

This is Progress?  
by Larry Fisher

News recently came out about the three largest “ride-hail” companies banding together to sue the NYC TLC’s mandate regarding accessibility for their cars. Their claim is that the TLC is being “arbitrary and capricious” in burdening the app companies and smaller FHV companies to meet a 25% requirement for their entire fleet by 2023. In a separate action, five trade groups argued for an injunction against the rule change. The yellow taxi industry needs to take advantage of this faux pas. The yellow taxi industry needs to beat the FHV and app companies brains in by marketing to the disabled community and the general public as good business and corporate citizens. This could be the greatest opportunity to recapture some of the luster the traditional taxis have lost over the last few years.

I must admit, though, I was never a fan of the accessible program. Initially, I believed it to be unplanned, not well thought out and deficient in its infrastructure. Vehicles were in short supply, and worse yet, so were replacement parts. The dispatch system was originally a joke. It would chase a driver from Long Island City, for example, to Manhattan, only to cancel when it would take too long to get there.

As time went on, the dispatch program improved. The vehicles became more plentiful, though still not fuel efficient. Parts were in supply. The expense of the car was still an issue when the city auctioned off the first of 400 accessible medallions in 2013. There were another 1,600 scheduled to be auctioned to the public during subsequent years. In addition, one condition of the issuance of green medallions was the requirement that 20% of that fleet be accessible, which, by the way, never has been. This led me to believe that the city was strongly behind the program to provide accessibility to all New Yorkers. Boy, was I wrong.

It will be interesting to me to see how the courts will decide this issue, and more to the point, how hard the city will defend its rule-making ability. As we all are painfully aware, the multiple yellow groups that have sued the city or the TLC have fared badly in the judicial system lately.

On another note, whenever I see or hear from my friends in the taxi industry, there is a resounding sadness over what has become of this business. Wealth has been stolen. Income has been reduced. People’s lives have been reduced to rubble. It’s no joke. What has happened to the New York City taxi industry is a tragedy and a travesty, and moreover, is poor public policy. And, at the end of the day, this is, and was, and will always be, a political problem requiring political solutions.

As for me, to quote from the Fleetwood Mac song “Landslide”  
Well, I’ve been afraid of changin’  
’Cause I’ve built my life around you  
But time makes you bolder  
Even children get older  
And I’m getting older, too