



New York City Comptroller  
John C. Liu

NEWS RELEASE

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**LIU PUTS BRAKES ON “TAXI OF TOMORROW”  
UNTIL VEHICLES ARE WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE**

*Taxi Contract Violates Civil Rights and Is Dead on Arrival Until It Meets  
Requirements of Americans With Disabilities Act*

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NEW YORK, NY – City Comptroller John C. Liu today called on Mayor Michael Bloomberg to modify the proposed “Taxi of Tomorrow” agreement before sending the contract to the Comptroller’s Office for approval as required by the City Charter. Comptroller Liu vowed to reject the agreement, until New York’s entire taxi fleet follows in the footsteps of cities like London and makes all cabs wheelchair accessible.

“The new contract for taxis presents us with a historic opportunity to right a wrong that New Yorkers with disabilities have been fighting to achieve for nearly two decades,” Comptroller Liu said. “Requiring cabs to have independent passenger climate controls is nice, but when you fail to make them accessible to a growing number of New Yorkers, it’s not just a slap in the face, it’s illegal. We will send back any plan that does not uphold the civil rights demanded by the Americans with Disabilities Act.”

New York City’s 13,000 yellow cabs are famous, but for individuals with disabilities they represent the frustration of a separate and unequal transportation system. Just 231, less than 2%, of City taxis are wheelchair accessible. Although the City controls the sale of taxi medallions, it has failed to require that all taxis be accessible to wheelchairs.

“With the Taxi of Tomorrow, Mayor Bloomberg had the opportunity to transform the way New Yorkers get around the city whether they’re on two feet or four wheels,” said Assembly Member Micah Kellner. “Sadly, his choice for the Taxi of Tomorrow – the Nissan NV-200 – will be remembered as the Cathy Black of taxis. The Mayor should scrap his contract with Nissan and commit to making every taxi accessible to people with disabilities.”

“The Taxi of Tomorrow contract should be rejected,” said City Councilmember Oliver Koppell. “The contract includes terms that, in my view, violate the Americans With Disabilities Act and the Equal Protection Clause of the U.S. Constitution. The City has a responsibility to come down on the side of civil rights.”

“The Mayor and Taxi and Limousine Commissioner have chosen to deny access to new taxis to wheelchair users and require only some to be accessible,” said James Weisman, SVP and General Counsel United Spinal Association. “They would force wheelchair users to depend on a dispatch system instead of being able to hail any cab like all other New Yorkers and visitors.”

In December 2011, a federal court ruled that the City, through its Taxi and Limousine Commission, was in violation of the ADA. Recent proposals have failed to directly address this violation of civil rights. A proposal for a separate dispatch system for passengers using wheelchairs, for example, fails to address the underlying problem — there are not enough wheelchair accessible taxis in the City.

“The so-called “Taxi of Tomorrow” is really the taxi of yesterday,” said Edith Prentiss, Chair of the Taxis for All Campaign. “It rolls us back to the days before the Americans With Disabilities Act became federal law, two decades ago.”

Making the City’s taxi fleet wheelchair accessible is not just a civil rights issue, but is also simple common sense. Expanding access to taxis would reduce the financial stress on the MTA’s Access-A-Ride program.

“Let’s face it, anyone could find themselves in a wheelchair tomorrow,” said Comptroller Liu. “We should do everything possible to ensure that New York City’s iconic yellow cab does not become a symbol of exclusion by telling wheelchair users ‘find another ride.’ That’s not what New York City is about.”

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TEXT IN FULL OF COMPTROLLER LIU’S LETTER TO MAYOR BLOOMBERG:

May 2, 2012

Honorable Michael R. Bloomberg  
Mayor  
City Hall  
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor Bloomberg:

The New York City Charter (“Charter”) requires that all contracts or agreements executed pursuant to the Charter or other laws are registered by the New York City Comptroller’s Office (“Comptroller’s Office”). The Comptroller’s Office understands that the New York City Taxi and Limousine Commission (“TLC”) and Nissan have entered into a contract to provide the “Taxi of Tomorrow” for use on New York City streets by taxi medallion owners.

On December 23, 2011 a federal court held that the City, through TLC, was in violation of Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (“ADA”), which prohibits discrimination in governmental activities. The court further held that TLC was not providing meaningful taxicab access to disabled people who required wheelchairs, and that the lack of access was a direct result of TLC’s pervasive policies, practices, and regulations of taxicabs in the City.

The court also required TLC to propose a comprehensive plan describing how it would provide meaningful access to wheelchair users, including targeted goals and standards, as well as measurable results. The court further ordered that until TLC proposed such a plan, all new taxi medallions sold must be for wheelchair accessible vehicles. It should be noted that “meaningful

access” was defined, not as a Utopian goal or a political promise, but as a basic civil right for those with disabilities.

Moreover, the United States Department of Transportation has mandated that vans seating less than eight people are required to be accessible. The "Taxi of Tomorrow" does not meet this requirement.

Based on the TLC’s website, the “Taxi of Tomorrow” design lists a number of features; however, wheelchair accessibility is not one of them. We understand that the City is cobbling together a dispatch system and a plan to retrofit Nissan NV200 taxicabs to make them wheelchair accessible in an attempt to comply with the federal court ruling. However, without a comprehensive plan to provide meaningful access it is clear that any contract to provide a “Taxi of Tomorrow” that is not accessible to the estimated 60,000 New Yorkers who use wheelchairs would violate the ADA and the federal court’s decision.

The City should take immediate steps to modify the contract so that the entire “Taxi of Tomorrow” fleet is wheelchair accessible. New York City ought to be a leader, not a follower, on this important civil rights issue.

Sincerely,

John C. Liu

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