers. However,  
10 thanks to the hard work of the Access-A-Ride team  
11 based out of Long Island City to increase the pace of  
12 hiring for primary carrier operators, and bring on  
13 more Taxi and Limousine Commission taxi and for-hire  
14 vehicle drivers into our nondedicated broker program,  
15 and increase the capacity in our call center, we saw  
16 a significant increase in performance throughout the  
17 year in 2022, continuing into February of this year.

18 And the result is that despite ridership up over  
19 26 percent From November 2021, Access-A-Ride service  
20 is far more reliable today than it was then. On time  
21 performance increased from a low of 86 percent in  
22 November 21 to 96 percent in January of 2023.

23 Customers calling in to reserve their trips also saw  
24 much better service over the phone with 95 percent of  
25 our calls answered versus 86 percent a year ago, and

2 the call speed reduced from four minutes on hold to  
3 less than 44 seconds this month. And all of these  
4 improvements led to a 32-point increase in customer  
5 satisfaction from a low 44 in in fall of 21 to 76  
6 percent last month.

7 And although we are happy with the results of our  
8 hard work in 2022, we're excited to continue to work  
9 further to continue and improve. In 2023, we will  
10 maintain our push for expanded capacity in  
11 anticipation of travel demand growth that will reach  
12 or exceed pre COVID levels. We will also continue to  
13 strive to improve efficiency by getting the recently-  
14 updated My Access-A-Ride website and My MTA app into  
15 more of our customers hands.

16 We will also be seeking to harness the latest  
17 technology to streamline our shared ride travel times  
18 and improve reliability.

19 Now, of course, in addition to our recent  
20 successes, we have challenges that we are taking head  
21 on, and we want to be able to acknowledge that  
22 although our service has improved, we want to also be  
23 able to acknowledge that there is room to improve as  
24 well.

2       So on the technology front, we recently ended a  
3 contract to upgrade the software that powers our  
4 booking, scheduling, and dispatching of our 29,000  
5 daily trips. The project was unfortunately two and a  
6 half years behind schedule, with little hope of  
7 finishing with the intended benefits, and while it  
8 was disappointing to end work that began before my  
9 tenure here at Access-A-Ride, I did so to ensure that  
10 our technology investment was going to bring the most  
11 benefits possible to our customers in a reasonable  
12 amount of time.

13       And although in the near term, we will continue  
14 working with our existing software that does  
15 scheduling, I am excited at the opportunity before us  
16 to explore a technology marketplace that has changed  
17 drastically in the intervening five years, and bring  
18 on the right tools that will enable us to serve our  
19 customers more effectively and efficiently. Our  
20 other main challenges are similar to what other  
21 paratransit providers across the country are facing,  
22 ensuring we continue to have enough capacity to meet  
23 our growing demand. And so to do so, we're going to  
24 keep up the momentum on hiring, pushing our dedicated  
25

2 primary carriers which are the blue and white vans to  
3 reduce their vacancies to zero percent.

4 We will also continue to onboard taxiing for-hire  
5 vehicle drivers as part of our non-dedicated broker  
6 service that we do with our TLC driver partners.

7 So looking forward to the future, my vision for  
8 Access-A-Ride is one where customers can completely  
9 book their trips online or over the phone, can count  
10 on their rides to arrive on time every day, and to be  
11 assured that when their rights are shared, they're  
12 efficient and streamlined. I didn't come to Access-  
13 A-Ride to maintain the status quo. Again as a  
14 disability advocate myself, and as a customer of  
15 Access-A-Ride, I come I came here to make to  
16 implement this vision and make the changes that I  
17 just described. And the good news is that we have  
18 made significant progress toward this vision and that  
19 we should be able to realize this in the next couple  
20 of years.

21 So two weeks ago, we announced an exciting new  
22 update to the My MTA App and My Access-A-Ride  
23 website. These improvements provided a more user-  
24 friendly, intuitive experience making the app  
25 accessible to all 170,000 Access-A-Ride customers.

1  
2 The updates also make it easier to find paratransit  
3 information and track trips, including alerts and  
4 notifications about canceled trips. And the app is  
5 also now more screen-reader friendly. And one of our  
6 customers also helped us with the testing on this  
7 too, which was a great collaboration.

8       These enhancements responded specifically to  
9 feedback from customers using the app and are  
10 designed to allow the MTA to greatly scale up usage  
11 across the Access-A-Ride customer base. And what's  
12 even more exciting, too, is that we were able to do  
13 this in house using MTA IT resources. And I want to  
14 express my gratitude to Josh Gee, and the team under  
15 Raph Portnoy, and our Chief Information Officer at  
16 the MTA for their partnership on this project, which  
17 will continue to improve the customer experience for  
18 so many of our riders.

19       And by September of this year, we're going to be  
20 tightening our on-time performance window from the  
21 industry standard of 30 minutes to a more customer  
22 friendly 20 minutes to reflect the needs of our most  
23 active riders.

24       As I mentioned earlier, technology and  
25 transportation capacity will be the cornerstones of

2 making the vision this vision a reality. The  
3 technology to enable us to develop more reliable and  
4 streamline schedules on a daily basis, and the  
5 transportation capacity. In other words, the  
6 thousands of taxi drivers, for-hire vehicles, and  
7 primary carrier operators to help facilitate our  
8 trips for our customers.

9 So to conclude my remarks, I just want to note  
10 that we have made significant strides in recent  
11 months and years with Access-A-Ride service, but our  
12 work is not yet done. The recent customer service  
13 and our on time performance numbers are encouraging,  
14 but we will continue to work to modernize Access-A-  
15 Ride through the latest technologies, increasing  
16 capacity, and improve our reliability, and shared  
17 ride travel times. We appreciate the Council's  
18 partnership and oversight with that, and I'm happy to  
19 take any questions that you may have. Thank you

20 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: I'm going to just  
21 segue really quickly to Councilmember Narcisse.

22 COUNCILMEMBER NARCISSE: Good morning and thank  
23 you Chair for giving me the opportunity to just make  
24 a short statement because this is very important.  
25 It's just like I have a skin in this game, because

2 for me being a nurse for over three decades serving  
3 the population of disabled New Yorkers and seniors, I  
4 understand the statement you make, and I want to say  
5 thank you for the effort you're making.

6 But Access-A-Ride is a crucial lifeline for our  
7 most vulnerable populations, and that's the reason I  
8 want to say something before I go. This is much  
9 needed door-to-door transportation which seniors and  
10 disabled access rely on in our city every day.  
11 However, it also appears to be one of the most  
12 complained-about services our city. Often, seniors  
13 in New Yorkers with disabilities come to my office to  
14 lodge their complaints about wait times, delay, and  
15 not really dealing with the drivers, you know, the  
16 drivers are not complying, or not supportive to them.  
17 Those are the complaints that I receive in my office  
18 time and times.

19 And we have a need to increase-- I mean, to  
20 improve the services. I'm curious to hear: What  
21 steps are being taken by MTA to improve this service,  
22 and to give the people the freedom, those that  
23 struggle, and the statistic proving those are the  
24 most population that have most difficult time to deal  
25 with. I'm not going to be here to wait for the



2 answer, but my colleagues, the three Chairs will  
3 continue. But I want to know, what's the step that  
4 you're taking in hiring the drivers as well, so they  
5 can be responsible, they can be sensitive. Those are  
6 the things that we need to improve much more.

7 Because the reality, you have the folks right in  
8 front of you, telling you, they're going through it.

9 I understand you are using the service as well.  
10 But we need to do much more, the ADA compliance in  
11 the train stations, all those things, in the bus  
12 station, and even, you know, providing the services  
13 for those folks who know the transportation to come  
14 around closer, to make it easier. That's why I would  
15 like to hear more.

16 So I'm going to leave you. So thank you Chair  
17 for giving me the opportunity. I have to go but my  
18 heart and soul is with you, and I'm here to support  
19 and whatever my colleagues need me to be. We're  
20 going to work together to address the issues. Thank  
21 you.

22 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you. I'd also  
23 like to take a moment to acknowledge that we are  
24 joined by the Mayor's Office for People with  
25 Disabilities Commissioner, Commissioner Curry, who we

1 will have come up momentarily and will be on hand for  
2 question-- to be able to answer questions from the  
3 members of the Committee as well.  
4

5 We are also joined by Councilmember Won, who is  
6 online, and here in the chamber we're joined by  
7 Councilmembers Ariola, Palladino, Ayala, Brewer, and  
8 Abreu.

9 Okay, so thank you for the testimony today. And  
10 I guess we could just kind of jump into it.

11 Please walk us through the process of signing up  
12 for Access-A-Ride and what their recertification  
13 process looks like.

14 MR. PANGILINAN: Sure thing, thank you for the  
15 question. So if a customer is interested in signing  
16 up for Access-A-Ride, what they can do is give us a  
17 call, and we will be able to schedule-- after a quick  
18 brief discussion with them, be able to schedule an  
19 appointment for an assessment with them. And so what  
20 they'll do is they will get the paperwork, and fill  
21 it out and bring it with them to the assessment when  
22 they-- when that assessment that happens.

23 At the Assessment Center, what we do based on the  
24 US DoD regulations and the ADA is we assessed the  
25 functional abilities of the of the customer that

2 wants to apply. And so we want to make sure that we  
3 are able to educate the customer on-- on the  
4 transportation options, we'd be able to give them the  
5 right option that they need based on their functional  
6 abilities. And I say that just to make a distinction  
7 between the disability, in that regard. Someone like  
8 me, for example, with cerebral palsy in a wheelchair.  
9 The exact same-- somebody with the exact same  
10 disability and mobility device might have a different  
11 ability to use public transportation. And so we want  
12 to be able to distinguish between that ability to  
13 ensure that they have the right level of service on  
14 either bus, subway, or Access-A-Ride. And so once  
15 that determination-- determination has been made,  
16 we'll be able to grant them a level of-- of  
17 eligibility for our paratransit service in which 90  
18 percent of customers that apply will get some level  
19 of eligibility. And once they are eligible, they're  
20 able to use the Access-A-Ride service at that time.

21 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: And then the  
22 recertification process?

23 MR. PANGILINAN: Thank you for that. Yeah, for  
24 the recertification process, depending on the-- their  
25 level of disability, it's every five years, we'll

2 bring them in back into the-- the Assessment Center,  
3 but after-- after 10 years, if they've had a full  
4 eligibility for that-- that length of time, they will  
5 no longer have to be recertified and just need to  
6 update their paperwork every five years with us to  
7 make sure that we can stay in touch with them.

8 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: For those who have  
9 like permanent disabilities, is there a need for them  
10 to still go through that recertification process?

11 MR. PANGILINAN: Yeah, so we do that, again, at  
12 the five year mark and at the 10 year mark. But  
13 after the 10 year mark, if it's the same level of--  
14 of eligibility, they won't have to come in at that  
15 time. The reason why we check in at five and 10  
16 years is if anything has changed with their  
17 functional ability. Again, they might be able-- they  
18 might have, for example, the ability to have an  
19 elevator that's opened up in their-- in their-- in  
20 their neighborhood, for example, or their abilities  
21 with their disability have changed. But if not,  
22 again, after 10 years, they don't have to come back  
23 in.

24 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: So what I've heard  
25 from some of the advocates, especially this morning,

1 before coming into the hearing was, you know, there  
2 are some disabilities that are just not coming back,  
3 like some abilities that are not coming back, that  
4 are permanent, and is there a way that in those  
5 instances that they can just bypass to have to  
6 recertify, considering that nothing is going to  
7 change in terms of that that particular ability  
8 coming back?  
9

10 MR. PANGILINAN: So it's hard for us to determine  
11 that at the outset, because we want to be able to  
12 give them a chance to come in at the five-year mark,  
13 and at the 10-year mark, and it's only-- so it's only  
14 two more times that they would have to come back in  
15 to recertify. And so at that point, we're able to  
16 say, "Okay, at this point we'll give you-- we will be  
17 able to give you full continual eligibility," in  
18 which they will not be coming in again after-- at  
19 that point.

20 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Also, if you could  
21 walk through the process, including a timeline of  
22 booking an Access-A-Ride by phone, and then versus  
23 over app.

24 MR. PANGILINAN: Sure thing. So when booking a  
25 trip by the phone. For example, if you want to

1 travel on Saturday or Sunday, you would book your  
2 trip today by 5 p.m. on the phone. You would give  
3 our reservation agents a call before 5 p.m., and let  
4 them know where you want to go, where you're coming  
5 from, . and what time you want to depart.

6  
7 Right now, our average hold time, if you will,  
8 is-- is 44 seconds, which is wonderful. It's a lot  
9 better than it was before when it was up to four  
10 minutes, a year and a half ago. So we're very proud  
11 of that, that we'd be able to reduce that time. And  
12 but once they booked their trip, we'll be able to  
13 pick them up and drop them off on either Saturday or  
14 Sunday, with a trip that's booked on a Friday.

15 On the app, it's very similar as well, they'll  
16 just-- Instead of calling however, they can just  
17 bring up their smartphone or log into the website and  
18 enter in their origin and destination and the time  
19 they want to travel, and we'll be able to receive  
20 that and confirm the booking within one or two  
21 minutes on their app.

22 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: And I know you noted  
23 in your remarks that you will be shortening on-time  
24 performance from 30 minutes to 20 minutes, but isn't  
25 20 minutes still too long? I think about how

1  
2 difficult it is when the subway runs five minutes  
3 late. Why is it 20-- like why is 20 minutes late  
4 okay.

5 MR. PANGILINAN: Yep. So with-- The standard  
6 with the ADA, the-- the main thing that we're looking  
7 to-- to be compliant with is the FTA's-- the FTA's  
8 regulation, which says that paratransit providers  
9 across the country may not provide an artificial  
10 capacity constraint. In other words, they must serve  
11 all customers that want to travel, no-- no  
12 restrictions on the number of trips or where they  
13 want to go.

14 And one of the ways that they measure that is  
15 artificial constraints of untimely pickups, and the  
16 FTA and guidance around that is generally defined, in  
17 practice around the country has generally defined 30  
18 minutes as the pickup window to when an untimely  
19 pickup occurs. And that is what we've been  
20 following, and a number of properties around the US.

21 Now I agree with you that is-- that is too long,  
22 30 minutes, which is why we want to bring that down  
23 to 20 minutes. And I think what's-- what's been  
24 great is we've actually hit that 20 minute goal  
25 briefly in January, which is wonderful. And we're

2 going to continue to work to maintain that to  
3 maintain hitting that goal for the rest of the year  
4 going forward.

5 Now bringing that below 20 minutes: Absolutely.  
6 I think that is a wonderful goal for us to shoot for  
7 as well. What I want to do is make sure that we have  
8 enough capacity and the ability to do that first  
9 before getting-- before getting there.

10 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: And then I know  
11 Councilmember Narcisse had spoke about the-- the  
12 staffing piece, and just to kind of add on to it:  
13 Like, how are the rides assigned to drivers? Like is  
14 there a priority for specific vehicles?

15 MR. PANGILINAN: Yeah, so we have essentially  
16 three sets of vehicles, if you will. There's more,  
17 but three major categories. One is our primary  
18 carriers, which are blue and white vans. Those are  
19 all equipped with lifts and wheelchair securements.  
20 I think we've all seen them running-- running around  
21 New York. Those have lifts and securements in them.  
22 We call those our primary carriers.

23 The second kind is our broker service. And  
24 within brokers there's wheelchair accessible vans and  
25 sedans. Now, the wheelchair accessible vans are



2 going to be-- and the sedans are driven by the for-  
3 hire vehicle and taxi drivers here in New York. And  
4 I want to acknowledge all the progress that's been  
5 made to bring more wheelchair accessible vehicles  
6 into the TLC fleet, if you will, over the last  
7 several years, which has made our work with our  
8 customers a lot easier than in prior-- prior years.  
9 We, of course, we have a long ways to go in that  
10 space as well.

11 Now so what happens is if a customer needs a  
12 specific type of vehicle we indicate it in their  
13 profile. So for example for me, I need a wheelchair-  
14 accessible vehicle, but I don't necessarily need a  
15 lift. So I can use either the broker service or a  
16 wheelchair accessible broker vehicle. Some customers  
17 might need a lift and so we indicate in their profile  
18 that they will need a primary carrier vehicle only,  
19 and not a broker. And while-- while most of our  
20 customers, 85 percent in fact, are what we call  
21 ambulatory, which means they can use a sedan, a wave,  
22 or a blue and white van.

23 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: And with the broker  
24 service, especially during the pandemic, I know that  
25 it was extended to use, for example, Uber and I think

1 Curb. What about the Yellow Taxi cab medallions?

2 Has there been any outreach to try and engage the  
3 Yellow cabs in terms of expansion of the program?  
4

5 MR. PANGILINAN: Yeah, so we currently partnered  
6 with one of the Yellow Cab software-- software apps,  
7 I guess you could say, for our broker program. And  
8 so they have a fleet of drivers that are either  
9 Yellow cab or Green cab associated to be part of that  
10 broker program. Yes.

11 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: So out of the 1200,  
12 how much would you say is like Uber, versus how much  
13 is like the Yellow cabs?

14 MR. PANGILINAN: Sure. So actually, I was  
15 referring to our broker service, but I'll get to the  
16 1200 though. So on our broker service, we-- on a  
17 given day, we carry about 18,000 trips a day on the--  
18 on the broker service. And again, the broker service  
19 is our for-hire vehicle and taxi network that's  
20 reserved the day before. Of those, a number of trips  
21 go -- I guess I should say all of those trips, 18,000  
22 -- go to either black car livery trips, or to Yellow  
23 cab or Green cab affiliated drivers.

24 I think what you're referring to with the 1200 is  
25 our-- a different program, that's also administered

1  
2 by us, called E-Hail. And that program, with the  
3 1200, is split between three different providers,  
4 ARRO, Limosys, and LEAP. Uber is not part of that  
5 program.

6 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: And in terms of, just  
7 going back, like staying online with the E-Hail, what  
8 vendor do you use for that?

9 MR. PANGILINAN: Yep, for E-Hail, the vendors  
10 that we use for E-Hail, there's three of them. It is  
11 one called LEAP, L-E-A-P. The other one is called  
12 ARRO, A-R-R-O, and the third one is called Limosys.

13 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Who?

14 MR. PANGILINAN: Limosys, L-I-M-O-S-Y-S.

15 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Any of the three of  
16 them MWBEs.

17 MR. PANGILINAN: I don't-- I can't answer that.  
18 I don't have that information on me. But I know that  
19 with our broker program, one of our brokers is an  
20 MWBE, though.

21 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Okay. And is there  
22 like a 30 percent goal in terms of MWBE  
23 participation, like across the board with the  
24 paratransit service?

25 MR. PANGILINAN: That's correct.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: So that means one of  
3 like, some element of these vendors should be MWBE  
4 then as well.

5 MR. PANGILINAN: Yeah. Or the or their  
6 affiliates that they work with? Exactly. It's a  
7 it's kind of a holistic view of the of the providers.

8 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Would you be able to  
9 confirm what that percentage is?

10 MR. PANGILINAN: Yeah. I can back to you on  
11 that. Absolutely.

12 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Moving on to  
13 statistics, what is the city wide utilization rate by  
14 borough?

15 MR. PANGILINAN: Oh, that's a great question.  
16 I'll have to get back to you exactly on those stats.  
17 I can say that Brooklyn is our most-- highest  
18 utilized borough.

19 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: So Brooklyn a highly  
20 utilized. Which one is the lowest? Which borough is  
21 the lowest?

22 MR. PANGILINAN: It's likely Staten Island. But  
23 again, I'd probably have to get back to that exact  
24 stat.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Okay. I wanted to  
3 touch on the Department of Justice investigation a  
4 bit. When did the Department of Justice open its  
5 most recent investigation of Access-A-Ride?

6 MR. PANGILINAN: That investigation began in the  
7 fall of 2016.

8 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: And what to your  
9 knowledge triggered the opening of the investigation?

10 MR. PANGILINAN: The letter that we received from  
11 the DOJ in October of 2022, stated that it was from a  
12 number of complaints that they had received.

13 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: I'm sorry. Can you  
14 repeat that?

15 MR. PANGILINAN: That's okay. Yeah, that's  
16 basically from the letter that we received in October  
17 of 2022, the letter stated that it was from a number  
18 of complaints that they had received about the  
19 service.

20 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Okay. And what  
21 information has the Department of Justice sought from  
22 the Transit Authority regarding Access-A-Ride?

23 MR. PANGILINAN: Yeah. So back in 2016 and 2017,  
24 when that investigation was-- began and ongoing, they  
25 requested data from us on our travel times, as well

1  
2 as on-time performance, and I think other data as  
3 well that I'm not-- that's not at the top of my head  
4 right now.

5 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Okay, and--

6 MR. DAVEY: Let me just jump in there. It's  
7 important to note that data sent was from 2013  
8 through 2016. So the DOJ's investigation, the facts  
9 that they reviewed, are now between seven and 10  
10 years old.

11 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Okay. And has all of  
12 the request-- have all of the information requests  
13 been complied with?

14 MR. PANGILINAN: So we've submitted all the  
15 information to them as part of the investigation.  
16 Maybe this isn't the question you asked, but I'll try  
17 to answer it anyway: In October of 2022, they did  
18 mention a set of findings in that letter, in which  
19 we've spent some time to review, and we're in the  
20 process of responding to them right now, actually.

21 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Is it correct that  
22 FTA encourages establishing policies to drop off  
23 riders no more than 30 minutes before an appointment  
24 time and no later than appointment times?

1  
2 MR. PANGILINAN: That's correct. And that is our  
3 standard of our drop off performance time.

4 Previously, before I was here before, and before Rich  
5 was here as well, a number of years ago, the drop off  
6 time was different-- excuse me, the drop off standard  
7 was different. And so that since has changed since  
8 that investigation began to what you stated.

9 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: And is it correct  
10 that the late drop offs are a capacity constraint  
11 under the ADA?

12 MR. PANGILINAN: So what the ADA in the US DOT  
13 say is that we have to have -- and all paratransit  
14 providers across the country -- must have not a  
15 significant number of untimely pickups and drop offs.

16 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: I want to move to  
17 improvements and expansion. In what ways can Access-  
18 A-Ride customers provide feedback for service  
19 improvements and complaints?

20 So for example, I was hearing about complaints  
21 where some of the drivers may be on their phones  
22 while they're driving, for example, which if it was a  
23 bus driver under MTA standards, they would be  
24 disciplined. [background noise] Bless you. So what  
25 is like what, in what ways can they be able to

2 provide that feedback and complaints? And how are  
3 Access-A-Ride customers made aware of their right to  
4 provide feedback?

5 MR. PANGILINAN: Yeah, so there's a couple  
6 different, I would say, timeframes on the feedback.  
7 There's one on the immediate, which I think you  
8 mentioned with, like, for example, the driver on the  
9 phone example. And then there's more of, like, the,  
10 I guess, there's longer-term feedback about just the  
11 service in general or what they think about our  
12 practices and Access-A-Ride as it is.

13 So in terms of the immediate need, if there is an  
14 immediate safety issue or immediate issue with the  
15 driver or their ride, they may call us at-- with  
16 their phone number at the command center, which is on  
17 our website, and that phone number is also in our--  
18 our rider guide rider guidebook, which is available  
19 online or in print. And this number connects them  
20 directly to the Command Center so they can report any  
21 safety issues that are occurring, or if they have a  
22 question about where their ride is, or if they're,  
23 for example, still waiting for their ride. And what  
24 our Command Center can do at that point is to work  
25 with dispatch to either handle the real-time



1 situation with the driver, or if they haven't been  
2 picked up yet, for example, dispatch what we call a  
3 recovery ride, to pick-- to pick them up immediately  
4 and get them to where they-- they need to go.  
5

6 In terms of the broader complaints about Access-  
7 A-Ride like after their trip is over or about program  
8 in general, again, we have we have our comment line,  
9 we also have letters that I receive every day from  
10 either-- that they are either written directly to me  
11 or they're written to rich or perhaps even you as  
12 well, or there's also we have a couple other forums  
13 that we-- that we run. One is our Paratransit  
14 Advisory Committee (which we actually met yesterday,  
15 that group and I), and we also have the accessible--  
16 I forget the acronym, but it is-- it is an MTA  
17 Transportation Accessibility Committee, which is also  
18 one that I attend as well.

19 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Who's on the Advisory  
20 Committee?

21 MR. PANGILINAN: On the Paratransit Advisory  
22 Committee, it's a number of our riders and advocates  
23 that are-- actually maybe-- let me restate that. The  
24 Paratransit Advisory Committee is made up solely of  
25 riders of Access-A-Ride. And so they are part of

COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE with  
COMMITTEE ON MENTAL HEALTH, DISABILITIES, AND  
1 ADDICTION and the COMMITTEE ON AGING 50

2 this committee, which meets with me and my staff six  
3 times a year, and they meet with themselves an  
4 additional six times a year to discuss pertinent  
5 issues related to paratransit and how we are  
6 addressing them and make sure that we're aware of  
7 those issues. The other committee also meets on a  
8 regular basis in which they discuss larger  
9 accessibility issues at MTA, but also including  
10 paratransit.

11 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Any of them from like  
12 the outer boroughs of like Southeast Queens,  
13 Rockaway, like those transportation desert areas?

14 MR. PANGILINAN: Yeah, a number of them are from  
15 all the boroughs. I don't know exactly where they're  
16 from. A number of them are actually here in the room  
17 today, which is great, but they do represent-- their  
18 either organization or different neighborhoods that  
19 they-- that they come from.

20 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Can you explain--

21 MR. DAVEY: We'll take recommendations Chair, if  
22 there's, uh--

23 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Okay.

24 MR. DAVEY: Someone you might want us to-- to  
25 add.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Well just demo-- in  
3 terms of the demo graphics I would love to know  
4 because like, for example, Chair Lee and  
5 Councilmember Schulman, like, they're in areas that  
6 have a great level of-- is a transportation desert,  
7 and an older population that really utilize these  
8 services. Same thing in terms of Rockaway being on a  
9 peninsula. I'm sure Staten Island is the same.

10 So I just wanted to make sure, in terms of the  
11 demographics, it's meeting the needs of everyday New  
12 York, and not really centralized. Because like, for  
13 example, when I look at a city bike map, and I look  
14 where all the bikes are at, they're all in these  
15 transit-rich communities, and they're not really  
16 sparsed out. So I just would hate to see something  
17 like this, where you're taking feedback not  
18 reflective of the communities that are really using  
19 it.

20 There have been concerns that-- no, sorry, I'm  
21 not asking that one. Can you explain why individuals  
22 who qualify for reduced-fare MetroCards do not  
23 qualify for Access-A-Ride discounts?

24 MR. PANGILINAN: Yeah, so Access-A-Ride right  
25 now, just a quick background on that, on your

2 question: We charge \$2.75, which is the equivalent  
3 fare of the bus and the subway.

4 Now, the ADA and the US Department transportation  
5 allow paratransit providers to charge up to double of  
6 the fixed value fare, which for New York would be  
7 \$5.50. Again, we don't charge that we charge \$2.75.  
8 This is unlike neighboring counties, actually, in  
9 Nassau and Westchester County, they charge almost  
10 double their fares for paratransit. And in San  
11 Francisco, where I came from before they charge up to  
12 \$10 for a paratransit ride when-- when the fixed  
13 route is about \$5. So there is a significant  
14 practice around the country to charge double fare.  
15 And again, we don't do that. We charge \$2.75 here.  
16 And on our-- on the discounted fare trips. Some of  
17 the customers do-- some customers do receive a half  
18 fare on Access-A-Ride, thanks to the generous program  
19 that the city runs called Fair Fares, which is a  
20 great program. And for those under 65 years old, and  
21 who meet a certain income threshold can benefit from  
22 that program. And if the city chooses so, it  
23 absolutely could expand that program to those that  
24 are over 65 as well, and we'd be happy to administer  
25 that-- that discount.

1  
2 MR. DAVEY: I think, to your question, New York  
3 City might be the only authority in the state of New  
4 York which has a base fare that is not two times,  
5 just the base fare.

6 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: And think that's  
7 awful that they're allowed to even double it. But  
8 that's a whole other conversation. When will Omni be  
9 available on Access-A-Ride, and in many cars, if any,  
10 is it currently available?

11 MR. PANGILINAN: Yeah, Omni. So that's going to  
12 be one of our major initiatives this year. So we're--  
13 - we're close to getting that ready to do a pilot.  
14 So what our plan is to do is, as soon as the  
15 technical testing is complete, which should be within  
16 several weeks, we'll be able to roll this out to a  
17 cohort of about 100 customers. And these customers  
18 will receive an Omni Card, just like the subway and  
19 bus customers have for their-- for their tap and go.

20 But the unique thing about the Access-A-Ride  
21 customers is that their Omni Card will also function  
22 as their Access-A-Ride ID. So they'll have their  
23 photo and their ID information on the back of their  
24 Omni Card. And this way they have one card now which  
25 they can use for Access-A-Ride, as well as use it for

1 paying for the bus and subway, which as a reminder,  
2 Access-A-Ride customers at their request can get a  
3 zero fare MetroCard to take up to four rides a day on  
4 the bus and subway if they're able and choose to do  
5 so. As well, the other part of this pilot project  
6 will be to test the back-end payment for Omni. Right  
7 now, paratransit customers will pay \$2.75 in fare, in  
8 cash, when they take our rides. But in the future  
9 with Omni they'll be able to just board without  
10 paying with cash and we will deduct the money  
11 electronically on the back end.

12  
13 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: I'd also like to  
14 acknowledge that we've been joined by Councilmember  
15 Restler.

16 Next I want to pivot to E-Hail. The MTA has  
17 committed to doubling the size of the E-Hail pilot  
18 for Access-A-Ride in early 2023. Has it done so?

19 MR. PANGILINAN: So with the E-Hail pilot, the  
20 original-- the original expansion for phase two was  
21 slated for March 2020, so three years ago, but during  
22 the pandemic-- the pandemic hit, of course, shortly  
23 afterwards and put that on ice until then. Right now  
24 what we're doing is we're exploring how we can shape  
25 a phase two that would expand the participant pool,

2 but just as importantly, create a program that is  
3 financially sustainable and still benefits our  
4 customers to the maximum extent possible. That way  
5 we can expand that program in a financially  
6 sustainable manner.

7 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: I'm just going to ask  
8 one question on finance, and then I'm going to kick  
9 it over to my Co-Chairs. Why is the MTA looking to  
10 shift their budgetary obligations to the city? Is  
11 there a concern that if the city does not foot the  
12 bill, the state will not-- will be in noncompliance  
13 with the Americans With Disabilities Act?

14 MR. PANGILINAN: Yeah, I'm going to hand this  
15 over to Jai to help me answer.

16 MS. PATEL: Thank you. Thank you for the  
17 question. As many of us are aware, the MTA is facing  
18 a fiscal cliff. In 2021, the-- the pandemic hit.  
19 Farebox revenue used to generate more-- more than  
20 half of our revenues as the pandemic hit, that  
21 dropped precipitously. We've gained some ridership  
22 through the years. But we're still at the farebox  
23 recovery that was previously to the pandemic.

24 What has that done to the MTA finances? We face  
25 a \$600 million shortfall this year, and in the out

2 years that grows to roughly \$1.6 billion. One of the  
3 things that we've been doing is responsibly acting on  
4 that on our side. In 2022, we started to take  
5 initiatives to actually do cost savings and that tune  
6 to about \$400 million of our own efficiencies that  
7 we're finding to help solve the deficit. The  
8 governor has proposed in the executive budget a cost  
9 sharing plan to help fund the MTA, which is vital to  
10 New York City. Though it's the life blood of the  
11 city, we move our riders to the city and Metro North  
12 Long Island Railroad, our customers need the  
13 services. So this is a balanced plan that we're  
14 actually trying to implement here with the support of  
15 the city, the state, and the MTA itself. And this is  
16 just a piece of what we're asking in the governor's  
17 budget proposal is to actually fund the paratransit  
18 services 100 percent. Currently, the city funds 50  
19 percent of paratransit costs. As you stated earlier  
20 in 2020, that went to 50 percent. Prior to that was  
21 33 percent. The services are essential. We would  
22 run it similar to what we do today for MTA bus,  
23 Staten Island railway, which the city funds 100  
24 percent of the deficit as well.



CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: One last question and then follow-- it will be Councilmember, Chair Hudson.

So if MTA expands the E-Hail pilot for Access-A-Ride, will it impose any restrictions on use of E-Hail. For example, will limit the number of trips and eligible rider can take per month?

MR. PANGILINAN: Thank you for the question.

Yeah. So for E-Hail, we're still looking at the right way to craft phase two. Again, the proposal was presented in March 2020. But we're re-examining what that proposal will-- will look like, to make sure that our customers can benefit the most while still having a financially sustainable program.

It is worth noting that around the country and around the world, every city that does some kind of E-Hail program, including just to the north of us, Boston, Denver, Chicago, across the country, all of them do have some kind of limitation, or some kind of a number of trips per month or per day that customers can take, as well as a maximum cost per trip that those cities have as part of their structure. And again, they do that because they also want to be able to expand their E-Hail like service to as many

2 customers as possible. And so that is something that  
3 we have observed in those in those operations.

4 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you, Chair. So in  
5 your testimony, you said that 170,000 customers  
6 across the five boroughs are using Access-A-Ride, but  
7 we know that 11 percent of the total population of  
8 New York are identified as folks living with  
9 disabilities, and 20, almost 21 percent of the  
10 population are aged 60 and older, and of that  
11 population 34.6 percent have a reported disability.

12 So I'm just curious to know what type of outreach  
13 you're doing, and how we might be able to address the  
14 gap in the number of people who might qualify for  
15 Access-A-Ride versus the number of people who are  
16 actually utilizing it.

17 MR. PANGILINAN: Sure. Yeah. Thanks for the  
18 question Chair. So with our outreach, we have a  
19 dedicated team of customer outreach staff here at  
20 Access-A-Ride. And they reach out to our customers,  
21 whether they be at senior centers or independent  
22 disabled centers are other-- other areas where we  
23 might have a group of folks who could be qualified  
24 for our for our service. We do have a large number  
25 of applicants every-- every month, I believe 2022 is

1  
2 one of our highest years of applicants. And again,  
3 we have about 90 percent of eligibility rate among  
4 those applicants. And one note--

5 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: I'm sorry, what was the  
6 eligibility rate you said?

7 MR. PANGILINAN: Oh. About 90 percent of those  
8 who apply.

9 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Thanks.

10 MR. PANGILINAN: In terms of the gap between the  
11 disabled population and the population over 60, as  
12 well as compared to the 170,000. It is worth noting  
13 that not everyone with a disability or who is older,  
14 or is an older adult would qualify for Access-A-Ride,  
15 or want to use or need Access-A-Ride. They might  
16 have different levels of functional abilities that  
17 allow them to use a fixed route system.

18 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: No, totally understood, it  
19 just-- it's a huge gap. So I'd imagine there are  
20 some people within that number that would be  
21 qualified. And then can you just define for me  
22 "utilization rate"?

23 MR. PANGILINAN: Sure. Is that in terms of...?  
24  
25

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: So utilization rate that  
3 you-- that you've been referencing for Access-A-Ride?  
4 Just what's your definition of utilization rate?

5 MR. PANGILINAN: Sure. I think this might be a  
6 couple of definitions. Let me see if I hit on this,  
7 and correct me if I'm wrong. One of our--

8 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: There's no right answer. I  
9 just-- I just want to know how you define  
10 utilization rate.

11 MR. PANGILINAN: Sure. In terms of utilization  
12 rate, of 170,000 customers, we have 60,000 that are  
13 active right now. But I might be unclear where I  
14 might have said utilization rates. I just want to  
15 make sure I got the right context in your-- in your  
16 question.

17 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Chair Brooks-Powers asked  
18 earlier about the citywide utilization rate, by  
19 borough.

20 MR. PANGILINAN: Oh, I get--

21 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: And then you said you would  
22 get back to us, I believe. Apologies. Maybe it's  
23 our definition and not yours, but...

24 MR. PANGILINAN: No, no, that's okay. That  
25 cleared it up. Thank you. Yeah. So I think we've--

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1 ADDICTION and the COMMITTEE ON AGING 61

2 I believe my interpretation of that question was:

3 Where our customers are coming from, in terms of the  
4 way they live. So for example: Do 20 percent of our  
5 customers live in Brooklyn? That's a number that we  
6 can get back to you on.

7 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. And then-- But that's  
8 helpful. So as far as registered users 60,000, you  
9 have 60,000 active clients out of the 170,000?

10 MR. PANGILINAN: Correct. And they've taken a  
11 trip in the last 24 months, the 60,000.

12 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: So 24 months is considered  
13 active?

14 MR. PANGILINAN: Under our definition. Correct.

15 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Thank you. And  
16 that's like, at least one trip?

17 MR. PANGILINAN: Correct.

18 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Which could be only one  
19 trip?

20 MR. PANGILINAN: Correct.

21 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. This is very  
22 specific, so I don't know if you'll have it or not.  
23 But what's the utilization rate of the number of  
24 trips made divided by the total elderly or disabled  
25

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1 ADDICTION and the COMMITTEE ON AGING 62

2 individuals in New York City, or of eligible Access-  
3 A-Ride customers?

4 MR. PANGILINAN: I can, I can at least give you  
5 the number of trips that we do. So we do 29,500  
6 trips on our peak week day right now, which is  
7 growing, so I will probably clear it 30,000 in the  
8 coming weeks. I don't have the denominator for you,  
9 though, unfortunately.

10 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay.

11 MR. DAVEY: And just to give context on that,  
12 Chair, the 29,000 is almost 100 percent of pre-COVID  
13 ridership. So unlike bus and subway, where we're  
14 hovering around 66 to 70 percent ridership, pre-  
15 COVID, we're back almost to pre-COVID ridership on  
16 Access-A-Ride.

17 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay.

18 MR. PANGILINAN: Yeah. And, and the other  
19 number, I think it was 170,000 total registrants.  
20 And again, just to be clear, I know you know this,  
21 but it's not necessarily an age-based Entry Program--

22 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Yes.

23 MR. PANGILINAN: --because people can use a fixed  
24 route.

25

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Aware. Thank you. Okay,  
3 and then, this is just another like math question,  
4 so... What's the what's the average number of daily  
5 Access-A-Ride users and trips in the past month, in  
6 the past year?

7 MR. PANGILINAN: Yeah.

8 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: The daily average.

9 MR. PANGILINAN: Yeah. The daily average is  
10 about 27,000. Although, again, we do peak on  
11 Tuesdays and Wednesdays at about 29,000. Right now,  
12 that is up significantly from when I first started  
13 about a year ago. We were in the 22,000 range. So  
14 we're up, what's that?, about 30 percent since last  
15 year. And that compares to pre-COVID, we're about  
16 minus-- actually we're about par to minus 10 percent  
17 to pre-Covid depending on the day.

18 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: And sorry, that's 27,000  
19 riders, or trips?

20 MR. PANGILINAN: We do about 27,000 average trips  
21 per day.

22 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Trips.

23 MR. PANGILINAN: Yeah, per weekday.

24 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: But you don't know how many  
25 riders that would equate to?

1  
2 MR. PANGILINAN: Generally our-- we have about--  
3 what is our average? It's about 1.5. For example--

4 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Trips per rider?

5 MR. PANGILINAN: Yeah. For example, last year--  
6 Actually let me think about it. So I want to make  
7 sure I'm answering your question correctly. So last  
8 year, the bigger number, we had about 9 million  
9 riders, and 6 million trips and the reason why  
10 there's a different number is that some riders will  
11 bring a guest with them as well, not including their--  
12 - their personal care attendant, but like a guest  
13 that's not their PCA.

14 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: And what's the what's the  
15 policy with guests?

16 MR. PANGILINAN: They can take up to-- they can  
17 take up to one guest with them.

18 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: For the same \$2.75?

19 MR. PANGILINAN: Correct.

20 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, I'm going to ask you  
21 all the math questions. You seem to have them.

22 MR. PANGILINAN: I'll do my best.

23 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, on the dashboard on  
24 Your website, trips and ridership seem to have  
25 decreased from 2019 to 2022. Using drop off



1 locations, how does the share of trips to hospital  
2 medical care locations compared to more recreational  
3 locations?  
4

5 MR. PANGILINAN: Yeah, so our-- our top, and I'll  
6 probably want to follow up with you on this exact  
7 question--

8 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: That's, yeah, totally fine.

9 MR. PANGILINAN: --but from a-- from my recent  
10 look at this, we have-- our top drop off areas are an  
11 Employment Center as well as a shopping center, but  
12 also the other top three are medical centers in that  
13 top five. I don't believe that's changed in the last  
14 few months.

15 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. And do you know, of  
16 the medical center drop offs, what the on-time  
17 performance is?

18 MR. PANGILINAN: I don't on-- specific on medic--  
19 specifically for medical centers, I don't have that.

20 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: But you can follow up?

21 MR. PANGILINAN: I can follow up.

22 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Great. Thank you,  
23 that would be helpful. I mean, it'd be helpful to  
24 have to have all of them, but particularly the  
25 medical-- the medical center.

1 MR. PANGILINAN: Sure.

2 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: And then would you happen to  
3 know, or have the ridership and total trips breakdown  
4 for each available trip distance listed in the  
5 dashboard? So zero to three, three to six, six to  
6 nine, et cetera?  
7

8 MR. PANGILINAN: That's something we could  
9 definitely follow up with you on.

10 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. And then I would also  
11 be curious to know how that's changed pre-pandemic--

12 MR. PANGILINAN: Sure.

13 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: --and post. Okay, and then:  
14 who's responsible for determining which individuals  
15 are eligible to use Access-A-Ride?

16 MR. PANGILINAN: Yep. So we are, as well as our  
17 partners that work at the-- at the Assessment Center.  
18 So we're responsible for running and operating our--  
19 the Assessment Centers, setting the-- setting the  
20 policy that's compliant with the federal regulations,  
21 and then, based on the applications and the  
22 recommendations from the assessment centers,  
23 confirming that that determination,  
24  
25

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: But-- so who at the MTA  
3 determines what the functional testing, eligibility  
4 criteria entails?

5 MR. PANGILINAN: Yep. So that would be our-- at  
6 Access-A-Ride we have a-- we have an eligibility and  
7 compliance officer, and her-- she and her team are  
8 the ones that help implement the policies from the--  
9 from the US DOT and FTA to create our policies that  
10 reflect that, and then carry out those policies.

11 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Does she have any type of  
12 special certification or credentials?

13 MR. PANGILINAN: So the people that do the actual  
14 assessments are all licensed medical professionals,  
15 whether they be physical, or psychiatric, as  
16 appropriate.

17 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you. And then can you  
18 just share in what ways Access-A-Ride is designed to  
19 accommodate older adults?

20 MR. PANGILINAN: Sure. So Access-A-Ride is made  
21 to accommodate not just older adults, but also people  
22 with disabilities who might have similar needs as  
23 older adults, in that all of our vehicles are--  
24 excuse me, let me step back. All of our primary  
25 carrier vehicles are accessible for people who can't

1 climb stairs, or who need more help getting from  
2 door-to-door, for example. As well as our broker  
3 service, we have a large enough fleet of wheelchair-  
4 accessible vehicles for those who have mobility to  
5 devices, or need to use either wheelchair vehicle or  
6 might have mobility equipment they need to store in  
7 the vehicle. And we also have sedans as well, for  
8 those who prefer, or need to use a sedan, because of  
9 getting it out of the vehicle is difficult, or what  
10 have you.  
11

12 Also, for people who are low vision or blind, we  
13 note that in their profiles so that the drivers see  
14 it in their manifest, electronic or paper, they'll  
15 see that they'll need to call out the person's name  
16 and be able to find them to make sure that the  
17 customer and the driver are able to connect during  
18 the pickup.

19 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you. And apologies.  
20 You know, my lens is from older adults, but older  
21 adults are obviously a subset of people with  
22 disabilities that you all serve. Do you have  
23 accommodations for folks who don't speak English?

24 MR. PANGILINAN: Yeah. For folks who don't speak  
25 English, we have alternative options on our-- for the

1 call center to be able to, if they want to  
2 communicate in their in their language, depending on  
3 the availability of that language translation on the  
4 phone, as well as in written material as well.  
5

6 Okay, and there-- there have been reports of non-  
7 accessible vehicles arriving to pick up customers who  
8 require accessible vehicles. So can you explain that  
9 discrepancy and how often this might happen?

10 MR. PANGILINAN: Sure. So we've-- this is  
11 becoming less of an issue, but it was an issue  
12 certainly even during my time as well. What it is,  
13 is when a certain-- when a customer requires a lift,  
14 for example, that would mean that we would need to  
15 dispatch them a blue and white vehicle.

16 We were-- like all properties and all industries,  
17 really, since the pandemic we had a major driver  
18 shortage starting in June 2021-- or that really  
19 became apparent in June 2021. We were actually at 24  
20 percent vacancy for our primary carriers. That is  
21 down to now 4.5 percent, and I imagine that's going  
22 to get down to zero percent in the-- in the months  
23 ahead. So that's given us a lot more ability to  
24 dispatch the correct vehicle to those who-- who need  
25 the lifts. That is usually the case that you're--

2 that you are addressing there, is when somebody needs  
3 a blue and white van, and we didn't dispatch them  
4 that correct vehicle. Although there are other cases  
5 I want to acknowledge too, like they might need a-- a  
6 sedan when they needed a sedan, or what have you.

7 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you. One question I  
8 wanted to just go back on, and I think you may have  
9 addressed this a bit. But when you were talking  
10 about reassessments after five years and 10 years,  
11 you know, you were talking about the changes that  
12 people might have to their accommodations. What-- If  
13 somebody has, and I think you addressed if somebody  
14 might have fewer needs, if somebody's needs increase?  
15 How is that all, I guess, recorded?

16 MR. PANGILINAN: Sure. So for example, someone  
17 with a disability might come in to do an assessment.  
18 And then they might be determined-- a conditional  
19 assessment, for example-- I'm sorry, a conditional  
20 eligibility in which, let's just take an example,  
21 where they need to have a stair-free access for-- for  
22 the subway, but they might be able to use a fixed  
23 route bus if it's-- if there's a ramp. So they have  
24 a conditional eligibility, for example, on stairs, or  
25 it might be weather related in terms of temperature.

1  
2 Now, let's say when they do come back for a  
3 reassessment, that that has changed, and that they  
4 can no longer walk five blocks for whatever reason.  
5 At that point will be give them a different level of  
6 eligibility. It might become instead of conditional,  
7 it might just be full, that no matter what the  
8 conditions are, they will have access to Access-A-  
9 Ride.

10 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Got it. Okay. Thank you.  
11 And then there's my last question before I turn it  
12 over to Chair Lee. But can you describe the required  
13 training for Access-A-Ride staff who interact with  
14 folks with disabilities?

15 MR. PANGILINAN: Sure. Yeah. So we have a  
16 number of staff that interact from our call center,  
17 to our drivers, that interact on a daily basis with  
18 our customers. So for our drivers, we do an  
19 extensive amount of training for our primary carriers  
20 in terms of-- for our primary carrier operators, in  
21 terms of working with people with disabilities, being  
22 courteous, and being able to be helpful, and how to  
23 help. There's a number of tactical recommendations  
24 or requirements, I should say, on, for example, how  
25 to help someone who's blind find-- find you, and to

1 offer help, as opposed to helping out, just-- just  
2 assuming they need help, as well as driver, safe  
3 driver training and safe driving practices.  
4

5 This is also the same with our broker service as  
6 well. So we work with our for-hire vehicle and taxi  
7 brokers to mandate a certain level of similar  
8 training when it comes to either working with people  
9 with disabilities, working with them in their  
10 vehicle, as well as safe driving. And this is all on  
11 top of the TLC driving as well-- TLC training, excuse  
12 me, as well for the for them.

13 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: And you just used the word  
14 "mandate." So this is all required?

15 MR. PANGILINAN: Yeah. This is all required if  
16 they want to be an operator for an Access-A-Ride ride  
17 blue and white, or if they want to be eligible in the  
18 broker program to take our trips.

19 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, great. And is the--  
20 is that training culturally competent? Meaning, you  
21 know, teaching people about cultural competency and  
22 language access and things like that?

23 MR. PANGILINAN: Correct. Yes. And so,  
24 different types of disabilities are introduced in the  
25 training in terms of what that exactly means, how to



2 properly address someone with a disability, how to do  
3 wheelchair securement in a way that is respectful of  
4 the person that's in the wheelchair. You know, one  
5 of the aspects-- this is an example that, you know,  
6 people like me, when we're in the back of a  
7 wheelchair accessible vehicle, putting the seatbelt  
8 on being respectful where you position your hands and  
9 asking for permission to put the-- to reach over and  
10 put the securement straps on. That kind of thing is  
11 discussed at length with our-- in our training.

12 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. And then are there  
13 any specific requirements for drivers and licensees  
14 to be able to accept Access-A-Ride requests from  
15 riders? So some of these trainings, but is there  
16 anything like what-- what are the things I guess,  
17 that they're required in order to accept those rides?

18 MR. PANGILINAN: For drivers to accept rides?

19 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Yeah.

20 MR. PANGILINAN: Yup. So with our primary  
21 carriers, our blue-and-whites, those drivers are  
22 employed by the contractors and so they're fully  
23 trained up, and part-- and once they're employed  
24 they're-- they can-- they're taking any trips that we  
25 give them, as that's their full time job.

1  
2 For the Taxi and Limousine Commission drivers who  
3 are either taxi drivers or for-hire vehicle drivers,  
4 they could be taking a number of trips throughout the  
5 day, you know, an app-based drive, then an Access-A-  
6 Ride ride trip, maybe as street hail they might be  
7 doing. And so Access-A-Ride is not-- might not  
8 necessarily be their core business. But in order to  
9 be eligible to get Access-A-Ride trips, they must be-  
10 - pass those--- those trainings that I mentioned to  
11 you, including the refresher courses, as well as do  
12 what's called Drug And Alcohol Testing, which is  
13 required by the Federal Transit Administration. And  
14 that is drug and alcohol testing that's random and  
15 required for all transit-safety-sensitive employees,  
16 including bus drivers, subway conductors, and Access-  
17 A-Ride drivers, including the ones who do this part  
18 time, if you will.

19 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Great. Thank you so much.  
20 And I'll turn it over to Chair Lee.

21 MR. PANGILINAN: Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much. I'll try to  
23 make a quick because I know there's a lot of folks  
24 waiting to ask questions. Um, quick question,  
25 because I noticed that-- so you said that 90 percent

2 of the folks passed the eligibility assessment. Is  
3 that correct?

4 MR. PANGILINAN: Correct. 90 percent are given  
5 some level of eligibility.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. So for the 10 percent,  
7 is-- what happens if someone is denied? Is there an  
8 appeals process? Or if someone feels that there's,  
9 you know, that they should be eligible?

10 MR. PANGILINAN: That's exactly right. There's  
11 an appeals process that they can appeal. And again,  
12 for-- I don't have the exact number, but for a lot of  
13 those, we-- there is some level of eligibility  
14 usually granted after the appeal process.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay, great. And then just out  
16 of curiosity, is there a waitlist for folks that are  
17 waiting to get into the program currently?

18 MR. PANGILINAN: So there isn't a waitlist, per  
19 se, but-- because that's actually not allowed by the--  
20 - by the program, by the federal requirements, but  
21 what-- what there is-- is a certain amount of  
22 capacity that we have to have available for our  
23 Assessment Centers. And so the wait-- not the wait  
24 time, or waitlist, but the time until your  
25 appointment might be not immediate, if you will, but

2 might be a few weeks or a month out, or two out, a  
3 month or two out.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. And just out of  
5 curiosity, because I know you went over some of the  
6 percentages of the folks that need the services in  
7 terms of percentage of folks that have disabilities,  
8 versus the ones that are actually using-- utilizing  
9 the services. So in terms of the barrier to meeting  
10 the demand, is that because of the lack of drivers,  
11 the lack of vehicles that are outfitted properly, is  
12 it both? Is it also the eligibility assessments that  
13 are not happening quickly enough? Or is there  
14 anything like that that's happening? If you could go  
15 into that a little bit?

16 MR. PANGILINAN: Sure. And let me, if I may,  
17 first verify your question. I think you meant the  
18 gap between the number of people who are older and  
19 disabled in New York versus who we are serving today?  
20 Or do you mean, not being able to meet our current  
21 demand of our current customers?

22 CHAIRPERSON LEE: I think current also, but then  
23 also planning ahead, because-- and I say this as a  
24 background, because I know that, in general, the  
25 workforce shortage is a huge issue in, you know, the

2 social service sector, the disability sector, you  
3 know, and a lot of the service industry. So just  
4 wanted to know if you guys are also experiencing the  
5 same thing, and what the barriers are, and how to  
6 address that? And also, maybe from the Council's  
7 perspective how we can help address that as well.

8 MR. PANGILINAN: Sure. Yeah. Thanks for that  
9 question. Yeah. So I would say that we've got--  
10 come a long way in the last 18 months, since June  
11 2021, in that driver-- in that labor shortage area.  
12 Like, you're absolutely right, that this is something  
13 that affected not just the industries you mentioned,  
14 but as well-- as well as Access-A-Ride.

15 Right now, we're at about four and a half percent  
16 vacancy for our primary carriers, and we've almost  
17 doubled the number of TLC drivers who can take  
18 Access-A-Ride trips, to Chair Hudson's question.  
19 We've gone from 5000 drivers to over 9000 now in the  
20 pool, which is wonderful. So we are able to meet our  
21 demand right now for our current customers.

22 We of course, know that the current customers  
23 are-- the rate is growing. We've added several  
24 thousand customers on the eligibility pool since last  
25 year even, over 2022. And so what we're doing is

2 continuing to add more and more drivers from the TLC  
3 to be eligible from training and drug and alcohol  
4 testing, as well as making sure that we can get to 0  
5 percent vacancy on our primary carriers to be able to  
6 take all those trips that we do expect to come in.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay, great. And then I'll  
8 just, again, keep it short. So one last question is:  
9 I know that other states, you know -- because thank  
10 you to Chair Books-Powers, because you asked the same  
11 question I had, which, you know, Dr. Sharon had  
12 brought up during the press conference about, you  
13 know, if there's something that's-- if someone has  
14 something that's considered a permanent disability,  
15 then why do they need to keep going back for the  
16 reassessments? So just want to emphasize and echo  
17 the same sentiments on that. And then also, is there  
18 because I know other cities have been doing, you  
19 know, modeling Telehealth, you know, for their  
20 appointments and things like that. Is there a way to  
21 also-- I don't know if you're currently doing that,  
22 but if not, is there a way to accommodate, and do the  
23 assessments via, you know, Zoom or Telehealth or  
24 other platforms?

1  
2 MR. PANGILINAN: Yeah. So our assessments are  
3 all in person at this time. When-- when they do come  
4 in, we're able to, again, fully access-- fully assess  
5 their functional abilities at that point, and a  
6 number of agencies do those in person assessments.  
7 But we will always continue-- we are continuously  
8 looking at our assessment process to make sure we're  
9 doing it in the right-- in the best way possible,  
10 and-- and making sure we, you know, take on what the  
11 best practices around the country, and right now  
12 that, for us, at least it is in person.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Yeah, because I know that  
14 especially during COVID, we saw how a lot of these  
15 online platforms which of course, as I will say, I  
16 think the-- the disabilities community is usually  
17 ahead of us when it comes to this stuff in terms of  
18 knowing that you can do these things online and in  
19 different ways, and creative ways. And one thing  
20 that we saw quickly was in terms of the medical,  
21 mental health sectors. Like, there were a lot of  
22 assessments that they were able to shift online. And  
23 so I just want to, you know, emphasize that point and  
24 see if there is a way that you can look into how to  
25 do this in the future. Because, you know, the whole

2 point is to make this, you know, accessible. It is  
3 an accessible service. So, you know, in order to do  
4 that, and accommodate, if you could look into that  
5 and the legalities around that, that would be great.

6 MR. PANGILINAN: Sure. Thanks for your comment.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thanks.

8 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: I'd like to  
9 acknowledge that we've been joined by Councilmembers  
10 Dinowitz and Mealy.

11 Next, we will go to Councilmember Schulman for  
12 questions.

13 COUNCILMEMBER SCHULMAN: Thank you very much. I  
14 want to thank the Chairs for this really important  
15 hearing today. And I also want to acknowledge the  
16 people that are here listening to the testimony, and  
17 we really appreciate you. And it was so great that  
18 you came out to show support for what we're trying to  
19 do, which is to make New York City more accessible  
20 for everybody, and mobility is a fundamental part of  
21 making our city function, but not if you don't have  
22 access to that mobility.

23 And I also want to mention that I'm a lifetime  
24 member of what's called the 504 Club, which is an  
25 advocacy group for people with disabilities.



2           What Councilmember Brooks-Powers mentioned  
3 earlier is that I do have a lot of older adults in my  
4 district. One of the largest number of-- of older  
5 adults of any city council district. So I have a  
6 question: How many-- This has always been an issue  
7 for me for Access-A-Ride in all the years I've been  
8 in government. How many Access-A-Ride contracts are  
9 there?

10           MR. PANGILINAN: So we have a number-- So we have  
11 a number of contracts out. All of our service is  
12 contracted out. We have a contract with our call  
13 center, for example. We have a contract with four  
14 primary carriers and four broker-- brokers for our  
15 for our Taxi and Limousine drivers. As well as  
16 contracts with our Assessment Centers. I'm sure I'm  
17 forgetting a few more.

18           COUNCILMEMBER SCHULMAN: So, I really wanted to  
19 focus in on the contracts for the Access-A-Rides, the  
20 actual rides.

21           MR. PANGILINAN: Sure, for the actual  
22 transportation. We have four contracts with four  
23 different companies for our blue and white vans. And  
24 then we have an additional four for our broker  
25 services.

2 COUNCILMEMBER SCHULMAN: So isn't-- isn't it--  
3 wouldn't it be better to have one vendor who can be  
4 held totally accountable to us for the disability  
5 community and older adults as opposed to having four  
6 fractured contracts. It's always been an issue,  
7 because everybody points fingers at everybody else  
8 about who's responsible for what.

9 MR. DAVEY: So I'll take that, Councilmember,  
10 having run a previous system in Boston and consulted  
11 with a few others. Respectfully, I think it'd be a  
12 terrible idea. If you put all your eggs in one  
13 basket with one contractor who might fail, might go  
14 into bankruptcy, might have issues, which is why the  
15 blue and white vans typically are owned-- they're  
16 owned by MTA, so we don't have to wholly rely on a  
17 contract, one contractor to provide the services.  
18 But it's been a strategy utilized by, I think  
19 successfully, here and other systems to have multiple  
20 providers in that regard. It's also good for  
21 competition, too, in terms of making sure that if  
22 we're not getting good service out of one contractor,  
23 we can say, "Hey, you know, these other three are  
24 pretty good. You need to step up your game." And I

1 will I won't get into who we-- we've said that too,  
2 from time to time, but we have.

3  
4 So, you know, your point on the blame game, I  
5 appreciate. But we know exactly, you know, who  
6 brought, you know, a person today here in this, you  
7 know, in this audience, and if-- if you know, Jean  
8 has a problem, we know exactly who to hold  
9 accountable, you know, the contractor and the driver.

10 So-- So I appreciate the question, and I think  
11 multiple contractors-- in other government services,  
12 I agree with you. But I think on this particular  
13 one, it's not only an industry standard, but it's  
14 been successful.

15 COUNCILMEMBER SCHULMAN: Are there standards that  
16 you have to hold everyone accountable. I presume  
17 there are.

18 MR. PANGILINAN: That's right.

19 COUNCILMEMBER SCHULMAN: If we-- If we can see  
20 what those standards are, if that's something that  
21 can be shared with the Committee, that would be  
22 great.

23 MR. PANGILINAN: Absolutely.

24 COUNCILMEMBER SCHULMAN: And if I could just ask  
25 one-- one other question. So the-- the issues that

2 have been brought to me in terms of Access-A-Ride, I  
3 haven't heard-- I have people in my community who  
4 have a number of issues and-- but what I do want to  
5 say is that I've heard a lot of excellent comments  
6 about the E-Hail pilot program from a number of  
7 people, from older adults and people with  
8 disabilities, and I'm hoping that that can be  
9 expanded even more so than we're doing right now.  
10 Because, I mean, people just love that program.

11 MR. PANGILINAN: Yeah. Thank you very much. We  
12 agree, and we're looking into what-- how to structure  
13 that phase two program.

14 COUNCILMEMBER SCHULMAN: Okay. Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you. Next  
16 we'll hear from Councilmember Stevens.

17 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: Hello. How are you guys  
18 doing? My voice is going in and out, so I apologize.  
19 But I just have really just one real quick question.

20 So, one: My mom, she uses Access-A-Ride all the  
21 time, and one of the biggest things that we always  
22 have is like, obviously lateness in picking them up  
23 and not being consistent. So I know there's already  
24 been a number of questions asked about that. But  
25 there's also been some incidents where there has been

2 drivers who have been rude, been aggressive, and just  
3 trying to think-- just trying to get a better  
4 understanding of like, so when a complaint is lodged.  
5 What does that look like? What training does drivers  
6 get? And how do you make sure that drivers are able  
7 to really interact with folks in a meaningful way and  
8 treating them with dignity?

9 MR. PANGILINAN: Yeah. So there's a couple of  
10 things there to address that. One is on the training  
11 side, one is on the accountability side, and one is  
12 on how do we know what's going on. And so in terms  
13 of the training side-- and again, I won't reiterate  
14 too much of that, but we do have a lot of training  
15 that goes into making sure our blue and white drivers  
16 are absolutely respectful, and safe, and know what  
17 they're-- and are able to do their jobs in a great  
18 way. Same with our broker drivers as well, who do  
19 this-- who either due Access-A-Ride full time or part  
20 time.

21 Now if there is an issue, a specific issue with a  
22 customer, or long history of issues, the customer  
23 should absolutely let us know what those are. That's  
24 one way we find out is when the customers tell us,  
25 "Hey, on this trip, I encountered a very rude driver

1 that did X-Y-Z," or what-- or what have you. We are  
2 able to look into that immediately and investigate  
3 what happened on that trip by interviewing the  
4 reviewing the customer, finding out from the driver,  
5 if they have-- if they want to say their side, as  
6 well as working with the broker, with the-- with  
7 their employer-carrier to take the necessary action  
8 which-- which can include termination, or suspension  
9 from the Access-A-Ride program, if this is something  
10 that rises to that level.  
11

12 In addition, we do a number of we called Secret  
13 Shopper kind of trips, where we have some of our  
14 employees will take Access-A-Ride trips, and make  
15 sure that we are-- that the drivers are adhering to  
16 all the standards we're training them on, like  
17 wheelchair securement, behavior, helping customers,  
18 calling them out if they need to be called out if  
19 they're blind or low vision, and that kind of thing.

20 So all those aspects together help us understand  
21 what is going on among the driver-customer  
22 relationship, and for us to take action when  
23 necessary.

24 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: And did you talk a little  
25 bit about the training? Because I feel like maybe I

1 missed that? Like, what does training look like? Or  
2 how often does that happen? And is that something  
3 that's done regularly?  
4

5 MR. PANGILINAN: Yes, it is. So we have initial  
6 training, as well as annual refreshers with all of  
7 our drivers on the operator as well-- sorry, as  
8 primary carriers as well as our broker services. And  
9 so what this training will be is above and beyond the  
10 TLC training for our broker drivers. And for the  
11 primary carrier operators, it involves training such  
12 as safe driving, such as how to work with people with  
13 different kinds of disabilities and being culturally  
14 appropriate with those disabilities, being able to  
15 understand their duties as drivers, to bring people  
16 to and from where they need to go.

17 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: And just one last thing,  
18 really quickly. So this summer, I was taking my  
19 grandmother to her doctor's appointment, and we went  
20 in at nine. And at that time, there was another  
21 patient sitting outside, a senior, and she was in a  
22 wheelchair. And when my grandmother's appointment  
23 was over at 11, she was still sitting there. So I  
24 ended up having to pay for her cab, because she was  
25 sitting outside in 90-degree weather with her home

2 attendant, because her Access-A-Ride did not pick her  
3 up. So I just want to make sure that-- Those  
4 stories happen way too often. And we have to really  
5 do better because we literally had a senior sitting  
6 in the sun, who I was I thought it was going to have  
7 a heat stroke, because she was out there for so long.  
8 And things like that, to me is really unacceptable.

9 MR. DAVEY: Yeah. If I can, yeah. I know-- So  
10 one of those stories is one too many, to be clear.  
11 And, you know, I know we talked at the top about some  
12 of the great performance that we've had. But the--  
13 the real-life, you know, story you just had, and I  
14 assume you'll hear from, you know, our customers  
15 later with less-than-disappointing service, we  
16 acknowledge, and we need-- we need to get it right.  
17 76 percent satisfaction is great. We need to be at  
18 100. On-time performance at 95 percent? We need to  
19 be at 100 percent. We need to-- We-- So we  
20 acknowledge that. Apologies to that customer,  
21 whoever that was who had to go through that.

22 But these are lived experiences we just need to  
23 continue to get better at, because that day was a  
24 disappointing day for that person for sure. So-- But  
25 I appreciate you raising that.



2 MR. PANGILINAN: Yeah. And Councilmember if I  
3 may add to: You know, I'm definitely personally  
4 involved in a number of these that do happen. You  
5 know, when the customer was stuck several months ago  
6 in a similar situation that you described at night  
7 that didn't get there ride. You know, Will and I  
8 were both on the phone with the-- with the person  
9 that was with the customer as well as with the  
10 customer themselves and the Command Center to make  
11 sure that they get picked up. So definitely not--  
12 not-- I definitely am on the frontline and seeing  
13 that happen. We want to make sure as Rich said to  
14 prevent those from happening in the future. So thank  
15 you.

16 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you. Next  
17 we'll hear from Councilmember Hanif.

18 COUNCILMEMBER HANIF: Thank you so much, Majority  
19 Whip Brooks-Powers and to the Chairs for hosting this  
20 very critical hearing, and for the administration for  
21 joining. Chris, it's really wonderful to meet you,  
22 and hear about your track record, and your visions  
23 for disability justice and the work ahead for Access-  
24 A-Ride. We are absolutely aligned. And so just  
25 really grateful to hear from you.

1  
2       This oversight topic is personal to me as well.  
3 I was diagnosed with lupus at 17, and at the time my  
4 mobility was severely limited. And actually  
5 yesterday marks one year since I got my left hip  
6 replaced again in the span of 10 years.

7       And due to the MTA's failure and inaccessible--  
8 inaccessible subways, I was unable to depend on  
9 public transportation to get around. And I had  
10 applied for Access-A-Ride and encountered what was  
11 frankly a dehumanizing process. At the HRA  
12 Assessment Center, I was put through functional  
13 testing, where an employee watched me walk up stairs  
14 and board a simulated bus and subway.

15       Ultimately, the first time I applied I was  
16 rejected for the program. And I believe that this  
17 was a biased decision that did not take into account  
18 the complexity of lupus and the toll it puts on the  
19 body. And this rejection ignored the very real  
20 mobility challenges I face, and had a severe impact  
21 on my life.

22       When I started undergrad at Brooklyn College, I  
23 had to make the financially difficult decision to  
24 live near campus instead of living at home where I  
25 was dependent on care for my parents in Kensington

1 due to my inability to commute. I had to pay cab  
2 fare to get around to doctor's appointments, and  
3 severely restricted any transportation that wasn't  
4 for medical purposes in order to save money which of  
5 course hindered my quality of life.

6  
7 A year after being rejected from Access-A-Ride, I  
8 was allowed to reapply, and I'd like to understand  
9 the prohibitive one year rule if that still exists  
10 for folks who get rejected to apply again. But that  
11 was what was the-- the rule maybe 10-- 10 years ago,  
12 and this time I was approved.

13 Honestly, I'm not sure what was different this  
14 time because I had the same issues, I applied with  
15 the same kinds of mobility issues, which speaks to  
16 the arbitrary nature of this approval process. And  
17 while Access-A-Ride did make things slightly easier  
18 for me, it's helpfulness was limited by the issues  
19 that have long plagued the program, including needing  
20 to book far in advance, lengthy wait times, and no--  
21 no shows.

22 Effective paratransit could truly be a lifeline  
23 for folks like me, and it's unacceptable that Access-  
24 A-Ride has continued-- continuously failed to meet  
25 the needs of many New Yorkers with disabilities.

1  
2 I know we touched on applications that are  
3 accepted and rejected. Are you able to share  
4 disaggregated data by type of disability, age, race,  
5 borough, primary language spoken with the Council?

6 MR. PANGILINAN: I will look into that if I-- if  
7 we can do that. And I know there might be some  
8 sensitivities around that, from a privacy  
9 perspective. But if not, I can definitely work with  
10 you on that, though.

11 COUNCILMEMBER HANIF: And could you share what  
12 the criteria is, by which determinations are made  
13 around rejections? And could you share that with the  
14 Council?

15 MR. PANGILINAN: Sure. Yes. I can talk about it  
16 right now, but also follow up as well, if you'd like.

17 COUNCILMEMBER HANIF: That would be great.  
18 Chair, could I have a few minutes? Thank you.

19 MR. PANGILINAN: Sure. Yes. So with the with  
20 the assessments, it's-- essentially it's in line with  
21 what the US Department of Transportation and the ADA  
22 recommend for-- for paratransit providers, which is  
23 the functional abilities that limit someone because  
24 of disability to not be able to use fixed route  
25 public transportation. And there's a number of

2 factors at play there. One of them, like you did  
3 mention, is stairs. Another one is also the ability  
4 to walk a certain number of blocks, for example, to  
5 walk to a bus stop, or walk to a subway station, or  
6 be able to navigate because of other disabilities,  
7 the system at large, as well as a number of other  
8 factors as well. But that's essentially the-- the  
9 eligibility criteria that's evaluated on the  
10 application as well as in the in-person assessment.

11 COUNCILMEMBER HANIF: And I know we touched on  
12 training for drivers. What training and qualified  
13 qualifications are needed for staff who make  
14 determinations?

15 MR. PANGILINAN: So with our determinations, the  
16 folks at the at the Assessment Centers are all  
17 licensed medical professionals, whether it be a  
18 physical-- I'll probably get the wrong terminology  
19 here, but a physical medical license or psychiatric  
20 medical license for-- to be able to evaluate  
21 correctly the disabilities that are presented, and  
22 the functional abilities that are presented before  
23 them.

24

25

1  
2 COUNCILMEMBER HANIF: And then how is the program  
3 proactively working against various biases that could  
4 negatively impact a decision?

5 MR. PANGILINAN: Sure. And do you mean like in  
6 terms of the demographics of the person or the--?

7 COUNCILMEMBER HANIF: Absolutely

8 MR. PANGILINAN: Yeah. So I can get back to on  
9 exactly-- on the training on that, too, if you-- if  
10 you like.

11 COUNCILMEMBER HANIF: That would be really  
12 important for this-- for this council. And then how  
13 are Access-A-Ride applicants and customers made aware  
14 of their rights, and particularly what efforts are  
15 being made to inform those who don't speak English?

16 MR. PANGILINAN: Yep. So we have a Access-A-Ride  
17 customer Guide, which essentially highlights what the  
18 program is, what the-- what the customer's rights are  
19 with the program, as well as availability in  
20 different-- different languages.

21 COUNCILMEMBER HANIF: And then the MTA committed  
22 to doubling the size of the E-Hail pilot for Access-  
23 A-Ride in early 2023. Has it-- Has it done so  
24 successfully? Does it still plan to do so?

1  
2 MR. PANGILINAN: Yeah, so that was-- The  
3 commitment was from March of 2020. And if we have  
4 different information, that's okay. But from March  
5 2020, we had a program which was going to double the  
6 number of participants, and had caps on the number of  
7 trips (I believe it was 15 trips a month and \$16 per  
8 trip) back in March 2020. That program was shelved  
9 at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. And we're  
10 still in phase one of E-Hail. But right now what  
11 we're doing is we're looking at the program to ensure  
12 that we can expand the program in a financially  
13 sustainable way that still brings the benefits to the  
14 E-Hail customers.

15 COUNCILMEMBER HANIF: Got it. And then finally,  
16 could you share any updates on the DFDA My Ride On  
17 Demand pilot? Is that different from Access-A-Ride?  
18 It's-- I know that it's suspended.

19 MR. PANGILINAN: I'm unfamiliar with that  
20 program.

21 MR. DAVEY: It's a New York City program, not an  
22 MTA program.

23 COUNCILMEMBER HANIF: Okay. Got it. Great.  
24 Thank you so much. Thank you, Chair.

2 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you. Next, we  
3 will hear from Councilmember Brewer.

4 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much. I  
5 had, just like others, I think I've been through  
6 these hearings before over the last 40 years. What  
7 is the technology? I know that, for instance, we've  
8 been working in oversight and investigations with the  
9 bus companies for school children, and they have  
10 similar issues. How do you get there on time? So--  
11 And they have, I guess, a contract with VIA trying to  
12 figure that out. So I know that this issue of-- You  
13 know, "where is my vehicle?" is still an issue. So  
14 how-- What-- I should know this, and maybe you  
15 mentioned in your testimony, but can you be specific  
16 about the technology and what you're using?

17 MR. PANGILINAN: Sure. So right now, the  
18 scheduling software that we have, we've had for about  
19 20 years. This is a software that we procured in the  
20 early 2000s, which does kind of what you were saying  
21 there, which basically takes in the 30,000 or so  
22 29,000 or so trip requests every day, and from those  
23 trip requests, assign them to drivers and routes.  
24 And that way, the next day, we have as efficient as  
25 possible, have a schedule for our customers and our



2 drivers. And I did mention that software is 20 years  
3 old. So--

4 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: I noticed. I was going to  
5 say that, but I'll let you say it. Go ahead.

6 MR. PANGILINAN: Yes. Absolutely. So what we--  
7 Especially in the last five years, there has been a  
8 lot of changes in this-- in this space. As you  
9 mentioned, the school bus program working with a  
10 provider on the-- in this software. And so right now  
11 we're actively working with different companies,  
12 talking to them in person to see what is available in  
13 the market, and we'll be doing a process shortly, an  
14 official process, to bring somebody on board to help  
15 us upgrade our software.

16 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: All right. But I think  
17 now, if I'm standing on the corner, and the bus is  
18 late, I mean, the vehicle is late, I don't exactly  
19 know when it's going to show up, right? Is that-- I  
20 mean, is that true? Or is that-- that's what I get  
21 in terms of complaints.

22 MR. PANGILINAN: Sure. So actually with our My  
23 MTA App right now, it will have the ETAs available  
24 for either broker or primary carrier when they're--  
25 when they're being dispatched. And so that-- that

2 information is available for those using the app. If  
3 they don't use the app, they may call to get the-- to  
4 get the ETA if necessary.

5 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: It's hard to do, though,  
6 when you're waiting, and it's hot, and you may or may  
7 not have your phone with you. There's lots of  
8 challenges. Okay. The other question I have is --  
9 and maybe this has been addressed -- but in the past,  
10 and I think you'll hear all the issues from Jean  
11 Ryan, as you know, because she's fabulous at DIA--

12 MR. PANGILINAN: She is.

13 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: --but the issue is, people  
14 having taken a long time to get to their  
15 destinations, because people are picking up, the  
16 driver's picking up. How does that-- Is that-- Has  
17 that improved? Do you track it, et cetera?

18 MR. PANGILINAN: Yup. So that is something we  
19 also are looking to improve with this technology  
20 upgrade, to streamline our pickups. You know, some  
21 of this stuff, just an early preview of what we've  
22 seen is the technology is now available to ensure  
23 that when a customer is headed to their destination -  
24 - this is an example let's say from here to the Upper  
25 West Side -- that they're--

1  
2 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: You just happened to pick  
3 the Upper West Side, yes.

4 MR. PANGILINAN: I happen to be live there also,  
5 actually, yes.

6 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: I guess I work for you.

7 MR. PANGILINAN: We work for each other, right?

8 In the Upper West Side, instead of being-- When you

9 are on your way there that you can pick up and drop

10 off, let's say, pick up some one in Chelsea and drop

11 them off in Hell's Kitchen, and get to your

12 destination. That kind of, like, directional sharing

13 is something that we want to be able to harness with

14 this new technology, so that people are always on

15 their way home and not-- and not going out of their

16 way.

17 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: Okay. Just, finally, one

18 more quick question. This issue of driver and other

19 ability to be pleasant, for lack of a better word.

20 Training, training, training. You can do a lot of

21 it. And it may or may not work in every case. So

22 how do you-- Is there like a ComStat for drivers?

23 How-- Because it seems to be-- That should be

24 fixable. There's so many other issues that you have

25 to challenge, you know, that are the ones that you've

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2 outlined. But just being a pleasant person. How--  
3 Could you measure it? Is it by the complaints? You  
4 mentioned earlier that you get some letters. I  
5 assume some people do 311. Some people do your  
6 hotline. How do you deal with that? That seems to  
7 me like-- Believe it or not, for 40 years, that has  
8 been the issue.

9 MR. PANGILINAN: I do believe it. With-- With  
10 our system--

11 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: Software is not going to  
12 do it.

13 MR. PANGILINAN: No. It's not going to do it.  
14 But we are able to track complaints that come into  
15 our system to make sure and see what are the top  
16 complaints from people, and make sure we address  
17 those.

18 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: All right. I mean, it  
19 doesn't go away. That's the problem. Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you. Next, we  
21 will hear from Councilmember Kagan.

22 COUNCILMEMBER KAGAN: Thank you very much. First  
23 of all, I would like to thank all Chairs of today's  
24 hearing. Very important hearing. Thank you so much  
25 for hosting this. And of course, thank you, everyone

2 who is in the City Hall. And welcome to City Hall.

3 It's the people's house. So thank you so much for

4 coming, especially to advocate for people with

5 disabilities. Thank you so much for coming. My

6 question is like-- I have statement, I have

7 question. You know, like, I watched yesterday a

8 discussion between Governor and Mayor regarding

9 almost \$500 million proposed cut to Access-A-Ride

10 program in disbelief, because Governor was saying

11 that, "Oh, we're subsidizing MTA, we're subsidizing

12 Access-A-Ride program." She never mentioned that ATM

13 mobility tax to New Yorkers. She never mentioned

14 that the bulk of the revenue to MTA is coming from

15 New York City. She never mentioned any of-- how much

16 New York City is given to MTA. So I'm definitely

17 opposed to it.

18 But my question is, like, do you see that maybe

19 resolution from New York City Council, letters from

20 New York City Council to Governor will help to

21 prevent this cut, because it will be very

22 detrimental. It's half a billion dollars we're

23 talking about.

24 MR. PANGILINAN: Jai, do you want to take this?

1  
2 MS. PATEL: So one of the things that, you know,  
3 the Governor has proposed is a balanced approach to  
4 solving the MTA's fiscal crisis. And part of the  
5 solution is there's the a payroll mobility tax that  
6 we're proposing an increase to, the \$500 million  
7 contribution from the city, as well as the MTA's  
8 part, and all these balanced approaches will help  
9 solve the MTA's fiscal cliff and serve our riders,  
10 right? And that's the main goal, is to-- If the MTA  
11 is not fiscally sustainable, the ridership suffers.

12 COUNCILMEMBER KAGAN: How about not taking funds  
13 from MTA and transferring to multiple other programs  
14 that we see over the years, over and over again, that  
15 MTA funds are sent to other programs and other goals,  
16 not to MTA.

17 MS. PATEL: So some of the-- the items that  
18 you're talking about are for capital programming.  
19 There's a lockbox-- lockbox, you know, approach that  
20 the legislature has taken for congestion pricing,  
21 internet sales tax. Those are for the capital  
22 program that the MTA does for accessibility, for the  
23 subway, elevators, escalators, things that we're  
24 improving on the capital side.

2 But I'd also like to point out that other  
3 counties in New York State -- Nassau, Westchester,  
4 Suffolk -- also fund their own paratransit services.  
5 And this is MTA you know, the city's contribution to  
6 the MTA for running paratransit services.

7 COUNCILMEMBER KAGAN: I still believe that you  
8 cannot compare the contribution of New York City  
9 riders and New York City, in general, MTA comparing  
10 to Nassau County, with all due respect is like, un-  
11 comparable. So I'm totally opposed to this cut.

12 Thank you very much.

13 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Next, we'll hear from  
14 Councilmember Dinowitz.

15 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you Chair, and  
16 Chair, and Chair. A lot of Chairs here today. Thank  
17 you all. Hello, MTA. I want to ask about accessible  
18 stations and an accessible transit system. And just  
19 real quick how many accessible stations exist in New  
20 York City?

21 MR. PANGILINAN: Rich, do you want to take this?

22 MR. DAVEY: 140.

23 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: And that's what percent  
24 of the total stations about?

2 MR. DAVEY: About 25 or 30 percent. [background  
3 voices] Yeah. 29 percent to be exact.

4 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: 29 percent. Okay, so  
5 that number is increasing. And what is your--  
6 What's the plan? And what's the goal?

7 MR. DAVEY: Yeah, maybe taking a step back? I'm  
8 happy to-- exactly. So-- So certainly. I mean, we  
9 have a system, a fixed route system, a subway that is  
10 not welcoming to all of our customers, right? I  
11 mean, there a lot of reasons for that. Historically,  
12 how it's been built, may be ignored. You know, I'm  
13 actually proud to work for a Chairman who said, "We  
14 need to fix this," and decided to settle a lawsuit  
15 with some folks here who pushed us and made us  
16 better. I want to give them credit for that. And we  
17 made a commitment to make the system at least 95  
18 percent accessible by 2050.

19 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: So I want to talk about--  
20 - 95 percent by 2050.

21 MR. DAVEY: Excuse me, 2055.

22 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: Okay. You gave yourself  
23 an extra five years just now.

24 MR. DAVEY: No, no, that was from the press  
25 release some months ago. I made a mistake.



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2 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: I know. I was just  
3 kidding. I saw the press release. That's good. You  
4 know, I certainly believe the system, the fixed route  
5 system should be accessible for everyone. And I'm  
6 glad the MTA is making steps in that direction. When  
7 you say accessible, what do you mean?

8 MR. DAVEY: It means that the system can be used  
9 by any person regardless of their physical abilities  
10 or disability for that matter.

11 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: Okay, and-- So beyond an  
12 elevator, right? Very often we talk about  
13 accessibility just in terms of an elevator. But are  
14 there other accessibility upgrades that are always  
15 included in accessible stations, as you list  
16 accessible stations on your website?

17 MR. DAVEY: Sure. Yeah, I mean, we were-- I  
18 mean, we have been focused on I think, in large part  
19 because of the groundbreaking settlement on  
20 elevators, but absolutely: Tactile warning strips.  
21 I think earlier, a couple of your colleagues asked  
22 about making sure we have multilingual, you know,  
23 multilingual environment, for example. So for all of  
24 those, you know, things that we're thinking about for  
25 sure, so...

2 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: Well, I just-- Thinking  
3 about or doing? Because I, you know, I want to  
4 recognize not everyone with a disability is, you  
5 know, in a wheelchair. They may not need the  
6 elevator, but they may need other, you know, other  
7 accessible elements.

8 MR. DAVEY: Sure. I'm happy to go through the  
9 details. But exactly. I mean, we're not really  
10 thinking about it, but we're doing it.

11 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: Okay. And I just want  
12 to make sure that when you say accessible, you mean--  
13 you don't just mean installing an elevator, it means  
14 fully accessible--

15 MR. DAVEY: Correct.

16 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: --with all the criteria.  
17 Okay.

18 MR. DAVEY: So that could be, you know, the  
19 correct ramp. You know, for example, pitches, as I  
20 said, signage.

21 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: Signage, bumps, auditory  
22 notices, visual, okay.

23 MR. DAVEY: Correct. That's right.

24 [BELL RINGS]

2 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: May I have two more  
3 questions? Chairs? Do you have to vote on it as  
4 Chairs, because it's three of you? Just kidding.

5 So-- Okay, so the goal is fully accessible or 95  
6 percent system. They have to go in and order though.  
7 And they have to be installed in certain places  
8 first.

9 MR. DAVEY: Yep.

10 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: What are your selection  
11 criteria for determining where these-- where the  
12 accessibility upgrades are made first?

13 MR. DAVEY: I'm told we actually published it  
14 because of the law your father passed. So it's  
15 published on our website.

16 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: Good. I see in the--  
17 he's a good guy, because.

18 MR. DAVEY: I didn't know him. But obviously he  
19 was, if he cared about these issues.

20 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: Well, he still is a good  
21 guy. Believe it or not, he's still working. Because  
22 what I see on the on the press release was, I think,  
23 30 stations in the most recent press release. And I  
24 think two of them are in the Bronx, the Bronx, which  
25 has the highest rate of disabilities in New York

2 City. In a previous press release, it was-- it was a  
3 similar number, where we have a borough with higher  
4 poverty, higher health issues, higher disability  
5 issues, and yet it's not prioritized in terms of  
6 accessible stations. And so I'm wondering what the  
7 selection criteria are. There's a lot of Manhattan.  
8 Sorry. Is Gale still here?

9 MR. DAVEY: Yeah, I mean, again, I encourage you  
10 to look at the website happy. I'm happy to take that  
11 offline. But as I was also counseled as well, we're  
12 prioritizing accessibility for stations, you know,  
13 Metro North stations in the Bronx, for example, as  
14 well. So it's not just about New York City Transit.  
15 You know, we think about an accessibility strategy  
16 across MTA.

17 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: So then, I heard a rumor  
18 you're cutting express bus service, and for-- It was  
19 announced you're cutting express bus service to  
20 reduce the hours during non rush hours. This was  
21 originally planned in 2019. That was since taken off  
22 the table. But we have heard that that is back on  
23 the table to cut Express Bus hours, which is  
24 particularly important as it's the only fully  
25 accessible means of transportation, and especially in

2 areas of my district which are particularly hilly and  
3 don't have the elevators that other areas of  
4 Manhattan have.

5 I would love to see that headshaking be a formal  
6 "We are not cutting express bus service and we have  
7 no plans to."

8 MR. DAVEY: I don't know where you get your  
9 rumors, sir, but no, we're not cutting express bus.

10 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: You have no-- That is  
11 good to hear. You have no plans to cut Express--

12 MR. DAVEY: That said-- that said though, you  
13 know, Deputy Chief Financial-- in the conversation we  
14 had with your colleague, is if the governor's budget  
15 doesn't pass? If we don't get a bailout? If we  
16 don't get some help at MTA? We discussed this  
17 yesterday at our board meeting. Our Chair was very  
18 clear that there would be service cuts across the  
19 organization, layoffs. And we don't want to do any  
20 of that, obviously. We're, you know, we're bullish  
21 that the governor is having great conversations with  
22 the legislature and with the mayor. But...

23 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: But, as you say, I'm  
24 glad to hear you're not cutting express bus service.

2 MR. DAVEY: No. We've been investing in bus  
3 service, particularly in the Bronx. The Bronx  
4 redesign, we actually invested dollars into improving  
5 the bus service, which, you know, happy to, you know,  
6 again, talk offline. But the good news is: Customer  
7 satisfaction for Bronx is up because of the redesigns  
8 that, again, your colleagues, I'm sure you supported,  
9 which we appreciated. And you know, we're rolling  
10 out in other boroughs as well.

11 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: Good. And my last  
12 question is: As more stations come online for full  
13 accessibility, will that impact eligibility for  
14 Access-A-Ride? For example, if a person now lives  
15 closer to a fully accessible station, and their  
16 destination is fully accessible, will that impact  
17 someone's ability to use Access-A-Ride? Be eligible  
18 for it, rather?

19 MR. PANGILINAN: Yeah. Great question. So for  
20 our customers who have full eligibility, it won't  
21 impact them at all, because that's not-- there's no  
22 condition. If there's a condition with stairs, for  
23 example, it might enable them now actually, to take  
24 the fixed route. And that's actually kind of my--  
25 when I do have a fixed route subway, personally, that

2 definitely helps me take fixed route as opposed to  
3 using an Access-A-Ride ride.

4 And so when fixed route-- Sorry, when subway  
5 elevators or any other accessibility features come  
6 into the Bronx or other-- other areas, it gives our  
7 customers a lot more choice, which is great. And  
8 again, for those with full eligibility, it won't  
9 affect them at all, and conditions that don't affect  
10 stairs, no-- no effect either.

11 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: So I guess you expect  
12 fewer people without full eligibility to be eligible  
13 for Access-A-Ride as more elevators come online?

14 MR. PANGILINAN: I also expect customers to  
15 choose fixed route because that's-- it allows them to  
16 take the public transportation, that's kind of a  
17 bigger system, if you will, the one that that their  
18 neighbors use and others and other folks use. So I  
19 think they would they would take it by choice as  
20 well.

21 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: All right, thank you. I  
22 want to thank our Chairs. I want to thank the MTA,  
23 and of course, my assemblymember who's apparently  
24 passing great laws, and is continuing to pass great  
25 laws to make our system accessible. Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you now we have  
3 questions from Councilmember Farías.

4 COUNCILMEMBER FARÍAS: Hi. Thank you all. Thank  
5 you Chairs. I will try to be quick, and I'm sorry  
6 that I came-- I bounced out and came back in. So  
7 these any of these are answered, please let me know.  
8 I can always look back on video. Does the MTA own  
9 any of the fleet of paratransit vehicles themselves?  
10 And what percentage, if so?

11 MR. PANGILINAN: Yes, we do. So we own all 1,188  
12 blue and white vans. And then on the broker side,  
13 those are of course owned and operated by the drivers  
14 themselves.

15 COUNCILMEMBER FARÍAS: Okay. So Access-A-Ride is  
16 contracting out, or is it kind of like an Uber  
17 situation where people sign up to be an Access-A-Ride  
18 driver?

19 MR. PANGILINAN: Yeah. So we do-- All of our  
20 services are contracted out. And so about--  
21 approximately 30 percent of our customers use what we  
22 call our dedicated service. Those are our blue and  
23 white vans that are contracted out to four different  
24 providers. Those vans only do Access-A-Ride trips,  
25 and those drivers are employees of those contractors.



2 70 percent of our trips, however, are what we call  
3 our non-dedicated broker service. Those are  
4 fulfilled by-- those trips are distributed by four of  
5 our broker contractors to over 9000 eligible Taxi and  
6 Limousine licensed drivers that have passed training  
7 and other requirements to take-- to be eligible to  
8 take Access-A-Ride trips.

9 COUNCILMEMBER FARIÁS: Sure. And from the TLC  
10 services that are contracted out, are those for folks  
11 both that need wheelchair or assisted service, and  
12 for people that just need a regular, like, sedan?

13 MR. PANGILINAN: That's correct. That's correct.  
14 So they can take either a wheelchair accessible  
15 vehicle, they can take a sedan. Depending on their  
16 need, we can also do door-to-door service with that  
17 same service, where the driver can escort the  
18 customer to their door when they drop them off.

19 COUNCILMEMBER FARIÁS: Great. And then in terms  
20 of, like, at the base when appointments are made,  
21 whether it's through the app or over the phone, and  
22 folks are-- need to report out delays, and so on and  
23 so forth, who manages those employees?

24 MR. PANGILINAN: Yep. So we have the four  
25 contractors that are our primary carriers. They have

2 their own dispatch locations at their seven  
3 locations. They have a dispatch center and dispatch  
4 employees, which help keep their service on time. We  
5 also have our broker services, again the four  
6 brokers. They do the same thing, have their own  
7 dispatch systems to keep their drivers on time and en  
8 route. But we also have a Command Center at Access-  
9 A-Ride based out of Long Island City on Northern  
10 Boulevard.

11 COUNCILMEMBER FARIÁS: Okay. And then in terms  
12 of complaint systems. When they go to the vendors  
13 and they're not managed well, how does Access-A-Ride  
14 or the city MTA manage those complaints? And then  
15 vet those complaints through how the vendors follow  
16 through?

17 MR. PANGILINAN: Yeah, so we can follow up with  
18 either driver behavior issues or other issues that  
19 are pertinent to the-- to a specific ride with--  
20 directly with those vendors, or if there's a larger  
21 issue, like let's say they're not hitting their on-  
22 time performance goals, or having other things that  
23 are in the contract, we have liquidated damages and  
24 incentives in those contracts that we can-- that we  
25 can put in place.

1  
2 COUNCILMEMBER FARÍAS: Okay. And how long are  
3 the contracts? Are they annual or...?

4 MR. PANGILINAN: They are over several years. I  
5 don't have the exact number on my-- on me, but  
6 they're over several years.

7 COUNCILMEMBER FARÍAS: Okay. Can you get that to  
8 us? Like how-- What the contracts are, how long  
9 they are? And then just a final question: In terms  
10 of reassessing, like, do the contracts have to be  
11 RFP'd out? And is there like a self-assessment  
12 reassessment with each of those vendors on how they  
13 performed over there four, or however-long-year  
14 contract is?

15 MR. PANGILINAN: That's right. So every year we  
16 do a vendor evaluation. So we know who-- which of  
17 our vendors and contractors are performing and how we  
18 find that-- how we find that performance, as well as  
19 when we go up for renewal, it is a public RFP  
20 process.

21 MR. DAVEY: And I would say, I think-- and Chris,  
22 you and your team bring in the contractors on a  
23 monthly basis to go through performance. So--

24 MR. PANGILINAN: And I talk to them weekly as  
25 well.

2 MR. DAVEY: Exactly. So while we do have the  
3 formal evaluation processes, we are holding them  
4 accountable or praising them as the case may be on a  
5 very regular basis.

6 COUNCILMEMBER FARIÁS: And how often are you  
7 folks reaching out to the customers individually  
8 themselves to discuss the complaints, if they feel  
9 like they are not rectified?

10 MR. PANGILINAN: Yeah. So there's-- there's a  
11 couple things here. One is our customer complaints,  
12 as they come in, we call them or write them as  
13 needed, to make sure we can follow up on the correct  
14 investigation-- investigation for that issue.

15 We also do approximately 2000 customer surveys a  
16 month with our brokers, following up with customers  
17 about their previous trip the day before, to ask  
18 several questions about aspects of the service and  
19 whether or not they were satisfied with it. And that  
20 way we can understand closely if there are issues,  
21 and how we can address those issues.

22 COUNCILMEMBER FARIÁS: Okay, I'll-- I'll stop  
23 here. I appreciate you folks being here and  
24 answering these questions. I'm someone that used to  
25 travel with my grandfather to all of his

2 appointments, to the VA hospital in Kingsbridge.

3 That was someone that needed and utilized a  
4 wheelchair on the day to day. And so along with just  
5 the numerous complaints that I've received as a  
6 community organizer and as a Councilmember, I'm sure  
7 we all know the timing is always an issue, the  
8 complaint system is an issue. So I'm glad to hear  
9 some of these responses and hope to follow up offline  
10 on some of the things we have in my district.

11 MR. PANGILINAN: Thank you, Councilmember.

12 COUNCILMEMBER FARÍAS: Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you. And I  
14 just have two quick follow up questions. One: How  
15 much money would you need to expand same day E-Hail  
16 service to all of the Access-A-Ride registrants?  
17 Would a same-day ride share system be possible, and  
18 how much-- and how much would it cost?

19 MR. PANGILINAN: Yeah. So we'll have to get back  
20 to that exact number. Again, with phase two  
21 construction, we're going to try to learn a lot more  
22 about how-- what the expansion costs would-- would  
23 be.

24 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: And what about the  
25 rideshare system?

2 MR. PANGILINAN: Do you mean like the existing  
3 broker system right now or...? Yeah, so right now  
4 that is available for-- Sorry. That's available for  
5 all of our customers. Right now, it serves about 70  
6 percent--

7 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Not the same day,  
8 though.

9 MR. PANGILINAN: Not the same day. Correct. The  
10 day bef-- the regular Access-A-Ride service? Yes.  
11 Right now, 70 percent of our customers use that, and  
12 30 percent use the blue and white vans, and that is  
13 by choice. A lot of times, our customers-- the 30  
14 percent that are on the blue and whites request it,  
15 or need it for their disability, I should say. They  
16 might need a lift or-- or whatever they might need,  
17 which requires the blue and white service.

18 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: And you said you  
19 believe it is important to hold contractors  
20 accountable, when Councilmember Schulman was asking  
21 questions earlier. If they provide poor service, how  
22 do you hold them accountable?

23 MR. PANGILINAN: Yes. So there's several aspects  
24 there. From-- From the actual contractual side, we  
25 have liquidated damages in the contracts for our

2 primary carriers that we can-- that we do on a  
3 monthly basis exercise based on either safety  
4 violations, on-time performance issues, whatever it  
5 might be. On our brokers we also have, again, four  
6 brokers that are part of our program. So we-- and it  
7 is in our contract that the number of trips goes to  
8 those who are performing the best by those-- by those  
9 performance metrics.

10 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Also, unfortunately,  
11 there was someone here today that was a customer with  
12 Access-A-Ride, is a customer with Access-A-Ride, and  
13 they were unable to stay to testify, because Access-  
14 A-Ride came to pick them up. And so we wanted to  
15 know: How long will a driver wait for a customer,  
16 because we know that at least 30 minutes is going to--  
17 - which is a minimum really, what I've seen and  
18 observed, in terms of passengers waiting for an  
19 Access-A-Ride to show up or to drop them off.

20 So wanting to know, like what that policy is, in  
21 terms of them waiting?

22 MR. PANGILINAN: Sure. So with the ADA  
23 guidelines, and the US Department of Transportation,  
24 all of us, including me, when we reserve our trips  
25 have to be the day before, for our drop off and

2 pickup times. When-- Let's say for example, if the  
3 pickup time is 12 noon, and the driver gets there,  
4 let's say at 12:30, they have to wait at least five  
5 minutes for the customer, and notify them when they--  
6 when they're there, for the customer to come down.  
7 If the driver gets there early. Let's say they get  
8 there at 11:30 in the morning for 12 o'clock pickup,  
9 they cannot leave until at least they've notified the  
10 customer, and it's been at least five minutes after  
11 the pickup time, so that's 12:05. So just because  
12 they get there at 11:30, they can't leave at 11:35.  
13 They must wait until the pickup time, unless the  
14 customer is ready to go, then they can-- then they  
15 can leave.

16 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: So they can come  
17 late, and they still will only give five minutes?

18 MR. PANGILINAN: Again, that's by the  
19 requirements of the US Department of Transportation.

20 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: And-- And I hear you,  
21 and the emphasis in terms of what's required by the  
22 federal government. But I do think that there's a  
23 level of discretion that the MTA can be able to  
24 exercise in these decisions. And I strongly think  
25 that we should revisit that and adjust, because I



2 think it's unfair, that you know, it's not  
3 reciprocal. Like, they have to wait, sometimes  
4 without even knowing how long they're waiting, and  
5 then when it's time to go, it's time and go for them.  
6 And I think this is where that E-Hail system really  
7 is more beneficial, because it's, like, if you wanted  
8 to go, you could just kind of call for it as you need  
9 it, versus scheduling it out. Have you all thought  
10 of maybe shifting to that type of system for the  
11 paratransit program?

12 MR. PANGILINAN: Yeah. So like I said in my  
13 opening remarks to you. You know, I definitely  
14 didn't come here to maintain the status quo of what  
15 Access-A-Ride is, and what it is around the country.  
16 I think we all know, and I agree with everyone in  
17 this room, too, that the way that paratransit has  
18 been run in the United States is not up to what a lot  
19 of our customers want, including myself.

20 And so with-- On the specific part about the  
21 five-minute wait pickup time, there's a lot of  
22 mechanisms in place, there's a lot of-- the word of  
23 "discretion", if you will and checks. They just  
24 can't take off. They have to call dispatch and  
25 ensure that the customer actually isn't ready. And

2 if they are on the way down, we absolutely wait for  
3 them. There's a number of those things that are in  
4 place. It's not just about taking off.

5 In terms of improving the service, and, you know,  
6 I think you hit-- hit the nail on the head there  
7 about just what about the service level, and the  
8 level of service we provide to customers? Moving  
9 into a more customer-friendly service regime, if you  
10 will, is absolutely where we want to go, which is why  
11 we're reducing that 30-minute window down to 20  
12 minutes by September, and striving to get there as  
13 much as-- as fast as we can.

14 And really all of this comes down to capacity and  
15 the amount that we're willing to invest into Access-  
16 A-Ride to make this work. And we want to be using  
17 technology and other aspects to make it as efficient  
18 as efficient as possible to do so. But we'll always  
19 be continuing to work towards that goal of making  
20 this a much more reliable and customer-friendly  
21 service.

22 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Sorry. I do have one quick  
23 follow up question. So the-- You said US Department  
24 of Transportation or is it the ADA that makes a rule  
25 about the time?

2 MR. PANGILINAN: Yeah. So the-- the ADA. I  
3 would say it's a law that the US Department  
4 transportation implements with their regulations?

5 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Do they have a similar law  
6 for the pickup-- for the-- the wait time on the other  
7 side? So like we're talking about-- that's  
8 pertaining to how long-- yeah, the pickup-- how long  
9 they can wait for a customer? But what about is  
10 there a maximum on how long a customer has to wait  
11 for them?

12 MR. PANGILINAN: Right. And so in the law, and I  
13 guess it's intentionally vague, they say "significant  
14 number of untimely pickups" is the exact wordage.  
15 The way that it's generally been interpreted by a lot  
16 of agencies (and with the FTA is what they call their  
17 triennials, where they follow up every three years  
18 with agencies to verify they're following the rules  
19 and regulations) is a 30-minute pickup window.

20 Some agencies have gone a little bit shorter.  
21 We're going to go to 20 minutes in September which is  
22 below-- which is tighter than that recommendation.

23 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you.

24 MR. PANGILINAN: Yup.

2 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: I think in hearing  
3 some of the answers, you wonder, like, if it is the  
4 thought process that making this system too good may  
5 drive costs up. So it's just, like-- because right  
6 now we have Uber, we have Lyft. And we still are  
7 using an outdated process with this program. And so  
8 like, even if like the E-Hail in itself would be too  
9 costly, maybe like E-Hail with the rideshare, maybe  
10 something that could be more explored, because it  
11 allows use of the technology, it allows for it to be  
12 less delays and service. I mean, I can't even begin  
13 to count how many times I see a senior at the end of  
14 church outside, waiting, no matter the weather, for  
15 their Access-A-Ride, and sometimes they've waited for  
16 over like an hour for it. And that's, like,  
17 unacceptable.

18 And so right now, that means we are not providing  
19 sufficient service to some of our most vulnerable New  
20 Yorkers. And I think that's largely problematic.

21 And so I would love to work with you to see how  
22 we expand this, and what that looks like. Because it  
23 is definitely needed to be able to ensure dignity to,  
24 again, our vulnerable New Yorkers.

25 [APPLAUSE]

2 Sorry. No clapping, no clapping. Y'all are  
3 going to get us in trouble in here.

4 But-- but in all seriousness, that was the end of  
5 the questions for the Councilmembers. I thank you  
6 for being a part of this starting point for this  
7 conversation. As you already know, I'm extremely  
8 passionate about Access-A-Ride. So this-- this is  
9 just the beginning. We're going to have more  
10 hearings on Access-A-Ride. I'm so thankful to my Co-  
11 Chairs for partnering on this. And I will ask that  
12 you leave staff behind to be able to hear the  
13 testimonies of the public.

14 And then now we're going to invite up the Mayor's  
15 Office for Peoples With Disabilities. We are going  
16 to take a short pause just to make sure we can work  
17 out the accessibility dynamic. So for those who want  
18 to kind of move around a bit in the room, feel free  
19 to and thank you again.

20 If the sergeants could just check and see if  
21 there's any further accommodations that we need while  
22 we're switching over

23 [5 minutes silence]

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Testing one two. Testing the  
25 wireless mic in the chambers. Testing one two.

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1 ADDICTION and the COMMITTEE ON AGING 126

2 [12.5 minutes silence]

3 ZOOM MODERATOR: Hi everyone that's available on  
4 Zoom with us. We have a ASL interpreter if they need  
5 one. You can pin Jan who's also available here on  
6 Zoom, which is signed. Please raise your hands if  
7 you do need an ASL interpreter before you testify.  
8 Thank you.

9 COUNSEL BREIDBART: So thank you so much. And  
10 we'll be calling up our next panel. Before we do so  
11 I just want to note that for folks on Zoom, there's  
12 an ASL interpreter available. And if-- if they're  
13 seeking ASL interpretation, they can pin Jane on the  
14 Zoom.

15 Our next panel will include Commissioner  
16 Christina Curry from MOPD, and Emily Sweet from MOPD.  
17 I will now administer the oath. So please raise your  
18 right hands. Do you affirm to tell the truth, the  
19 whole truth and nothing but the truth before these  
20 committees, and to respond honestly to Councilmember  
21 questions?

22 MS. SWEET: I do.

23 COMMISSIONER CURRY: Yes, I do.

24 COUNSEL BREIDBART: Thank you. And we will now  
25 go to questions for this panel.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Hi there, Commissioner.  
3 Thank you for joining us. I just have a couple of  
4 questions. The first is: What is the city's  
5 investment in accessibility overall, and then  
6 specifically as it pertains to Access-A-Ride? It's  
7 accessibility in the MTA. Sorry.

8 COMMISSIONER CURRY: Good afternoon and thank  
9 you. So would you clarify what you mean by that,  
10 please? Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: What if-- How much money is  
12 the city investing into overall accessibility in the  
13 MTA, and then specifically with Access-A-Ride?

14 COMMISSIONER CURRY: Well, to that I must defer  
15 to the City Financial Department and MTA. I do not  
16 have that answer for you at the moment.

17 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Okay, thank you. And  
18 then. The MTA mentioned its PAC earlier. Do you  
19 know if there are city representatives that sit on  
20 that PAC?

21 COMMISSIONER CURRY: Do you mean MOPD  
22 representatives, or city representatives as a whole?

23 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: City representatives as a  
24 whole, or somebody from MOPD?

25

1  
2           COMMISSIONER CURRY: Currently we do not have  
3 anyone that sits on, from MOPD. I cannot respond  
4 from the city representatives.

5           CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you.

6           CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you. Hi,  
7 Commissioner Curry, and welcome once again. Two  
8 quick questions for you. The first-- I'm interested  
9 in knowing what MOPD is hearing from constituents  
10 about Access-A-Ride?

11           COMMISSIONER CURRY: Good afternoon, and thank  
12 you for that question. We receive, on average, three  
13 calls a week regarding complaints about Access-A-  
14 Ride, and that's through our 311 services. We also  
15 receive e-mail and other methods or ways of receiving  
16 comments and complaints about Access-A-Ride on a  
17 regular basis.

18           CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: And then when you  
19 receive the calls and the feedback-- Well, first,  
20 generally speaking, are they calls that are making  
21 any specific type of complaints about the service?

22           COMMISSIONER CURRY: On average, the calls are  
23 about timeliness or lack thereof.

24           CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: And when you receive  
25 this information, what is it-- what is MOPD's role?



2 Like, what do you do with the feedback? Do you-- do  
3 you get-- do you refer them to MTA? Do you consult  
4 with the MTA?

5 COMMISSIONER CURRY: When those calls are  
6 received, they're then referred back to Access-A-  
7 Ride, so that they know what we are receiving.

8 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: And do you find that  
9 Access-A-Ride follows up on the complaints?

10 COMMISSIONER CURRY: To my knowledge, once it is  
11 referred to Access-A-Ride, they are supposed to  
12 handle it. But I do not know at this time

13 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Is there a way that  
14 we can begin to track whether or not Access-A-Ride is  
15 responding to the-- the commuters?

16 COMMISSIONER CURRY: That is a very good  
17 question. Currently, I wish I could respond other  
18 than, "I do not know." All I can tell you is what we  
19 receive from MOPD's side.

20 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Understood. And how  
21 frequently does MOPD speak with Access-A-Ride?

22 COMMISSIONER CURRY: Well, I've only been in this  
23 position for six months, so we have started reaching  
24 out to Access-A-Ride, but I do not have a weekly or  
25 monthly contact, if that's what you're looking for.

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1 ADDICTION and the COMMITTEE ON AGING 130

2 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Given the budget, and  
3 especially given that the state is looking to pass  
4 the responsibility to the city in its entirety, do  
5 you-- is the administration concerned about the  
6 frequency currently of communication with Access-A-  
7 Ride?

8 COMMISSIONER CURRY: Well again, I've only been  
9 here six months. So I have not been read into that  
10 as of now, so I could not answer at this point.

11 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Okay. I'm going to  
12 pass it to Chair Lee.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Hi. Thank you so much again,  
14 Commissioner, for joining us today. And as Chair of  
15 the mental disabilities and addictions committee, I  
16 still remember this is something we spoke about  
17 during our meeting. You know, the-- the budget for  
18 your agency is something that I will gladly help you  
19 work on, because the annual budget for MOPD is  
20 currently only \$820,000. Is that correct?

21 COMMISSIONER CURRY: We are-- We have a very  
22 small budget. That is correct.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Yes. Okay. So that is  
24 something that was very alarming to me, considering  
25 how many people in New York, how many individuals

2 with disabilities we have. And so that is something,  
3 number one, I just wanted to, as a statement, wanted  
4 to say: However we can help to increase that,  
5 please, let's-- you know, let us know, and I would  
6 love to work with you on that.

7 And as someone yourself who comes from the  
8 advocacy roles beforehand, now in your current role  
9 as Commissioner, I just wanted to know, in an ideal  
10 world, so far, from what you've seen, I know it's  
11 only been six months, but from what you've seen so  
12 far, what types of improvements to Access-A-Ride  
13 would you recommend that you feel as Commissioner  
14 you'd be able to help push the buttons on?

15 COMMISSIONER CURRY: As Commissioner I'm here to  
16 represent the community that we serve and to work  
17 with the city agencies. So in the real world or a  
18 perfect world, I think it's best to listen to the  
19 advocates who are going-- who are here to speak about  
20 their everyday experiences, because they can better  
21 tell you, or come up with suggestions on what they  
22 think would work best.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEE: I echo that. Thank you. And I  
24 don't-- Does MOPD currently have capacity? For  
25 example, if someone does get denied for eligibility

2 with Access-A-Ride, and they reach out to your  
3 office, do you have capacity to help them to apply  
4 for eligibility or appeals? Or is that something  
5 that will get referred out to a different agency?

6 COMMISSIONER CURRY: Hmm. Thank you for that  
7 question. As of now, to my knowledge, we've not had  
8 anyone contact us about that. So I could only  
9 speculate as to what we would do. But it would  
10 definitely be on a case-by-case basis.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. And I think we had-- I  
12 had asked this last time, but if you could just  
13 repeat for us, or for the record, how has it been so  
14 far-- have you had a chance or opportunity also to  
15 sit with other agencies -- for example, HRA,  
16 Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, or other  
17 agencies that may overlap with some of the  
18 communities that you serve together -- to sort of, I  
19 guess, piggyback on each other's resources? Because  
20 I know that, you know, some agencies take care of one  
21 aspect of the process, and another agency may pick up  
22 and, you know, take on the other piece of it. So  
23 just wondering how the coordination process has been  
24 with other city agencies as well.

2 COMMISSIONER CURRY: I'm sorry. I was asking the  
3 interpreter. I thought I missed something. Can you  
4 repeat that, please?

5 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Oh, sure. So just in short, I  
6 guess, how has it been working with other city  
7 agencies? Because I know that, you know, HRA for  
8 example, as well as Department of Health and Mental  
9 Hygiene may sort of take on different aspects of this  
10 whole process with Access-A-Ride. So how has it been  
11 working with other city agencies?

12 COMMISSIONER CURRY: So-- And thank you for that  
13 one. So related to the other city agencies? Yes,  
14 I've met with them, but not on this issue. As you  
15 know, we have the Five-Year Accessibility Plan to  
16 help make sure that New York City is accessible for  
17 all. So that has been the focus of MOPD, but not  
18 the-- to the other question.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. Great. Thank you so  
20 much.

21 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you. And I'd  
22 like to apologize that I did not acknowledge myself  
23 before speaking. This is Councilwoman Selvina  
24 Brooks-Powers, Chair to the Transportation and  
25 Infrastructure Committee.

2 And with that, I don't think we have any more  
3 questions, but Commissioner Curry, we sincerely  
4 appreciate you coming and taking the time to be a  
5 part of this conversation, and look to follow up with  
6 you as we continue the conversation around Access-A-  
7 Ride, and how we improve the services for our  
8 vulnerable New Yorkers. So thank you.

9 COMMISSIONER CURRY: I thank you all. And I'd  
10 just like to reiterate, we have some of the best  
11 advocates in the disability community who are here to  
12 speak. So I urge all of us to listen to what they  
13 have to say, take what they have to say seriously,  
14 and when you're asking about suggestions for  
15 improvements, as someone with the lived experiences  
16 of physical disability, understand our motto:  
17 "Nothing about us without us." Start from the  
18 beginning. Talk to the ones who are real experts:  
19 Those that are here. Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you so much.

21 COUNSEL BREIDBART: Thank you. And just to  
22 identify, again, for those on Zoom, and here. I'm  
23 Sam Breidbart, Counsel to the Committee on  
24 Transportation and Infrastructure. And we will now  
25 turn to public testimony. For public testimony, each

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1 ADDICTION and the COMMITTEE ON AGING 135

2 panelist will be given three minutes to speak and we  
3 ask that those speaking speak slowly and clearly and  
4 please identify yourselves before-- before you go  
5 into your testimony.

6 For panelists testifying in person, please come  
7 to the dais as your name is called, and wait for your  
8 turn to speak. And for panelists who are testifying  
9 remotely, once your name is called the member of our  
10 staff will unmute you and the Sergeant At Arms will  
11 give you the go ahead to begin with. Please wait for  
12 the Sergeant to announce that you may begin before  
13 delivering your testimony.

14 So our first panel for the in person testimony  
15 will be Judy Ortiz, Jean Ryan, Iris Kelly, and Cara  
16 Leibowitz.

17 [1 MINUTE SILENCE]

18 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Identify yourself for the  
19 record, and then you can begin.

20 MS. ORTIZ: Okay. I'm Judy Ortiz, and I'm here  
21 because of Jean Ryan and Iris Kelly. And I'm  
22 representing NYCC, New York Community for Change.  
23 Now, I know there's a lot of problems with Access-A-  
24 Ride, especially that they come when they feel like  
25 it to pick up people. But New York Community-- NYCC,

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1 ADDICTION and the COMMITTEE ON AGING 136

2 once we get on something, we don't let it go. And  
3 I'm planning to work on this because, we're like a  
4 basketball court, NYCC, we slam dunk an issue and we  
5 don't let it go. And we're going to be on this. So  
6 anybody who has a problem with this, NYCC is in every  
7 borough. Try to get in touch with them. Because  
8 we're going to have a lot of Zoom meetings on this.  
9 And Chair Lee, there's a-- this Monday there's going  
10 to be a Community Board meeting at Community Board 13  
11 at, I think, it's seven o'clock Monday. Try to make  
12 it.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEE: In Queens?

14 MS. ORTIZ: Yes. Community Planning Board 13.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you.

16 MS. ORTIZ: Jeremy[ph] Maldonado is part of that.  
17 Yep. Okay.

18 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Okay, thank you.

19 MS. ORTIZ: You're welcome.

20 COUNSEL BREIDBART: Next, we'll have Jean Ryan.

21 MS. RYAN: I can't hear very well. So I'm kind  
22 of clueless with masks and not being able to hear  
23 well.

24 Thank you. My name is Jean Ryan and I'm  
25 President of Disabled In Action of Metropolitan New



2 York, DIA for short. I've been an Access-A-Ride  
3 rider since 1994. Right now we are going back to the  
4 90s, in the way Access-A-Ride is working, since  
5 drivers of the primary blue and white vans are  
6 filling out paperwork for each ride with literal  
7 paper and pencils.

8 I submitted longer testimony online and in my  
9 printed remarks, but now I will focus on three  
10 problems that Access-A-Ride has:

11 One, when we have a problem getting a ride or  
12 with a ride, there is almost nothing we can do at the  
13 time, and we can only complain about it after the  
14 fact or maybe call the same-day trip people, but not  
15 much happens in a timely manner. Access-A-Ride needs  
16 to be much more nimble and have dedicated floaters  
17 and people who listen to our plight and immediately  
18 send somebody to come and pick us up. No one should  
19 be waiting for 45 minutes or more for a ride, ever.  
20 No one should have someone forcefully telling them to  
21 get out of the car when they're sitting quietly and  
22 riding. And this happens.

23 Number two, we need on-demand, spontaneous  
24 service for everyone who has Access-A-Ride. Our  
25 lives are rich, and varied, and busy. Sometimes we

2 have emergencies. There is no reason that we should  
3 be dependent on a system that uses manifests even for  
4 brokers, and requires that we schedule rides one or  
5 two days in advance. Yes, it is better than the 90s  
6 when we had to call four to seven days in advance,  
7 and then one to four days, for example. But, you  
8 know, that's-- there aren't enough improvements. We  
9 need to be able to get a ride today, now. For  
10 example, no one knows how long this hearing is going  
11 to last. But we had to book our rides yesterday, and  
12 try to guess when the hearing will be over, or risk  
13 having to leave early or wait around afterwards for a  
14 scheduled ride.

15 Number three, we need more and better funding,  
16 preferably partly from the federal government. This  
17 is a federally mandated service that local government  
18 and state government is struggling to fund. But why  
19 are people with disabilities being singled out so  
20 that the city will have to pay the whole amount for  
21 Access-A-Ride while the state continues to run it?  
22 Will the state want to give up access ride completely  
23 since they never wanted it in the first place? No  
24 one ever wanted to fund Access-A-Ride either or make  
25 subways accessible so we had a viable option for

2 traveling our city. Now we are stuck with this.

3 Let's think of creative funding sources as well as  
4 reimagine Access-A-Ride to be the first-class  
5 paratransit service that people with disabilities  
6 want and deserve. Thank you.

7 [BELL RINGS]

8 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: That was perfect  
9 timing. I'm so impressed. I love it.

10 So just a couple of questions for you, because I  
11 know you are an expert in this space. And so you  
12 talked about some of your experience with Access-A-  
13 Ride. When you travel with Access-A-Ride, roughly  
14 how frequently would you say that you arrive to your  
15 destination on time?

16 MS. RYAN: It depends. Because before-- before--  
17 when I was on the blue-and-whites, I would be late  
18 most of the time. And I would be picked up-- I live  
19 in Bay Ridge and South Brooklyn. I would be picked  
20 up, and often if I was going to Manhattan, I'd be  
21 taken to Sheepshead Bay, Marine Park, and Howard  
22 Beach. And they are east of me not West, like  
23 Manhattan is. I'd be driven around for an hour or so  
24 picking up people, dropping off. I met a lot of  
25 interesting people.

2 But then I will be late getting to Manhattan to  
3 my destination. And that is not even on the way.  
4 And that's what DOJ was complaining about. We  
5 shouldn't be getting a borough tour. We shouldn't be  
6 taken west to go east, or east to go west, or north  
7 to go south. It's not on the way. It's not like  
8 something that you could just schedule where you  
9 know, it's-- it's logical, and it's convenient.

10 I don't think most people are going to complain  
11 about shared trips if they're really on the way. But  
12 you get this sinking feeling that, "Oh my god. Here  
13 we are going and picking up even more people." Or  
14 you hear the driver get an add on while you're in the  
15 van, and you already have a couple of people in  
16 there. And you just know you're not going to get  
17 where you're going on time.

18 One time we-- You know, we sued this-- we sued  
19 the MTA over subway accessibility. One time I was  
20 going to a rally that started at 9. And then the  
21 court hearing started at 10. I totally missed the  
22 rally. Totally. And I got to court at 10:23. I  
23 remember that because there was only so much you  
24 could try to do, you know, to get some place on time.  
25 And then the rest is up to the other people.

2           You know, I can't drive the van. I can't drive  
3 anything anymore except for a wheelchair. So, you  
4 know, it's really frustrating, because every single  
5 time we get an Access-A-Ride, we know what our point  
6 of origin is. We know where we're going to end up,  
7 because we booked the trip. But unlike the subway or  
8 the bus, we don't know where the stops are. And we  
9 don't know what the route is. So every single time  
10 we take Access-A-Ride, there is some element--  
11 element of worry, you know, and concern because we  
12 don't know how the trip is going to turn out. And  
13 we're not worried about traffic because traffic  
14 happens to everybody. You know, we're worried about  
15 the routing and the scheduling.

16           CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: And I know you're on  
17 the advisory council that they have.

18           MS. RYAN: The advisory committee, yes. I've  
19 been on it since 2000. I was on one before, and I  
20 actually resigned because it was so ineffective. And  
21 so they started this other one, and-- that I'm on,  
22 and you know, early in the 2000s, and yeah, I'm on  
23 it.

24           But like, they didn't tell us anything about the  
25 DOJ letter. We found that out separately, and we

2 publicize that at the MTA board meeting. And even  
3 the board members who run the MTA did not know about  
4 that DOJ letter. So when I said that recently to,  
5 you know, Access-A-Ride people and MTA people,  
6 they're-- they get defensive. But I said, "Well,  
7 look, if you're not transparent, how can we work with  
8 you?" You know, we don't even know what's going on  
9 with them. So-- So that's why we're harping on, you  
10 know, trying to get information so that we can work  
11 together. And we are capable of working together.  
12 But if we're kept in the dark, we can't work  
13 together.

14 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: And how do you think  
15 the committee can be improved?

16 MS. RYAN: The committee? Well, we have  
17 vacancies. We always have vacancies on that  
18 committee. And I don't understand why we don't get  
19 people who-- who apply for it. That would probably  
20 help. And we used to meet six times a year. Now we  
21 meet, I don't know, I think we meet four times a year  
22 now, which isn't very much. So if something comes  
23 up.

24 But you know, what? We activists are capable of  
25 doing activism more than four times a year. And we

2 communicate with each other, you know. And we make  
3 it our business to find out what's happening. And we  
4 go to MTA board meetings and MTA committee meetings.  
5 And we have sources that we talk to. So we do find  
6 out things, and share.

7 But we don't want to just be talking about the  
8 same thing all the time. I mean, that's the thing.  
9 Jenna Lieber said, "Oh, well, you know, we're giving  
10 X number of rides a day, we're doing so good." I  
11 said, "But you have the same problems you had in the  
12 90s." So why are we having these problems. And if  
13 somebody doesn't get picked up for an hour or two,  
14 that's terrible. Or more than that? You know, or  
15 not at all? And maybe it's a small number relative  
16 to 31,000 rides a day. But it's not a small number  
17 to those people who are having a really bad day with  
18 Access-A-Ride, and not getting where they need to go  
19 and missing their meeting, missing their family  
20 outing, missing their Broadway show, you know, being  
21 late for work again, and-- and trying to depend on a  
22 boss who's somewhat understanding and worrying about  
23 if you're going to be fired or not. And being tired,  
24 from waiting, and waiting, and waiting. It's so  
25 common for people who are on subscription to be

2 waiting outside of their building or in the lobby of  
3 their building forever, for their rides every day.

4 That's-- That's sad. And you know, how much that  
5 takes out of you, besides your working life, when  
6 you're just, you know, waiting to be picked up just  
7 to go home? It's-- It's really super tiring. I  
8 know, because I did it. And I had to quit my job,  
9 because I was just so exhausted all the time from  
10 being driven all around Manhattan and Brooklyn, you  
11 know, coming and going, and to work and, and then  
12 being no-showed when I was trying to get the van to  
13 go home. You know, and they'd say, they were there  
14 and they weren't, you know, I mean, I just was  
15 exhausted. And I love my job and it was good at it.

16 But I just-- I could not do it anymore. That's  
17 when I decided I would become a disability rights  
18 activist.

19 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: No, thank you so much  
20 for that, Jean. This is a super helpful and I look  
21 forward to working with you more on this issue.

22 MS. RYAN: Thank you. And thank you for your  
23 interest. And please don't just say that you want  
24 to, you know, meet with people and do it, you know,  
25 because we really need all to work together and-- and



2 come at this with heart and head, and, you know, know  
3 that people are going through really hard times and  
4 figure out solutions.

5 But I don't think that this-- that the city  
6 paying for all of Access-A-Ride is the answer.  
7 Because then you're going to be paying for something  
8 that you have no control over, and the state will  
9 have control over. And then if you complain, the  
10 state will probably say, "Take it," you know?, and  
11 then you will have the Access-A-Ride problem, and  
12 they won't have to deal with it anymore. That's what  
13 I'm really worried about.

14 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: That's what we're  
15 worried about. I'm very concerned about that, as  
16 well. And when we go through the preliminary budget  
17 hearings, this is going to be a point of  
18 conversation. So I definitely invite you to testify  
19 also during the public commentary period at that  
20 point. But we will be asking those questions as  
21 well, because, you know, it's unfair to have to write  
22 pretty much a blank check to a program that we have  
23 no control over.

24 MS. RYAN: Yeah. And to me, it makes about as  
25 much sense is taking over one subway line.

2 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Mm-hmm.

3 MS. RYAN: You know, and the city owns that. And  
4 then MTA runs all the rest and owns it or whatever.  
5 I know, the city owns land, but you know, I mean, why  
6 are they picking on people with disabilities? And  
7 why is it okay, supposedly, that we outsource all the  
8 services to people with disabilities, who are trying  
9 to use the MTA. It's only Access-A-Ride that's  
10 outsourced. It's not buses and subways, they those  
11 workers work for the MTA. But will they-- will the  
12 MTA-- MTA hire Access-A-Ride drivers? No. Will they  
13 hire the company, or have a company...? And DIA  
14 tried to get that from Access-A-Ride when Tom Charles  
15 was a head of Access-A-Ride. We said we wanted  
16 Access-A-Ride to have its own base and explore that.  
17 And they were going to set one up and then something  
18 happened and they didn't.

19 But we have been working on that and pushing for  
20 that. But now it-- it's like going the other way  
21 even more. So we are concerned. Do you know when  
22 that budget hearing is that will cover Access-A-Ride?

23 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: So the Transportation  
24 preliminary hearing-- Oh, sorry. And again, this is  
25 Councilmember Brooks-Powers, Chair, Transportation

COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE with  
COMMITTEE ON MENTAL HEALTH, DISABILITIES, AND  
1 ADDICTION and the COMMITTEE ON AGING 147

2 and Infrastructure. The Transportation prelim  
3 hearing will be on Thursday, March 9. But the public  
4 testimony I believe, is after all of the hearings  
5 have happened, is that correct? And we can let you  
6 know the date. I don't have it readily offhand for  
7 that.

8 MS. RYAN: It's after all the hearings are held,  
9 then the public can comment?

10 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: I believe that's the  
11 case. Yes.

12 MS. RYAN: So could we watch it on YouTube on the  
13 seventh?

14 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Absolutely. Yeah. I  
15 believe you can come when the hearing is actually  
16 happening. It's just--

17 MS. RYAN: And is it in the morning or the  
18 afternoon?

19 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: It's in the morning.  
20 It is at 10 a.m.

21 MS. RYAN: 10? Okay, I'll look at my calendar.

22 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: We'll make sure you  
23 get the information. Thank you.

24

25

2 MS. RYAN: Thank you very much for your interest  
3 and your concern. [TO OTHERS:] Did we all finish?  
4 No. Iris?

5 MS. KELLY: Okay, thanks. My first time taking  
6 Access-A-Ride back in 2007--

7 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: I'm sorry to pause.  
8 If you could just identify yourself please. My name  
9 is Iris Kelly. I take Access-A-Ride daily as a  
10 passenger. Back in 2007, when I first started, there  
11 was a lot of no shows from them, but they tried to  
12 say it was me, because they don't take the long trip  
13 to Bay Ridge to pick me up, and I had problems there  
14 for a while there, and I lost a lot of time at my job  
15 for that. But now with this new thing with the app,  
16 I don't like the new one versus the old. The old one  
17 had it where it would you your pick up and your drop  
18 off. It would show the flag if someone else came in  
19 on that route. And you'll be able to see the little  
20 car driving, showing exactly where it was coming, and  
21 give you a better idea when you'll be there be and  
22 picked up on time.

23 Then the other thing I have here is the crazy  
24 times to pick somebody up. Like for instance I had  
25 to be somewhere 5:30. They picked me up at three,

2 instead of picking me up at 4:30, like an hour  
3 before, like a normal trip would be. And then the  
4 other thing is also booking these trips for-- you  
5 can't have a time change for a ride, if you have  
6 something come up AST the last minute for your job.  
7 Like if you said, "Oh, I'm going to go early at three  
8 o'clock instead of at five o'clock." We can't have a  
9 time change pick up then at that time. And also like  
10 we don't have any last-minute planning we can do, to  
11 get a ride for the same day. Like for instance, my  
12 family does things unplanned, last minute people. So  
13 I can join them for the ride. I have to call two  
14 days before to get that ride if I wanted to see them.  
15 And there's many other things that are involve with  
16 these trips too. Also the fact that we should be  
17 able to book trips right away on demand, not having  
18 to do one or two days before, to get rids taken care  
19 of. But it's a shame how things are running, because  
20 it is a good company.

21 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you so much.  
22 Next we'll hear from Cara. And if you could just  
23 identify yourself first.

24 MS. LIEBOWITZ: Good morning. My name is Cara  
25 Liebowitz. I'm the Advocacy Coordinator at the

2 Brooklyn Center for Independence of the Disabled.

3 I'm also an Access-A-Ride rider who frankly tries to  
4 avoid using Access-A-Ride whenever possible because  
5 of its issues. Thank you for the chance to testify.

6 My organization and other colleagues have worked  
7 for years to get the MTA to offer on-demand service,  
8 and improve its serves overall. We formed a  
9 coalition called the Access-A-Ride Reform Group, or  
10 AARRG. For a brief moment, we had hoped that things  
11 would get better. The MTA introduced an on-demand  
12 service pilot, allowing 1200 riders the ability to go  
13 where they wanted when they wanted. What a concept.  
14 Participants called it life changing. But that pilot  
15 is only available to a small minority of Access-A-  
16 Ride customers, and efforts to expand the pilot have  
17 been met with delay after delay.

18 As you know, the southern district of the  
19 Department of Justice has noticed how badly the MTA  
20 is doing. In a letter to the MTA last fall, it  
21 called out Access-A-Ride, noting that riders often  
22 took circuitous rides, dropped riders off too late or  
23 far too early, among other flaws. The MTA's response  
24 as you've heard today: "We're doing great." Really.  
25 For example, the MTA claims that Access-A-Ride's on-

2 time performance is in the high 90s. But the MTA  
3 defines "on time", as arriving no more than 30  
4 minutes after your scheduled time. Imagine if your  
5 bus or train arrived 29 minutes behind schedule and  
6 that was considered "on time". Moreover, the MTA's  
7 open standards say that broker service, which carries  
8 most riders these days, is considered "on time" if it  
9 arrives no more than 15 minutes after the scheduled  
10 time. But through 2022, the on-time rate for broker  
11 service was only 75 to 80 percent. That means one in  
12 five broker service trips were not on time, and we're  
13 supposed to celebrate?

14 Even more telling are the drop-off statistics.  
15 In December 2022, only 44 percent of trips booked  
16 with an appointment time, the time you want to get  
17 dropped off at your destination, were on time. More  
18 than a half of trips got to the destination either  
19 early or late. Excessively early drop offs were a  
20 key problem cited in the report. I can personally  
21 attest to this. We plan our whole days around and  
22 Access-A-Ride trip because we have no idea when  
23 Access-A-Ride is going to pick us up and what time  
24 we're going to get to our destination.

2 We need a reliable, consistent, on-demand  
3 paratransit. We expect accessible transportation  
4 that arrives on time, rather than a 30-minute window  
5 and drops you off at the time you expect to get to  
6 your destination, not early or late. That's the bare  
7 minimum that fixed-route transportation customers  
8 receive. It is no less than what we deserve. Thank  
9 you.

10 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you so much.  
11 Chair Lee. Sorry, if we can refrain from clapping.  
12 Sorry. We'll hear from Chair Lee.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEE: On no. I just wanted to say  
14 thank you to this panel for all of your testimony.  
15 And I actually have D-75 interns that come to my  
16 office every week. But I think on average, they  
17 probably miss three out of four weeks because of the  
18 transportation issues. And granted it's not Access-  
19 A-Ride, but it's through other transportation  
20 services. But I can only imagine how, when it comes  
21 to jobs work, other activities, it can be very  
22 challenging. So I just wanted to thank you all for  
23 being here, and for sharing your testimony, and to  
24 Chair Brooks as well. Brooks-Powers. Sorry.



2 COUNSEL BREIDBART: Thank you so much. And we  
3 will not call on the next panel.

4 MS. RYAN: Yeah. Getting someplace early is not  
5 really something that the MTA and Access-A-Ride cares  
6 about, too early. But is really a problem and that  
7 means you get less sleep in the morning. You know if  
8 you're going first thing in the morning, you get  
9 someplace so early. I got here today at 8:35. You  
10 know, like I didn't need to be here at 8:35, and it's  
11 cold out. I mean, it happened to everybody. I just  
12 met my friends because they were all early too. You  
13 know, you can actually make friends because you get  
14 some place so early.

15 MS. ORTIZ: I've done it.

16 MS. RYAN: It's an advantage.

17 COUNSEL BREIDBART: Thank you again. We'll now  
18 call on the next panel. Sharon Weir, Jessica  
19 Tamboor, Liam Blank, and Daniel Ross.

20 [1 MINUTE SILENCE]

21 DR. MCLENNON-WEIR: Good afternoon. My name is  
22 Dr. Sharon McLennon-Weir. I'm the Executive  
23 Director for the Center for Independence of the  
24 Disabled New York, CIDNY. I'm also a totally blind  
25

2 person, and I've been a totally blind person for many  
3 decades.

4 I am happy to talk about paratransit as a user of  
5 the Dutchess County paratransit system, the  
6 Westchester paratransit system, and Stress-A-Ride for  
7 New York City. I call it Stress-A-Ride because we  
8 always have to worry about being on time. I'm a  
9 working professional. And I demand that I get to  
10 work on time. I run an organization of people with  
11 disabilities, and I do expect them to be on time to  
12 serve consumers throughout the five boroughs of New  
13 York City.

14 It is unfair and unconscionable to have to see  
15 staff members wait outside our building, wait to be  
16 taken to work, and wait to leave work. It's  
17 important to have an opportunity to be picked up on  
18 time.

19 Also, we have to constantly be reassessed. I  
20 know that previously, we've heard testimony from  
21 Access-A-Ride personnel stating that they don't  
22 reassess. That is a lie. I've been blind a long  
23 time, and I do have to be reassessed next month for  
24 Access-A-Ride. Why is that? I don't need to-- my  
25 vision is not going to change. And I think it's

2 important for them to look at their criteria and what  
3 they define to be permanent disability.

4 Also, we need to talk about training. I've been  
5 in many opportunities where I had drivers who refuse  
6 to wear masks, who didn't even take a shower, they  
7 did they didn't wear deodorant, they smelled  
8 horrible. Some of them smell like cigarettes. Some  
9 of them are on their phone. Some of them don't do  
10 the call out and assists for blind passengers as  
11 they're supposed to do per-- per our documentation.

12 So it's important to talk about what is the  
13 training that's being put forth to these individuals  
14 who are drivers and the safety precautions, because  
15 they're carrying, taking care of, very important  
16 people.

17 We need to ensure that when we get into Access-A-  
18 Ride, that we're being safe, and we're getting to our  
19 destination on time without worry. It's also-- let's  
20 talk about the condition of the vehicles. Sometimes  
21 they are not clean, and they smell horrible. Why  
22 should we be in a vehicle for an hour or two hours  
23 that is a horrible trip because you can't deal with  
24 the smell? That is something that needs to be  
25 addressed as well.

2 Finally, I want to say that disability can happen  
3 to anyone at any time. And if you want to improve  
4 the quality of your life, you need to be able to have  
5 access to work, school, friends, and activities. No  
6 person regardless of disability status should take  
7 their quality of life away. So we need to be ensured  
8 that we provide services, bus, train, or Access-A-  
9 Ride for every New Yorker that visit or live here.  
10 Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you. Next,  
12 we'll hear from Jessica. Just please-- they'll--  
13 they'll adjust the microphone for you, don't worry.

14 Just if you could state your name.

15 MS. TAMBOOR: Good afternoon. My name is Jessica  
16 Tamboor, and I am a longtime Access-A-Ride user.  
17 Access-A-Ride is an amazing service, but it needs  
18 improvement. First, the right times need to be  
19 shorter.

20 On February 14, I requested an appointment time  
21 and was given a pickup two and a half hours before  
22 the appointment time. This means they were probably  
23 going to be driving me all over to different boroughs  
24 before dropping me at my destination. I had to  
25 cancel the ride because I can't be traveling for that

2 long. It doesn't take two and a half hours to get  
3 from my home to the city.

4 On February 10th, I was supposed to go to dinner.  
5 But Access-A-Ride came an hour late and I wound up  
6 missing the dinner. They are supposed to wait five  
7 minutes for us but we have to wait an unknown amount  
8 of time for them. They had the driver come all the  
9 way from Staten Island to pick me up in Whitestone  
10 Queens. Staten Island is very far from Whitestone,  
11 and they only gave him a half hour to get there,  
12 which is impossible to do.

13 Access-A-Ride should also expand their on-demand  
14 service for everyone. They can use the lessons they  
15 already have to increase the capacity of their on-  
16 demand program. I also hope that Omni comes to a  
17 Access-A-Ride soon, because it is hard to always have  
18 exact change all the time. That's it.

19 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you. Liam. If  
20 you could just state your name.

21 MR. BLANK: Good afternoon. My name is Liam  
22 Blank. I'm the Associate Director of the Permanent  
23 Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA, also known as  
24 PCAC, an independent organization established by the  
25 State Legislature in 1981.

2 As the coordinating body for three rider councils  
3 our mission is to give subway bus and commuter rail  
4 riders a voice in the formulation and implementation  
5 of MTA policy, to hold the MTA board and MTA  
6 management accountable to riders, and to advocate on  
7 their behalf as we are doing today.

8 I'm here to urge you to increase New York City's  
9 contribution to Access-A-Ride, a vital service for  
10 fellow New Yorkers with disabilities or health  
11 conditions that prevent them from using public buses  
12 and subways. AAR operates 24/7, 365 days a year with  
13 the New York City's five boroughs and nearby areas of  
14 Nassau and Westchester Counties, enabling disabled  
15 individuals to travel safely and reliably around the  
16 city, while also providing them access to employment,  
17 education, and recreational opportunities as well as  
18 critical health care and other appointments.

19 In recent years, the MTA has made several  
20 improvements to the program such as introducing an on  
21 demand E-Hail service, expanding same-day and advance  
22 reservation options, adding a mobile app as a  
23 reservation system and reducing trip denials and no-  
24 shows. These efforts, along with better customer  
25 service and communication and expanding the use of

2 accessible taxis and for-hire vehicles have increased  
3 customer satisfaction, reduced costs per trip, and  
4 advanced mobility and enhanced independence for  
5 users.

6       However, as its riders will tell you this system  
7 is still far from perfect. Therefore, it's crucial  
8 that AAR receives the funding it needs to provide  
9 safe and reliable transportation to our fellow New  
10 Yorkers with disabilities. Governor Hochul's  
11 proposed \$1.6 billion executive budget, which calls  
12 for the city to pay for the net operating expenses  
13 for the program, \$273 million in 2024, is a necessary  
14 step to ensure the continued operation of this vital  
15 service. Paratransit riders need your support to  
16 make this funding a reality.

17       We also urge you to support a proposed bill in  
18 the State Legislature to add a paratransit user as a  
19 voting member on the MTA board, in addition to giving  
20 votes to our three rider representatives. This will  
21 ensure that the needs of riders and people with  
22 disabilities are better represented in the MTA  
23 decision making processes, giving them not just a  
24 voice, but a vote.

2 As we collectively work to improve Access-A-Ride,  
3 we must also continue to make our entire transit  
4 system more accessible. The MTA's commitment to  
5 making 95 percent of subway stations accessible by  
6 2055 is a good start, but it's not enough. We urge  
7 the city to provide additional funding and zoning  
8 incentives like zoning for accessibility to deliver  
9 accessibility upgrades on a faster timeline. We also  
10 believe there may be an opportunity to expand the  
11 zoning for accessibility program to consider bus  
12 stops and other bus related improvements. It's  
13 something we're exploring in depth and we'll come  
14 back to you and the City with more detailed  
15 recommendations. You have an opportunity to make a  
16 real difference in the lives of our fellow New  
17 Yorkers and the chance to create a more just an  
18 inclusive city. We strongly encourage each of you to  
19 seize this opportunity. Thank you for the  
20 opportunity to testify before you today.

21 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you, and can  
22 you provide the testimony in writing, please?

23 MR. BLANK: Absolutely.

24 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: You can e-mail it to  
25 us.



2 MR. BLANK: I did. Okay.

3 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Okay. Thank you.

4 Daniel Ross.

5 MR. ROSS: Good afternoon. My name is Daniel  
6 Ross. I'm a Senior Staff Attorney and Mobilization  
7 For Justice. We represent Access-A-Ride applicants  
8 who have been denied in eligibility appeal hearings,  
9 and people who use Access-A-Ride and an advocate for  
10 better service as a member of AARRG, which you heard  
11 about earlier. When we look at AAR's performance, we  
12 do not see cause for celebration. We see a system  
13 that fails to get customers where they need to go  
14 when they need to be there. We see a system that  
15 causes lost employment opportunities for customers,  
16 wasted appointment slots at medical and other  
17 offices, and lost tax revenue for the city and the  
18 state as a result. We see a system designed to  
19 discourage use of this essential service. Indeed,  
20 that design is so successful that in any given year,  
21 roughly half of people approved for this service  
22 never use it. That's an illegal capacity constraint,  
23 as we've already heard about from the Department of  
24 Justice this morning.

1  
2 To obfuscate those constraints, the MTA grades  
3 Access-A-Ride performance on a special scale, far  
4 more generous than it rates bus and subway metrics.  
5 On the subway, the MTA measures on time performance  
6 as a percent of trains that reached their terminus  
7 within five minutes of their scheduled arrival.

8 As we've talked about a lot today, they use 30  
9 minutes as-- as the benchmark for Access-A-Ride that  
10 25 minute cushion unreasonably inflates Access-A-Ride  
11 on time performance.

12 The MTA is also generous to itself when measuring  
13 trip length on buses and subways. The MTA measures  
14 how many riders experienced trips less than five  
15 minutes longer than scheduled. On Access-A-Ride.  
16 The MTA has generously inflated its scheduled trip  
17 length. Federal law requires transit authorities to  
18 offer paratransit service comparable with its fixed  
19 route service. That means total trip times must be  
20 comparable as well.

21 Two examples, I think, easily demonstrate the MTA  
22 is manipulation of ride length metrics. Perhaps  
23 after this hearing, Chair Hudson, you may have an  
24 appointment at your district office in Fort Greene.  
25 That's about a 20 minute trip from here. On Access-

2 A-Ride, the MTA would allow it to take an hour and  
3 five minutes before it's considered too long.

4 President Davey is no longer here. But if he were  
5 wanting to go see a Yankees Red Sox game after work  
6 one night, he would go from 2 Broadway, where MTA  
7 headquarters are, to Yankee Stadium. It takes 32  
8 minutes door to door using the subway. On Access-A-  
9 Ride the MTA will allow would allow two hours and 15  
10 minutes for that trip. Even then, with these  
11 exaggerated scheduling times, they're missing their  
12 target every 50 trips. The bottom line is that  
13 Access-A-Ride is failing to deliver a comparable  
14 service. The MTA's performance benchmarks for  
15 Access-A-Ride demonstrate what Access-A-Ride  
16 customers already know: That they're second class  
17 citizens in our transit system.

18 Better metrics are necessary but so is better  
19 service. Shifting all funding for the required  
20 service away from the state, which controls the  
21 transit authority, risks worse service.

22 The cornerstone of better service and the future  
23 of paratransit is the life changing on-demand program  
24 that currently only 1200 Customers have access to.

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2 That program deserves this council support and  
3 funding. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you. Thank you  
5 to the panel.

6 COUNSEL BREIDBART: Thank you so much. We'll  
7 call up our next panel. We'll call up RueZalia  
8 Watkins, Gian Carlo Pedulla, Michael Ring, and Kathy  
9 Collins.

10 [1.5 MINUTES SILENCE]

11 MS. WATKINS: Good afternoon. Thank you so very  
12 much for holding this hearing, Chair Brooks-Powers,  
13 Chair Hudson, Chair Lee, thank you for your  
14 commitment. My name is--

15 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: sorry to interrupt  
16 you, if you could-- Oh, never mind. We were just  
17 going to ask you to introduce yourself.

18 MS. WATKINS: My name is RueZalia Watkins. And  
19 guess what? I am Chair of the Access-A-Ride PAC,  
20 that mysterious group. However, the testimony before  
21 you has not been approved by my colleagues, so I'm  
22 testifying here today as an individual who has been  
23 using Access-A-Ride for decades. Actually, before  
24 the program was under the-- under transit.

25

2 Previously, in the very beginning, it was under  
3 transportation.

4 And so I know, you're going to hear a lot today  
5 about what's wrong, and there is so much that's  
6 wrong. I'm going to try in the few minutes that I  
7 have to give you a couple of recommendations. And I  
8 want to start by saying although the recently-  
9 disclosed document from the Department of Justice  
10 used old data, the issues are still occurring today.  
11 So it doesn't matter when it was identified. What  
12 matters is that it is still happening. [TO OTHERS:]  
13 Are you trying to get over here? [TO COUNCIL:] But  
14 what matters is that it is still happening today, and  
15 it's still interfering with the lives of many, many  
16 Access-A-Ride passengers.

17 So to ensure that there's some kind of progress,  
18 I just want to pull out a couple of recommendations.

19 [TO OTHERS:] I'm sorry, thank you so much. [TO  
20 COUNCIL:] One of the things that it's important for  
21 you to look at is how are you going to protect the  
22 safety of Access-A-Ride passengers? And you know,  
23 many of the users, especially the ones using broker  
24 services, you know, they're traveling with drivers  
25 who do not speak English. So imagine a city bus

2 carrying passengers who do not speak English.

3 Imagine what happens in an emergency. You know, we

4 and we have had many situations with seniors, and

5 also many situations-- and also many situations with

6 disabled people like myself, that have been stranded

7 that I've actually had emergencies in vehicles with

8 drivers who do not speak English. And I know we-- we

9 are diversity. All of us need to be learning a

10 second language. But when there is an emergency, you

11 need to make sure there's someone that speak English.

12 Obviously reducing trip times is really important.

13 But the most important thing here is we need the

14 ability to complain. You're hearing all of these

15 complaints, but they're not recorded anywhere. Why

16 is that? Because we can only record from nine to

17 five. There's no ability to record after work.

18 There's no ability to record on the weekends. So

19 today, as you listen to everyone's recommendations

20 and cry for the funding that we need, just as we need

21 support for this Access-A-Ride unit that's trying to

22 serve us, I want you to also think about some basic

23 things like the right to complain.

24 And you know, something so simple takes money.

25 There are three people, four people maybe, to work on

2 complaints. So everything you're hearing is almost  
3 anecdotal. It's not captured, everything that you're  
4 going to hear, and a lot of my PAC colleagues will be  
5 there visually in the room. Everything that you're  
6 hearing is completely anecdotal. It's not captured.

7 So the survey goes out. But when we come home,  
8 frustrated because our ride was long, when we come  
9 home because we missed a family event, when we come  
10 home because the driver didn't know which way to go,  
11 when we come home, because there was so many add-ons  
12 on our ride, and we want to complain, there is  
13 nothing happening after five.

14 So I do look forward to working with you in an  
15 official capacity. I'm sorry, that I'm really,  
16 really late for work. And like many subscription  
17 riders, you know, I will be getting home late, late,  
18 late, late, late, because that's what happens when  
19 you work. Subscription riders, people come in from  
20 hospitals, on the way back is the longest ride. So  
21 I'm sorry to rush through this, I hope you will  
22 review this and pay attention to our comments. And  
23 we also hope that we can sponsor a meeting with our  
24 PAC in full with members of your committee.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: No, I thank you for  
3 the testimony and for the sacrifice we know that  
4 you're making up here today. I'm interested and  
5 intrigued in the fact that you were using Access-A-  
6 Ride before it was under transit and wondering what  
7 some of those differences may be.

8 MS. WATKINS: So when Access-A-Ride first started  
9 under transit, it was really interesting. So there  
10 was a carrier in every borough. So for example,  
11 American was responsible for Manhattan and the Bronx.  
12 Not Maggie's[ph]-- but the company before  
13 Maggie's[ph] [background voices]-- right-- was  
14 responsible for Brooklyn. Okay, and-- and then you  
15 still had RJB in Staten Island. [background voices]  
16 but-- RJR thank you very much. But what was  
17 interesting is that they were isolated. They weren't  
18 connected. So for example, at the time I was living  
19 in Brooklyn, I couldn't get a ride to Manhattan,  
20 because they wouldn't have a ride to go back. The  
21 service was completely isolated. So it's interesting  
22 because we talk about how bad Access-A-Rides. And I  
23 remember not being able to get a ride with Access-A-  
24 Ride. The other thing that they had that I spoke to



2 Chris about, is they had these little services. And  
3 I don't want to show my age, but--

4 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: We know you're 21.

5 MS. WATKINS: --they had the services that would  
6 run the first of the month, and you could call and  
7 they would pick you up to go downtown so you could  
8 pay your electric and gas bill.

9 Okay, so they had these like little routes. And  
10 I think those are the most important differences.  
11 But-- but predominantly, I couldn't get a ride. It  
12 wasn't until-- it wasn't until transit took over the  
13 service that it became a citywide service. Under  
14 DOT, it was a borough-based service that didn't work  
15 very well for hardly anybody. So I think those are  
16 the biggest differences.

17 Other than the fact that you know, I always think  
18 about American, because American took good care of  
19 their drivers. And I always felt if they-- when I  
20 mean by taking care of your drivers, I mean, you're  
21 not giving your driver extra rides, you're not  
22 bombarding your driver with all of this. And I was  
23 always thinking about American, that if-- as long as  
24 long as they were taking care of their drivers, I  
25 knew they were going to take care of me. And I think

2 back then there was more of that. Right now the  
3 drivers are bombarded. The schedule is very  
4 difficult and I know, I know Chris's team they're  
5 working on this new system. And I know that that's  
6 going to help.

7 But ultimately down the road in order to reduce  
8 the wait times it's going to-- it's going to take  
9 some money. We're going to need new vans. We're  
10 going to need new drivers. You know, it's not-- it's  
11 it's not-- I don't think it's that easy to just say  
12 that you can reduce wait times just by changing the  
13 system. And-- and I know that that's the belief and  
14 I'm willing, I'm willing and praying for that.

15 But I'm here in front of you saying, we're going  
16 to need money to reduce the waiting times. We're  
17 going to need money to change the scheduling system  
18 so that people aren't stranded. People are still  
19 getting stranded.

20 And probably the last thing that I'll say, even  
21 though I said it was the last thing I was going to  
22 say, 20 minutes ago: When you think about Access-A-  
23 Ride, and you think about us, we are all different.  
24 We are-- some of us want an early ride. Some of us  
25 don't. There-- there not only is, I'm sorry, not one

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2 size fits all. It's almost like a kaleidoscope. So  
3 when everybody thinks about same-day service, or the  
4 pilot, guess what? I was stranded with the pilot. I  
5 have to stop using the pilot. I couldn't get  
6 anywhere with the pilot, it works for some people,  
7 but not everybody. So what we have to do is to  
8 create a system that is based on the respect and  
9 dignity of disabled people, of seniors, and to  
10 provide an array of services that allows the  
11 flexibility that we need.

12 So I do look forward to bringing the PAC  
13 committee to meet with you to discuss some of these  
14 issues in the future.

15 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: I look forward to  
16 that. And my last question: Are you on the advisory  
17 committee as well that the Access-A-Ride has, that  
18 they mentioned?

19 MS. WATKINS: That's what I'm talking about.

20 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Oh, that's the PAC.

21 MS. WATKINS: I'm Chair.

22 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Oh, you're the Chair.  
23 Got it. Understood.

24 MS. WATKINS: That-- this is not their-- this is  
25 not our collective testimony.

2 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: This is your  
3 individual--

4 MS. WATKINS: It is my own individual, because I  
5 believe in unity, and I believe that we're working  
6 together, and we're reviving this PAC to be more  
7 responsive. We're interchanging with the Access-A-  
8 Ride staff on a different-- on a different level now,  
9 I think than has happened in the past. And-- and I'm  
10 hopeful. And we are ready to do things like meet  
11 with your committee to discuss some of these issues  
12 at a later time.

13 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: I look forward to  
14 that. Thank you.

15 MS. WATKINS: Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Now we'll hear from  
17 Giancarlo.

18 MS. WATKINS: Excuse me. One second. No  
19 offense. My apologies, sir. I have to run to work.  
20 Please forgive me for leaving the table during your--  
21 as you're preparing for your testimony.

22 MR. PEDULLA: Let's try that. Yeah, there we go.  
23 Check, check. All right. There we go. All right,  
24 ladies and gentlemen, my name is Gian Carlo Pedulla.  
25 I work for the Department of Education, although I am

2 on vacation, so I do not represent the DOE today. I  
3 am an Administrator. I'm a Supervisor for District  
4 75. In particular, Educational Vision Services,  
5 we're the program that provides services to our  
6 city's blind and low-vision students. I'm totally  
7 blind myself, and have been an Access-A-Ride user  
8 since 2003.

9 Things were definitely very bad back in the day.  
10 They got better around 2016, 2017-ish, once E-Hail  
11 became an option, and then in 2018 the on-demand  
12 program started and that definitely changed my life,  
13 and it's enabled me to have the autonomy and the  
14 flexibility to live a much more productive,  
15 independent life. And I think that's the point,  
16 right? It's supposed to be a comparable service.  
17 And, you know, as an educator, I want my kids to be  
18 as independent as possible, and I want my kids to  
19 have the best quality of life as possible. And in  
20 order to do that, you need a certain level of  
21 flexibility, you need a certain level of autonomy,  
22 and you need to be able to come and go and make  
23 decisions, and whether it's work or whether it's  
24 social. You know, it breaks my heart. The young  
25 lady before said she had to miss dinner plans with

2 friends because she was dependent on a ride and-- and  
3 unfortunately, when you have a disability, you're  
4 very vulnerable and you are dependent upon different  
5 services.

6 But when things can be in our control, they  
7 should be in our control. There are times where I  
8 need help and that's okay. But if I'm in control of  
9 when and how I utilize that help, if there are tools  
10 in my toolbox, I'm independent, and that's okay.

11 There's a lot that can be said. I'm not going to  
12 regale you guys with anecdotes and whatnot. And  
13 obviously, we know Access-A-Ride is an old model, it  
14 needs to evolve into a viable, more modern-day, sort  
15 of distributive on-demand model, whether we call it  
16 E-Hail, it's blue and white or whatever, just the old  
17 school manifests and scheduling system from 1993 in  
18 2023, I just don't think works.

19 And I think disabled people, we're doing a lot  
20 more we're not porcelain dolls just going to and from  
21 doctor's offices. I think, in the spirit of  
22 inclusivity, and diversity, right?, I think the  
23 population of Access-A-Ride users, there's diversity  
24 amongst us. My Aunt Mary loves Access-A-Ride, she's  
25 ecstatic. She's 83, goes to her daughter's house a

2 couple of times a week, goes to get her hair and  
3 nails done and goes to the doctors a couple of times.  
4 So her bar of satisfaction is much different than  
5 mine, that's managing teachers in two boroughs and  
6 has a lot of different responsibility for the city  
7 going on, right?

8 But I just think we need to invest in our cities  
9 disabled. And I think we need to be able to give  
10 people the opportunity to do more to be more  
11 productive. Access-A-Ride has to evolve. We all  
12 deserve the same rights, the same autonomy, the same  
13 flexibility. It's-- It's-- To me, it's a civil  
14 rights issue. And somebody else said it before:  
15 It's dignity. Why isn't my time just as valuable as  
16 anybody else's time in this city? My name is Gian  
17 Pedulla. Thank you for your time.

18 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you. Next,  
19 we'll hear from Michael.

20 MR. RING: Hi, my name is Michael Ring. I'm  
21 speaking for-- Today I'm speaking for Disabled In  
22 Action of Greater New York. And, for those who need  
23 a visual description, middle aged white guy wearing a  
24 hoodie, and I need to shave.

2 I want to play a little mind game with the people  
3 sitting up at the dais there today. Don't answer my  
4 questions out loud, but imagine if, you know, today's  
5 Friday, and if you wanted to go to work today, you  
6 had to decide on Thursday or-- or Thursday before  
7 five, or anytime on Wednesday, what time you wanted  
8 to leave your house, and then what time you would  
9 want to leave this place. That-- that wouldn't work  
10 so well. I mean, for lots of reasons. You might  
11 know when you want to leave. But people who work  
12 effectively, just because it's five o'clock doesn't  
13 mean you go home. Sometimes you might go out  
14 somewhere after work. Not only you won't be able to  
15 go home at the time, you said you wanted to go home,  
16 you won't be at the same spot. You might go out for  
17 drinks with the people you work with. You might have  
18 a late meeting. It happens and that's what effective  
19 employees do.

20 But if you have to deal with Access-A-Ride, you  
21 can't go to work. I'm lucky enough to be in the on-  
22 demand program we've been talking about. I have an  
23 app on my phone that kind of looks like Uber, and a  
24 car will come relatively quickly like an Uber. We  
25 have debates as to whether or not the drivers know



2 that we're disabled when they come to pick us up, and  
3 we don't even know that we might-- they might get  
4 paid less. Sometimes they don't like to pick us up.

5 But I can-- I can travel in real time. I could go  
6 to work. And everyone talks about Access-A-Ride like  
7 doctor's appointments, and go to church, and go to  
8 visit family. I think us advocates got to get those  
9 words out of our mouth, and start saying, "Go to  
10 work", "Go to school," because that's what everyone  
11 on the subway is doing. They're not going to  
12 appointments, they're going to work. That's what  
13 mass transit is about.

14 But earlier I said I was lucky enough to be in  
15 that program. I wasn't lucky. Look at this room.  
16 The people in that program are in this room. We got  
17 in the program because we're big mouths and we're  
18 activists. They wanted our feedback on the program.  
19 They didn't ask 1200 random Access-A-Ride users to  
20 get into this program. And now they're upset that  
21 it's expensive. It's costing them money. Well, of  
22 course it costs more money. It works. We're using  
23 it. If they end the program for me, I can't-- I  
24 don't know what I would do to deal with those blue  
25

2 and white vans again and planning in advance, but  
3 we're using it.

4 So if there's anything in your power to implore  
5 the MTA not to call it phase two, and limit it on how  
6 much they'll pay for a ride, or how many rides you  
7 can do, because people who go to work go to work five  
8 days a week, and they might-- I mean a \$15 ride  
9 doesn't get you from Park Slope to here. And that's  
10 not far, and that's-- that's my trip. That's a \$40  
11 or \$50 trip. But we go to work. And you know what  
12 we also do when we go to work? We pay taxes. So  
13 this is an investment-- what John said, "Investing in  
14 the disabled." This would get the people who have  
15 disabilities out of their isolated, sit-at-home-and-  
16 watch-TV lives and get them to go to work.

17 So if there's anything you can do to keep this  
18 program moving forward, expand it to more people,  
19 maybe the expansion should be to Jon's aunt and to my  
20 mother in law, who may not use it that much. But--  
21 and then they can find out how much it really costs,  
22 but they didn't pick random people. They picked us  
23 here. Thank you.

24 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you so much.

25 Kathy?

1  
2 MS. COLLINS: Good afternoon. My name is  
3 Kathleen Collins. And I first of all, I like to  
4 thank all three Chairs for having us here today, and  
5 taking the time to listen to us. I'm on the board of  
6 Disabled In Action with Michael and with Jean. And  
7 also, with Michael, were involved with Downstate New  
8 York ADAPT, other advocacy group of people with  
9 disabilities.

10 I know you've heard all about flexibility, and  
11 reliability, and safety. To address reliability and  
12 flexibility, to put it into terms of my life, I'm a  
13 lawyer. And when I-- I was born missing my arms and  
14 legs. And I lived out in Queens. And I had people  
15 driving me, family members driving me to and from  
16 work for about the first 10 years. Then I moved into  
17 the city, because I knew I would never be able to  
18 afford transportation from out long-- out in Queens.  
19 So I moved to Manhattan and got an apartment. And I  
20 took not Access-A-Ride. I took car service. Because  
21 I knew if I took Access-A-Ride, it would not work for  
22 me. As a lawyer how many times you work late hours.  
23 You don't even know. You know, that Order to Show  
24 Cause comes in at the last minute. You can't tell  
25 the judge, "Hey, I've got to go home, because Access-

2 A-Ride won't pick me up later." So I used car  
3 service. And I calculated it out. It was about  
4 approximately, \$400,000 to \$500,000 for me to use  
5 that over 20 years. And the last 10 years I was able  
6 to walk to and from work because I worked for the  
7 Port Authority. We were in the World Trade Center.  
8 And when we moved to our new location, when we'd had  
9 no more World Trade Center, I was able to walk to and  
10 from work with someone assisting me, pushing me, a  
11 friend.

12 So that's the real cost of not having accessible,  
13 reliable, flexible transportation. And I paid a lot  
14 of taxes all those years.

15 So I really am a good investment. And so all  
16 these other people. So that's the first thing.

17 Second, I just wanted to go and focus on safety.  
18 Now, I know, we talked about how our bus drivers and  
19 the subway personnel, they all are direct employees  
20 of the MTA. And as such, I looked up that they must  
21 be able to understand and be understood in English to  
22 perform the duties and responsibilities of their  
23 position. Even plumbers for the MTA have to do--  
24 have to be able to speak and understand English.

2 Now don't get me wrong. My grandparents came  
3 from the old country. And they had a brogue, and I  
4 have two nieces that come from other countries that  
5 are immigrants, first-time immigrants, and so I mean,  
6 I understand, and I-- I'm trying to learn myself  
7 Spanish. And now I'm thinking I should learn a  
8 couple other languages, because otherwise how am I  
9 going to speak to my Access-A-Ride drivers? And I've  
10 had situations where like one time like, my hook got  
11 stuck in my wheel, and the guy wanted to push me, and  
12 I had to like yell at him, just to make him  
13 understand don't push me otherwise my arms going to  
14 come out and hurt me.

15 So I just wanted to point that out that-- why is  
16 it that they have to be able to speak English but the  
17 Access-A-Ride drivers do not? And that's because  
18 many of them are in the broker service. They're taxi  
19 drivers and black car drivers. Also, that's a safety  
20 concern for other people with disabilities.

21 Just one other thing. They talked about how  
22 they, you know, need to get complaints in that.  
23 Well, I spoke in 2019 before the MTA board about the  
24 lack of seat belts and shoulder belts in the taxis  
25 and in the broker service. In 2019 this is. And now

2 in 2023, I've only I've had about 10 to 15 rides  
3 since the pandemic and I've only had one time where I  
4 got a seatbelt. And it wasn't today either. And as  
5 Councilwoman Brooks-Powers pointed out about them  
6 driving and talking on the phone. That happened to  
7 me today. Would you like to have your bus driver  
8 talking on the phone when he's driving you around in  
9 the bus. Absolutely not.

10 So I just want to mention that yeah, we are not  
11 getting comparable service and safety. I mean, I  
12 feel like it's just a matter of time till I get  
13 either badly injured or killed. So thank you for  
14 listening to my testimony and everyone else's  
15 testimony today. And thank you for your time.

16 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you, and thank  
17 you for again, all of your sacrifice to be here  
18 today. We know it was not easy to be able to be here  
19 and be here all day. We really appreciate you and  
20 your testimony.

21 MS. COLLINS: We appreciate you too.

22 MR. BREIDBART: Thank you so much. And we'll  
23 call up our last in-person panel. Mark Saphan,  
24 Yolanda Elaine, and Raul Rivera.

2 Just to note, before we begin, if anybody that we  
3 have missed or hasn't been called wants to testify,  
4 they can come out to the dais, and will proceed with  
5 your testimony. You may begin one ready.

6 My name is Yolanda Lee. I'm an Access-A-Ride  
7 user. You people are very dignified to call it  
8 Access-A-Ride. But on the street it's known as  
9 Stress-A-Ride. Anyway, I talk about-- we're the most  
10 disrespected individuals in New York City Transit,  
11 seniors and disabled people that use Stress-A-Ride.

12 And I can speak on the E-Hail problem that they  
13 have also. Everybody have that glowing term, but  
14 true it is not. It depends on who is your-- who you  
15 pick at your assigned riders. I used to use Curb, I  
16 had no problems until 2022. In 2022 I went to Leap  
17 and I was stuck in at the doctor's office. My  
18 granddaughter had this after-chemo treatment. My  
19 granddaughter had to send a, Uber to pick me up. I'm  
20 sitting there for two and three hours. I call at  
21 1:00. I don't get picked up until 4:00. And I don't  
22 get home until 6:00. That's ridiculous. Is not  
23 fair. Even today using E-Hail, I tried Arrow. Guess  
24 what? I call them at 7:30 p.m. to pick me up at  
25 10:00. No one calls me back. I call them again.

1 10:30. That's when I get a ride to get home. Can  
2 you imagine waiting from 7:30, and don't get picked  
3 up until 10:30? Is that fair?  
4

5 I hear all these glowing term from New York City  
6 Transit people. But who do they ask? Do they ask  
7 other people? And we're seen as a concern. They say  
8 they have apps. A lot of seniors don't have  
9 smartphones. So how are they going to get to  
10 navigate the system when they don't have smartphones?  
11 Is that fair? You know, when I look at my telephone  
12 bill. I check MTA charge. When I look at my gas  
13 bill, I see MTA charge. When I look at my electric  
14 bill it MTA charge. So what am I doing? Don't I get  
15 the same respect as all these people that take New  
16 York City Transit buses, New York City subway system?  
17 Do we get that as Stress-A-Ride users? No, we don't.  
18 You know, is really unfair. DFDA had a program that  
19 I joined, and that was the most beautiful program  
20 that they had. You had no stress. You call, you use  
21 your app, you could get from point A to point B in a  
22 reasonable time. You didn't have to book your trip  
23 three hours before, hoping that the ridership would  
24 pick you up. And even now, when I use Arrow, a lot  
25 of them don't pick me up because I'm going from



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2 Brooklyn to Manhattan, and Manhattan to Brooklyn when  
3 I go to a doctor's appointment, and know why? They  
4 say it don't pay him enough. It's \$33 a trip. Can  
5 you imagine leaving East Flatbush to go to the Upper  
6 East Side, and the guy only get \$33. Is that fair?  
7 It's most ridiculous.

8 We need the same opportunity that everybody else  
9 in New York City have. We're not asking for nothing  
10 that's impossible. We're just asked to have the same  
11 treatment like everybody else get in New York City,  
12 as far as transit is concerned. Thank you very much,  
13 and I appreciate it.

14 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you so much.

15 MS. RYAN: Have you tried [inaudible]?

16 MS. LEE: I tried Leap, I tried Arrow, and to no  
17 avail.

18 UNKNOWN SPEAKER #2: [inaudible] is better.

19 MS. RYAN: [inaudible] is better. They'll help  
20 you. They'll [inaudible].

21 MS. LEE: But that shouldn't be happening. Why  
22 should somebody have to sit down and wait for two and  
23 three hours to get from point A to point B?

24 MS. RYAN: Right. So why should they even have  
25 bad ones like that? So you--

2 MS. LEE: And when you call in and don't even use  
3 the app, because if they don't pick you up at a  
4 certain time, the app drop you off and cancel your  
5 ride. So then you have to call them up. And to call  
6 them up, you have to wait sometimes 10, 15, 20  
7 minutes, even a half an hour. And don't call them at  
8 a certain time, because it is a two-hour wait before  
9 you get somebody to answer the stupid telephone.  
10 Where is the justice?

11 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you so much.

12 COUNSEL BREIDBART: Thank you. And we'll now  
13 move on to Zoom, our testifiers who are logged in on  
14 Zoom.

15 Before we start on Zoom, I just want to note that  
16 if anyone needs ASL, they can raise their hand on  
17 Zoom. And with that, we will begin with Florence  
18 Ferguson.

19 MS. FERGUSON: Good afternoon, Chair Brooks-  
20 Powers, Chair Hudson, and Chair Lee. I want to thank  
21 you all for allowing this opportunity to address this  
22 joint hearing. My name is Florence Ferguson. I'm a  
23 retired executive from Auburn, New York, on the  
24 Rockaway Peninsula, in the county of Queens. As one  
25 of approximately 170,000 users of the Access-A-Ride

2 service for over 10 years, I am deeply concerned with  
3 the continued lack of secure, timely, and efficient  
4 services provided to those of us with physical and  
5 mental disabilities, and mobility issues.

6 As you have heard today, the ADA of 1990 required  
7 that the paratransit system provide a level of  
8 service comparable to the public transportation  
9 services made available to non-disabled users. It  
10 has been my experience that the MTA continues to fail  
11 the disabled public in violation of this requirement  
12 on a daily basis. The non disabled public are able  
13 to access bus and subways at will. However, Access-  
14 A-Ride users must continue to schedule trips at least  
15 two days in advance and are denied the convenience  
16 and critical necessity of on-demand service extended  
17 to over 1200 of the program's current users. Plans  
18 to extend on demand service to a total of over 2400  
19 users announced recently is woefully inadequate. An  
20 unscheduled doctor's visit or an impromptu outing for  
21 any reason remain impossible for many of us who  
22 depend on this service. At the mercy of seemingly  
23 unregulated blue-bus carriers, broker services and  
24 the patchwork of Yellow cabs, Green cabs, and livery  
25 drivers, riders are forced to schedule rides in

2 advance, pray that the drivers show up at the  
3 appointed time, and accept long travel times to  
4 accommodate built-in shared ride pickups. Such rides  
5 can see a direct one hour trip turn into three or  
6 four hours if the ride is split between passengers  
7 with unreasonable pickup points and destinations that  
8 are far apart.

9 System Monitoring is manual and antiquated,  
10 costing huge amounts of lost time. Add on top of  
11 that poor communications because of language barriers  
12 between drivers and passengers, and a lack of enough  
13 interpreters, dispatchers, to bridge the gap, and you  
14 have a horrendous level of frustration for us as  
15 disabled passengers.

16 It is worth mentioning here, and I want the  
17 Committee--

18 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

19 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: You to finish, Ms.  
20 Ferguson. Go ahead.

21 MS. FERGUSON: Yes, it is worth mentioning that  
22 many times broker drivers avoid more direct routes,  
23 because they want to avoid paying the tolls and  
24 actually ask passengers to pay the toll in order to  
25 get a shorter route. And if you don't pay that toll,

2 you're going to go the long way. And this is  
3 especially true for trips between the Rockaway  
4 Peninsula on which I live, and the city. And this  
5 just highlights some of the glaring inequities riders  
6 throughout the various sections of the city face  
7 daily. The pandemic showed us that the nightmare  
8 scenarios described above do not have to be the norm.  
9 Pandemic restrictions actually limited the number of  
10 passenger pickups per ride, and therefore increase  
11 the number of on-time drop offs and pickups, which  
12 while clearly a result of low ridership, it gave us  
13 an inkling of what is possible.

14 As we resume near-pre-pandemic levels of travel,  
15 it is time to pull the entire Access-A-Ride system  
16 into the 21st century so that true equity for  
17 disabled passengers can be achieved. We cannot  
18 continue the slow crawl to parity with the non-  
19 disabled as proposed public transportation  
20 improvements project almost full accessibility 30  
21 years into the future.

22 The disabled and those with mobility issues  
23 continue to depend on Access-A-Ride services in the  
24 here and now, and have suffered enough. The funding  
25 for such an overall is not a political football to be

2 tossed back and forth between various levels of  
3 government. A successful overhaul of the system will  
4 require collaboration and funding from federal, as  
5 well as state and local sources to deliver the kind  
6 of transportation service parity needed and deserved.

7 At the very least, it should begin by pledging to  
8 immediately implement same-day on demand service for  
9 all users of Access-A-Ride. If Uber and Lyft can  
10 dispatch same-day service, it proves that the  
11 technology already exists. And we should be able to  
12 do this. It's not rocket science.

13 Develop enforce carrier and driver standards and  
14 accountability protocols with incentives for those  
15 who meet or exceed performance standards. We heard  
16 testimony today that this was being done, and it's  
17 been my experience that it is not so.

18 We should also commit to funding a central fleet  
19 of modern wheelchair accessible buses, cars, and  
20 livery cabs with standardized training programs for  
21 all drivers and dispatchers on how to deal with the  
22 elderly and disabled.

23 These are the basic changes the disabled  
24 ridership need to have in order to begin to achieve  
25 minimum levels of transportation equity. That's all

COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE with  
COMMITTEE ON MENTAL HEALTH, DISABILITIES, AND  
1 ADDICTION and the COMMITTEE ON AGING 191

2 we're asking for. I know that they can be attained  
3 with the appropriate funding from every level of  
4 government and appeal to this committee to advocate  
5 accordingly.

6 I thank you on the committee for convening this  
7 hearing, and for listening and hope that you will use  
8 all the resources at your collective disposal to move  
9 forward with consideration and implementation of  
10 these improvements. The time is now. Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you. Thank you  
12 so much, and if you don't mind submitting that in  
13 writing, so we can have it for the record.

14 MS. FERGUSON: It has been submitted. Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Thanks, Ms. Ferguson.

16 COUNSEL BREIDBART: Thank you. We'll now hear  
17 from Fay Hill.

18 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

19 MS. HILL: Wait a minute. Hello, this is Fay  
20 Hill, District Leader-- District Leader for Assembly  
21 31B in Queens, Springfield Gardens, and Far Rockaway,  
22 Laurelton, and Rosedale. Thank you very much,  
23 Councilwoman Selvena Brooks-Powers for having this  
24 meeting.

25

1  
2 I've heard a lot and my testimony would be  
3 repetitive, but I like to add this input here.

4 When an elderly or disabled person apply for  
5 Access-A-Ride, which would allow them to go to the  
6 doctor's visit and to go to their-- their shopping  
7 and so forth, when they get a letter from their  
8 doctor and say that this person is unable to take the  
9 subways, take the stairs, are go on buses and so  
10 forth, they are being denied. I am one of the  
11 persons who I'm talking about. I've applied for  
12 Access-A-Ride for the past 10 years. And I wasn't--  
13 I was then not, you know, my medical wasn't as bad as  
14 it is now where I can't walk around too fast because  
15 of my arthritis. And, you know, off my, my asthma  
16 and my breathing problem.

17 Now, why should someone who is behind the desk  
18 examining you and telling you that you can't get be  
19 approved for Access-A-Ride? And you have a letter  
20 from your doctor who examined you, telling you that  
21 you're you-- you need to get an application process  
22 to Access-A-Ride.

23 So you know, this is only my comment. I've  
24 posted my testimony online. But hearing all the  
25 testimonies from other people, I'm hoping that the



2 Committee will be able to get all the funding and  
3 change all-- the system has to be changed moving  
4 forward. The American people are-- the people in New  
5 York City are getting older, the baby boomers are  
6 getting older, and we need to have access to Access-  
7 A-Ride. And also not have to wait two hours, three  
8 hours, sometimes they drop you off. And they don't  
9 they don't return to pick you up.

10 So with that in mind, I want to thank the  
11 Councilwoman, I want to thank the Committee to-- to  
12 have this meeting, or this hearing, because we need  
13 to improve the system. It has to be done  
14 immediately, if not sooner. Thank you very much.

15 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you.

16 COUNSEL BREIDBART: Thank you. And I'll call on  
17 the next three who will testify and they can go in  
18 the order they're called. You can wait for the  
19 search and to give you the go ahead. Khalia  
20 Hayslett, Edward Funches, and Beverly Paker.

21 Hi, everyone. Good afternoon. Can you hear me  
22 okay?

23 COUNSEL BREIDBART: Yes.

24 MS. HAYSLETT: Yeah, my name is Khalia Hayslett.  
25 I am the person they were talking about that came in

2 person today and had to leave. Thank you,  
3 Councilwoman for taking my testimony virtually.  
4 Councilman Lee, and Councilwoman Powers, thank you  
5 for meeting me earlier.

6 This is one of those times where it was very  
7 important to me to be in person, right?, so you can  
8 put a face to our testimony. You know, it not just  
9 be words jumping off of a page.

10 Uh, yes, I will repeat what everyone has been  
11 saying about Access-A-Ride in overhaul. But what's  
12 unique about me is that I feel like I'm the only  
13 travel-trainer left in New York City that is teaching  
14 riders, like everybody on this call, and that every  
15 everyone in in the hall, how to navigate the MTA  
16 system.

17 And what I was going to show you is this is my  
18 transit card. This is my MetroCard. This is what I  
19 rely on when Access-A-Ride doesn't show up. When  
20 they are an hour and 33 minutes late to pick me up.  
21 On Tuesday, when they were an hour and 33 minutes  
22 late, due to the service changes that occurred, they  
23 didn't take into consideration at all people with  
24 disabilities, right? As a travel trainer, I know  
25 every bus route. I know every subway route. From

2 11:30 until 2:00 pm, it took me to get from 34th  
3 Street in Manhattan to get to Williamsburg Brooklyn.  
4 You tell me that is acceptable? Somebody tell me  
5 that is acceptable.

6 My home station is the station that has those--  
7 the first decals to mark where you stand and how to  
8 properly enter and exit the train. Those conductors  
9 station signs are so antiquated. That is not where  
10 you get on a train safely. I have many, many times  
11 stuck my arm through many cars so that the conductor  
12 wouldn't leave me so I can find a safe spot to  
13 ambulate on and off the train and not have to do a  
14 Dukes Of Hazzard move, and hope I don't go off the  
15 railing in the train station, or be stuck like a  
16 subway rat.

17 There has to be accountability and funding on a  
18 federal, state, and city level.

19 Also, what I really am strongly advocating for is  
20 that the Mayor's Office for People With Disabilities,  
21 Commissioner Curry, has more enforcement powers. I  
22 don't think anybody talked about the fact that it  
23 seems that she can't do anything for us--

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

2 MS. HAYSLETT: --right at this point. She needs  
3 to have enforcement powers, along with the City  
4 Council to hold somebody accountable.

5 We are tired of being pegs trying to be fit into  
6 a hole of this world. We are active taxpayers. We  
7 too are straphangers. Can someone be accountable for  
8 us? Can we get dignified service? It's time. The  
9 time is now. And by 2055, my great grandchildren  
10 will be teaching travel training, that's not  
11 acceptable. And why do we have to sue every single  
12 time to do the right thing in the right way?

13 Somebody tell me, why is it always a lawsuit? To the  
14 Councilmembers there today, thank you so much. We  
15 are honored that you took the time out to say, "We  
16 want to hear every single one of your testimonies  
17 today," because I said it to Richard Davey, and I  
18 said it to you, and I said it to all of the heads of  
19 MTA. What they said today were a lot of untruths.  
20 They manipulated the facts. And it's not true. It  
21 is not our lived experience as passengers. And we  
22 need you to understand that. There has to be an  
23 overhaul. And unfortunately for me, I wasn't one of  
24 the people selected for on-demand service. So I had  
25 to leave today, and not have the chance to stand

2 before you and give my testimony. I am so glad that  
3 you give-- gave me the opportunity today to speak  
4 with you and everybody on the call virtually to say  
5 we are fighting hard as advocates, not just for  
6 ourselves, but for everybody here, for everybody here  
7 that we have comparable service. It is not just a  
8 moral issue, it is a legal issue. It is our  
9 constitutional right.

10 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you so much for  
11 that powerful testimony. And we made sure we  
12 highlighted the fact that, you know, you had to go  
13 because of the Access-A-Ride. And this is something  
14 that we're going to continue to focus on. But, of  
15 course, as I said before we started the hearing  
16 today, we can't do it without centering the voices of  
17 those who are using these services. So thank you so  
18 much for being a part of that.

19 MS. HAYSLETT: Thank you.

20 COUNSEL: We will now hear from Edward Funches.  
21 You may begin once the sergeant cues you and you're  
22 unmuted.

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

24 MR. FUNCHES: Hello, my name is Edward Funches  
25 and I am disabled. Unfortunately, I do not drive. I

2 mean I drive, I do not take Access-A-Ride, but I am  
3 an advocate for the disability community.

4 And I think the problem is that we're not really  
5 included into the decisions that are being made when  
6 it comes down to these Access-A-Rides.

7 You know, we have the highest unemployment rate  
8 than any community. This is an opportunity that we  
9 can be employed when it comes down to making these  
10 decisions. You had the lady from the Commission from  
11 the Mayor's Office. You had guys from MTA. We need  
12 to be involved in-- more involved in making these  
13 decisions. That right there. That is how you fix  
14 these problems right here. And you'll-- you'll get  
15 away with-- with employing individuals.

16 You spoke about the ADA. The ADA is old, it's  
17 old and antiquated. That needs to be updated. You  
18 also spoke about you know, the MWBEs. You know,  
19 those are companies that-- I am certified with the  
20 city as an MWBE. The MTA needs to be consulted, you  
21 know, they're constantly making decisions that are  
22 not suitable for individuals that are disabled. Like  
23 I said, we have the highest unemployment than any--  
24 any community. Everyone is making money off the  
25 disability community but the people that are

2 disabled. You know, I'm here to talk about they got  
3 contrast, this person contracts with that person.  
4 What about the disability community? We need to be  
5 involved? That's all I have to say, as far as this  
6 situation, as far as with Access-A-Ride. I want to  
7 thank you all as well

8 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much for your  
9 testimony.

10 COUNSEL BRIEDBART: Thank you. And we'll call up  
11 the next three. Is Beverly Parker still on? I  
12 believe she was called. Beverly Parker.

13 MS. PARKER: Yes. Hello. Good afternoon. I was  
14 prepared to say good morning, but it's good  
15 afternoon. I'm, uh, I'd first like to thank you so  
16 much for having this forum today. I really  
17 appreciate it and I think was so needed. And I  
18 learned a lot.

19 I-- In early September of 2022, I had a stroke.  
20 After a month in the hospital and rehab, I went home,  
21 there was a visit-- there were visiting nurses all  
22 the time, a homecare health aide, and many  
23 therapists. Then I started to go out, and when I  
24 went out to doctor's appointments and physical  
25

2 therapists, for that I had to depend on Access-A-Ride  
3 for the first time of my life.

4 There was a lot of representation and discussion  
5 today about Access-A-Ride. About customer service I  
6 found from the Access-A-Ride personnel, and for me, I  
7 find the customer service end of Access-A-Ride is  
8 satisfactory. That's not the problem. The actual  
9 car service is extremely stressful, Stress-A-Ride,  
10 and unreliable. For example, for me, one day, in  
11 mid-December, my physical therapy session was over at  
12 4 p.m. That was my second trip on Access-- actually  
13 my fourth trip I was looking forward to that day on  
14 Access-A-Ride. And it was the last time I did plan  
15 two trips in one day. My car was scheduled to arrive  
16 between 15 and 45 minutes after the scheduled  
17 appointment that I was on. But it didn't arrive. It  
18 didn't show up.

19 So I had no text, no information as to why it  
20 didn't show up. So I called for another ride. And I  
21 was told that another car was coming. It didn't  
22 arrive after 30 minutes that they allow. So I called  
23 again. And that one didn't come. Finally I went  
24 outside to wait and call-- well, they said that they  
25 were sending a third time car, but I went outside to



2 wait for them. When I went out, I found that the  
3 building that I was in closed at 6pm. And it was  
4 after 6 now that I was outside, and my phone died at  
5 6:30.

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time has expired.

7 MS. PARKER: Oh, and I didn't mention that it was  
8 snowing. Thank you. I'll finish up. It was  
9 snowing, and cold and I had to lean on a cane at an  
10 office building door. But luckily someone was  
11 yelling-- someone was getting out of a cab just  
12 happened to getting beginning out of a cab. And I  
13 got in. I hopped into it. My question, my question  
14 really was: Just why is it so impossible, that it's  
15 not more cost effective to have safe, reliable fleet  
16 service, than to just do it the way we've been doing  
17 it for so many years, when we can't even depend on  
18 reliable transportation. We can't have-- we don't  
19 have any indication as to-- we have unmarked cars and  
20 we have to go up to a car and ask if that's our  
21 driver-- in the middle of you know at six or seven or  
22 eight o'clock at night. It's not safe. And why is  
23 it less cost-effective to have at least the safety  
24 and-- and security of our passengers first at mind?

2 I don't understand. But I do appreciate--  
3 appreciate this forum. I'm so grateful to be here  
4 with you. And I hope and pray that something can be  
5 done. Thank you very much.

6 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much.

7 COUNSEL BREIDBART: Thank you. And we'll call up  
8 the next two or three and we'll go in order.

9 Beginning with Brianna Paden-Williams, C.N., and  
10 Diane Rose. Brianna may begin.

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time has begun.

12 MS. PADEN-WILLIAMS: Thank you. Hello, I'm  
13 Brianna Paden-Williams. I'm the Communications and  
14 Policy Associate at LiveOn New York. And thank you  
15 for the opportunity to testify today. LiveOn New  
16 York's members include more than 110 community-based  
17 nonprofits that provide core services, which ensure  
18 that all New Yorkers can thrive in their community as  
19 we all age.

20 Age friendly and accessible transportation is a  
21 key element of allowing older adults to age in  
22 community. Yet, in the most recent MTA customer  
23 satisfaction survey, customers noted an average 65  
24 percent satisfaction rating, demonstrating that  
25 Access-A-Ride is not meeting the needs of its users.

2 And through a network we've seen the importance of  
3 transportation as a top concern for older adults as  
4 well as people living with disabilities, and yet we  
5 know that for many people who live in transit  
6 deserts, as we've heard today, getting to work,  
7 doctor's appointments, going to the grocery store, or  
8 just taking advantage of the resources throughout the  
9 city, like our older adult centers are really a  
10 constant challenge. And we've heard today in this  
11 hearing, as well as through our members, the  
12 fundamental issues with Access-A-Ride in terms of its  
13 reliability and timeliness.

14 So creating a robust and accessible  
15 transportation system is a key step to create an age-  
16 friendly and accessible city for everyone.

17 And so LiveOn New York are proud to offer the  
18 following recommendations.

19 First, the City should partner with the State to  
20 make public transportation truly accessible for all  
21 people. And while we're proud to see the recent  
22 announcement by the MTA to install new elevators, and  
23 ADA enhancements at MTA stations, we know that  
24 currently only one in four New York subway station  
25 stations excuse me it have elevators or ramps or

2 accessible entrances. And so while this expansion is  
3 a step in the right direction to ensure that  
4 transportation is accessible to everyone, we know  
5 that more work must be done. And so we really  
6 encourage the City to work with the State as well as  
7 the agencies to remove one of the largest barriers of  
8 the use for many older adults as well as people with  
9 limited mobility.

10 We also encourage the City to expand and increase  
11 investment in the MTA paratransit E-Hail program,  
12 which uses the city's fleet of taxis to allow older  
13 adults and others with mobility impairments to get  
14 around. And as we've heard today, really given the  
15 divergent experience between the traditional Access-  
16 A-Ride, and the E-Hail program, expanding on the on  
17 demand E-Hail program should really be a priority for  
18 the city.

19 We also encourage the city to adopt universal  
20 design principles in all repairs and reconstructions  
21 of the streets and public spaces. We know that  
22 universal design makes the city a better place for  
23 everyone, and this includes curb cuts not only to  
24 help people move around using walkers or wheelchairs,  
25 but also to help parents with strollers as well. But

2 more information and recommendations can be found in  
3 our written testimony. And thank you for the  
4 opportunity to testify today.

5 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much.

6 COUNSEL BREIDBART: Thank you. We'll now hear  
7 from C.N.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time has begun.

9 C.N.: Hello. Can you hear me?

10 COUNSEL BREIDBART: Yes, we can hear you.

11 C.N.: I am a blind E-Hail on demand rider,  
12 private citizen. So we heard from the MTA today that  
13 they have medical licensed doctors who work in the  
14 Assessment Centers. And we also heard how they have  
15 said that they, you know, are spending a lot of money  
16 on the paratransit program and things like that. So  
17 why is it that people with disabilities are not  
18 having their, their doctors letters from their own  
19 providers being the, you know, the end of or, you  
20 know, proof that they need this service? Why are we  
21 wasting money on other doctors reexamining people  
22 with disabilities who already have documented  
23 disabilities, who already have SSI and SSDI, who have  
24 been even examined by state doctors, to prove that  
25 they're eligible for those benefits?

2 For example, why is it that the MTA is wasting  
3 money on these other doctors? Isn't the word of one  
4 doctor good enough? Why do we have to have their  
5 doctors rule on if someone's eligible for  
6 paratransit? And how much are these doctors being  
7 paid in wages? And if the MTA wants to save money,  
8 and they're really stubborn about having licensed  
9 doctors in these Assessment Centers, shouldn't  
10 Medicaid, you know, pay for that? And shouldn't it  
11 be classified as a doctor's visit, in a way, saving  
12 the MTA money.

13 Also, as a blind passenger using the E-Hail on  
14 demand program, I rely on verbal cues. Sadly, I  
15 heard at the Mayor's Office for People with  
16 Disabilities that the TLC representatives said that  
17 the-- their fluency, basically the-- Sorry, I'm so  
18 sorry, the requirement for taxi drivers to speak  
19 English has been dropped by the TLC, and even though  
20 that might have had good intentions, it has  
21 negatively affected people in the blind community,  
22 because we rely on verbal cues and we rely on you  
23 know, people telling us, you know, which side of the  
24 car to get off the, you know, sorry, leave, to leave.  
25 You know, are we directly outside the door, is there

2 an obstacle, you know, and, obviously, to communicate  
3 with the driver.

4 So, I feel that, you know, this is against the  
5 Americans with Disability Act, because if you look at  
6 the Americans with Disabilities Act, there is a  
7 section on effective communication. And we need to  
8 be able to communicate effectively with taxi drivers.  
9 And this shouldn't be just for the on-hail demand  
10 program, this should be for all taxis. They should  
11 bring back the requirement to have some sort of level  
12 of English so that blind people like myself are not,  
13 you know, stuck with communication issues.

14 Could there be other revenues or money to help  
15 the MTA? You know, we heard about legalizing  
16 cannabis for example in the city? Couldn't some of  
17 that revenue go towards the MTA? Couldn't some of  
18 the congestion charging go towards--

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time has expired.

20 C.N.: Thank you for listening. Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much.

22 COUNSEL BREIDBART: Thank you and we'll now hear  
23 from Diane Rose. You may begin around ready.

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time has begun.

2 MINISTER ROSE: [background voices] Diane, I  
3 think you may have the recording on in the  
4 background, but you're you can go on already.

5 ZOOM ADMINISTRATOR: Sam, maybe we could circle  
6 back?

7 COUNSEL BREIDBART: Let's try to-- let's see if  
8 we can get Diane again.

9 MINISTER ROSE: Okay, good afternoon. I'm glad  
10 to be here. Better last than never right?

11 ZOOM ADMINISTRATOR: No. You can proceed.

12 [BACKGROUND VOICES]

13 ZOOM ADMINISTRATOR: Ms. Rose, if you're able to  
14 turn off the live stream.

15 COUNSEL BRIEDBART: Kevin, why don't we mute, and  
16 then we can go back.

17 [BACKGROUND VOICES]

18 MINISTER ROSE: Hello, can you hear me?

19 COUNSEL BREIDBART: Yes, we can. Can you hear  
20 us? Diane?

21 MINISTER ROSE: Okay. I'm not sure if you can  
22 hear me, but I'll continue. I'd like to begin with  
23 after hearing all the testimony that I don't really  
24 have that much to add because I think everyone has  
25 said everything. Yet I do have a different



2 perspective. Let me start introducing myself. My  
3 name is Minister Dr. Diane Rose and I am bringing  
4 testimony on behalf of a ministry I define as Aging  
5 Gracefully In The City.

6 Within this ministry, my focus is on equipping  
7 and enabling individuals to age gracefully, and  
8 gracefully as defined as holistically having a life  
9 of health and the sanctity, for lack of a better  
10 word.

11 What is happening, I think as it relates to this  
12 is we're failing to take a holistic approach. And  
13 we're doing so within a fractured and fragmented  
14 system, who's focus is on transportation and not the  
15 ability, nor the disabilities of people. I say this  
16 as a psychiatric professional, who worked and focused  
17 on disabilities beginning with the FMLA, and  
18 continuing to that barrier removal such as  
19 accessibility into buildings otherwise. And now as  
20 an individual, retired seeking services for which I  
21 advocated for and have experience in for a long time.

22 So I'm just going to speak to three areas and  
23 then submit a more thorough written testimony. But  
24 the first area that I hear difficulty is: There's a  
25 lack of a plan for transportation for people with

2 disabilities. And as with any other treatment plan,  
3 that's how I envision transportation to support time  
4 has expired, that are aging, and disabled, is going  
5 to be needed. What I hear is a lack of  
6 accountability, of lack of outcomes, focus  
7 monitoring, and reporting that's on an operational  
8 end.

9 Secondly, my area, and what I'm contending with  
10 is the design for assessing the need for  
11 transportation to begin with. If we're beginning  
12 with an ability and disability focus, and or taking a  
13 functional assessment, what I find and did not know  
14 is that the Assessment Centers use a cookie cutter  
15 approach. So every one is given to the same  
16 examination irregardless of disability, and thereby,  
17 you're not looking at, as someone mentioned earlier,  
18 the functional ability according to that person's  
19 disability or ability. I like to focus on one's  
20 abilities.

21 So the subsequent decision making process lacks a  
22 clear plan for what's really needed. And this is  
23 coming again, from an assessment perspective.

24 When assessing someone who-- whether they're able  
25 to walk five feet in a room or climb three stairs may

2 not reveal the true level of disability when  
3 attempting to travel within the city, absent, what do  
4 you call it?, elevators, et cetera. In addition to  
5 the fact that many like myself traveled from borough  
6 to borough. Finally, the MTA system as a whole,  
7 which kind of follows upon what I just said, as a  
8 whole is not a DEA compliant. For example, in Queens  
9 where I live, the closest accessible subway to begin  
10 with is approximately a mile or so away, and that  
11 particular station does not take a person down or up  
12 each level and is often not operating. The nearest  
13 subway to that location is like on the other side of  
14 town, not to even calculate it. In a-- so when it  
15 comes to travel, for example--

16 COUNSEL: Minister Rose, can you hear us?

17 MINISTER ROSE: --there's a failure to consider  
18 the distance a person is traveling, what is needed to  
19 travel such as a train or bus or whatever, and what  
20 the purpose is that they are traveling for.

21 Which takes me to another category I have here,  
22 which is, as I'm thinking about employment, shopping,  
23 and medical appointments. So that's my three-prong  
24 holistic planning for people with disabilities, and  
25 I'm happy to submit testimony going forward.

2 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much.

3 CHAIRPERSON BROOKS-POWERS: BRIEDBART: Thank  
4 you. And we'll move on to the next panel which will  
5 be Eman Rimawi-Doster, Glen Bulofski, and Jose  
6 Hernandez. We will begin with Imaan.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time has begun.

8 MS. RIMAWI-DOSTER: Hi. Thank you so much for  
9 this opportunity. Good afternoon, Chair Lee, Chair  
10 Brooks-Powers, and Chair Hudson. It's so wonderful  
11 to see you again. My name is Eman Rimawi-Doster, you  
12 may remember me from my years of working with New  
13 York Lawyers for the Public Interest. I am now the  
14 new Executive Director of the Harlem Independent  
15 Living Center.

16 I still use Access-A-Ride daily. And in the last  
17 several months, and I've actually say the last two  
18 decades, the service has been awful. From extremely  
19 late pickups, to rude drivers, to a tour de boroughs,  
20 to no shows, to sexual harassment, it's been rough.

21 Lately, they've been employing some folks who are  
22 clearly not getting trained. Last night, for  
23 example, the driver put my walker up on the sidewalk.  
24 He didn't park close to the curb, and I had bags, and  
25 then he just got in the car and left. Luckily, my

2 balance was okay yesterday, but it isn't always  
3 because I have lupus, just as Councilmember Hanif  
4 mentioned much earlier today. He wouldn't listen  
5 when I asked him to bring us closer and so therefore  
6 it was not safe. As many as many of the other people  
7 are mentioning today, the drivers show up wildly late  
8 or wildly early.

9 In the past two weeks, I have gone up to Harlem  
10 at like 8:50 in the morning, when I wasn't supposed  
11 to be there that early. But you know, I worked with  
12 it. Many of the drivers just show up when they feel  
13 like. They won't tell you when they show up. And  
14 also, I realized quickly, that the brokers don't even  
15 know what time they are supposed to show up, or if  
16 they're even picking up someone who uses Access-A-  
17 Ride.

18 What the MTA didn't mention is that the lawsuit  
19 is what made them put the fare at \$2.75. And no, you  
20 all don't go to all boroughs as you said, because  
21 when Staten Island is involved with Access-A-Ride,  
22 you can get there, but you often can't get out. I've  
23 gotten stuck in Staten Island multiple times, which  
24 is probably why the ridership is low in Staten  
25 Island. They've also been sued around language

2 access, because people who have limited English  
3 proficiency weren't provided with language access.  
4 And that is why they are providing it for the  
5 customers. My dad wasn't born here, and it took him  
6 several years to learn English. Let's not treat  
7 immigrants like they're the bad guys. That's not  
8 okay. And if people are worried about communicating  
9 with the drivers, then maybe the MTA should provide  
10 some English classes for them, instead of making them  
11 out to be bad guys, and then not having them have  
12 jobs. That's not okay, either.

13 I'm not asking for special treatment. I'm not  
14 asking for luxury. I'm simply asking for decency and  
15 respect. I'm asking to be treated like a human  
16 being. I'm asking for the MTA to follow the law.  
17 It's not a favor. It's not being warm and fuzzy.  
18 It's the law. And if I have to follow the law, the  
19 MTA better get on board. Pardon the pun, it was  
20 intended.

21 I've made a lot of friends with drivers. And  
22 they've told me about the people like me, advocates,  
23 and regular complainers, we're put on a difficult  
24 people list, which I brought to the MTA, and they  
25 denied, but based on my treatment, I think that that

2 list is very real. And why would they make a list of  
3 complainers.

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time has expired.

5 MS. RIMAWI-DOSTER: And, you know, the point that  
6 I'm trying to make is that the MTA often blames the  
7 customers for the issues that are going on within  
8 Access-A-Ride. And that is not okay. I am on the  
9 Advisory Council for Transit Accessibility at the  
10 MTA, and I feel completely powerless on that  
11 committee. With the way my service goes, I've missed  
12 meetings with elected officials, I've missed meetings  
13 with folks interested in a script I wrote, I've  
14 missed family events, I've missed doctor's  
15 appointments, I've missed work, and so much more.  
16 And oftentimes, they don't think about the working  
17 people with disabilities who rely on this service.

18 If I worked anywhere else for the past five and a  
19 half years other than New York Lawyers for the Public  
20 Interest, I would have been fired a long time ago,  
21 because I was not showing up on time. And I think  
22 it's very appropriate that the Mental Health  
23 Committee is with us. Because nobody ever talks  
24 about the mental health toll of constantly being  
25 left, constantly being ignored, constantly feeling

2 like the MTA does not care about the lives that  
3 they're badly affecting. It diminishes my quality of  
4 life to be constantly stressed out by Access-A-Ride.

5 I'm lucky that I take blood pressure medication,  
6 but I shouldn't have to do all that simply to use a  
7 public transit system that I am paying for. Thank  
8 you so much. Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you.

10 COUNSEL BREIDBART: Thank you. We'll next hear  
11 from Glen Bolofsky.

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time has begun.

13 Good afternoon everyone. Can everyone hear me?

14 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Yes we can.

15 MR. BOLOFSKY: Thank you so much. First of all,  
16 I thank all the Chairpeople today, Chairman Selvina  
17 Brooks-Powers, Chairman Linda Lee, Chairperson  
18 Crystal Hudson, all their team, staff, central and  
19 district, and all of those individuals who are not  
20 elected officials to take their valuable time and be  
21 here to help the quality of life of members of our  
22 community. I want to thank Eman, who just spoke so  
23 eloquently about justice and about doing the right  
24 thing.



2 In terms of money, we all know there's plenty of  
3 money for things. Last week, we heard the DOT  
4 complain, they couldn't find staff, but they had the  
5 money. Well, maybe DOT wants to give some of that  
6 money to the MTA since they're not using it. I mean,  
7 let's be practical. To be honest, if you can't use  
8 the dough that the mayor gave to you, give it to the  
9 MTA. I mean, let's just move the money that we have.

10 But in terms of the drivers, a possible solution  
11 is that money talks. We need to give them  
12 incentives. They don't have an easy job. They have  
13 a hard job. And it's not their fault all the time.  
14 But once they're monetized to be on time, and to make  
15 money for being on time, they'll be more on time.  
16 They'll be nicer to people. If they get complaints  
17 against them, they should lose a \$5 bill if there's a  
18 complaint. So again, it's monetized. Thank you all  
19 for allowing me to be here. And I appreciate again,  
20 the opportunity of this joint Committee of  
21 Transportation, Mental Health, and the welfare of all  
22 of our neighbors and friends.

23 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much.

24 COUNSEL BREIDBART: Thank you. And we'll now  
25 move on to Jose Hernandez.

2 MR. HERNANDEZ: Thank you very much city  
3 Councilmembers for allowing me to testify today. My  
4 name is Jose Hernandez and I am the President the New  
5 York City Chapter of United Spine Association, and I  
6 am one of the members of the Paratransit  
7 Accessibility Committee. Paratransit services are  
8 critical for individuals with disabilities like  
9 myself and seniors who can't get around the city  
10 using buses or the limited accessibility of the  
11 subway system. It allows us to attend doctor's  
12 appointments, family events, work, and so much more.

13 The MTA's transportation network has been  
14 referred to as the lifeblood of New York City by the  
15 Governor and the Vice President of Paratransit.  
16 However, for individuals with disabilities and  
17 seniors, that lifeblood is currently experiencing  
18 reduced blood flow, leaving us on life support.

19 The MTA's current paratransit system is extremely  
20 outdated. We are in 2023, where there are air tags  
21 that allows us to track our luggage. However, the  
22 MTA can't track its rids. With all of the advances  
23 in technology when it comes to GPS and real time  
24 traffic, there is no reason why paratransit riders  
25 are still being taken on tours of the city, being

2 picked up in Brooklyn traveling into Queens, then  
3 into Manhattan, only to be dropped off in Brooklyn.  
4 transportation network companies like Uber have  
5 technology that allow you to estimate the time of  
6 arrival of a cab within minutes, and they can tell  
7 you in real time how long your trip is going to take.  
8 They can also forecast traffic patterns that  
9 coordinate tens of thousands of cars throughout the  
10 city. Yet the MTA can't coordinate 1200 blue and  
11 white carriers.

12 New York City currently pays 50 percent of the  
13 bill when it comes to paratransit service. And if  
14 the governor has her way, New York City will pay 100  
15 percent for the paratransit service. However, New  
16 York City has limited input on how the paratransit  
17 services are delivered to New Yorkers with  
18 disabilities and seniors.

19 I would love to see the City Council and the  
20 mayor take a more active role in ensuring that  
21 paratransit services are delivered effectively and  
22 the reporting is done in a more transparent way. We  
23 need more accountability for carriers who fail to  
24 meet the standards given to them during their  
25 contract.

2 I would also request that individuals with  
3 disabilities and seniors have more representation on  
4 the MTA board.

5 And I just wanted to highlight that the MTA just  
6 spent \$3.2 billion on new subway cars. And one of  
7 the major issues with the paratransit system is that  
8 there is no investment. People with disabilities and  
9 seniors are treated as second class MTA riders. You  
10 know, the new riders-- or regular riders, riders of  
11 the regular transit system are going to be riding in  
12 luxury in these new R211's open gangway. Yet we as  
13 paratransit riders, don't get any modern systems.

14 Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much, Jose. Also,  
16 I don't know if you remember me from the Civic  
17 Engagement Commission, but I'm glad that you're still  
18 serving there and always advocating on behalf of the  
19 disabilities community in every space that you're in.  
20 So I appreciate all the work you're doing.

21 Thank you.

22 MR. HERNANDEZ: Absolutely. Thank you very much.  
23 I'm still serving on the committee.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Yes. I saw. Awesome. Thank  
25 you.

2 MR. HERNANDEZ: Thank you.

3 COUNSEL BREIDBART: Thank you. And we'll call up  
4 our next three for the next panel beginning with  
5 Loriana Tompkins, Lyric Thompson, and Ruth Lowenkron.  
6 We will begin with Loriana.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

8 COUNSEL BREIDBART: Is Loriana on? Sorry, we'll  
9 go to the next person. That's Lyric Thompson.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

11 MS. THOMPSON: Hi, good afternoon. My name is  
12 Lyric Thompson, thank you for holding this hearing.  
13 And so that finally all of the issues with Access-A-  
14 Ride can be addressed. I used to work for Access-A-  
15 Ride. I worked for GCS, Global Contract Services.  
16 Those are the people that set these appointments. I  
17 was really excited about this job until I started  
18 taking calls. An overwhelming majority of these  
19 calls were from people that had been stranded places,  
20 weren't getting picked up on time, were missing their  
21 chemo treatments. One woman, who I'll name Rose for  
22 the sake of this conversation. Rose explained to me  
23 that she was dropped off at her dialysis appointment  
24 an hour and 15, an hour 20 minutes early.

25

2 So she waited for her appointment. She got her  
3 dialysis. And Access-A-Ride never picked her up.  
4 She kept calling, kept calling. Someone's coming,  
5 someone's coming. Four hours this woman waited  
6 outside of her dialysis place. Well, the place  
7 closes, and Rose with no one to help her decides to  
8 take her electric wheelchair home the two miles. She  
9 was only a couple of miles from her house. She got  
10 halfway home and then got stuck because it started  
11 raining.

12 At this point, I was so incensed that all I could  
13 do was cry. I mean, honestly. So on my lunch break  
14 I called the MTA. A lot of you council people know  
15 that I'm not shy about calling bad behavior out when,  
16 with regard to city-- city government.

17 I called the MTA and I spoke to a gentleman named  
18 Daniel DeConza[ph], something to that effect. I'm  
19 probably slaughtering his last name, but that doesn't  
20 matter. I explained to Daniel that I got-- probably  
21 40 to 45 percent of the calls I received were from  
22 people who weren't picked up, or picked up two hours  
23 early, an hour and a half late, who were missing  
24 appointments, who never made it home because of  
25

2 Access-A-Ride. And what can we do to address these  
3 issues?

4 Well, Daniel was rather upset about getting  
5 called out. So he started yelling at me that there  
6 wasn't enough drivers. We didn't have this. We  
7 didn't have that. And I explained to him that that  
8 was not the problem of the people who depend on this  
9 service. That was his problem to address. And what  
10 is he doing to address this? What can we do to  
11 address this?

12 Well, Daniel's response was to call my  
13 supervisor. I heard from HR within 15 minutes. And  
14 I think I don't even have to say that I was fired  
15 within a week from Access-A-Ride for being late.  
16 Although I doubt that the actual reason.

17 The stories you're hearing from these people are--  
18 - I would say there-- a lot of them, it's not even  
19 the worst that I've heard.

20 Our elderly and disabled depend on us to provide  
21 these services for them, because they like anybody  
22 else have the right to have a life. And that life  
23 includes being able to get up and go to the store get  
24 up and go to church, going and having lunch with  
25 friends--

2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

3 MS. THOMPSON: --which they find to be pretty  
4 much impossible when you have non-pickups, or an hour  
5 and a half that you have to wait for somebody just to  
6 go to-- you know, just to go to the grocery store.  
7 It's unacceptable. And when the MTA said that 80  
8 percent and 90 percent show up on time. I mean, I  
9 don't even know how to handle that other than what  
10 universe are they talking about? Certainly not this  
11 one that we all live in.

12 We have to do better. We have to do better. And  
13 I urge you, please, I beg you to listen to the people  
14 that are testifying. And take it seriously and  
15 address it. Thank you.

16 COUNSEL BREIDBART: Thank you so much. We'll  
17 move on to Ruth Lowenkron. xxx

18 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

19 Good afternoon, Councilmembers. Oh, good  
20 afternoon, Councilmembers. My name is Ruth  
21 Lowenkron. I'm the Director of the Disability  
22 Justice Program at New York lawyers for the Public  
23 Interest. And New York Lawyers for the Public  
24 Interest is a another one of the founding members of  
25 the Access-A-Ride Reform Group, AARRG. And we have



2 been working in this space since I arrived in 2016.

3 And I would like to say that we have had a big hand  
4 in some of the positive changes at the MTA.

5 I'd also like to thank the MTA. I'll start out  
6 by doing that. I understand that Chris Pangilinan  
7 has stayed there to listen to us. And I think that's  
8 a really important thing. He cares. And he has also  
9 been meeting with the advocates regularly, which I  
10 think is another very important thing.

11 And by the way, while I'm giving out thanks, I  
12 want to thank the City Council for allowing me and  
13 others to testify remotely. That is a huge, huge  
14 boon to the disability community. I myself today  
15 needed to testify remotely for a physical reason,  
16 having had surgery yesterday. And it's really-- the  
17 world has changed. And we now know that remote  
18 works. And I want to thank you for recognizing that.

19 I had several papers. Here's my visual of all I  
20 was going to tell you about all of the problems, but  
21 you've heard them and you've heard them from much  
22 better people than I, because they are the ones who  
23 use Access-A-Ride. I don't use it. I just advocate  
24 for its reform.

2 And so what I'm going to do, and this may sound  
3 familiar to Councilmember Lee, the last time I  
4 testified before her, I said yes being the last one,  
5 it's nice to try and pick up on things that everyone  
6 has said, a little melange of testimony. So few  
7 things I think are important.

8 I think the fact that people are mentioning  
9 subway access is hugely connected to Access-A-Ride.  
10 Were it not for the wholly inaccessible subway  
11 system, we wouldn't have an Access-A-Ride program  
12 that's near as large. The Access-A-Ride program,  
13 yes, is mandated by non-discrimination laws,  
14 including the ADA for those who are unable to utilize  
15 traditional mass transit. But typically that does  
16 not mean that they can't use them because the system  
17 itself is inaccessible. So great, as some people  
18 have said that finally the lawsuit has been settled,  
19 I do kind of wonder that it's got to take up till  
20 2055 to finalize what's long been in the law. And  
21 that that will only get us to 95 percent  
22 accessibility--

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time has expired.

24 MS. LOWENKRON: --unless it's what-- I will go on  
25 for a few more moments, if I may. If it's not fully

2 accessible, it's not meaningful. And another really  
3 important thing to talk about, as we say, that's  
4 what's going to make the subway accessible.  
5 Obviously, that lawsuit is about elevators. And  
6 obviously elevators are important. But one thing  
7 that I heard very few people talk about is the fact  
8 that there's a whole other aspect of physical access,  
9 and that is the enormous gap between the subway cars  
10 and the platforms. And that is something that also  
11 needs to be corrected. Coincidentally we have  
12 litigation in that space. And maybe while I'm  
13 talking about litigation, just to note too, that our  
14 office along with others, the advocates were involved  
15 in getting the Fair Fares to be a part of Access-A-  
16 Ride. So and we are also, as Eman mentioned, the  
17 office that worked on getting services for limited  
18 English proficient. So yes, good things maybe to say  
19 about the MTA, but sometimes they have to be sued in  
20 order for it to happen.

21 Um, one area that I'd really like to pick up on  
22 is the fact that one of the prior speakers spoke  
23 about: That if the complaint is that there's not  
24 enough money, and we get that, that the MTA doesn't  
25 have a lot of money, then let's think about ways to

2 bring money into the system. And one very important  
3 way would be to eliminate the Assessment Centers. As  
4 another person mentioned, why do we need assessment  
5 centers? Why can't we do what many, many benefit  
6 programs do and that is rely on the treating  
7 physician? And if there are questions, then bring in  
8 a questioning-- a physician who can question it.  
9 That would save a lot of money. And mind you and  
10 this was a question and the Councilmember, I believe  
11 it was Brooks-Powers asked: And that is what did the  
12 system look like before the MTA took over? In that  
13 regard, that's exactly what it looked like. It was a  
14 system that relied on treating physicians to  
15 determine eligibility. So you not only could do away  
16 with major costs, but do away with some of the horror  
17 stories that Councilmember Hanif spoke about, from  
18 her own personal experience and others spoke of.

19 Um, a couple more quick things--

20 COUNSEL BREIDBART: Thank you, Ruth. Time had  
21 been called. But if you would like you can submit  
22 your testimony. We encourage you to--

23 MS. LOWENKRON: Yeah, I know. But I'm figuring  
24 how everybody else spoke way over the timeframe, I  
25

2 thought maybe you'd give me just a few moments. I'm  
3 getting to the end. May I do that?

4 COUNSEL BREIDBART: Okay.

5 MS. LOWENKRON: Thank you. I appreciate it. I  
6 really-- I've been here since 10 a.m. So thank you.  
7 Just a few quick things to note that the lack of  
8 transportation is the number two contributor to  
9 unemployment amongst people with disabilities, which  
10 is crucial. Another thing to note, that it was  
11 suggested that the reason that the-- the people with  
12 disabilities are getting off well, by being able to  
13 pay only the typical mass transit rate, because they  
14 are allowed to charge more than that, to charge  
15 double. But in fact, that's ignoring the fact that  
16 there is an MOU in place with the city, who wisely  
17 said, "No, you will not charge them more than the  
18 rate you charge anyone else." And I question whether  
19 that would be permissible anyway, as a lawyer, and I  
20 also, in terms of questioning things will say, "We've  
21 talked a lot about the ADA. But we've not talked  
22 about city law, which puts many more benefits in the  
23 pocket of people with disabilities than the federal  
24 laws." But let's think about that, as we think about  
25 what is what is in fact happening on the legal front.

2 Just too close, I'd like to say the key thing is to  
3 make on demand, to expand it. And to, in fact,  
4 ensure that there is no rationing put in place, so  
5 that you are limiting the amount of services. And  
6 it's very crucial, as nobody mentioned, that the cost  
7 of each ride under on-demand was less than half, or  
8 is less than half of any other ride. So the rides  
9 themselves are way cheaper. What becomes more  
10 expensive, as somebody else mentioned, is the fact  
11 that it's a good service and people want it and use  
12 it. Tell me one other group that gets punished for  
13 utilizing a good service.

14 Okay, I have a lot more to say. But I've already  
15 indulged you way more than I should. And I thank you  
16 kindly for those extra moments. I'll submit the rest  
17 in testimony.

18 COUNSEL BREIDBART: Thank you. Yes, please do.  
19 And then we'll call on our last panel. Sharon Suggs,  
20 Tashia Lerebours, Yasmin Campbell, and Zay Zay.  
21 We'll begin with Sharon Suggs.

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time has begun.

23 MS. SUGGS: Hello? Hi, my name is Sharon Suggs.  
24 Thank you very much for calling on me for this panel.  
25 I've been on Access-A-Ride for the last five years.

2 And I'm very grateful and very thankful that I have  
3 the service. It allows me to go to my appointments  
4 and to do the things and keep me active.

5 I have two points about Aaccess-A-Ride. You  
6 know, President exemplifies extraordinary empathy. I  
7 find that the drivers that Access-A-Ride has hired  
8 have no empathy at all with a handicap. They drive  
9 reckless. They-- they speak to you hurry up, hurry  
10 up, hurry up. I've got to go pick up somebody else.  
11 They are more concerned with making a buck than  
12 caring for the people that's in their cars.

13 The second thing is: There's something going on  
14 with the computer system. My address is 66-37. Both  
15 Access-A-Ride, and broker, none of them can put the  
16 dash in there. So I'm late for my appointments every  
17 time because they don't put the dash in there. If  
18 you do not put the dash in my address, you end up at  
19 a 99-Cent store.

20 So I've called and complained several times,  
21 spoke to multiple people. They said that the  
22 computer cannot handle a dash. And I was just  
23 wondering if we could just get some, some decent  
24 drivers. Because I know-- I know. It's hard how  
25 here. I know everybody deserves and needs a job.

2 But I feel that the drivers that are currently  
3 driving us around now is at the bottom of the barrel.  
4 And they really don't respect us handicapped people.  
5 Thank you so much for allowing me to speak.

6 COUNSEL BREIDBART: Thank you so much. We'll  
7 move on to Tashia Lerebours.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time has begun.

9 MS. LEREBOURS: Yes, hello, good afternoon. My  
10 name is Tashia Lerebours. I work for Center for  
11 Independence of the Disabled, New York and I'm also a  
12 member of AARRG. I use Access-A-Ride myself. I've  
13 applied more than once, was denied the first time  
14 because even though I have an invisible disability, I  
15 have epilepsy. But I was not approved because I do  
16 not look disabled. I have a neurological disorder.  
17 I do not-- Unfortunately I no longer can tell when  
18 I'm going to have a seizure. I cannot control that.  
19 Just this week, I've had multiple seizures, and I--  
20 it has interfered with my work.

21 But when the Assessment Center, they question  
22 you, they don't believe you, even with the letters  
23 from my doctor and the bottles of my medication.  
24 It's still right now as-- as a matter of fact, I had  
25 my reassessment, so I'm waiting for them to make



2 their decision. I can still use the service until  
3 they made their decision. So I'm not 100 percent  
4 sure yet.

5 But the number of complaints I have heard from  
6 consumers that I've helped, the number of horror  
7 stories that people will use broker service, which I,  
8 sad to say, is a broken service and needs  
9 improvement.

10 While the MTA spoke of all the improvements and  
11 they invited the people who spoke on what they liked  
12 about the blue and white service, of course, they  
13 didn't have any one spoke about broker service.  
14 Because broker service needs a lot of work. And  
15 finally, in regards to Omni and what they're planning  
16 on doing with the Access-A-Ride: I've been to  
17 multiple community centers, speaking to senior  
18 citizens about Access-A-Ride, Fair Fares, and  
19 whatnot. They do not know about Omni. Talk to them.  
20 Reach out to the senior citizens. Go to the  
21 community centers. Don't just talk about it or post  
22 videos about it on YouTube because not everyone is  
23 tech savvy. It's extremely frustrating. But that's  
24 pretty much all I got to say. Thank you.

2 COUNSEL BREIDBART: Thank you so much. We'll go  
3 on to Yasmin Campbell.

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time has begun.

5 MS. CAMPBELL: Hello, okay, can you hear me?

6 COUNSEL BREIDBART: Yes, we can hear you.

7 MS. CAMPBELL: Okay. I'll make mine real quick.

8 But my name is Yasmin. I am visually impaired and I  
9 live in the Bronx. And just like a lot of other  
10 people here giving testimony my problem was with the  
11 broker services. I have, you know, since been  
12 removed from the broker services, which I didn't know  
13 that that was an option to the blue and white van.  
14 So I do experience a lot better service with the blue  
15 and white vans than I have with a broker services.  
16 And a lot of my complaints were about the  
17 communication. Like a lot of people have said, you  
18 know, some drivers are rude. But there are some good  
19 drivers. i have, you know, given commendations for,  
20 you know, someone who did actually do, you know, do a  
21 very good job to assist me.

22 I think definitely, maybe training, doing more  
23 with the the language barrier for customers. Because  
24 if, you know, you can't communicate with someone,  
25 then how are they supposed to be able to assist me?

2 And or maybe you want to stop using that call out and  
3 assist, because a lot of drivers do not understand  
4 what that means. I also have experience where they  
5 don't understand "dead end street", or like "one  
6 way", and I give as much description when I book my  
7 rides as possible, you know? And for someone who has  
8 a vision problem, you know, I'm always asking  
9 questions, but I, in turn get, "Well, maybe you need  
10 to give a different address." "No, I don't need to  
11 do that. I'm giving you the address where I live.  
12 I'm not going to go somewhere else, just so it's  
13 convenient for you to pick me up from there." You  
14 know, the taxis have been able to find me, you know,  
15 given when I give my regular address. So it's I  
16 don't understand what the problem is. But, you know,  
17 I'm sure that could be worked on.

18 And I'll leave you with one story where I did  
19 have a driver. This was during this time I was on  
20 the broker services. And, like, I was going from the  
21 Bronx to Brooklyn, and was picked up the driver was  
22 speeding the whole way there. And then we got pulled  
23 over on the highway in Brooklyn. So a hole-- and  
24 then the driver was, you know, being really  
25 belligerent with the police officer.

2 So could you imagine what would have happened if  
3 the police decided to arrest the driver on the hot on  
4 the shoulder of the highway with a passenger in the  
5 back? So, you know, needless to say, they just gave  
6 him a ticket. And then we went on to the  
7 destination. And I did report that you know, at the  
8 time that that happened. But and then I did get a  
9 call from the from Access-A-Ride, you know, asking me  
10 what happened. But then I never knew what happened  
11 after that. So I don't know if he's still driving,  
12 you know, with you guys or not. There's never  
13 anything else besides after they find contacted--

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time has expired.

15 MS. CAMPBELL: Yeah, so you know, there's nothing  
16 there's no more follow through after Access-A-Ride  
17 talks with you, you know, to hear your complaints.  
18 So I was wondering, maybe there's some something  
19 could be done, as far as letting passengers know,  
20 like, what was the outcome of the complaint that I  
21 filed.

22 Thank you so much for letting me testify.

23 COUNSEL BREIDBART: Thank you so much. And we'll  
24 go to Zay Zay.

25 ZAY ZAY: Can you hear me?

2 COUNSEL BREIDBART: YYes, we can hear you.

3 ZAY ZAY: Okay, first of all, good afternoon,  
4 everyone. I have been taking Access-A-Ride for a  
5 very long time. Let me, first of all, thank you guys  
6 for having this meeting. I'm very, very thankful and  
7 appreciative that I'm part of it. Thank them for  
8 inviting me in-- in this gallery. I have been taking  
9 Access-A-Ride for a long time, I think over 15 years.  
10 I mean, it is a great service. But it depends on  
11 what experiences. Where, once upon a time, they came  
12 to pick me up on West 51st Street in Manhattan,  
13 instead of bringing me to Staten Island, they took me  
14 into the Bronx.

15 It took me over three hours to come home. During  
16 that time, I make a complaint, but I observed that  
17 the complaint was not going anywhere. Because the  
18 same people that were working with us and the same  
19 people that we are complaining to, two hours after  
20 our complaint was not going anywhere because of that,  
21 I had endured, I made challenges and decided not to  
22 complain. But with this gallery, I think a way to  
23 help us to expedite some of our trips. I know from  
24 today on, I believe that there'll be a change.

2 In regard to that-- to the pilot program. I  
3 think it's a great service, as I heard, I mean,  
4 everyone's talking about it.

5 And that would put an end to it, I think, because  
6 of lack of funding, I don't know.

7 But the bottom line here, first [inaudible] a  
8 driver. But I have observed that most of the drivers  
9 say that, I mean, they don't have enough drivers. So  
10 because of that they came late. So what we have to  
11 work on is the maintenance of resources and enough  
12 financial support. Even with the pilot program, when  
13 there is enough financial support [inaudible] that  
14 service, I think, will be encouraged to be part of  
15 it. I would, yeah, I would like to be part of the  
16 same-- these services.

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

18 ZAY ZAY: Yeah, let me just end. Because if they  
19 know, I mean, that they don't have enough drivers,  
20 why make a reservation? And if you take somebody to  
21 their destination, and you are unable to pick up them  
22 on time, or you forgot about them completely. So  
23 that should be taken to consideration in regard to  
24 financial support. Thank you.

2 COUNSEL BREIDBART: Thank you so much. If we  
3 have inadvertently missed anyone that is registered  
4 to testify today and is yet to be called, please use  
5 the Zoom hand function if you're testifying remotely.  
6 And you will be called the order your hand has been  
7 raised. If you're testifying in person, please come  
8 to the dais.

9 Seeing none, I will now turn it over to Chair Lee  
10 to gavel us out.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEE: Again, thank you so much.  
12 Everyone who has testified in person and on Zoom. We  
13 really appreciate all of your feedback. And believe  
14 me when I say that the staff on the Council read  
15 every single word of all the testimonies that are  
16 submitted. And I just really appreciate the voices  
17 of the advocates. And of course, thank you to Chair  
18 Brooks-Powers and Chair Hudson for-- for holding this  
19 hearing.

20 And with that I will close this out thank you so  
21 much.

22 [GAVEL]

23

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date 03/06/2023