



**Testimony of Aziz Bah**  
**Organizing Director**  
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**MTA, NYS DOT, NYC DOT Hearing on Central Business District Tolling Program**  
**September 30, 2021**

Good evening. My name is Aziz Bah, I am a for-hire vehicle rideshare driver and the Organizing Director of the Independent Drivers Guild (IDG). Thank you for this opportunity to testify before you today regarding the Central Business District Tolling Program (CBDTP)

The IDG is a nonprofit affiliate of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAMAW), and our organization represents over 120,000 for-hire vehicle drivers in New York State and 250,000 in Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey and Illinois, all of whom are working throughout the for-hire vehicle industry. The IAMAW is the only union to successfully organize black car workers in New York City and has been doing so for over twenty years.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am here to caution you, to implore you to not add any additional fees on trips in for-hire vehicles, including Ubers, Lyfts, Liveries and Taxis. The fees will not come from the pockets of Silicon Valley billionaires, but from the pockets of hard-working New Yorkers. New Yorkers that have invested in driving, pouring their life savings into the industry. These are the workers that end up paying the fees.

All drivers were struggling and barely able to make ends meet before the pandemic and we have been through some even tougher times, to say the least, over the last 18 months and counting. Drivers across all our industry's sectors (FHVs, medallions, liveries) are some of the true unsung heroes of this crisis, putting their own lives at risk shuttling essential workers, doctors and nurses back and forth from their jobs and delivering millions of meals to those in need. Many of our drivers were out of work for several months and some still are. Some drivers got sick. Some drivers died. Some have and continue to suffer from depression, anxiety and other mental disorders. Many drivers have been financially devastated, have simply left the industry, filed for bankruptcy or on the brink of doing so.

While companies like Amazon thrived in the pandemic, for-hire vehicle drivers were suddenly without work, but were still on the hook for contractual expenses for vehicle payments and TLC insurance which often total more than \$1000 per month. And that's before rent and food. Even now as pandemic unemployment payments have ceased, the city's Taxi and Limousine

Commission reports that the number of average daily For-Hire Vehicle trips is still significantly lower than during the pre-pandemic period.

That being said, we simply cannot absorb another fee or another tax. Even if it is paid for by the consumer, the ultimate impact will be on the drivers in lost business and income. And in order to remain competitive, we fear the app-companies will simply lower their rates, again, impacting driver income. For-hire vehicle travel in New York City cannot be seen as an untapped source of funding for the state, city and MTA. This must stop as it is only hurting the working class, poor and immigrant communities and drivers.

FHV rides already pay more than their fair share. While the deep-pocketed commercial, construction and big box delivery vehicles that clog our streets have been exempt from congestion fees to date, low-income drivers and riders have already been subject to congestion fees pursuant to NYS law since 2019. We are already paying congestion fees of \$2.50 on trips in taxis, and \$2.75 for trips in an Uber or Lyft. Where has this money gone, how much has been raised for the MTA congestion program? It is also important to remember that New York City's FHV trips are also subject to an 8.875 percent sales tax (of which .375 percent is dedicated to the MTA), much higher than the fees charged to city taxis (a 50¢ surcharge) or upstate FHVs (a 4 percent assessment on TNCs).

Any policy changes in this area must level the tax playing field between New York's for-hire vehicles once and for all so that one service is not advantaged over the other – not simply add to the inequity. All livery, taxi and FHV drivers are treated fairly with parity across the industry.

While we share the all-important goals of reducing traffic, improving air quality and public transportation, the rideshare industry should be viewed as part of the solution and supported -- not taxed and penalized. The benefit of our industry is in our name, ride-share. We help keep private vehicles off the streets as consumers share our vehicles. We serve those communities who are underserved by public transportation.

Instead of increasing costs on these drivers or those riders who depend on these services for reliable, affordable transportation, we encourage you to look at the other contributors of traffic in the congestion zone - including those who drive their personal cars into the CBD, a place with incredible access to public transportation, and delivery services like Amazon, UPS, FedEx, which are continually creating congestion through double parking while they make deliveries and taking up huge amounts of space on the narrow streets in Manhattan. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



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The Guild is an IAMAW affiliate  
representing app-based drivers.  
We are Uber, Lyft, Via, Juno workers  
united for a fair for-hire vehicle industry.

