

June 2023

Congestion Digestion

In recent years, our industry has endured more than its share of uncertainty. Disruptive new technologies, the medallion crisis, the pandemic—we have been hit by one tidal wave after another. This has been stressful and exhausting and, man, we could all use some smooth sailing.

Some of those waves we've seen coming, as is the case with the MTA's latest congestion pricing plan. How hard this is going to impact our industry has been unclear, but the May 12 release of the MTA, state and city environmental report at least provided some clarity on what is likely to be the worst-case scenario: taxi and for-hire vehicles will be charged a one-time daily fee for entering the congestion zone. How much that fee will be is still unknown, but the high-end is \$23.

I should say "new" congestion zone because, as we all know, since 2019 TLC vehicles have already been paying surcharges on trips that start, end, or pass through the zone south of 96th Street. This has amounted to well over a billion dollars. And while it comes as a relief that TLC vehicles won't be paying every darn time they move into the zone, we will be watching the MTA board very closely as they approach a final decision. It is my hope that the outcome actually *benefits* our industry.

May also brought the beginning of a new initiative at TLC: the Street Hail Livery Pilot Program. Using returned SHL permits and licenses, we have made up to 2500 special licenses available. They eliminate the upfront costs associated with SHLs, like the apple green paint job and meter installation, but also do away with the street hails, which are not always easy to find in the outer boroughs. Yes, I will be the first to admit it is a little confusing to call it the SHL Pilot Program when there is no street hailing allowed; the technicality is that, to do this, we had to utilize returned SHL permits. Like the greens, they can't conduct pickups in the exclusion zone and interest has been high. More than 5000 people submitted the Authorization Agreement. Those who aren't in the first 2500 will be placed on a waiting list. It is our hope that these vehicles will improve outer borough service, and especially non-emergency medical trips. Like any pilot program, it is an experiment. We will be keeping a close eye on it to see if this is a viable, long-term alternative to traditional SHL licenses.

As far as how my own driving experiment is going, I am slowly learning some tricks. One of them is quite down to earth. See, I have found that every time I am driving, I need to go to the bathroom. Seriously. Twenty minutes after I get in the vehicle, I gotta go. I don't know if it's because I'm a little nervous being both commissioner and a driver or what, but this doesn't happen in my personal vehicle, just when I'm out there looking for trips! I've been dropping by the Taxi Clubhouse regularly to use their great facilities and chat with drivers (by the way, we worked with DOT to expand parking for drivers across the street) but the Clubhouse is not a relief option unless I'm in the neighborhood. What I have discovered, however, is a nifty Google Maps app called got2gonyc that shows the location of over 1000 publicly available bathrooms

in NYC. It's crowdsourced, and it can be a godsend in a jam. You can learn more about it at got2gonyc.com.

See you out there!

David Do
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