

# Bloomberg's taxi plan sparks debate

## Queens legislators disagree about merits of mayor's livery cab proposal

by Jason Pafundi

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Public Advocate Bill de Blasio rallied a crowd of nearly 1,000 livery and taxi drivers last week in front of Gov. Cuomo's city office to urge the governor to make significant modifications to the Livery Street Hail bill (A.8496/S.5825).

The group, composed of organizations that represent over 90 percent of the livery and yellow taxi industries, presented more than 10,000 signatures from drivers, garage and base employees and the general public, urging the governor to stop the mayor's plan from "wrecking the livelihoods of thousands in the livery and yellow taxi industries."

As it is written, the bill would allow livery cars to pick up street hails, a practice that is now illegal.

"As a yellow cab driver, I am against this bill because it will take money out of my pocket," said a driver who wished to remain anonymous. "The street hail is supposed to be for yellow cars not black ones."

In Queens, elected officials disagree on whether or not the bill should be signed into law by the governor.

State Sen. Toby Ann Stavisky (D-Flushing), who represents an area without yellow cabs, said that many of her constituents rely on car services to take them to appointments and to the airport. If livery cars can pick up fares on the street, Stavisky said, they might forget about the woman needing a ride to the doctor's office.



An army of taxis sit in a parking lot at LaGuardia Airport. The Livery Street Hail bill has yet to be signed into law and would allow livery cabs to pick up passengers from the street.

PHOTO BY STEVE MALECKI

"A senior citizen calls, but on the way, the cab picks up a fare from the street because that person wants to go a longer distance," she said. "The poor lady is left standing, nobody comes to get her, and she misses her appointment. That is what would happen under this plan.

"You've got to have some controls, partic-

ularly for the pre-arranged calls so that they can't stop for the more lucrative fare from someone standing on the street," the senator added.

Others, like Assemblyman Rory Lancman (D-Fresh Meadows) are in favor of the bill. He said the area he represents has no taxi service, so allowing livery street pickups

"makes sense." Also, the sale of permits to livery cab drivers would be a financial windfall for the city.

"It makes sense to let New York City raise a billion plus dollars by expanding the number of medallions by selling them at auction," Lancman said. "It accomplishes two very important objectives."

Yellow cab service outside Manhattan is mainly relegated to cars going to and from the airport, and though it's illegal, livery cabs still attempt to pick up people on the street because the demand is there.

"When you have a huge demand for something but it is illegal, some percentage of livery drivers and ordinary people will engage in that conduct," Lancman said. "So it makes sense to legalize it. Let's regulate it and get revenues from it, and let people take a cab if they want to."

The current enforcement of illegal street hails has been lax, according to a press release from the Coalition for Taxi Equity and Justice.

Madeline Ortega, a Woodside resident, said she made the mistake of getting into a livery cab to go to the grocery store. A five-minute ride ended up costing her \$30 because the driver could charge whatever he wanted.

Lancman said the practice is widespread and unregulated.

"It's the wild west out there," he said. "We need to legalize and regulate this

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