

UNITED SPINAL^{NOW}

Congestion Pricing, Taxis and PWDs

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People with disabilities (PWDs), more specifically, wheelchair users, will experience New York City's congestion pricing surcharge in a more punishing manner than most other New Yorkers.

Congestion pricing will raise approximately \$400 million per year for the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) and, of course, is intended to ease congestion and improve traffic flow. Because wheelchair users generally have less transportation options than the able-bodied public they depend more on automobiles than those who can use all forms of mass transit.

If subway stations are not wheelchair accessible many wheelchair users rely on their cars and special parking permits or accessible taxis. If they rely on taxis they may be in trouble.

The Taxis For All Campaign (TFAC) is an association comprised of disability-related organizations, including United Spinal Association and individuals with disabilities, which has fought for the past 20 years to make taxis and other for-hire vehicles accessible to people with disabilities. We have submitted an affidavit in support of Taxifleet Management's suit against the State of New York, the City and its Taxi and Limousine Commission (TLC).

The suit is aimed at exempting the yellow cab industry from the surcharge. TLC Commissioner Meera Joshi, supported relieving the already Uber/Lyft-devastated taxi industry from the \$2.50 per trip surcharge for travel below 96th St. in Manhattan. She stated, "the fact that it will cost \$5.80 to step into a taxi cab now is going to be devastating for the taxi industry." The plan was adopted, including the yellow cabs, over her objection. She recently announced her resignation.

While Uber is beginning accessible service in N.Y.C. after years of resistance, the only vehicles that are generally available to those who use wheelchairs are yellow cabs, which must be 50 percent accessible by 2020, pursuant to the settlement of a lawsuit brought by the TFAC. (Unfortunately, they won't be as a result of TLC policy changes to support the sagging yellow cab industry, foreclosures on financed taxi medallions and, according to some medallion owners, the inability to get drivers to operate accessible vehicles despite compensation enhancements approved by the TLC.)

TFAC's affidavit demonstrates to the court how necessary accessible taxi services are to wheelchair users. TFAC points out that only yellow cabs have to be 50 percent accessible, but not their much less regulated Uber/Lyft competitors.

Additionally, every single yellow cab passenger pays a 30 cents surcharge to N.Y.C. intended to be returned to purchasers of accessible taxis to offset the cost of accessibility equipment and maintenance. The Uber/Lyft type services do not pay into this fund.

The \$2.50 surcharge imposes a burden on poor people that is disproportionate in effect when compared to the rest of the population, but poor people do not need to rely on taxis. They can use the subway.

With only 24 percent of stations accessible, poor wheelchair users are more taxi dependent and the surcharge is burdensome for those living on fixed incomes.

When congestion pricing is implemented there is a real threat of even more isolation and marginalization of N.Y.C.'s wheelchair-using population as yellow cabs go out of business.

Visitors who use wheelchair, who have called to compliment us in the past about our partially accessible yellow cab fleet, will find themselves stranded at the airports, Penn Station and Grand Central Station as they arrive, much like they were before our "successful" accessible taxi initiatives.