



Paratransit Testimony

Good afternoon Chairperson Ayala, Chairperson Chin, Chairperson Rodriguez and members of the Mental Health, Disabilities and Addiction, Aging, and Transportation Committees. I would like to thank you for this opportunity to discuss Access-A-Ride. I am Craig Cipriano, the acting President of MTA Bus Company/Senior Vice President for New York City Transit Bus. I'm joined here today by the Vice President of Paratransit Michael Cosgrove and the Senior Advisor for Systemwide Accessibility, Alex Elegudin.

I manage the MTA's Bus and Paratransit operations. Mike manages the day-to-day operations of the Paratransit program. And, we work closely with Alex, who is the first-ever Senior Advisor for Systemwide Accessibility and a valued colleague and partner in shaping our vision for Paratransit as we look to the future.

New York City Transit's Fast Forward Plan is intended to modernize every aspect of our operations. A key aspect of this plan is to expedite work to make the transit system fully accessible as quickly as possible. To this end, Alex has assembled a world-class team that is laser-focused on making our vision a reality. As you know, we're investing an unprecedented \$5.2 billion to add 70 new accessible stations to the subway system – more than meeting our goal that no customer is ever more than two stations away from an accessible station.

Paratransit service is provided for people who meet the eligibility criteria set forth in the American Disabilities Act of 1990. It's important to note, our service today goes above and beyond the requirements set forth in the ADA. ADA requirements include origin-to-destination and door-to-door service where needed, next day reservations, no restrictions on trip purpose, and zero denials.

To give you some background on the City's AAR system, our Paratransit service is the largest in North America, performing over 8 million trips a year. We have 160,000 registrants with approximately 68,000 active New Yorkers in any given month. This month we reached a peak of 33,700 trips scheduled in a single day, our highest number ever. 71% of registrants are over 65 years of age and 15% use a wheelchair. And this year's budget for Paratransit was \$614 million.

The MTA assumed responsibility for providing Paratransit service under the 1993 Agreement with the City. There is a partial annual subsidy from the City, which amounts to the lesser of: (1) 33% of the MTA's net Paratransit operating expenses; or (2) a 20% increase over the subsidy paid by the City in the prior year. Since taking over the program, Paratransit ridership has seen a six-fold increase in registrants, from 25,000 to more than 160,000 and the total number of

trips has increased 1900% since 1994. Both registrants and ridership are only expected to continue to increase in 2020 and beyond.

Although the ADA allows agencies to charge up to double the base fare for paratransit service, based on the 1993 agreement with the City, our paratransit customers pay the standard base fare. This is an important note when thinking about the budgetary aspects you will hear from us on today.

As a result, our net operating deficit has risen from \$11 million in 1994 to \$548 million today. Of that, the City will pay only \$176.4 million, leaving us with the remaining balance of \$371.9 million, which is twice as much as the City's share.

The reality is that the City's contribution to Paratransit's net operating expense has not kept pace with the growth in demand and accelerated investments in service. Given our current financial outlook, it is no longer sustainable for the MTA to shoulder a disproportionately high share of the operating expenses. We believe that an equal 50% share of the costs is fair. As you may know, in many jurisdictions across New York, the locality covers the full amount of Paratransit costs and in other cities dedicated taxes have been appropriated to help share this expense.

Service Improvements:

I want to take a moment to highlight how we've gotten to where we are today and how we have improved our services to facilitate the type of growth we are seeing. Over the last three years in particular, we've made great strides as part of Fast Forward.

We simplified the registration application and improved the eligibility process by reducing reassessments. The no-show/late cancellation policy was updated and simplified. In 2019, we've introduced 700 new dedicated service vehicles to replace older vehicles approaching their end of serviceable life. Customers can now take advantage of improved GPS tracking to follow their trips on an app and a [webpage](#). Thanks to a collaborative effort with advocates and our partners at NYC DOT, dedicated carrier vehicles now have access to bus lanes. We launched an on-demand e-hail pilot, and we will be doubling the pool of participants as part of the next phase in early 2020. To increase transparency, we're now regularly publishing performance metrics on a public dashboard. We've also introduced a customer Bill of Rights, and instituted improvements for driver training. There's also a new scheduling, dispatching and AVL system in development.

These changes have led to significant improvements in service. The numbers speak for themselves. Since this time last year, on-time performance for primary Carrier Pick Up within a 30-minute window is up to 97%. Broker Pick Up On-Time-Performance within a 30-minute window is up to 96%. Average Trip Duration is down 7 minutes from last year to 37 minutes in October 2019. Primary Carrier no-shows are down to less than one per thousand scheduled

trips in October 2019, compared to 2 per thousand in October 2018. Broker no-shows are also down to less than one per thousand over the same period.

Our customers have also been telling us that they're satisfied with service. In our latest customer satisfaction survey, 89% of respondents said they were satisfied with their most recent AAR trip. This is an increase of 24 percentage points when compared to 2016.

Cost Containment Measures:

Along with customer service, the MTA has also prioritized financial responsibility in Paratransit, with reforms dating back to 2010. These include:

- Leveraging fixed route services by introducing feeder service and a free fare MetroCard.
- Reviewing contracts to find potential cost savings. In 2010, this yielded savings of \$83.4 million over 10 years. In our 2013 -2015 Carrier Reviews, we found another \$31 million in annual recurring savings. And in 2019, efforts to cut costs across the entire MTA yielded \$14.7 million over 2 years.
- We're fully leveraging our ability to perform AAR trips in taxis and for-hire vehicles, which have a lower cost per trip than dedicated vehicles, in cases where such services meet our customers' needs. In the last several years, we've shifted service being performed by dedicated carrier vehicles from 70% down to 40%. 60% of trips are now being performed by taxi and FHV's – leading to \$33.2 million in recurring savings.
- We've also reviewed schedules to improve dedicated carrier productivity.

Current Financial Situation:

While we have been laser-focused on cost containment measures, the substantial investments we've made in Paratransit, along with service improvements, has led to a boom in ridership.

Since 2017 alone, we have seen a 7% increase in customer growth, a 31% increase in trips, and a 29% increase in the budget. This shows no signs of slowing down. In fact, when we look at the overall demographics of the City, there is a much larger population of potentially eligible customers, including 1.1 million persons with disabilities and another 1.1 million that are over the age of 65.

With that, I'll let Alex take over for the next portion of our testimony.

(ALEX TAKES OVER)

As Craig mentioned, we are working on numerous efforts to improve Paratransit service for our customers. There is no silver-bullet solution when it comes to Paratransit, so we are taking a multi-pronged approach to create a more flexible, responsive service that's based on the vehicle mix that best serves our customers, and that the MTA can manage responsibly and sustainably.

As Craig mentioned earlier, we are fully committed to expanding the availability of taxis and for-hire vehicles to take trips where it makes sense for our customers. We have heard loud and clear from many who say that they prefer to travel by taxi, and that they enjoy the efficiency and potential flexibility that this mode offers.

That's why, earlier this year, we launched our enhanced broker service. We now offer fully ADA-compliant service with a high level of driver training and customer assistance. Customers can book their trip on the app or website and track the vehicle as it arrives.

While we faced some challenges over the summer as we transitioned to this new program, we are confident we have reached a real milestone in terms of our enhanced broker service. We are doing approximately 18,000 trips on an average weekday with an on-time performance in the mid 90%.

We also added a new broker to provide service on Staten Island, bringing parity in service across the City. The brokers are adding more wheelchair accessible vehicles to their fleets and continuing to train more drivers with the skills needed to successfully perform Access-A-Ride trips. Overall, we see this transition as a way to make taxi and for-hire vehicle trips an even more integral part of our service mix. We believe that this modal shift is responsive to customer feedback and needs.

About 60% of our trips are currently carried out through broker service, and we intend to grow this number in future months. This is yet another of our strategic cost containment efforts, which Craig spoke to a few minutes ago, as well an effort to improve customer service.

The average broker trip costs about \$34, while that same trip would cost \$85 on a dedicated carrier. This modal shift represents significant potential savings over time, as we right-size our dedicated carrier fleet.

We continue to work closely with our partners at the TLC to educate drivers and the industry around this program – and the important opportunity it provides for the taxi industry.

Of course, moving trips to taxis is only one part of the equation. We are working on many ways to improve our dedicated carrier service, which remains an integral element of our system and a mode that will always be needed by a significant portion of our customers who require various levels of assistance. It not only serves some of our customers who can't use taxis or FHV's but helps us to meet our zero-denial mandate.

We know that, at times, paratransit customers' travel needs may change, and they cannot plan this in advance. We are looking at options to offer this kind flexibility, and make trips faster for everyone involved. We will have more on that in the future. But know that we hear our customers – and their representatives here today – and share the goal of building a more flexible system.

Of course, the on-demand pilot program represents the greatest possible flexibility we could offer. Through this pilot, which has been running for about two years, 1,200 of our customers can book trips at any time using a smart phone app. Although this service has received rave customer reviews, we are still studying how best to implement it and its capacity to serve a greater portion of the AAR customer base.

Throughout the pilot, we have seen previously low-use Paratransit customers become high users, and previously high users taking 100+ trips/month. Our experience to date is that some low users have increased their trips 10-fold, some medium users have doubled their trips, and some high users have increased their trips by about 30%. While we are glad to see our customers using the service, we are also closely monitoring the costs of this program.

As I announced to our Board last month, we will be expanding the pilot to 2400 participants starting in early 2020, with new parameters in the form of caps and subsidies designed to make the program more sustainable. Customers will be able to take up to 16 on-demand trips each month, with a subsidy of up to \$15 per trip. This model is consistent with the structure of on-demand service in peer cities like Boston and Chicago, and we believe it is a good start for a next phase of the pilot.

Of course, AAR customers will continue to have unlimited access to our traditional, ADA-compliant Paratransit service – the zero-denial mandate remains a core tenet of our service. The on-demand service will provide another option for participating customers to take truly spontaneous trips or adjust when plans change.

We hear our customers when they say how life-changing on-demand service has been for them. But it's important to note that we view e-hail as another type of service for Paratransit, not a replacement for traditional service. Our own data shows us clearly that customers need different service modes – even on-demand pilot participants still take trips on our primary carrier service – and we have an obligation to continue providing these options.

We need to continue testing on-demand service to best determine how it fits into our full service picture, and how we can offer this valuable option to more of our customers.

It is absolutely our goal to continue to expand on-demand service in the future. We remain equally committed to all the other service improvements we have discussed today.

However, to get there we need the City to come to the table as a partner. Expanding access to on-demand service and offering more flexibility for all of our customers will have a cost, and that will mean expanding our budget envelope. So, we are here today in part to continue that conversation.

We know all of you will be interested in seeing what we learn from the next phase of the on-demand pilot, and we are happy to share that information as we have it. We appreciate all the

City has done to support Paratransit service to date, and we ask you to seriously consider the request from our Chairman to re-evaluate the 1993 cost sharing agreement.

As this discussion develops, we will continue our investment and focus on improving the user experience for all of our customers – whether they use on-demand, broker, dedicated carrier or all of the above. We look forward to continued dialogue about how we can work together, as partners, to provide this vital service for tens of thousands of New Yorkers, and do so in a sustainable, responsible way. And, just want to highlight again that the Access-A-Ride program of today has made tremendous strides in service and performance over the Access-A-Ride service of yesterday, as evidenced by the unprecedented growth we've seen and all the metrics we presented to you today. Yes, once in a while you may hear a story from a constituent about a negative experience with one of our trips, but that is the exception and not the rule today, and I say that with full confidence. We're now happy to take your questions.



DISABLED IN ACTION OF METROPOLITAN NEW YORK
POST OFFICE BOX 30954, PORT AUTHORITY STATION
NEW YORK, NY 10011-0109 TEL/FAX 718-261-3737
www.disabledinaction.org

Testimony by Jean Ryan at AAR Oversight Hearing in City Council 12/18/19

Hello. It seems that every time something is working better in Access-A-Ride and they are providing more meaningful service, ridership and number of trips go up. Uh-oh, they must say to each other. They don't want increased ridership because they say it's too expensive, never mind that people with disabilities have to get places to work and school and medical care and social events. Nope, they want to stop this from happening, so what can they do to reduce and discourage ridership this time? Last time they instituted in-person testing, lowered appeals success rate, and then they put a lot of people on feeder service whereby AAR riders would be driven to a bus stop or train station for the rest of their trip. Never mind that there was no shelter or the trip took extra-long or the person could not ride without a seat. Not their problem. Many people got so discouraged because they could not get places that they didn't even reapply for AAR when it was time.

Fast forward to 2019. The MTA has a popular taxi pilot program which allows people with disabilities – us -- to call a cab and take rides spontaneously without having to book trips a day in advance and try to guess when we will need transportation, when the city council hearing or meeting or doctor appointment will be over or when we need or want a spontaneous trip. What if we have an emergency in our family? The MTA plans to only allow 16 trips per month and will only pay \$15 dollars per trip. Guess what? That will have the same effect that the feeder service had on people with disabilities. It will again make us stuck in our homes and doing way less because we cannot get around quickly or spontaneously the same day.

We are being punished for having a disability and for wanting to be productive! Who is the sick one? The MTA!

We want to be able to take same-day cab rides so we can be productive and accomplish things. We do not want a cap on distance, on amount, or on number of trips.

Thank you.

Jean Ryan, President, Disabled In Action of Metropolitan NY
pansies007@gmail.com
917-658-0760

N Y L P I

**JUSTICE THROUGH
COMMUNITY POWER**

**Comments of Eman Rimawi, New York Lawyers for the Public Interest
To the New York City Council
Regarding the Access-A-Ride Program
December 18, 2019**

Good afternoon, Chairs Ayala, Chin, and Rodriguez and all committee members, and thank you for holding this important hearing on Access-A-Ride.

My name is Eman Rimawi, and I am the Access-A-Ride Campaign Coordinator and Organizer at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest. Since its first days in November 2017, I have used Access-a-Ride's on-demand pilot program to commute to a full-time job, to healthcare appointments, and to social events with my family, friends, and my partner. I also use "traditional" AAR, for which I have to book a trip at least one day in advance.

While there are bumps and snags in the pilot program –there are huge differences between the two programs, and I truly hope that an on-demand service is the future of paratransit.

With the traditional service, it is impossible for me to know whether my trip will take one hour or two. I don't know how many other riders we might pick up, and how many of them will get dropped off before me, possibly in other boroughs or neighborhoods far from my route. When I use this service, I am routinely late for work – despite waking up at 6 AM to catch my ride - and I can't alter my schedule to accommodate meetings, events, or an impromptu happy hour with colleagues and friends.

The on-demand pilot program has changed all of that, and has been truly liberating for paratransit riders like me.

AARRG! – the Access-A-Ride Reform Group – of which New York Lawyers for the Public Interest is a founding member, has three simple demands to ensure the survival and success of on-demand service.

1. Gradually **expand the number of riders who can participate in the on-demand pilot**. Eventually, all AAR users should have access to on-demand, but to allow the MTA to plan for the expansion, the program needs a representative sample of the AAR community, to achieve a proportional mix of high, medium, and low frequency riders, riders of different ages, and geographic distribution across the boroughs.
2. **Do not ration the service**. Other transit users with Metro Cards do not face the artificial limits on the number of trips or the length of those trips that the MTA has proposed for paratransit riders. And it is especially inappropriate to impose such restrictions before accurately measuring the true need for, and cost of, this pilot program.
3. Work with drivers and vendors to **ensure that on-demand service is available throughout the city**, including the currently-excluded Staten Island. For on-demand service to be truly successful, it needs to be

available across each borough, which means having sufficient vehicles and trained drivers who are able to complete trips.

The On-Demand pilot has been an extraordinary success at a relatively small cost to the MTA. We urge the City, the State, and the MTA to work together to save this innovative program, to conduct a more extensive Phase 2 pilot, without any restrictions, and to return to New York's legislative bodies to discuss funding once the true costs and benefits of this program are clear.

We look forward to working with each of you to ensure that New York City is indeed one of the fairest cities in the world for people with disabilities.

Eman Rimawi
New York Lawyers for the Public Interest
151 West 30th Street, 11th floor
New York, NY 10001
rlowenkron@nylpi.org
(212) 244-4664

For over 40 years, New York Lawyers for the Public Interest has been a leader in advocating for marginalized New Yorkers, working to accomplish equality of opportunity for all. NYLPI utilizes a community lawyering model to bridge gaps between traditional civil legal services and civil rights advocacy, and to fortify capacity for both individual solutions and long-term impact.

NYLPI's work encompasses comprehensive organizing, policy campaigns, impact litigation, and individual legal services, and we are guided by the priorities of our communities as we advocate for the rights of people with disabilities, equal access to health care, immigrant opportunity, invigorated local non-profits, and environmental justice for low-income communities of color.

NYLPI's Disability Justice Program works to achieve equality of opportunity, self-determination, and independence for people with disabilities. Our advocacy spans community integration, access to justice, educational rights, equal access to programs and services, and fair housing.

NYLPI is a founding member of the Access-A-Ride Reform Group (AARRG!), which advocates for an affordable, efficient, and functional paratransit program for New Yorkers with disabilities who cannot use our largely inaccessible mass transit system.



Making New York a better place to age

**New York City Council
Joint Hearing
Committee on Aging, Chair Margaret Chin
Committee on Mental Health, Disabilities and Addiction, Chair Diana Ayala
Committee on Transportation, Chair Ydanis Rodriguez
December 18, 2019
Oversight: Access-A-Ride**

Thank you to Chairpersons Chin, Ayala, Rodriguez, and the full committees, for holding this important hearing on Access-A-Ride. My name is Frederica Bepler, I am an intern at LiveOn NY, and a graduate student in social work at Fordham University. I am also a lifelong New Yorker and caregiver for an elderly parent.

LiveOn NY's members include more than 100 community-based organizations that provide more than 1,000 programs to serve older New Yorkers. These core services include senior centers, home-delivered meals, NORCs, case management, transportation, and homecare. Through our policy efforts, LiveOn advocates to increase funding and capacity for our members to meet the needs of older adults in their communities.

Whenever the topic of Access-A-Ride (AAR) comes up with our members or clients, we often hear about the long wait times, and even longer rides, that clients have to contend with. New York City has always struggled with how to serve disabled New Yorkers in need of transportation. But we are poised at a moment when the City can use its resources and capacities to further expand programs that we know are working—like on-demand E-hail and transportation programs through community-based providers—and establish a strong base of support for disabled and older New Yorkers.

Any number of us here have our own woes when it comes to riding the subway; but as an able-bodied person, I recognize my privilege in that I'm even able to ride the train. The majority of disabled New Yorkers do not live near an accessible station, and instead must rely on surface transit. Even those who do live near accessible stations contend with broken elevators, broken escalators, and difficult conditions when either are actually working. Even so, the delays and inconvenience that the average AAR user faces are much worse than anything I could say about relying on the G train during rush hour. **The fact is that Access-A-Ride users deserve the dignity of a transit system that meets their needs.**

There are solutions that exist, since the introduction of Access-A-Ride's on demand E-hail pilot program, and the further incorporation of more broker services into the Access-A-Ride system, AAR's metrics have consistently improved along with overall satisfaction with AAR. As seen in the MTA Board's December Agenda, paratransit numbers have improved in impressive ways in 2019. The further technological expansion hinted at for 2020 sounds promising. But the proposed \$15 subsidy cap runs counter to the needs of the population that AAR is meant to serve—low income, disabled and elderly New Yorkers who cannot afford to regularly hire cabs or drivers.

According to the *Daily News*, in MTA Board Chair Pat Foye's letter to the Mayor about Access-A-Ride, he stated that the new subsidy cap is comparable to ones in cities like Boston, Chicago, and Washington, D.C. But all three of those cities have something that New York City does not: an accessible subway system.

- Chicago's subway system is 67% accessible.
- Boston's subway system is 74% accessible.
- Washington, D.C.'s subway system is 100% accessible.
- **New York City's subway system is only 25% accessible.**

LiveOn NY

Making New York a better place to age

A longtime employee from our benefits outreach program recently underwent ankle surgery, and as she was unable to manage the stairs to her subway station, she experienced Access-A-Ride and the E-hail pilot program firsthand. She called the E-hail program "perfect" and "the best thing ever," and said that she found her rides convenient, well-organized, and efficient. But when she had to use traditional Access-A-Ride, she described disorganized rides in vans that were often filled to capacity, showed up late, and would take her far out of her way—in one instance driving from Manhattan, up past her neighborhood in the West Bronx, and into the East Bronx, before doubling back to drop her off. She said that many people she knows refers to it as "Astress-A-Ride." **Given the divergent experiences between traditional Access-A-Ride and the new E-hail program, expanding on-demand E-hail, and establishing its permanency, should be a priority for the City and the agency.** Expansion could also have the added bonus of bringing in more medallion cab drivers to the program, and help to ameliorate one of the City's other great transit challenges.

We are incredibly proud and appreciative of the ingenuity of individual council members to create and fund alternatives to this system, likely as a result of concerns voiced from constituents. For example, Council Members Vallone and Koo came together to provide a transportation service for older adults living in Eastern Queens by providing discretionary funds to LiveOn NY's member, Selfhelp Community Services, to provide rides to seniors en route to their medical appointments. One of LiveOn's long-time volunteers recently underwent surgery and had a series of medical appointments as a result of the procedure. In the past, she would struggle to make those critical appointments using Access-a-Ride; but this time, she decided to use Selfhelp's transportation program, and said this about her experience, "They were kind enough to recognize my need and provided the necessary round trip with extremely kind and supportive drivers." **New York City should look to further expand and support these proven successful, in-demand, and cost-efficient transportation alternatives that were piloted in Queens.**

Finally, LiveOn NY would be remiss if we did not further encourage the MTA to continue to improve and expedite the accessibility of *all* of New York's subway stations. We further support Speaker Johnson and the New York City Council's efforts to realize this goal, in the release of their Zoning for Transit Accessibility proposal. This, in conjunction with effective alternatives like the Queens transportation pilot program, E-hail for Access-A-Ride, and general improvements to the timeliness and service of traditional Access-A-Ride, can create a city that's accessible to all New Yorkers, including those with mobility limitations.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important issue.

LiveOn NY's members provide the core, community-based services that allow older adults to thrive in their communities. With a base of more than 100 community-based organizations serving at least 300,000 older New Yorkers annually. Our members provide services ranging from senior centers, congregate and home-delivered meals, affordable senior housing with services, elder abuse prevention services, caregiver supports, case management, transportation, and NORCs. LiveOn NY advocates for increased funding for these vital services to improve both the solvency of the system and the overall capacity of community-based service providers.

LiveOn NY also administers a citywide outreach program and staffs a hotline that educates, screens and helps with benefit enrollment including SNAP, SCRIE and others, and also administers the Rights and Information for Senior Empowerment (RISE) program to bring critical information directly to seniors on important topics to help them age well in their communities.

José Hernandez
President United Spinal Association NYC Chapter
120-34 Queens Blvd, Suite 320
Kew Gardens, NY 11415
JHernandez@unitedspinal.org
718-803-3782 x7188

Wednesday, December 18, 2019

Committee on Transportation
Committee on Mental Health, Disabilities and Addiction
Committee on Aging
Council Chambers,
City Hall, New York, NY

Re: Oversight - Access-A-Ride

My name is Jose Hernandez. I am the NYC Advocacy Coordinator at United Spinal Association and I am a Civic Engagement Commissioner appointed by the Mayor in 2019.

I want to specifically address the downfalls of the current Access a Ride program, the Access a Ride program as it stands cost the MTA \$85 per trip with an estimated 8 million trips in 2019. It looks like the MTA is spending an estimated \$680 million on the current Access a Ride program. The system is antiquated and inefficient, all too frequently the carriers are over 30 minutes late and at times take members on rides through multiple boroughs to pick up other members making the trips over an hour and a half long or more.

The access a ride service needs an overhaul there is no reason why the MTA should be spending \$680 million on a program that does not have a real-time component and a streamlined reservation system. Also, it should have a modern navigation system so that riders can track their vehicles in real-time. Paratransit riders should not feel trapped in a vehicle when having to go from one borough to another. To give you an example of this I have booked a ride from the Bronx into Manhattan and for some reason have been taken into Queens to be then taken into Manhattan. This is inefficient and a waste of time, a modern system could have found someone that was already going into Manhattan or someone already in Manhattan to pick up followed by my drop off.

Now to discuss the E Hail pilot program, this program allows Access a Ride consumer to use yellow and green cabs instead of the traditional blue-and-white buses. According to Alex Elegudin the MTAs Senior Advisor to Systemwide Accessibility it cost the MTA an average of \$35 per ride a cost savings of \$50 per ride. Recently the MTA has chosen to completely destroy

its successful E Hail program by imposing a 16 ride per month limit and even worse capping the trip cost to \$15 per ride with anything above that being the responsibility of the MTA paratransit consumer. In today's current environment before you get into a taxicab the meter already reads \$3.50 and if you have to cross one of the tolls that would add an additional \$6.15. So, if you're crossing from Queens into Manhattan using the pilot program you get into a yellow or green taxicab \$3.50 is already accounted for additionally \$6.15 for the toll is already accounted for so before you even go anywhere \$9.65 is already accounted for. I'm not sure where in New York City you are going for \$5.35.

I am not sure the reasoning behind the decision, however, this would shift the current members of the pilot program to again use of the unreliable regular Access a Ride on white buses which by Mr. Elegudin's own words cost \$85 per ride. A better solution would be to limit the E Hail program rides to two round trips per day and a cap of \$50 per ride. Study how that would affect the program and its budget. Boston has a similar pilot program where the paratransit member pays for the first \$1 of a trip taken in an UberPool and anything over \$41 and for all other Uber, Lyft and Curb trips the member would pay for the first \$2 dollars and anything over \$42.

Individuals with disabilities cannot use the MTAs subway system like everyone else. With only 27% of their 472 subway stations being ADA accessible stations, we lack the adequate means to get around the city. Access a Ride is sometimes the only way some individuals with disabilities can get to and from work, family events and to just live life. The MTA made getting around the city as a person with a disability a whole lot easier when they put together the E Hail pilot program allowing us to get around freely with same-day service. Unfortunately, they are deciding to essentially kill the program.

I asked that you look at the E hail program and urged the MTA to change the program not to make it worse but to create a program that works for paratransit consumers and the MTA. Other cities have done this successfully there is no reason why New York City can't.

Thank you



NYPIRG

Straphangers Campaign

a project of the New York Public Interest Research Group Fund

9 Murray Street, Lower Level • New York, NY 10007-2259 • 212-349-6460 • www.straphangers.org

**TESTIMONY OF
JAQI COHEN, CAMPAIGN DIRECTOR
ON BEHALF OF THE
NYPIRG STRAPHANGERS CAMPAIGN
BEFORE THE
NYC COUNCIL OVERSIGHT HEARING ON ACCESS-A-RIDE
NEW YORK, NY
December 18, 2019**

Good afternoon, and thank you for the opportunity to be here today. My name is Jaqi Cohen and I am the Campaign Director for the NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign, a transit riders advocacy group.

In New York City, access to mobility means access to greater opportunity. Yet a significant number of New Yorkers are unable to benefit from our city's expansive transit network due to limited mobility, age, or disability. Three quarters of New York City's 472 subway stations are inaccessible, and the few elevators that exist in the system are subject to frequent outages and breakdowns¹. According to a 2018 report by the New York City Comptroller's office, 640,000 New Yorkers are currently living in "ADA transit deserts" without a single accessible subway station in their neighborhoods.²

Subways and buses are not the only way for straphangers to travel the boroughs. Access-a-Ride (AAR) is the MTA's surface paratransit service, required by the federal Americans Disabilities Act for New Yorkers with disabilities who cannot access subways or buses. It is a 24-hour, 7 day a week service, operating in all five boroughs as well as parts of Westchester and Nassau counties. Access-A-Ride currently provides vital transit service to 150,000 New Yorkers annually.

Although thousands of New Yorkers depend on paratransit each day, Access-A-Ride has a long history of maintaining a toxic reputation among its riders. Vehicles often arrive late or not at all, riders are taken on unnecessary detours, and there is no way for a rider to predict or even anticipate when they will arrive at their destination. Access-A-Ride is a "shared-ride" service, meaning drivers will often pick up multiple passengers on their trip. This often leads to longer

¹ Barron, James. "For Disabled Subway Riders, the Biggest Challenge Can Be Getting to the Train." *New York Times*, 26 July 2018, www.nytimes.com/2018/07/26/nyregion/disabled-subway-riders-elevators.html.

² Comptroller Stringer: 'ADA Transit Deserts' Leave 640,000 New Yorkers Stranded Without a Single Accessible Station in Their Neighborhood. comptroller.nyc.gov/newsroom/comptroller-stringer-ada-transit-deserts-leave-640000-new-yorkers-stranded-without-a-single-accessible-station-in-their-neighborhood/

rides, and it is not uncommon it to take multiple hours for an Access-A-Rider to reach their final destination, even if they're not traveling very far.

Many of the challenges faced by Access-A-Riders are by design. According to the MTA's own *Trip Planner* site, a subway ride from MTA Headquarters at 2 Broadway in Manhattan to Grand Central Terminal is expected to take 13 minutes, yet Access-A-Ride's own Maximum Ride Time guidelines determine the same trip taken via Access-A-Ride is expected to take over an hour.³ According to the MTA's paratransit dashboard, Access-A-Ride's on-time performance in September 2019 was 95%. But the agency's metrics don't tell the full story. A dedicated Access-a-Ride carrier is considered "on-time" even when it picks up passengers up to 30 minutes later than its scheduled arrival time, as well as a 15 minute arrival window for broker vehicles. A 2016 audit of the program conducted by NYC Comptroller Stringer's office found that in 2015 alone, 31,492 Access-A-Ride customers were left stranded without a pickup, and less than 50% of one broker car services' trips were considered "on-time".⁴

Adding to the frustration of many Access-A-Riders are the firm trip booking restrictions in place. Access-A-Riders are required to book their travel at least a day in advance, with trips booked no later than 5PM the day before travel, meaning freedom of day-to-day travel is severely limited.⁵ If a rider needs to cancel a trip, they must do so three hours before the trip is scheduled, or risk obtaining a violation from the MTA. Riders with numerous violations risk losing access to Access-A-Ride service altogether.⁶

Even something as simple as fare payment can serve as an impediment to Access-A-Riders. The Access-A-Ride fare costs the same as a subway or bus fare at \$2.75 per trip. Unlike subways or bus riders, however, Access-A-Riders are required to pay their fare in exact change and cannot use MetroCards to pay for their trips. Not only is this a major inconvenience, but it also means that Access-A-Riders are not eligible for many of the same fare discounts as subway or bus riders, like unlimited MetroCards. What's worse, while paratransit users are eligible for pre-tax commuter benefits, low-income Access-A-Riders are not eligible for Fair Fares as the program is administered via MetroCards.⁷

³ Metropolitan Transportation Authority, *Maximum Ride Times*, Guide to Access-A-Ride Service:
<http://web.mta.info/nyct/paratran/guide1.htm#RideTimes>

⁴ Comptroller Stringer: Audit Report of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's Oversight of the Access-A-Ride Program.
<http://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/audit-report-of-the-metropolitan-transportation-authoritys-oversight-of-the-access-a-ride-program/>

⁵ Metropolitan Transportation Authority, *Making a Reservation and Managing Trips*:
<https://new.mta.info/accessibility/paratransit/making-a-reservation-and-managing-trips>

⁶ New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, *Using Access-A-Ride Factsheet*:
<https://nylpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/AAR-Fact-Sheet-Using-Final-8.2012.pdf>

⁷ Chung, Jen. "City Says 50,000 New Yorkers Have Enrolled In Half-Price MetroCard Program." Gothamist, 5 June 2019, gothamist.com/news/city-says-50000-new-yorkers-have-enrolled-in-half-price-metrocard-program.

While there are no shortages of challenges facing Access-A-Riders each day, there is hope for change. In 2017, many Access-A-Riders celebrated the creation of a new e-hail pilot program, which allowed Access-A-Rider to hail a yellow or green cab through a ride-hailing app on demand. For the 1,200 riders enrolled in the program, this pilot transformed AAR service for the better, providing shorter trips, easier trip-hailing, and more flexibility for its riders. Despite its popularity and broad support from riders and advocates alike, the fate of Access-A-Ride the on-demand e-hail pilot is dire. While the MTA announced it plans to expand its on-demand e-hail paratransit pilot service to an additional 1,200 riders, it will significantly reduce service. This service reduction includes a limit on rides to 16 rides per month as well as a \$15 subsidy cap. The future of Access-A-Ride should be one that includes, and expands, unlimited on-demand e-hail service to all paratransit riders.

If done right, on-demand e-hail service has the potential to become one of the greatest success stories to come out of the MTA in recent years. The authority has a chance to transform a service that has failed its riders into a shining example of what paratransit can look like in transit systems all of America's big cities. Yet the MTA has chosen to weaken its program that has been lauded as "life changing"⁸ by so many of its users, opting instead to provide pilot users with on-demand service on a severely limited basis.

Accessibility of New York City's vast transit system was made a top priority in the MTA's next 5-year capital plan with the addition of 70 newly accessible subway stations. Yet the agency cannot claim it is serious about improving accessibility until it provides decent service to the almost 150,000 New Yorkers who depend on Access-A-Ride each day.

⁸Rappaport, Joe. "Op-Ed: The Truth about NYC Transit and People with Disabilities." New York Daily News, 5 Dec. 2019, www.nydailynews.com/opinion/ny-oped-the-truth-transit-disabilities-20191205-267uytkfjncqfg4wql6c3y2ohm-story.html.



Two Penn Plaza ■ Fifth Floor ■ New York, New York 10121

Testimony on the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's Access-A-Ride Program

*Testimony before the New York City Council Committees on Mental Health, Disabilities and
Addiction; Aging; and Transportation*

December 18, 2019

Denise Richardson, Vice President of Research, Citizens Budget Commission

Good afternoon Committee Chairs Ayala, Chin, and Rodriguez. Thank you for the opportunity to testify about the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's (MTA's) Access-A-Ride program. I am Denise Richardson, Vice President of Research of the Citizens Budget Commission, a nonprofit, nonpartisan think tank devoted to influencing constructive change in the finances and services of New York City and New York State government, including the MTA and other public authorities.

Transportation access for people with disabilities is an important component of an important public service. As with other public services, a challenge is how to share the costs among stakeholders and balance with other priorities.

In its 2020 Final Proposed Budget and November Financial Plan for 2020-2023, the MTA assumed New York City will increase its contribution to Access-A-Ride from one-third to one-half of the program's net operating deficit. The City currently pays its share pursuant to a 1993 agreement with the MTA. The City is not legally obligated to pay additional costs as the Americans with Disabilities Act placed responsibility for paratransit with local transit agencies.

In 2017 the Access-A-Ride program provided 6.1 million trips at a cost of \$474.7 million.¹ Fare revenue in that year was \$17.5 million, and the City paid \$134 million toward the operating deficit.² In 2018 the City's share of the Access-A-Ride operating deficit was \$150 million.³ The MTA forecasts total operating costs for the program to grow from \$537 million in 2018 to \$691

million in 2023.⁴ Under the current cost-sharing formula, the City's share in 2023 would grow to \$199 million. However, the MTA's proposed formula change would increase cost to the City by \$47 million in 2020 and cumulatively \$361 million from 2020 to 2023.⁵

The cost growth in the program reflects higher utilization. Access-A-Ride had been criticized for poor customer service, missed appointments, and inefficient routes. In 2016 the MTA instituted a reservation service to enable customers to book for-hire vehicle trips in advance. This program was expanded in 2019. In 2017 the MTA also started an enhanced Access-A-Ride on-demand e-hail pilot program.⁶ These two service enhancements have contributed to a 31 percent increase in trips, from 6.1 million in 2017 to an estimated 8 million in 2019.⁷ From 2017 to 2019, however, the number of registered Access-A-Ride customers increased only 7 percent from 150,000 to 161,000.⁸ Annual trips are expected to continue growing to 8.4 million in 2020 and to 9.8 million in 2023.⁹ The MTA's service enhancements, including permitting on-demand for-hire vehicle trips, have improved mobility for disabled customers.

Use of for-hire vehicle services lowered the 2018 per trip cost from \$86 for a primary service ride to \$29 for an advance reservation trip and \$37 for an on-demand trip.¹⁰ Yet even with these per-trip savings, Access-A-Ride's fare revenue represents a mere 4 percent of the program's total operating cost.¹¹ Although the MTA is also taking steps to reduce the cost and improve the efficiency of its primary van service, the surge in demand, particularly in rides per user, outweighs the decline in per trip costs, resulting in significant cost growth projected in the future.

The MTA and the City face financial constraints that require determining what level of Access-A-Ride service is possible and how best to pay. Part of that solution may be to ask passengers to pay a greater share of the cost for the enhanced service of the for-hire vehicle origin to destination trips, as the MTA has proposed. Another method the MTA has proposed is to constrain costs by limiting the number of on demand for-hire vehicle trips a passenger may take.¹² The City should work with the MTA to assure that Access-A-Ride will achieve firm financial footing while providing a cost-effective and efficient service that offers greater mobility to disabled riders.

Thank you.

¹ Metropolitan Transportation Authority, *2019 Preliminary Budget and July Financial Plan 2019-2022, Volume 2* (July 2018), pp. II-68, <https://new.mta.info/sites/default/files/2018-12/MTA-2019-Prelim-Budget-July-Financial-Plan-2019-2022-Vol2.pdf>.

² The calculation of the City's share of the operating deficit excludes program non-reimbursable OTPS expenses; totals may not add due to this exclusion. See: Metropolitan Transportation Authority, *2019 Preliminary Budget and July Financial Plan 2019-2022, Volume 2* (July 2018), pp. II-68, <https://new.mta.info/sites/default/files/2018-12/MTA-2019-Prelim-Budget-July-Financial-Plan-2019-2022-Vol2.pdf>.

³ Metropolitan Transportation Authority, *2020 Final Proposed Budget and November Financial Plan 2020-2023, Volume 2* (November 14, 2019), pp. II-70, <https://new.mta.info/document/12266>.

⁴ Metropolitan Transportation Authority, *2020 Final Proposed Budget and November Financial Plan 2020-2023, Volume 2* (November 14, 2019), pp. II-70, <https://new.mta.info/document/12266>.

⁵ Metropolitan Transportation Authority, *2020 Final Proposed Budget and November Financial Plan 2020-2023, Volume 2* (November 14, 2019), pp. II-70, <https://new.mta.info/document/12266>.

⁶ Metropolitan Transportation Authority, "MTA Offers First Ever Real-Time, On Demand Service for Access-A-Ride Users" (press release, November 13, 2017), www.mta.info/press-release/nyc-transit/mta-offers-first-ever-real-time-demand-service-access-ride-users; and "MTA Announces Enhanced Program to Expand Taxi Use for Entire Paratransit System—And Extension of 'On-Demand E-Hail' Pilot" (press release, March 17, 2019), <http://www.mta.info/press-release/nyc-transit/mta-announces-enhanced-program-expand-taxi-use-entire-paratransit-system>—.

⁷ Alex Elegudin, Senior Advisor for Systemwide Accessibility, Paratransit Strategic Vision Update Report (presentation to MTA Transit and Bus Committee Meeting), December 16, 2019, slide 0

⁸ Alex Elegudin, Senior Advisor for Systemwide Accessibility, Paratransit Strategic Vision Update Report (presentation to MTA Transit and Bus Committee Meeting, December 16, 2019, slide 0

⁹ Metropolitan Transportation Authority, *2019 Preliminary Budget and July Financial Plan 2019-2022, Volume 2* (July 2018), pp. II-68, <https://new.mta.info/sites/default/files/2018-12/MTA-2019-Prelim-Budget-July-Financial-Plan-2019-2022-Vol2.pdf>; and *2020 Final Proposed Budget and November Financial Plan 2020-2023, Volume 2*, (November 14, 2019), pp. II-70, <https://new.mta.info/document/12171>.

¹⁰ Metropolitan Transportation Authority, *Paratransit Ridership Cost Update* (April 17, 2019, accessed December 15, 2019), p. 6, http://web.mta.info/mta/news/books/archive_board.htm.

¹¹ Metropolitan Transportation Authority, *2020 Final Proposed Budget and November Financial Plan 2020-2023, Volume 2* (November 14, 2019), pp. II-70, <https://new.mta.info/document/12171>.

¹² Clayton Guse, "MTA to severely limit pilot program that gives cheap cab rides to Access-A-Ride users," *New York Daily News* (November 12, 2019), <https://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/ny-access-a-ride-pilot-changes-20191112-7pvvw3pcdfhc5dq6bqsubzu6wm-story.html>.



Changing Lives... Building Communities

**New York City Council
Committee on Mental Health, Disabilities and Addiction
Jointly with the Committee on Aging
Chair, Council Member Diana Ayala
December 18, 2019
Oversight Hearing: Access-A-Ride**

Thank you Chair Ayala, the full Committee on Mental Health, Disabilities and Addiction, jointly with the Committee on Aging, for the opportunity to testify at today's Oversight Hearing relating to Access-A-Ride.

Sponsor of more than 160 programs across Brooklyn and Queens, for the last 121 years, Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens (hereinafter "CCBQ") exists for the purpose of *"affirming the dignity and value of every person, especially the most vulnerable members of our diverse society... developing effective responses to human need and joins with all people of good will in advocating for a social order that promotes justice and embraces human development"*. To further reinforce this Mission, over two and a half years ago, CCBQ embarked on an initiative which created Saint John XXIII Senior Services – a network leveraging all senior services across CCBQ and affiliate organizations, to provide awareness and timely access to services, enhance our referral process, assess for service gaps, and create platforms for seniors to get involved in advocacy initiatives to improve their quality of life.

The Saint John XXIII Senior Services network, serving over 22,000 seniors, includes: 17 senior centers; 1 NORC program; 23 buildings with a combined total of 2,488 affordable housing units for seniors; 2 nursing homes; services for the homebound elderly; social adult day programs for seniors diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease; 2 home care agencies; bereavement services; homeless prevention services; case management services; home delivered meals; friendly visiting services; health and wellness services; and geriatric mental health services.

During the second half of 2019, Saint John XXIII Senior Services created three advocacy councils made up of seniors - one in Brooklyn and two in Queens. The Saint John XXIII Advocacy Council of Brooklyn (hereinafter "the Council") held its first meeting on July 18, 2019 with eleven (11) members present. As we got into the Discussion phase of the Agenda to seek out advocacy activities for the group, one common issue continued to emerge: senior after senior shared their displeasure and unpleasant experiences about the services provided by Access-A-Ride, which they pay for. Some of the stories outlined were heartbreaking and utilizing the Access-A-Ride Complaint Hotline brought about no change to what the seniors termed as "unreliable" and "horrible" service. By the end of the 45-minute discussion on Access-A-Ride, the Council decided to obtain signatures and chose to petition Access-A-Ride as their first advocacy initiative. Within

the following weeks, petition forms were created and by the second meeting on September 19, 2019, the Council was ready for action. A subsequent meeting with the Saint John XXIII Advocacy Council of Southern Queens has garnered the same results to engage in acquiring signatures in an effort to petition Access-A-Ride to improve their services.

Seniors across Brooklyn and Queens have complained about the tardiness in service, often having to request transportation via Access-A-Ride to pick them up at least an hour before their actual time to leave, to ensure timely arrival. There are numerous instances when transportation shows up late - an hour, two hours or more - with a number of calls made to the base to inquire about the arrival time of transportation, many times having to wait outside, sometimes in the cold. Instances were also described that transportation via Access-A-Ride may not show up at all, leaving seniors stranded and having to cancel important appointments with difficulty of rescheduling on a date sooner rather than later. The following stories from Access-A-Ride patrons illustrate the hardships they have been subjected to. A lady from Howard Beach who is in a wheelchair was dropped off by an Access-A-Ride van, equipped for a wheelchair, but when Access-A-Ride came to pick her up to return home it was in the form of an Access-A-Ride taxi, which took her almost half an hour to get into the taxi and she was uncomfortable the entire ride home. This was not an isolated situation, for similar stories were expressed at other locations. Another senior who lives in Brooklyn was picked up at a location in Brooklyn, about 20 minutes away from her home, but was taken to Queens first to drop off another passenger, then brought back to Brooklyn, getting her home two and a half hours after her pickup.

Seniors report that their *"complaints are usually not taken seriously by Access-A-Ride"* and at times patrons feel retaliated against when they call to complain *"too often"*. One senior came to the first meeting of the Advocacy Council of Southern Queens and was so delighted to learn about our petition against Access-A-Ride, for she was being retaliated against by employees at a dispatch site in Queens, for having a certain *"tone"* in her voice when she calls to complain, which she has had to do numerous times due to Access-A-Ride's tardy and unreliable service.

The Advocacy Council of Brooklyn, Northern Queens, and Southern Queens are working tirelessly to obtain signatures to petition Access-A-Ride and are connecting with partners to assist in drawing awareness to the efforts of our seniors to bring about change in customer service, dispatch, operations, and other areas that impact the overall quality of service Access-A-Ride provides to its patrons. Today, Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens becomes the voice before this body, on behalf of our many clients/seniors impacted by the tardy and unreliable transportation services provided by Access-A-Ride, that so adversely impacts their lives. We solicit the support of this body to represent and assist us in holding Access-A-Ride accountable and to take steps that would require Access-A-Ride to significantly improve services for their patrons.

Access-A-Ride is a much needed service for our seniors and improvements need to be made. Our seniors demand change and they intend to effect change for all who are currently using Access-A-Ride and for potential users of Access-A-Ride. CCBQ is committed to the efforts of our Advocacy Councils and support their efforts in demanding better service from Access-A-Ride.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Johanna Climenko, LCSW-R, LCAT, BC-DMT, CRET
110 West 96th Street, Suite 1D4, New York, NY 10025
Voice: 212 874-3475 Mobile: 646 808-5280

Greetings,

My Name is Johanna Climenko, and I wear multiple professional hats. I am a mind/body psychotherapist, a dance/movement therapist and a non-verbal communication analyst. I direct a treatment, training, and consulting center using these modalities. We work with individuals, families, groups and systems. I am a social worker with a specialty working with people with disabilities individually, and on a systems level. I am also an E-‘Hail On-Demand’ passenger.

It is this program that enables me to navigate my professional life, and do the rehab maintenance that allows me to maximize my function and minimize my pain.

‘Beating the red-haired step child’ characterizes how the MTA relates to the vulnerable communities of disabled AAR passengers, and the ‘endangered species’ of NYC Taxi Drivers.

When this program was conceived in 2017 by former AAR director, Steve LoPiano, it was intended to replace 99% of traditional AAR with ‘On Demand Taxi Service.’ It would then also have the concomitant result of saving the beleaguered NYC taxi industry.

To blame the shortfall of the MTA budget on the tiny group of 1200 passengers in the E-Hail on Demand Pilot Program, and allied cab drivers, is cynical and deceitful.

The MTA is notoriously opaque in its operations. The current budget is billions of dollars in the red. The infrastructure replacement and construction of new subway lines for example, has cost 10 times comparable work in Paris and London (NYT investigative reporting series summer 2019.) To link this cost overrun to our tiny pilot program is indecent.

This program has enabled AAR passengers to finally have quality of life to work, do medical and PT maintenance, experience NYC’s cultural life, and visit with loved ones.

Translation: Current ‘E-Hail On Demand Passengers’ are quote ‘heavy users’ because it is a predominantly working population. Therefore this group is paying City and State taxes. If AAR passengers are relegated to van service, there is much less likelihood of being able to adhere to a work schedule.

Normal AAR transport often takes up to 3 hours from target time of pick up, to drop off. Passengers are required to wait outside for their transportation, regardless of

weather conditions—please imagine that in climate change extremes—and travel through other boroughs before they get to their destinations.

Therefore, there is more likelihood of normal AAR passengers relying on fixed income disability support, rather than enduring the vagaries of ordinary AAR transit.

AAR vans are notoriously unreliable in time, painful to ride in, disrespectful of passengers, and extremely costly for the MTA—far more costly than taxis. One wonders about the endurance of these privatized contracts for traditional AAR transportation.

Maximizing quality of life is what everyone aspires to, and transit for able-bodied people is available via an 'MTA unlimited card.' (We all know the problems of accessibility in subway and bus transit.)

So why will the MTA now make the lives of AAR passengers again 'limited?' This is the critical question. The notion that to 'assess the pilot program objectively by quantifiable variables' it needs to be totally altered makes no evaluative sense.

If the intention is to objectively evaluate the Pilot Program, let us do that by altering one variable at a time. Let us keep the pilot as it is, and in a research model, systematically alter one variable at a time sequentially.

The program is working beautifully for disabled passengers and beleaguered taxi drivers, whose fate is intertwined.

In sum, this program is the smartest innovation of the MTA in our era. Let us expand upon it as it was intended to be, and study the results empirically.

Dear City Council Members:

The New York City Chapter of the National Federation of the Blind thanks you for the opportunity to submit this testimony. We regret that none of our members is able to attend the November 21, 2019, hearing.

More than twenty-five years after the inception of Access-a-Ride ("AAR"), we continue to hear horror stories of customers having to wait over two hours to be picked up, or not being picked up at all. Our time is as valuable as anyone else's. We need to arrive at work on time, as much as do people who do not use AAR, and we need to arrive on time for other appointments. When an AAR vehicle arrives late enough to force the customer to cancel an appointment and therefore the trip, the customer often receives a penalty point, when the fault actually lies with AAR.

One of our members reports that she has lost count of the number of times she has been late for work this year alone. As a result, she has missed or had to reschedule numerous work-related appointments.

Taxi authorizations can help when an AAR driver is late for a pickup. A taxi authorization allows the customer to call a cab or car service, submit a receipt for the trip, and later be reimbursed the cost of the trip minus \$2.75 (the standard fare for fixed route trips and AAR trips). However, taxi authorizations are only available for trips within the same borough. Thus, a customer traveling between Manhattan and one of the outer boroughs to go to or from work cannot obtain one. Also, the quantity of approved taxi authorizations per day is limited, which puts an undue burden on customers who encounter unexpected changes in their day.

E-Hail, a system by which customers can schedule same day door to door rides through an app or by calling, has helped tremendously. However, it is currently available only to 1,200 customers, and we are constantly being told that it will be discontinued.

We recommend that MTA take the following steps:

- 1) Centralize oversight and dispatch operations of the AAR program;
- 2) Institute a mechanism by which customers can schedule same day pickups, rather than being required to do so one to two days prior to their planned trip;
- 3) Continue E-Hail without restrictions and without additional charges;
- 4) Remove restrictions on obtaining taxi authorizations;
- 5) Provide better training for drivers, including proficient use of the GPS system and the rules of simple courtesy.

We stand ready to work with MTA and with the City Council to make AAR a service that levels the playing field for its customers and those who use fixed route public transportation.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Mindy Jacobsen,
President, New York City Chapter, National Federation of the Blind
63rd Street
Brooklyn, New York 11220

Dear City Council Members:

I am a long time Access-A-Ride (AAR) user who is totally blind and lives in Brooklyn. I have been fortunate to have been able to participate in the On-Demand Pilot with AAR and the TLC. As the Pilot Program is coming to an end at the end of December, I am concerned with the future of AAR service and the rights of our city's citizens with disabilities who cannot ride the subways and/or buses. This program has greatly enhanced my level of independence and productivity as a professional person who is blind and juggling two jobs.

The traditional way AAR has operated is very rigid, confining you to live your life in a very predetermined, scheduled fashion, allowing for no flexibility. Unfortunately, it does not give an individual with a disability the same level of autonomy and access to opportunity that citizens who can ride the subways and/or buses have. Having to schedule trips before 5 P.M. a day or two in advance, enduring the number of late pickups, and the often-circuitous rides of the five boroughs made AAR very frustrating to use at best. With the inception of the On-Demand program the AAR service has been greatly improved! All these previously mentioned issues have been solved in one fell swoop.

The Pilot Program has been a long-awaited breath of fresh air for us long suffering AAR customers. My quality of life as a blind citizen living in New York City has dramatically improved. For me especially, it has allowed me to accept a promotion as an itinerant Supervisor for Educational Vision Services (EVS) within the NYC Department of Education's District 75. My main office is in Manhattan at 400 First Avenue. I supervise teachers in all of Staten Island, several areas of Queens and in some districts in the eastern/southern parts of Brooklyn. Without the autonomy and the independence that On-Demand Pilot Service facilitates, I would not be able to competently perform my job at the highly proficient and efficient level that allows me to compete with my non-disabled colleagues. Traditional AAR service would make it very difficult for me to move around in a reasonably, efficient and timely manner. If I must rely on AAR vehicles and carriers, my ability to work as a NYCDOE Supervisor will be severely compromised. I would not be able to maintain the same level of professionalism and productivity I have without On-Demand Service as it is currently.

The MTA has announced that it intends on restricting use of On-Demand service which would require people like myself to have to utilize the more expensive traditional AAR service, instead of the On-Demand service. The MTA has decided it would only pay for 16 rides a month with a cap on what they would pay of \$15.00 per ride. I find myself wondering how many of the MTA Board members as well as AAR management understand that disabled folks are not porcelain dolls, just living our lives on a glass shelf somewhere. "Accessibility", "Equal Access", "Universal Design", etc., are these just platitudes? The MTA is complaining that the E-Hail program is too expensive because people are booking too many trips. However, the On-Demand trips on average cost \$36 per trip and traditional blue and white Paratransit trips cost \$80 per trip. We are investing hundreds of millions of dollars on accessible transportation; is that insane sum being invested fruitfully? Is there any awareness as to why this ridiculous amount of money is being invested in a resource that is supposed to level the

playing field, or to some, might the Paratransit discussion be analogous to an unpleasant mundane task such as, taking out the trash?

At the end of the day, I am a pedagogue at heart. I ask these questions not to be contentious, or to offend, rather to better understand a difficult and frustrating situation. I am committed to partnering in the problem, in order to arrive at an equitable solution for all stakeholders. I would like to better understand the vantage points of all the key players to help raise awareness, to educate, not just about blindness, but the possibilities and contributions that all of us with disabilities have to offer if we are afforded the same rights as people without disabilities. Is it possible that the number of trips has increased because of the increased accessibility? Could it be that New Yorkers with disabilities who cannot ride the subways and/or buses are still contributing to our city's fabric on multiple levels? Not only do individuals with disabilities contribute socially, helping to raise awareness promoting tolerant and inclusive attitudes, we are making economic contributions as viable workers, consumers, and patrons as well. It is my view that the MTA board and AAR management should have to participate in some disability awareness/sensitivity trainings offered by a range of authentic and qualified disabled professionals to deepen their understanding of these issues.

I recommend that the MTA take the following steps:

1. Continue the On-Demand program. If there is concern of fraud, establish a process for oversight and plan on how to address it with input from the community;
Centralize oversight and dispatch operations of the AAR program allowing for increased customer flexibility;
2. Institute a mechanism by which customers can schedule same day pickups, rather than being required to do so one to two days prior to their planned trip leveling the playing field with nondisabled citizens;
3. Remove restrictions on obtaining taxi authorizations to allow for out of borough use;
4. Provide better training for drivers, including proficient use of the GPS system and the rules of simple courtesy.

In light of these things, given my multi-faceted background both personally and professionally, I am writing to enquire how we can engage in a collegial and collaborative discussion with the MTA (AAR), to arrive at an equitable and comprehensive solution that is reasonable and viable for all stakeholders, in order to improve outcomes, change the misconceptions, and the low expectations that are often associated with the disabled community. Please feel free to contact me if I can assist in any capacity with these matters.

Gian Carlo Pedulla
Educational Vision Services Supervisor, NYCDOE
gpedula@schools.nyc.gov

Brooklyn, NY 11204

Access a Ride Hearing 12/18

I was not able to attend Wednesday's Access-A-Ride hearing, unfortunately, but please accept the following written testimony:

My name is Carolyn Wember. My daughter has been participating in the "On-Demand E-Hail" pilot program. We live in Brooklyn, and I was really distressed to learn about the MTA's plans to degrade the E-Hail program, under the pretense of "expanding" it.

My daughter has cerebral palsy. She is severely physically disabled, and uses a motorized wheelchair as her only means of mobility. She always travels with a Personal Care Aide. She is not able to use the subway -- and anyway, we do not live near an accessible subway station.

Before she got into the E-Hail program, my daughter rarely used Access-A-Ride, even though she's had eligibility since she was a child. The experience of traveling in a "traditional" Access-a-Ride van was simply too grueling and too traumatic, both for my daughter and for her aides. A few years ago, my daughter was traveling in an Access-A-Ride van with her aide. The van took them on a LONG detour, far into Brooklyn, where the driver got into a minor "fender-bender." My daughter and her aide were essentially imprisoned in the van, until the police showed up. They were both traumatized by the experience and my daughter never used "traditional" Access-A-Ride after that.

By contrast, the E-Hail on Demand pilot has been a blessing -- as I'm sure you have heard, from other consumers. My daughter has been able to travel to Manhattan on a regular basis, knowing that she will get there in a reasonable amount of time. She is able to take shorter, local trips, without the fear of being taken on crazy detours far from her destination. Being hauled around in Access-A-Ride vans makes people with disabilities feel like prisoners and second-class citizens. With the E-Hail on Demand pilot, disabled passengers are FINALLY treated with respect, and are able to have a transportation experience similar to everyone else's.

Please do whatever is in your power to prevent the MTA from destroying a great thing. Limiting the fare subsidy to \$15 will insure that the E-Hail program becomes useless to a large percentage of the disabled people who have been using it. Let's get our priorities straight as New Yorkers. MTA should truly expand the E-Hail program, rather than offer a severely "watered down," practically useless version to a larger group of Access-A-Ride consumers.

Carolyn Wember
Brooklyn, NY

Access a Ride Hearing 12/18

I was not able to attend Wednesday's Access-A-Ride hearing, unfortunately, but please accept the following written testimony:

My name is Peter Kowalski. My daughter has been participating in the "On-Demand E-Hail" pilot program. We live in Brooklyn, and I was really distressed to learn about the MTA's plans to degrade the E-Hail program, under the pretense of "expanding" it.

My daughter has cerebral palsy. She is severely physically disabled, and uses a motorized wheelchair as her only means of mobility. She always travels with a Personal Care Aide. She is not able to use the subway -- and anyway, we do not live near an accessible subway station.

Before she got into the E-Hail program, my daughter rarely used Access-A-Ride, even though she's had eligibility since she was a child. The experience of traveling in a "traditional" Access-a-Ride van was simply too grueling and too traumatic, both for my daughter and for her aides. A few years ago, my daughter was traveling in an Access-A-Ride van with her aide. The van took them on a LONG detour, far into Brooklyn, where the driver got into a minor "fender-bender." My daughter and her aide were essentially imprisoned in the van, until the police showed up. They were both traumatized by the experience and my daughter never used "traditional" Access-A-Ride after that.

By contrast, the E-Hail on Demand pilot has been a blessing -- as I'm sure you have heard, from other consumers. My daughter has been able to travel to Manhattan on a regular basis, knowing that she will get there in a reasonable amount of time. She is able to take shorter, local trips, without the fear of being taken on crazy detours far from her destination. Being hauled around in Access-A-Ride vans makes people with disabilities feel like prisoners and second-class citizens. With the E-Hail on Demand pilot, disabled passengers are FINALLY treated with respect, and are able to have a transportation experience similar to everyone else's.

Please do whatever is in your power to prevent the MTA from destroying a great thing. Limiting the fare subsidy to \$15 will insure that the E-Hail program becomes useless to a large percentage of the disabled people who have been using it. Let's get our priorities straight as New Yorkers. MTA should truly expand the E-Hail program, rather than offer a severely "watered down," practically useless version to a larger group of Access-A-Ride consumers.

Peter Kowalski
Brooklyn, NY



TESTIMONY FOR A HEARING ON:

ACCESS-A-RIDE OVERSIGHT

PRESENTED BEFORE:

THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON AGING
MARGARET S. CHIN, CHAIR

THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON MENTAL HEALTH, DISABILITIES,
AND ADDICTION
DIANA AYALA, CHAIR

THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION
YDANIS A. RODRIGUEZ, CHAIR

PRESENTED BY:

DANIEL A. ROSS
SENIOR STAFF ATTORNEY
MOBILIZATION FOR JUSTICE, INC.

December 18, 2019

MOBILIZATION FOR JUSTICE, INC.
100 William Street, 6th Floor
New York, NY 10038
212-417-3700
www.mobilizationforjustice.org

I. Introduction

Mobilization for Justice’s mission is to achieve social justice, prioritizing the needs of people who are low-income, disenfranchised or have disabilities. We do this by providing direct civil legal assistance, conducting community education, engaging in policy advocacy, and bringing impact litigation.

Since 2012, Mobilization for Justice has advised and represented in administrative appeals hearings and Article 78 proceedings individuals who have applied for and been denied Access-A-Ride (AAR) service. Based on clients’ experiences challenging improper eligibility determinations, we filed a class action lawsuit against the New York City Transit Authority (NYCTA) for denying due process to Access-A-Ride applicants and recipients. In 2016, we settled that case with NYCTA agreeing to revise its application denial and appeal process, providing case-specific rationale for its decisions, providing access to individuals’ records to help them correct assessors’ mistakes, and providing continuing eligibility to people whose AAR was terminated, pending the appeal decision.

Mobilization for Justice also advocates for improvements to AAR with its partners— Brooklyn Center for Independence of the Disabled, Center for Independence of the Disabled – New York, and New York Lawyers for the Public Interest—in AARRG!, the Access-A-Ride Reform Group.

II. Key Recommendations

Mobilization for Justice suggests the following legislative measures to improve paratransit service for New York City residents, as more fully set forth below:

- 1. Fund Access-A-Ride’s on-demand service.** The MTA’s pilot for 1,200 AAR users demonstrates that on-demand service changes lives. The program allows participants to get around the city with the same flexibility as all other transit riders have always enjoyed. On average, on-demand service costs half what traditional AAR trips cost, so it’s an efficient use of funds. But because traditional AAR’s bad service suppressed demand and this program allows people who are excluded from the bus and subway to get where they need to go, riders use it more. The City should contribute to save and expand this life-changing program.
- 2. Include Access-A-Ride users in the Fair Fares program.** Fair Fares helps low-income New Yorkers save money on transportation costs, but because implementation focused on Metrocards, which AAR doesn’t accept, many low-income people with disabilities are excluded from the program.
- 3. Open bus lanes to all Access-A-Ride vehicles.** Earlier this year, the Department of Transportation amended its regulations to allow wheelchair-accessible vehicles exclusively used to transport AAR passengers to use bus lanes. But many AAR users do not use wheelchair-accessible vehicles, and the AAR sedans that are used to transport them continue to be excluded from bus lanes.

III. On-Demand service changes lives and must be funded

AAR requires passengers to make trip reservations at least a day in advance. That means riders have no way to make same-day plans. If a rider plans a trip in advance and then those plans change, the rider is penalized for late cancellations (less than two hours prior to pick-up). Decades ago, when paratransit vehicle dispatch routing was planned by hand, that inflexibility was a necessary evil. It's now an archaic barrier to inclusion in the life of the city.

The roughly 160,000 people with disabilities who must rely on AAR for transportation – including tens of thousands of seniors – cannot get everywhere they need to go relying on AAR as it is. Pick-ups are scheduled unreasonably early, actual pick-ups are generally late, trips are not direct and often result in a tour-of-the-boroughs. The unemployment rate for people with disabilities is almost 30 percent, and transportation is cited as one of the main barriers to employment.

The on-demand program, begun in late 2017, revolutionized travel for 1,200 pilot participants who are excluded from buses and subways because of their disabilities. The pilot allows these riders to work late without advance planning, to accept a last-minute social invitation, or to make an emergency medical appointment. On-demand service provides flexibility and independence to AAR riders. And it's not just good for riders: the average cost per trip is half what traditional AAR service costs. The pilot, which relies primarily on medallion taxis to provide the service, has also provided needed income for taxi drivers when that industry has been hurt by companies like Uber and Lyft.

The unqualified success of the on-demand pilot must be expanded. It is a life-changer for individuals and a game-changer for City, improving access to employment, education, health care, and social and cultural integration for people with disabilities.

Unfortunately, the MTA has announced changes that will essentially end the pilot's usefulness. Starting early in 2020, pilot participants (which the MTA intends to double to 2,400 riders) will be limited to only 16 trips per month, and the MTA will only cover up to \$15 on the meter for each of those trips, limiting a trip length to only two or three miles. These restrictions will prevent people with disabilities from commuting to work, arriving for doctors' appointments on time, and participating in the social and civic life of this city.

The MTA is concerned that, if it made on-demand service available to all AAR users, those riders would start taking as many trips as other transit riders. However, speculation about future costs is premature. The original 1,200 pilot participants were first-in-line, highly motivated users. Doubling the number of participants to include a representative sample of AAR riders based on usage, geographic distribution, and age, as we propose, will allow the MTA and state and city officials to make accurate predictions about future expansion of this life-changing service.

The on-demand program began slowly at the end of 2017 and ridership increased over the course of 2018 before plateauing in mid-2019. In 2018, the program cost less than \$9 million and riders

took an average of 15 rides per month. At its peak this summer, riders averaged 28 rides per month, which is still less than one ride per day. We estimate that, at that ridership level, the program will cost \$16.4 million in 2019. The MTA estimates costs at \$1.2 to \$1.3 million per month, or \$14.4-\$15.6 million for 2019.

While we expect current high users' demand to stay relatively constant, we expect the new, representative sample of pilot participants will use the program less. Doubling the number of participants to include a representative sample of AAR riders based on usage, geographic distribution, and age, as we propose, would add many more low-ridership users. That means the current pilot costs are probably higher than the cost for a representative sample, and doubling the number of participants in this way would not double the cost of the program. These new riders might use the service at a level close to the 2018 level, which cost \$9 million, but certainly not more than the high users' peak level, \$16.4 million. This means we would expect the next stage of the pilot would cost between \$23 million and \$33 million.

The MTA's proposed second phase of the pilot is a huge step backward, and a reduction of the agency's commitment to on-demand service. If used to its maximum – all 2,400 pilot participants taking 16 rides per month at \$15 – the program will cost the MTA \$6.9 million. The City should dedicate funding to this extraordinary program to save it from the MTA's draconian cuts.

The MTA agrees with us that the future of paratransit is primarily on-demand. Our proposal is an affordable step toward that better, more equitable future in which New Yorkers with disabilities have equal access to employment, education, health care, and social and civic life. We urge the city to fund the continuation of on-demand service without the MTA's proposed trip rationing. We do not ration the use of the subways and buses—Why should people who have disabilities be treated differently?

IV. Fair Fares must include AAR users

In January, the City unveiled its Fair Fares program to help low-income New Yorkers afford public transportation. Many low-income New Yorkers have disabilities and rely on AAR because they cannot take the bus or subway. But unlike the bus and subway, AAR does not accept Metrocards. AAR riders are not eligible for discounts. And these public transit riders must pay their exact fare in cash.

By definition, AAR users are people whose disabilities prevent them from taking buses and subways. Low-income AAR users would be eligible for the Fair Fares program if the subways and buses were accessible to them. But the Fair Fares program was rolled-out using only specially-designed Metrocards which aren't available for low-income AAR users. By excluding AAR users from the Fair Fares program, the Human Resources Administration is discriminating against people with disabilities.

V. Bus lanes must include all public transit riders

As Manhattan's central business district becomes increasingly congested with vehicle traffic, the City has expanded its bus lane system to more than 100 miles of roadway across each borough, in part to improve on-time performance of the New York City Transit Authority's buses.

For decades, paratransit riders, who already shoulder the indignity of being excluded from buses and subways, have endured AAR trips that start late, can last hours, and frequently result in riders missing appointments. And yet, until this summer, they were not able to take advantage of the improved speeds bus lanes provide fixed-route public transit riders in the city.

Earlier this year, the City revised regulations to allow wheelchair-accessible vehicles that exclusively transport AAR riders to use bus lanes. But many AAR users do not need wheelchair-accessible vehicles and therefore get assigned to other cars, including white-and-blue sedans that exclusively transport AAR riders. The revised regulations continue to exclude riders in these vehicles from the benefits of bus lanes offered to all riders of fixed-route buses. This discrimination must end.

Allowing all dedicated paratransit vehicles into bus lanes would be fair and workable. AAR service is provided by a mix of dedicated paratransit vehicles, car services and taxis. NYCTA owns and registers approximately 2,000 vehicles – standard wheelchair-accessible paratransit buses, MV-1 wheelchair accessible SUV-like vehicles, and sedans. All are painted white with a blue stripe and AAR decals, and all have or can be outfitted with special New York City Transit license plates registered with the New York State Department of Motor Vehicles. This license plate is new and was authorized specifically at the request of NYCTA for this purpose. Upon information and belief, only dedicated paratransit vehicles have the New York City Transit license plate. Further, upon information and belief, only one make and model of sedan is used in paratransit service. It would be easy for any enforcement camera or police officer to identify an AAR vehicle with its specific paint scheme, markings, vehicle types, and license plate.

VI. Conclusion

Mobilization for Justice thanks the Committee on Aging and the Committee on Mental Health, Disabilities, and Addiction, and the Committee on Transportation for holding this hearing. We are committed to helping the City and the New York City Transit Authority improve AAR, which provides critical transportation services to disabled and older New Yorkers that allows them to live healthy, rewarding lives integrated into the social fabric of the city we all call home.

New York City Council
Committee on Aging, Council Member Chin
December 18, 2019
Oversight Hearing: Access-A-Ride

Thank you Council Member Chin for chairing today's Aging Committee Oversight Hearing on Access-A-Ride.

I am writing on behalf of Bushwick/Hylan NORC's Community Group that meets weekly on Fridays for members to discuss issues that impact them, talk about how to advocate for change within their community, and learn about issues that others in their community are facing. We have a diverse group of ten members, all of whom are regular attendees of the NORC Program. Of that group, four people use Access-A-Ride.

We would like to thank the New York City Council for hosting this important hearing. Access-A-Ride is an important asset for seniors in New York City, especially for those that are unable to traverse New York's often inaccessible subway system.

In preparation for this hearing, we discussed Access-A-Ride with the group and the following are the points that came up about the service. The seniors enrolled in the Access-A-Ride program noted the following:

- The subscription service is easy to use and usually comes on time
- It is helpful that the CPA can ride free
- Being able to bring a paid guest is a beneficial service and helps couples, friends, or advocates travel with the seniors to appointments and/or important meetings
- They call 48 hours in advance to ensure their ride comes at the time they prefer
- The service is often late, leaving seniors to wait on curbs or other locations without seating for up to an hour
- Seniors are not given a reduced rate for service as they are for other public transit options, which can be prohibitive
- Rides sometimes do not call the appropriate number when they arrive, leaving seniors to miss their rides

Discussing this program also encouraged other seniors in the room to consider utilizing this helpful service. We welcome an Access-A-Ride associate to come present on the new technology being implemented by Access-A-Ride and to provide general information about the service.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this feedback today.

Sarah Steeley
Social Work Intern, Bushwick/Hylan NORC
New York University Master's Candidate
sarah.steeley@nyu.edu



Via Transportation, Inc.
160 Varick Street
New York, NY 10013
www.ridewithvia.com

Prepared Testimony for New York City Council Committees on Transportation, Aging, Mental Health, Disabilities and Addiction Oversight Hearing on Access-A-Ride

Good afternoon Chairs Rodriguez, Chin, Ayala and members of the Transportation, Aging, Mental Health, Disabilities and Addiction Committees. I'm Ya-Ting Liu, Director of Government & Policy at Via. Thank you for the opportunity to share our ideas and recommendations on how to modernize New York City's paratransit services in a way that improves service, reduces costs, and brings greater visibility and accountability for this essential service that 160,000 New Yorkers depend on.

Background on Via

Via was founded in New York City 2012 with a simple mission: to build technology that powers the most efficient, affordable, convenient public mobility solutions across the globe. Over the past seven years, we have grown to become the world's leading developer and operator of public transportation systems solutions. To date, we have delivered over 70 million rides in deployments around the world: our technology serves a diversity of demand responsive transportation systems, from paratransit services to on-demand shuttles to school buses. Our global team of over 700 data scientists, developers, operations specialists, project managers, and customer support experts develop transportation technology solutions tailored to the local and contextual needs of partners.

Municipalities and transportation agencies are partnering with Viato provide new public transportation solutions aimed at increasing economic and social mobility, reducing congestion and GHG emissions, and improving public transportation. Our platform is being used in a variety of public mobility use cases including:

- **On demand shuttle buses (aka "microtransit):** cities such as Seattle, Los Angeles, Austin, Berlin, and London are utilizing Via's technology to connect people to transit hubs and to cover less dense areas with on-demand, dynamically routed shuttles.
- **School Buses:** school districts, including the NYC Department of Education in the coming months, are using Via's technology to provide parents and students visibility into the real-time location of buses and to improve routing.
- **University Shuttles:** several universities, including Harvard, Northwestern, and Northeastern, are using Via to improve campus shuttle services.

- **Autonomous vehicles:** auto companies and AV technology developers are using Via's technology to make autonomous fleets on-demand and shared. We are part of the nation's first on-demand, shared deployment of autonomous vehicles on public streets in Irvine, CA.
- **Paratransit/Dial-a-Ride:** we are licensing our technology to providers in the United States and Europe to make paratransit on-demand, convenient and more cost effective. Additionally, we will soon be operating ourselves a large scale paratransit service on behalf of a major metropolitan area in Virginia, powered by the Via technology.

Is Access-A-Ride the System We Would Design Today?

As noted by a variety of advocates and experts like the Citizens Budget Commission, NYU Rudin Center for Transportation Policy and the New York City Comptroller's office, a key structural challenge for MTA leadership and staff is overcoming the historically siloed and byzantine procurement process for paratransit services. This is one main reason it is the most expensive paratransit program in the country. But there is now an opportunity to fundamentally rethink the way the agency runs this program and bring it into the 21st century.

Since the MTA took over the federally mandated service from the City in 1994, much has changed in the transportation industry. Technology companies, like Via, have developed powerful and sophisticated software platforms that can in a single stream receive a trip request, match the passenger with the appropriate vehicle, create the most efficient route, add additional passengers along that trip where appropriate, provide real-time location tracking of vehicles, and create visibility and accountability for each trip. And most importantly, when done right, this new technology can be combined with the proper operational expertise to provide an even better experience for paratransit riders in a way that is sensitive to the specific needs of this group of customers. We believe that right-sizing vehicles, maximizing the number of passengers in each trip, and bringing the customer experience of on-demand ridesharing to the paratransit space are strategies the MTA should prioritize. However, the incredibly burdensome and siloed procurement system makes it challenging to do so.

MTA is not alone in facing these challenges. Many paratransit and non-emergency medical transit (NEMT) operators have struggled to provide user-friendly, affordable service to their customers. While technology has revolutionized transportation for most able-bodied Americans, paratransit has often been left behind.

The good news is that this is beginning to change. For example, in early 2020, Via will transform the paratransit system in Hampton Roads, Virginia - a region of more than 1.6 million people that includes the cities of Virginia Beach, Norfolk, Newport News, Chesapeake, Hampton, and Portsmouth. Under the legacy paratransit system, Hampton Roads Transit

Authority issued three separate RFPs for call center service, wheelchair van service, and ambulatory sedan service. Rides had to be booked at least a day in advance, over the phone, and fares paid in cash. Via won all three RFPs with our proposal for a single, integrated solution comprising all three existing services. Via's service will allow riders to book same-day or in-advance over the phone or by using an intuitive, accessible app. Riders can pay with credit cards and other non-cash payment methods. For those with smartphones, a vehicle's progress can be tracked in real time as it approaches, and for those without smartphones, helpful reminder messages can be sent over SMS based on the customer's preferred way of receiving them. By leveraging best in class routing and ride matching algorithms, this will all cost less than previous operations, while providing dramatically better service.

We are also doing this elsewhere. In Grand Rapids, Michigan, we partnered with The Rapid to provide an accessible on-demand service that has wait times of 12 minutes, a dramatic improvement from the previous 24-hour advance reservation requirement. As a community organizer with Disability Advocates in Kent County put it: "On-demand public transit is revolutionary for our area. Riders are already sharing how easy it is to book a ride and get where they need to go with no fuss."

We applaud the MTA for its recent efforts to seek ideas and partnerships with technology companies to solve complex challenges. Just last week, the MTA held a conference inviting technology companies to share ideas for slashing time and cost of modernizing the antiquated signal system in the subway. Mark Dowd, the new Chief Innovation Officer at the MTA, declared, "We are looking for cutting-edge technologies, technologies that may have not been designed for this purpose, but can be applied to this purpose." We urge the MTA to apply this type of innovative thinking and partnership with technology companies to transform the costly and antiquated paratransit program, and consider questions such as:

- If the MTA were to design its Access-A-Ride program from scratch - given the advances in booking, dispatching, ride matching, and routing technology - what would it look like?
- How can the program match paratransit customers to right-sized vehicles from a variety of modes?
- How can the program increase efficient sharing and routing of vehicles?
- How can the program create more transparency and accountability for quality of service and customer complaints?

Finally, the MTA should also build on the success of the e-hail program and improve, not limit the program. Most of the rides booked under the current program are single passenger rides. With a more sophisticated algorithm and ride matching, more of these e-hail paratransit trips can be shared, thus reducing the cost-per-trip per vehicle hour.

We look forward to working with the MTA, the City and the State to help improve the quality of paratransit service for our fellow New Yorkers.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/18/19

(PLEASE PRINT)
Name: La Ferne Andreys

Address: 191 Joralemon Street, Brooklyn 11206

I represent: Catholic Charities Brooklyn & Queens

Address: 191 Joralemon St, Brooklyn, NY 11201

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)
Name: JACI COHEN

Address: _____

I represent: STRAPHANGERS CAMPAIGN

Address: 9 MURRAY STREET, NY NY

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)
Name: Valerie Joseph

Address: _____

I represent: Brooklyn Center for Independence of the Disabled

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

[]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Daniel Ross

Address: _____

I represent: Mobilization for Justice, Inc / AARRG!

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

[]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: 12/18/2019

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: JESSICA MURRAY

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

[]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: 12/18/19.

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: LUCIA MARETT

Address: _____

I represent: DIA - self

Address: _____



Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms



**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kathleen Collins

Address: 245 East 24th Street, Apt 5th
New York, N.Y. 10010

I represent: a member of the public who uses
ACCESS A RIDE and on Disabled Action

Address: Board

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition continuing

ON-DEMAND

Date: 12-18-19

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: MARITZA FLORES

Address: 74-04 97th Ave, Ozone Park

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

OF CONTINUING ON DEMAND

Date: 12/18/19

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: JOHANNA CLIMENKO

Address: 345 8TH AVE

I represent: SELF & CIBNY

Address: NEED TO LEAVE ASAP!

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 12/18/19

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Vincent Pedulla

Address: 1364 82nd Street

I represent: Department of Ed / UFT

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 12/18/19

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Frank Senior

Address: 140 De-Kruff Place

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 12/18/19

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Britney Wilson

Address: 487 Christopher Ave. Brooklyn, NY

I represent: _____

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Dustin Jones

Address: _____

I represent: City Day

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 12/18/19

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Denise Richardson

Address: 3546 29 St Queens 11372

I represent: Citizens Budget Commission

Address: 2 Penn Plaza NY NY 10021

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Helene Schularzenberger

Address: 2621 Av. W Bklyn NY 11229

I represent: Assoc. for the Rights of Disabled Consumers Inc

Address: Same as above

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. on-demand Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 12/18/19

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Eman Rimawi

Address: 208 Balcan Ave

I represent: Access-a-Ride customers

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jose Hernandez

Address: _____

I represent: United Spinal

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 12-18-19

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Michael Ring

Address: 78 8th Ave, Brooklyn

I represent: Disabled in Action

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

on Demand Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jean RYAN *646*

Address: panstles007@gmail.com *77th*

I represent: Disabled IN ACTION *BKlyn St*

Address: _____ *NY 11209*

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 12/17/19

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Edith P...

Address: 739 156 St

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 12/18/19

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Va-Ting Lim

Address: 160 Vanck St.

I represent: VIA

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Frederica Rappler

Address: 49 West 45th Street, NYC

I represent: Live On NY

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 12/18/2019

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Gian Pedulla

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sasha Blair-Goldensohn

Address: 365 West End Ave NY

I represent: Rise and Resist - Elevator Action Group

Address: _____

◆ Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms ◆

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: C N

Address: 14 East 28th St.

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: TERRA

Address: MANHATTAN

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 12/18/19

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ray Wayne

Address: 7101 4th avenue apt B2, Brooklyn, 11629

I represent: National Federation of Blind

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Alex Elegudin

Address: Senior Advisor for Accessibility

I represent: MTA NYC Transit

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Michael Cosgrove

Address: _____

I represent: VP MTA TRANSIT

Address: MTA NYC TRANSIT

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Chris Calkins

Address: Acting VP Dept of Transit

I represent: MTA NYC TRANSIT

Address: MTA NYC TRANSIT

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms