

STATEMENT OF DAVID YASSKY
BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON RULES

March 25, 2010

Good morning Chairman Rivera and members of the Rules Committee. My name is David Yassky and I am here as nominee for the position of Chair of the Taxi and Limousine Commission. I am especially honored to appear before this body, and at the outset I wish to thank the Committee and the Speaker for hearing this nomination so expeditiously.

The vehicles regulated by the TLC – not only taxicabs, but livery cars and the entire for-hire vehicle industry -- are a critical part of the City's transportation network. This industry transports 1.2 million New Yorkers and visitors every day, and employs more than 100,000 workers. The mission of the TLC is to ensure that the industry is safe and efficient, that it delivers good value and is accessible to all passengers, that it provides fair compensation and reasonable working conditions for drivers, that it offers genuine opportunity for entrepreneurs and small businesses, and that it is financially healthy so as to be able to support these outcomes.

Under the leadership of Mayor Bloomberg and Chairman Matt Daus, the TLC has effected numerous service improvements over the past eight years. I will mention only a few:

- Yellow cabs now accept credit cards, an advance that has proved enormously popular with riders.
- New rules prohibiting driver distractions such as cell phone use are making cab rides safer.
- A comprehensive reform of livery car regulation will enhance safety and customer service in that important segment of the industry.
- Nearly a quarter of the taxi fleet is composed of fuel-efficient hybrid cars.
- The innovative pilot program for group rides in taxicabs has the potential to both reduce the cost for passengers and increase driver earnings.
- Of particular importance, the TLC's own performance has improved markedly, with shorter wait times for drivers at licensing and inspection facilities

Of course there is much to be done. I believe that the industry now provides a high level of service to its passengers, but we cannot rest content or take it for granted – we must continually strive for improvement. This is not the time to set forth a detailed agenda, but I do want to outline some of the areas that I intend for the TLC to focus on during my tenure.

First, it is time for the TLC to plan for the next generation of yellow cabs. With its bold "Taxi of Tomorrow" initiative, the TLC has sought to drive change rather than simply respond to it. The goal is to ensure that yellow cabs continue to perform their vital function while improving upon their comfort, fuel efficiency and accessibility to all users.

Even while the "Taxi of Tomorrow" process unfolds, I intend to push forward on these goals. As you know, the City Council took an important step toward making the taxi fleet

accessible to wheelchair-using passengers by mandating the introduction of a small number of wheelchair-accessible cabs, and the TLC has taken another important step with its dispatch pilot program. This pilot program should tell us a lot about what works and what doesn't, and I will carefully evaluate its results to determine what next steps should be taken.

Another immediate priority will be to reassure passengers that they will not be overcharged in taxicabs. As I am sure you were, I was outraged when I learned that some drivers have used the out-of-City rate to overcharge passengers on in-City trips. The TLC working to ascertain how widespread this practice has been; the staff is now in the process of analyzing the data to determine how many of the instances in which the out-of-City rate was applied are likely to have been inadvertent errors and how many are likely to have been deliberate overcharges. I know the Council's Transportation Committee has already scheduled a hearing on this topic, and that will be an opportunity to go through the facts in detail. I can say here that I am determined to see that the practice is completely eliminated – and in fact, the TLC has already taken action to alert passengers if a driver activates the out-of-town rate during their trip. We must also hold drivers who committed deliberate overcharges accountable. We will not act precipitously, but I do intend to move swiftly to begin appropriate enforcement proceedings where the evidence indicates driver misconduct.

Beyond this particular practice, I want to assure the Council that I am committed to tough enforcement of TLC rules guaranteeing passengers fair and consistent pricing.

The rate code episode also points to another priority, which is greater use of data both in enforcement and in planning. Beginning a little over two years ago, when the TLC mandated the use of in-vehicle consoles that employ GPS to record each trip, the TLC has collected a great deal of data on taxicab usage. As has been reported, it was this data that enabled the TLC to find other instances of rate-code-overcharging after a passenger complaint brought the first instance to light. I will direct the TLC staff to search for other opportunities to use data analysis to make its enforcement operations more efficient and effective.

Again, this is certainly not an exhaustive agenda for the TLC, but rather the beginnings of one. In addition to these specific policy issues, I want to make a couple of larger points about the perspective I hope to bring to the agency.

First, I believe the TLC must attend to all parts of the industry it regulates, and ensure that the industry serves all parts of the City effectively. These goals are related, because, in practice, yellow cab service has historically been concentrated in the Manhattan central business district of Manhattan and the nearby residential neighborhoods, while residents of the boroughs other than Manhattan, and of northern Manhattan, are more likely to use livery cars. Public discussion of the industry often focuses on the yellow cabs, and of course they are of critical importance to central to the City's residents and our economy – but ensuring quality service for all New Yorkers means focusing on the livery industry as well, and I intend for the TLC to do that.

Second, I understand that the customers of the TLC include not only the passengers (New Yorkers and visitors alike), and not only its industry partners, but also and crucially the drivers

who are the industry's core workforce. As Chairman, I will be looking actively for opportunities to protect and enhance the welfare of this workforce.

Third, if the Council does confirm my nomination, I will be mindful that the impact of TLC policies often extends beyond New York City. Our for-hire vehicle industry is widely recognized as one of the world's finest and most sophisticated, and TLC itself is a world leader in regulating this type of business. Other cities often wait for New York's TLC to try new ideas - and then follow suit if they work. Under Mayor Bloomberg and Chairman Daus, the stature of the TLC has even increased, and I will strive to continue this record of accomplishment.

I will also be mindful that, in addition to playing a crucial function in our overall transportation network, taxicabs also have a symbolic importance. The yellow taxi is a world-recognized emblem of the City's 24-7 energy and entrepreneurial culture. The TLC is a steward of this icon, and has the opportunity to help define the values it will represent over the coming years. I would relish that opportunity.

Finally, I will of course work closely with the Council, and in particular with the Transportation Committee and Chairman Vacca, for whom I have great respect.

I am happy to answer any questions.



Greater New York Taxi Association

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March 25, 2010

Greater New York Taxi Association (GNYTA) members represent the majority of owners of hybrid and accessible taxis in New York City.

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Several years ago our members had the vision to see clean air taxis and hybrid taxis in particular as an important step in achieving a sustainable City and industry. They invested millions of dollars in clean air taxi medallions. Even though the benefits of cleaner air and more efficient transportation should have been obvious to everyone they were only confronted with a bureaucratic brick wall when they tried to put hybrid taxis on the road. Then Council Member David Yassky shared our vision. He was highly instrumental in pushing for their acceptance by the Taxi and Limousine Commission. He went further by also introducing legislation that made the use of clean air taxis a more attractive alternative for taxi operators. The benefits of cleaner air and more efficient transportation are now clear to everyone.

GNYTA is grateful to David Yassky for spearheading the effort for government acceptance of hybrid taxis and for helping make it easier for taxi operators to afford these more expensive vehicles at no cost to the City or to the taxpayer.

GNYTA endorses Mayor Bloomberg's nomination of David Yassky to be a member of the New York City Taxi and Limousine Commission and the Mayor's intention to then designate him as the next Chair of the Commission.

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