

Now Is Not The Time For Paratransit Shared Rides

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If you have even taken Access-A-Ride (AAR) in New York City, I am sure you have some interesting stories.

While it is an essential service that many people with disabilities, rely on for transportation, and for some, their only option for transportation, there are a number of issues that need improvement. One such issue I would like to mention is shared rides.

During the pandemic shared rides were suspended. As Access-A-Ride can often be the only transportation option for some people with disabilities, this was a welcome safety measure.

You should know that I am a totally blind woman and use paratransit services. Knowing that I would have a vehicle to myself if I needed or chose to take AAR was certainly a welcome relief during these tough times.

Despite concerns and objections from riders and disability advocates, and despite the fact that we are still very much in the midst of a pandemic, shared rides returned in July 2021. Now is not the time to return to shared rides. Safety, while perhaps the most important reason, is only one of the reasons we believe this.

The quality of service of AAR is something that may not be understood by people who do not use the service. Vehicles are frequently old and not as clean as they could or should be. Rides are often late with long trip times, especially when there are shared rides.

This is a big problem when it comes to things like getting to a medical appointment, a full-time and/or part-time work assignment, a job interview or school. We've heard reports of some drivers not wearing masks. In addition, we do not know about their vaccination status. This puts us at tremendous risk and in uncertain and possibly high-anxiety situations.

With the rise of the COVID-19 Delta variant, we say again, now is not the time for shared rides. The Delta variant has been reported to be highly contagious. It is also now the most prevalent strain of the virus in New York City.

A paratransit ride is already in an enclosed space with the potential of passengers and/or drivers who may not have a full-vaccinated status. The addition of multiple riders with trips scheduled throughout the five boroughs will result in an increased trip time.

A ride that should be only 30 minutes could now take an hour or two hours. It is not a position that people with disabilities should face, especially if Access-A-Ride is someone's only option for transportation.

We are calling for the suspension of shared rides until it becomes safe again. You can help. You can contact the MTA by calling 877 337-2017 or visit <https://new.mta.info/customer-feedback> to let them know how you feel about this issue.

When we speak together, we are heard. Let's make sure the MTA hears us when we say "Now is not the time for shared rides."