

# Congestion in Midtown

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## **Introduction**

This paper reports on the volume of vehicle-types that make-up daytime Midtown weekday traffic. This paper summarizes the analysis of over 90 short videos of daytime traffic conditions at (basically) randomly selected midtown locations. In each video, this author calls out the type of vehicle which passes by the location of the recording. The purpose was to highlight the extent to which midtown traffic congestion is due to the invasion of 100,000 Taxi and Limousine Commission (TLC) approved App-Based, For-Hire-Vehicles (Uber, Lyft, etc.)

The importance of this work is to point out not only the true cause of congestion but also the missed opportunity on the part of the City and State to raise the money the MTA needs. This report has been done for the benefit of the public, in general, and, specifically, for consideration by the committee contemplating the design of the Midtown Congestion Pricing program that the State and the Federal Government authorized the City and the MTA to implement.

## **Summary of Results**

For this study, each observed vehicle-in-motion was placed into one of seven categories: TLC-plates (FHVs), Yellow or Green Cabs, Regular (private) vehicles, Commercial vehicles, Large Trucks, Buses, and Other (police, EMS etc.). Of the over 2,000 vehicles recorded, 36.3% were TLC plated For-Hire-Vehicles, 32.7% were regular (personal) cars, and only 14.2% were yellow or green cabs (virtually all were yellow cabs.) If only vehicles that could be considered “cars” are included, the FHV’s constituted 43.6%, regular cars 39.3%, and cabs 17.1%.

Since FHVs look, to the untrained eye, no different than personal cars, they are not recognized as the primary cause of daytime midtown congestion. But the numbers indicate that indeed they are.

*It can be said with confidence that more than half of those “cars” that people see are not personal cars driven by commuters, but instead FHV's.*

FHV's represent the largest proportion of vehicles and the largest proportion of car-type vehicles. More than 4 out of every ten car-type vehicles are FHV's. There are about three times as many FHV's as cabs. Cabs have paid up to a million dollars to have the right to be there. FHV's pay \$275. Both percentage values for the FHV's are significantly higher at the 95% statistical level. *There should be no doubt in anyone's mind that FHV's are not only a significant and substantial source of congestion in Midtown but are also likely the most significant source.*

## **Methodology**

The library of videos consists of over 90 short videos of vehicular traffic during weekday hours in a number of Midtown locations during October and November before the holiday season started. Most of the videos record at least one light cycle of traffic at an intersection or segment of a street although some are shorter. Some involve a couple of dozen vehicles; some just a handful. The videos are available on the following YouTube channel “[Lucius Riccio on Traffic Congestion.](#)”

The locations include: Broadway between 8<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> streets, West 4<sup>th</sup> Street near Washington Square Park, 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue near 8<sup>th</sup> Street, Madison Avenue in the 20's, Lexington Avenue and Park Avenue South at 33<sup>rd</sup> Street, and 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue near Penn Station. Although this group may not be a perfect random sample of Midtown, it is a varied collection of locations with a large number of vehicles observed. No effort was made to include or exclude locations, times, or traffic volume conditions. In total, the resulting distribution of vehicle-types is a likely representation of all vehicles in Midtown during weekday traffic.

In the Introduction of this report, it was stated that the group of locations is “basically” a random sample. The locations were not “randomly” selected in a pure scientific sense. They were recorded by the author while going to and from the subway during the course of the day on the way to and from work.

Although this sample represents a substantial collection of locations, there are large sections of Midtown not included in this study. More videos will be added to the YouTube Channel going forward by this author and the data will be updated. However, this author encourages rather than discourages the collection and documentation of other videos by anyone reading this report. This author expects the results will be similar.

## **Commentary**

As state earlier, most people do not recognize the extent to which the FHV's have taken over our streets and have caused congestion and pollution. *This is because most FHV's look like regular, personal cars.* Most people see FHV cars and assume they are privately owned vehicles. In midtown it is assumed that those cars are for commuters or other business people. The notion of congestion pricing is that if commuters' vehicles were charged to drive in Midtown, fewer cars would populate the streets. The assumption by most people is that all those cars one sees in the streets are personal cars most likely driven by a commuter. But this study disputes that assumption.

A cab can be distinguished by its color, but FHV's are regular cars. To distinguish them from personal cars, one has to look at the license plate. The FHV's have distinctive "TLC" license plates. On the videos, the author calls out "TLC" to indicate the passing car is not a personal ("regular") car as it might appear, but instead is a FHV.

The overall number of FHV's authorized by the TLC has been until recently unregulated and each pays a pittance (\$275 per year) to operate in Manhattan. Yellow taxis have paid the City up to \$1 million for a medallion and about \$15,000 per year in fees. Yellows are limited to about 13,500 medallions. If the City wanted to sell more, they would have to do an EIS. Not so for FHV's. The City and State have placed not only no medallion-type fee on FHV's but also no limit on their number until only recently. The Yellow medallion system is already the City's first congestion pricing program: their number is limited by law and by the EIS process, they pay a fee (medallion) to "enter" service, and then additional annual fees.

As the City and State contemplate the implementation of a Congestion Pricing program, it is useful to understand how harmful the FHV's are to the City and what a lost opportunity it has been to raise perhaps billions of dollars for the MTA by not charging the FHV's what the Yellows have had to pay. Not only has the infestation of FHV's led to 9 suicides and hundreds of bankruptcies, the City *gave away* (this author contends illegally) access to the valuable midtown streets to the FHV's when it could have raised enough money to build several miles of new subway tunnel by charging the FHV's what the Yellows have to pay.

## **Additional Studies**

Two important aspects of NYC traffic were not studied: weekday traffic on the bridges and tunnels entering Manhattan, and non-weekday (evening and weekend) traffic. NYC weekday congestion really consists of three distinct parts: morning rush hour traffic at the bridges and tunnels entering Manhattan on the opposite side of those bridges and tunnels, then mid-day Midtown congestion, and lastly the far worse evening crunch traffic at the bridges and tunnels within Manhattan of vehicles trying to get off the island.

This study reports on that mid-day Midtown component. The next phase will be to look at the bridges and tunnels. However, it has been expected that a sizable number of those vehicles entering Manhattan in the rush hour are those FHV's driving in so that they can drive around all day. The drivers certainly don't live in Midtown. They must comprise a substantial number of rush hour traffic. The same is likely true of the evening rush, although there may be a second wave of FHV's for the evening and night customers.

As mentioned, also not covered by this report is Midtown traffic on weekday *evenings* and traffic in Manhattan on weekends, which in this author's limited experience is often far worse than the weekday traffic. Saturday may actually be the worst day of the week for traffic congestion. Based on this author's anecdotal observation of Saturday traffic, it is not just worse than weekday traffic but worse due to an even greater abundance of FHV's.

## Recommendations

First, charge the FHV's like the medallion cabs a significant "entry" fee. Had the City charged the FHV's what the Medallion cabs have had to pay just to be able to operate, the City would have raised perhaps close to \$100 billion. Of course, the City could not have charged each FHV \$1 million and still sold 100,000, but any charge would have been "found money".

Unfortunately, given that the City and State completely fumbled the ball when the app-based FHV's arrived by not charging them an "entry" fee, it may be somewhat problematic doing so now. But here is a suggestion: Create a permit fee bidding procedure. In the first year, bid out 100,000 (or whatever the current number of allowed FHV's is) one-year permits. Assume, under this approach, the City went and set the price at \$5,000 per year and then sold 100,000 permits, they would raise *a half billion dollars*, enough to build a mile and a half of new subway tunnel each year. For the second year, bid 80,000 permits. By raising the price to \$6,500, the City would raise approximately another half billion dollars.

Then each year reduce the number by 20,000 and raise the price until the number of permits approaches the number of existing medallions. The amount of money raised each year would likely approach the amount expected from Congestion Pricing, without the expense of a network of cameras and enforcement personnel. If used properly, NYC could have a subway system that would maintain its position as the number one city in the world.

Second, implement a Community Board Based Residential Parking Permit program to protect the neighborhoods around the edges of the planned Congestion Zone. Those communities are currently and understandably afraid commuters will flood their neighborhoods looking for free parking.

Third, at a minimum, **exempt the Yellow Medallion and Green cabs from the congestion charge.** *They've already paid a congestion charge by buying a medallion.* The fees they are charged should also be re-examined. Some of those fees should either be dropped, or dedicated to the drivers.

## Conclusion

The MTA desperately needs a new, substantial source of funds. NYC needs a vibrant MTA. Congestion Pricing is one way, but there are other, perhaps better ways. One of which is by recognizing the true source of congestion and charging those vehicles.

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## Data

### Video # Counts by Category of Vehicles

#	TLC	Car	Comm	TRK	Taxi (Y/G)	Bus	Other
15544		5	1	0	0	0	0
15555		3	7	2	2	4	0
15562		7	6	0	1	2	2
16043		4	4	0	0	1	1
16050		6	1	3	0	1	0
00321		4	7	2	0	4	0
21232		14	4	2	0	4	2
21262		15	9	0	0	5	0
21303		9	20	0	1	2	2
21291		10	7	0	0	2	0
21272		2	2	0	0	0	0
21304		11	12	2	0	1	0
21272		11	11	1	0	3	2
21253		4	5	0	0	0	0
16471		8	3	3	0	1	0
15020		10	11	4	1	3	0
22011		21	8	3	0	7	1
16350		12	10	0	0	4	0
16323		4	3	0	1	0	0
16315		4	1	0	0	0	0
22112		15	12	1	1	5	0
22063		8	7	0	0	1	0
20265		4	4	2	0	4	0
20250		9	14	0	0	2	0
20225		13	16	1	2	5	2
12390		10	5	2	1	1	0
22070		10	7	1	0	0	0
1421		11	5	0	0	1	0
1424		2	1	0	0	4	0
1439		10	5	1	0	13	0
2206		4	1	0	0	1	0
20454		7	8	0	0	1	0
2043		10	17	1	3	0	0
17341		5	5	3	1	6	1
17332		4	2	1	1	0	0
17104		5	6	3	1	7	4
17085		6	6	4	1	6	0
20321		11	14	2	0	1	3

17233	7	9	5	3	2	1	0
1722	6	5	3	0	3	1	0
1409	6	6	4	1	6	0	0
1257	3	5	1	0	7	0	1
1255	11	12	4	0	3	0	0
1724	6	7	7	0	1	1	0
1723	1	2	2	0	1	0	0
1718	7	6	3	0	5	0	0
2015	6	8	5	1	1	0	0
1427	14	12	3	0	8	0	0
1425	6	3	3	1	4	0	0
21003	12	17	5	0	4	2	1
1812	8	10	1	0	2	3	0
2046	5	1	0	0	0	1	0
20455	4	4	0	0	1	0	0
20454	7	8	0	0	1	0	0
2043	11	16	1	3	0	0	0
1240	10	10	1	1	2	1	0
1744	13	4	6	1	6	2	0
1742	13	12	4	2	5	0	1
1739	18	16	5	2	10	0	1
1734	5	16	6	5	7	0	0
1729	17	13	13	4	8	2	3
1723	11	3	2	2	6	0	0
17185	2	8	0	0	1	0	1
1716	12	11	1	2	9	0	0
1709	6	8	6	1	3	0	0
2118	20	20	1	1	9	2	0
1305	4	5	4	0	2	0	0
1303	4	5	5	0	0	0	0
1450	13	10	5	0	3	0	1
1448	15	5	6	1	4	0	0
1624	13	20	9	8	6	1	0
2057	11	9	2	0	7	0	0
2056	6	7	1	0	5	2	0
13004	7	9	1	1	1	2	0
1257	5	3	3	0	0	1	0
1451	4	3	0	0	0	0	0
1432	10	8	1	0	10	0	1
1285	3	3	0	1	3	0	0
2146	9	13	0	0	3	1	0
1300	3	4	2	1	3	2	0
1446	8	8	0	2	7	3	0
1431	19	5	8	0	10	0	0
1428	6	8	3	0	0	0	1

1245	14	12	9	3	3	1	0	
1831	10	3	4	0	5	1	0	
1547	3	3	2	0	0	4	0	
2151	14	2	2	2	0	0	1	
Total	736	664	203	66	289	54	18	2030
Percent	0.362562	0.327094	0.1	0.032512	0.142365	0.026601	0.008867	
% Cars	0.435761	0.393132			0.171107			