

Taxis for ALL Campaign

June 3, 2008

Testimony before the Transportation Committee of the NYC Council

I am Jean Ryan, a VP of Disabled In Action and Vice-Chair of Taxis for ALL Campaign. The Taxis for ALL Campaign is a coalition of groups and individuals devoted to promoting taxis and for-hire services that are fully accessible to people with disabilities in New York City. We are by far the broadest-based, longest-established and most knowledgeable group in the City on this topic.

We are pleased that the City is taking steps to promote manufacture of a new “iconic taxi,” which we hope will meet the goals of being less polluting, more comfortable for passengers and drivers, and accessible to passengers with disabilities. We are also pleased that the City has passed a regulation requiring black cars to have better gas mileage. However, without also mandating accessibility at the same time, the City is doing the thousands and thousands of City residents and tourists and businesspeople in our city a disservice.

We love clean air. Who doesn't? Many people with disabilities already have breathing problems. We care about the air we breathe and we care about the environment and about the depletion of natural resources. But we also need to get places. But if vehicles can be developed that are cleaner, they can also be developed and *are being developed as we speak that are also accessible, too!* Why not mandate both? **Green and accessible – Perfect together.**

When Sam Sullivan, the mayor of Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, recently came to New York City on a fact-finding trip, he had a horrible experience because he uses a wheelchair. He talked about it on his radio show and his blog and we have it on our website, www.taxisforall.org. He said, and I quote: “It was very difficult arriving at the airport. There were no wheelchair accessible taxis available. I had to be carried into a van by four people and my wheelchair had to be manhandled into a van as well, only to get into Manhattan to get to my hotel.” He was lucky he got there. Many people can't get where they want to go because we don't have accessible taxis and car services to speak of in this City.

Up to now, the TLC, the Mayor, and the City Council seem to have lacked the will to do anything meaningful about it. We don't need anything *special and separate!* We need something universal that everyone can use!

As it stands now, the iconic taxi RFI does not require accessibility at all according to ADA standards! For example, the ADA height specifications for the passenger door opening are 56 inches and the passenger area is 56 inches, and there are requirements for a wheelchair restraint system and a ramp. The RFI's Vehicle Technical Specifications do not include any of these requirements and only specify that the doorframe has to be 38 inches high (VTS 2.8.6). No one in a wheelchair could get into a doorframe that low.

Furthermore, the Vehicle Technical Specifications 2.8.6 permit the passenger doorsill to be 13-16 inches above the ground, and that is far too high for many people with mobility disabilities.

Additionally, there is no provision in the Vehicle Technical Specifications for audio output for the meter or other technology for the benefit of people who are visually impaired, (VTS 2.4.1) or for any accommodation for people with hearing impairments such as an induction “loop” to help people with hearing aids to understand the driver-passenger intercom or audio systems, (VTS 2.10.18 and 2.10.21).

Despite our numerous requests, the iconic taxi committee which drew up the RFI refused to include anyone from the Taxis for *ALL* Campaign. Why not? Why don't they want to make the iconic taxi *accessible*? Or was this a huge oversight? We wouldn't know. We weren't on the committee and couldn't have input.

As it stands now, people who use wheelchairs and have major mobility problems in this City and who need accessible taxis cannot reliably get them. We cannot get accessible car services because they hardly exist. We usually have to call days in advance and pay exorbitant rates by credit card. For car service! Last year when my wheelchair wheel broke, I was going to have to pay 45 dollars and wait 2 hours to go 7 blocks instead of waiting 10 minutes and paying 5 dollars if I were ambulatory. Is that equivalent service like the regulations call for? The TLC knows what is happening and does nothing about it.

In short, we care about clean air and we also want accessibility. To have vehicles with both will benefit everyone. It will mean that people will be able to transport their children in strollers easily. They will be able to haul their bulky packages easily and bring their suitcases and golf clubs into the car with them instead of putting them in the trunk, if they want to. It will mean that they will have room to transport their pets. They will have leg room if they are tall.

We encourage the City Council to think about the aging population in this City, to think about the rising costs of Access-A-Ride, to think about the tourist business and how the lack of accessible taxis and car services is hurting this City, is making life very stressful and costly in many ways, driving up Medicaid costs and Access-A-Ride costs because people can't get an accessible car services or taxis. We encourage the City Council to require all taxis to be green and accessible.

Respectfully submitted,

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