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Testimony of Peter Mazer, General Counsel to the Metropolitan Taxicab Board of
Trade and the MTBOT Driver Resource Center
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Good morning. My name is Peter Mazer and I am the General Counsel to the Metropolitan Taxicab Board of Trade, the City's largest taxi trade association representing the owners and operators of 5,500 yellow medallion taxicabs and more than 20,000 taxi drivers. I am also General Counsel to the MTBOT Driver Resource Center which provides free legal services and free mandatory education classes to drivers that lease from MTBOT fleets.

Congestion is among the greatest challenges that taxi drivers face in their everyday lives. It has become increasingly difficult to move in this city and while there may be numerous factors that have contributed to congestion, there have been very few solutions implemented by the City. The evidence is clear. Try getting across town during rush hour, up 6th Avenue on a Friday night or navigate the crushing traffic on the Grand Central Parkway near LaGuardia Airport.

Yellow taxis are the most efficient non-publicly subsidized mass transportation vehicles in New York City. We move more people with less vehicles. Medallion taxicabs move nearly a half million passengers each day; that is more than the entire mass transit systems of all but seven U.S. cities. It is due in large part to the prevalence a great mass transportation network including yellow taxicab that New York has the lowest level of car ownership in the country.

However, as transportation expert Bruce Schaller pointed out in his February report "Unsustainable: The Growth of App-Based Ride Services and Traffic, Travel and the Future of New York City," app-based services, which are not capped or subject to environmental reviews like yellow taxicabs, have grown exponentially and unsustainably. Mr. Schaller concludes that "a continuation of TNC-led growth in travel is not sustainable for a growing New York" and acknowledges that ridership, mostly concentrated in Manhattan, and overwhelmingly single passenger, non-car pool trips, had tripled in the 18 months preceding the report's publication.

App-based services perform far fewer trips per vehicle than yellow taxicabs – and are far less efficient than yellow taxicabs. There are also far more app-based black cars now than yellow taxicabs, which remained capped at under 14,000. If the city were to add more yellow taxi medallions, it would perform an environmental review. However, no such review process exists for the more plentiful app-based vehicles. An app company can own as many bases as it wants and can affiliate as many vehicles as it wants. And the app-based companies exploited this policy and indeed opened as many bases as it wanted and affiliated as many vehicles as it could. This is great for the app companies – but really bad for congestion and for many of the drivers struggling to compete for a limited pool of fares.

This represents a fundamental policy shift – allowing private companies to determine how many vehicles are appropriate to hit the road rather than those City agencies and elected officials responsible for transportation and traffic policy and public safety. Well, we all see the result of this policy shift – congestion, congestion and more endless congestion with no relief in sight – just more vehicles and more congestion.

You don't need to be a traffic engineer to realize that adding 50,000 app-based vehicles to city streets in 3 years will cause more congestion in the most congested parts of the city. In fact, today there are over 90,000 app-based for-hire vehicles on the road today. But traffic engineers like Bruce Schaller have compiled the data, and guess what, that is exactly what has happened. Additionally, the proliferation in app-based vehicles have led to thousands of drivers trapped in bad deals, where the only way they can make the hefty auto loan and insurance payments as well as the high commissions to the app companies is to cruise off the app and illegally pick up street hails – an exclusive right that yellow taxicab owners and drivers purchased from the city. Illegal street hails are a major contributor to traffic congestion as well as being dangerous for passengers and harmful to drivers who play by the rules.

The City has been unsuccessful in curbing this problem and it has spiraled out of control. And we applaud the chair for holding this hearing. Now we need to implement real reforms that will restore some level of sanity to the streets and help our city emerge the traffic madness.

Thank you.