

# Fixing the Pedicab Problem

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A Roadmap to Reform

Midtown  
Community  
Justice  
Center

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A report by the Midtown Community Justice Center in collaboration with the Office of Council Member Gale Brewer, the Central Park Conservancy, and the Times Square Alliance.

**May 2026**

## **Acknowledgements**

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## **Midtown Community Justice Center**

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# Executive Summary: The Case for Comprehensive Pedicab Reform in New York City

New York City’s pedicab industry is fundamentally broken. In its current form, it works for no one.

It does not work for consumers, particularly out-of-town tourists, who are routinely targeted and exposed to opaque pricing and extreme overcharging by operators. It does not work for pedicab drivers, many of whom are exploited by pedicab fleet owners who operate underground rental businesses while shifting legal and financial risk onto drivers. It does not work for Broadway theatergoers, who increasingly face congested sidewalks and streets, blaring music, and aggressive solicitation in Midtown’s already crowded Theater District. And it does not work for Central Park visitors, who must often run the gauntlet of pedicabs encircling the Park, competing aggressively for customers and undermining the visitor experience in one of the City’s most treasured public spaces.

The consequences of this failure are well documented. Reputable news outlets have repeatedly reported on tourists being charged hundreds of dollars for short pedicab rides spanning only a few blocks, often after being misled about pricing or told a per-minute rate was a flat fee. These incidents are not isolated; they are symptoms of a regulatory system that has failed to keep pace with the realities of the industry.

Complaints to the City’s 311 helpline also underscore the degree to which consumers are routinely taken advantage of in ways that leave them feeling angry and abused, with little recourse for corrective action.<sup>[1]</sup>

For years, the City has relied primarily on police enforcement—ticketing individual drivers, issuing summonses, and conducting episodic crackdowns. This approach has not had a meaningful impact. Enforcement is inconsistent, resource-intensive, and often misdirected at drivers rather than the business owners who control vehicles, pricing practices, and working conditions. High dismissal rates in court further undermine deterrence.

What is needed is not more of the same enforcement, but structural regulatory reform—a modernized framework that promotes safety, transparency, accountability, and fairness, while bringing the industry into the daylight in a manner that is good both for consumers and law-abiding drivers. The reforms below—developed by the Midtown Community Justice Center in close collaboration with the Office of Council Member Gale Brewer, and in consultation with a range of key stakeholders including the Central Park Conservancy, the Times Square Alliance, and the New York Pedicab Alliance—are designed to accomplish that.

## Core Reforms Needed

- 1. Move Industry Oversight from Department of Consumer and Worker Protection (DCWP) to Taxi and Limousine Commission (TLC)**  
The pedicab industry requires the regulatory structure used by the Taxi and Limousine Commission for other for-hire vehicles, which includes low barriers to legal entry, clear accountability, and strong safety standards.
- 2. Standardize Rates and Mandate Meters**  
Uniform pricing and mandatory meters are essential to protect consumers, reduce fraud, and legitimize the industry.
- 3. Hold Vehicle Owners Accountable**  
Many pedicabs are owned by individuals who rent vehicles to drivers daily while evading responsibility for compliance.
- 4. Legalize Safe Electric Motors and Ban Unsafe Ones**  
Electric motors are already deeply embedded in the industry and are a practical necessity for long shifts. Making all motors illegal has only empowered arbitrary enforcement.
- 5. Create a Consistent Civil Enforcement Structure**  
Pedicab enforcement is fragmented and overly reliant on criminal summonses issued by the NYPD.
- 6. Reform Court Processes**  
High dismissal rates for criminal summonses based on a lack of discovery compliance undermine enforcement and accountability.

### 7. Create Basic Driver Support Infrastructure

Even compliant drivers are forced to break rules due to the absence of basic facilities.

### 8. Ensure Accessible Insurance Premiums to Encourage Legal Operation

High insurance costs are a major barrier to legal pedicab operation. Currently, four insurance providers meet the insurance coverage requirements outlined in the Administrative Code. These providers charge annual premiums that are widely viewed as unsustainably high.

## Conclusion

The current pedicab system undermines consumer trust, exploits workers, degrades public spaces, and strains enforcement resources—while delivering none of the transparency or accountability New Yorkers deserve.

Comprehensive regulatory reform, modeled on proven frameworks already in use elsewhere in the City, offers a clear path forward. Done correctly, it will protect visitors, support a largely immigrant workforce, and restore order to Midtown and Central Park.

**\$ 4 PER  
MINUTE PER  
RIDE**

NO ADDITIONAL FEES  
MAY BE CHARGED  
DRIVER MUST GIVE  
PASSENGERS A PEDI CAB  
REGISTRATION CARD



## Background and History

Pedicabs, which combine a bicycle and carriage for passengers, are for-hire vehicles offering short-distance and scenic rides, primarily to tourists in Times Square and Central Park, and occasionally local commuters.

New York's pedicab industry traces back to 1994, when an environmentalist named George Bliss began assembling human-powered rickshaws in SoHo. Through the late 1990s and early 2000s, the fleet grew quietly around Midtown and Central Park—becoming a genuine commercial business with no licensing requirements, no mandatory insurance, no safety standards, and no enforceable rate rules.

By 2005, the industry's growth had alarmed the yellow cab and horse-carriage industries enough that they began lobbying the City Council aggressively. Council Member Christine Quinn—later Council Speaker—became the central legislative figure. Several bills were debated across the years, including one that would have capped licenses at 325, but ultimately the industry sued and won. A state court struck down the cap in 2008 as legally defective, leaving the industry in a practical enforcement vacuum while litigation wound through the courts.

The deadlock broke in June 2009, four days after a pedicab accident on the Williamsburg Bridge. Mayor Bloomberg and Speaker Quinn announced a compromise. The resulting law—Intro 1031-A—established the framework still nominally in place today: Department of Consumer and Worker Protection (DCWP) licensing for businesses and drivers,

mandatory insurance, safety inspections, an 850-plate cap, and per-minute pricing displayed on exterior signage. Subsequent amendments in 2011 and 2012 refined seizure procedures and clarified fare rules. On paper, it looked like a workable structure.<sup>[2]</sup>

## The Long Failure of Enforcement

In hindsight, the 2009 framework has failed on nearly every front. Pricing fraud became endemic. A 2018 ABC7 investigation found more pedicab operators breaking laws than following them near Times Square on a single evening, with fares billed at \$200, \$400, or even \$600 for short rides. DCWP at the time acknowledged it had no authority or operational capacity to conduct random on-street stops. By the early 2020s, individual passengers were being charged \$500 to nearly \$1,000 for 15 to 20-minute trips. Unlicensed operators multiplied unchecked. The city issued approximately 850 plates, but by 2024 an estimated 1,200 to 1,500 pedicabs were operating, many with forged credentials.

Residents near the Broadway theater district have faced amplified music audible inside performances. Licensed pedicab operators have been systematically undercut by more recent operators with no licenses and no insurance. A small number of pedicab fleet owners take advantage of drivers, often recent immigrants with very limited options for earning a living, renting vehicles by the day that are uninsured, display improper signage, and have broken seatbelts, and leaving drivers to bear the cost of criminal summonses.

Since November 2024, when the Office of Court Administration reopened the Midtown Community Justice Center’s (“Justice Center”) summons calendar, the Justice Center has adjudicated well over 2,000 cases related to pedicabs. The drivers who appear in the Justice Center’s courtroom have shared a host of frustrations about the industry, including working conditions, tensions with NYPD, frequent ticketing (sometimes for minor infractions), and an inability to obtain accurate information about their open cases. Drivers who are licensed, insured, and driving registered vehicles are distressed by the proliferation of drivers operating illegally who give their industry a bad reputation and take their customers. In August of 2025, a pedicab driver named Musa Cetin took his own life while in police custody after getting arrested on an open summons warrant related to pedicab driving. Mr. Cetin’s tragic death further underscored a dysfunctional industry that impacts lives and livelihoods.

The Justice Center has likewise fielded complaints about pedicabs from multiple stakeholders, including the Times Square Alliance, the Central Park Conservancy, Midtown businesses, community members, elected officials, and the New York Pedicab Alliance, which represents licensed pedicab drivers. These groups expressed frustration with the current system’s inability to address challenges posed by pedicabs, including blocked entrances to hotels and theaters, loud music, tourists’ complaints about excessive charges, and more. Council Members Brewer, Powers,<sup>[3]</sup> and Bottcher,<sup>[4]</sup> whose districts all include pedicab traffic, similarly receive complaints and requests for inter-

vention from the same stakeholders. In 2025, the City’s 311 system received 172 complaints related to pedicabs. Of those, 86 reported overcharging and another 35 reported an unlicensed pedicab operator.

What has emerged over time is a framework with enough restrictions to burden legal operators but not enough enforcement to deter problematic ones, much less the fleet owners who rent pedicabs to unscrupulous drivers. That imbalance has persisted for fifteen years.

## Pedicab Roundtable

As part of the Midtown Community Justice Center’s mission-driven goal to improve public safety and community conditions, we sought first to understand the issue from all perspectives and then to convene key stakeholders to seek solutions.

In partnership with Council Members Brewer, Powers, and Bottcher, the Justice Center hosted a roundtable meeting about the pedicab industry on Thursday, November 13, 2025, at the Marriott Marquis in Times Square. The goal of the meeting was to develop a blueprint for a healthy pedicab industry. The meeting was facilitated by the civic sector consulting firm Bennett Midland.

### Participants

#### *Assigned Counsel Plan*

- Dru Carey, Defense Attorney
- Gideon Oliver, Defense Attorney

## FIXING THE PEDICAB PROBLEM: A ROADMAP TO REFORM

### *Broadway Association*

- George Lence, Board of Directors

### *Center for Justice Innovation*

- Danielle Mindess, Project Director, Midtown Community Justice Center
- Jordan Otis, Deputy Project Director, Midtown Community Justice Center
- Emma Embleton, Community Partnerships Coordinator, Midtown Community Justice Center
- Elizabeth Brantl, Government Relations Coordinator, Center for Justice Innovation

### *Central Park Conservancy*

- David Saltonstall, Vice President for Government Relations, Policy and Community Affairs

### *City Council*

- Council Member Brewer
- Sam Goldsmith, Policy and Communications Director, Council Member Brewer
- James Lu, Legislative Fellow, Council Member Brewer
- Carl Wilson, Chief of Staff, Council Member Bottcher
- Hayley Brundige, Legislative and Budget Director, Council Member Powers
- Franklin Richards, Director of Operations, Council Member Powers
- Katie Sinise, City Council Oversight and Investigations Division

### *Department of Consumer and Worker Protection*

- Carlos Ortiz, Deputy Commissioner, External Affairs
- Karline Jung, Senior Legislative Analyst

### *Department of Transportation*

- Colleen Chattergoon, Senior Borough Planner

### *Driver Representative*

- Kerem Nuhoglu, Times Square Pedicab Driver Representative

### *Manhattan District Attorney's Office*

- Kofi Sansculotte, Financial Frauds Bureau Chief
- Estelle Strykers-Santiago, Executive Director, Community Partnerships Unit
- Alex Garcia, Community Engagement Coordinator, Community Partnerships Unit

### *Marriott Marquis*

- George Ntim, Market Director of Diplomatic and Community Relations
- Zoe Pepper, Hotel Manager
- Teddy Mihaliadis, Director of Event Management
- Tom Schultz, Director of Security and Safety

### *Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice*

- Inessa Abayev, Senior Counsel, Policy and Justice Operations

- Christian Klossner, Executive Director, Office of Special Enforcement

*Mayor's Office of Public Safety*

- Jessica Cruz, Project Manager
- Horace Norville, Chief Agency Liaison

*Midtown Community Justice Center's Presiding Judge and Staff*

- Hon. John Zhuo Wang
- Rebecca Basescu Schwartz, Court Attorney to Judge Wang

*New York Pedicab Alliance*

- Makan Camara, President
- Kenneth Winter, Public Affairs

*New York Police Department*

- Matthew Russo, Agency Attorney

*Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings*

- Rachel Amar, Senior Advisor to the Commissioner

*Times Square Alliance*

- Tom Harris, President
- Regina Fojas, Chief of Staff
- Ellen Goldstein, Senior Vice President, Policy, Planning and Research
- Michael Duggan, Vice President of Public Safety
- Caitlin Falk, Director, Policy and Research
- Riley Guggenhime, Coordinator, Policy and Research

## **Key Questions**

Prior to the meeting, a planning committee consisting of Midtown Community Justice Center and City Council member staff met with stakeholders to collect and analyze answers to the following questions:

- If you could build the pedicab industry from scratch, what would it look like?
- What are the main barriers to achieving the vision you'd like to see? What or who will be required to make your vision a reality?

What are we (or could we be) doing today to reduce harm to all stakeholders? Could we be doing something in the immediate term to start to solve some of the identified challenges?

In the answers to these questions, the planning team heard broad agreement on the components of a healthy industry, including a regulatory framework and enforcement strategy that ensures all pedicabs operating in the city are registered and all drivers are licensed and insured. DCWP currently licenses pedicab businesses and pedicab drivers in New York City, with NYPD and Parks responsible for conducting all on-street enforcement. Stakeholders agreed that the Taxi and Limousine Commission (TLC) has the right infrastructure in place to license, regulate, and conduct enforcement for the pedicab industry. Therefore, the industry should be moved under the authority of TLC.

# Recommendations

The roundtable generated robust conversation that produced the following goals and recommendations for how to achieve them.<sup>[5]</sup>

## 1

### **Move oversight of the industry to TLC and apply a regulatory framework similar to the City's other for-hire vehicle industries.**

The pedicab industry must reduce barriers to licensing for drivers and modify the regulatory framework to promote safety and accountability. This will require:

- Streamlining the license application process and expediting license renewals, including by allowing drivers to pick up renewed licenses in person.
- Requiring training in industry rules and safe driving practices when issuing licenses and license renewals.
- Creating barcodes for license plates to connect vehicle registrations to owners.

## 2

### **Ensure accessible insurance premiums to encourage legal driving.**

High insurance costs are a barrier to legal pedicab operation. Lowering premiums and making insurance more accessible is

necessary for industry legitimacy. This will involve the following considerations:

- Currently there are four insurance providers that meet the legal requirement for the amount and policy coverage set by the law. Unsustainably high annual premiums prevent many pedicab businesses from operating legally.
- Upon assuming responsibility for the industry, TLC must consider other insurers to create a competitive market and bring down costs to an amount that drivers can reasonably afford.

## 3

### **Standardize rates and mandate meters.**

Stakeholders support uniform pricing and mandatory, visible meters to protect tourists from overcharging, reduce fraud, and legitimize operators. This will require:

- Standardizing the per-minute price for pedicab rides and requiring the use of GPS-enabled meters similar to those used in other for-hire vehicles. Pricing may include variance based on ride duration (e.g. the price per minute is higher for rides under 20 minutes to account for quick trips versus scenic tours).

- Establishing a maximum rate per minute with a sunset provision for a higher standardized rate increase every two years.
- Requiring standard pricing signage for all pedicabs that is easily recognizable to potential customers. The New York City Administrative Code currently requires signs on both exterior sides and the rear of the pedicab, but drivers and vehicle owners create and hang the signs inconsistently. The signage package should include three signs, two for the exterior of the cab and one for inside the vehicle in a location visible to passengers. Standard signage issued with the seal of the oversight agency will not only ensure pricing transparency, but signal to riders which drivers are legitimate and operating legally.
- Developing app-based reservations, hailing, and payment.
- Metal plates for front and back of the pedicab similar to license plates for cars.
- Barcodes on license plates tied to vehicles' owners allowing enforcement agencies to hold pedicab business owners accountable for fake plates, renting to unlicensed drivers, pedicabs operating without registration or insurance, improperly displayed rate signs, broken seat belts, and/or illegal motors.
- Pedicab owners maintaining logs of insurance and maintenance requirements for TLC's monitoring of compliance.

## 4

### **Hold vehicle owners, not just individual drivers, responsible for operating legally.**

Drivers often lack control over the condition of the pedicab, including working seat belts and proper signage. Regulation and enforcement should focus on business owners, not just individual drivers. This will require:

## 5

### **Legalize safe electric motors and enforce proper motor use.**

Electric motors are a practical and reasonable necessity for a 10-hour shift and already deeply integrated into the industry. All motors on pedicabs are currently illegal, which gives the NYPD cause to stop nearly any pedicab for a violation, even if the driver is otherwise operating legally. Legislation passed by the City Council is needed to permit proper motors and ban unsafe ones. This will require:

- Amending the Administrative Code to allow safe motors on pedicabs.
- Providing battery charging infrastructure in Midtown Manhattan to ensure safe charging to prevent battery fires.
- Training in lithium-ion battery safety.

## 6

## Create a consistent enforcement structure that favors administrative penalties versus criminal penalties.

Enforcement of relevant laws is inconsistent, with different priorities and interpretations depending on the officer or area (e.g., Times Square vs. Central Park). Enforcement is tied to individual drivers, not to pedicab operator licenses and business owners. The current system overly relies on the NYPD using criminal summonses to enforce rules related to licensing and proper vehicle maintenance. Compliance with the law will require logical and consistent enforcement by TLC to investigate and enforce industry regulations. This will require:

- Moving oversight of the pedicab industry to TLC.
- More consistent regulation of the industry by creating tiered consequences for driving infractions, including fines, vehicle seizure, and loss of license.
- Amending the law to allow enforcement by TLC.
- Training for the NYPD on new enforcement procedures and updated laws, how to correctly write summonses, and interacting professionally with drivers.
- TLC and NYPD working with the Manhattan District Attorney's Office to support investigative efforts in instances where drivers are suspected of overcharging.

## 7

## Improve court processes related to criminal summonses.

High summons dismissal rates undermine enforcement and limit effective deterrence. Infractions that land in court often get dismissed due to discovery requirements. Summons proceedings in New York City do not involve prosecutors and so rely on police officers to directly produce discovery—which is not typically a police officer function and can be very resource intensive—resulting in a nearly 100 percent dismissal rate on cases that go to trial. Non-criminal summonses are returnable to the Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings (OATH), while criminal summonses are returnable to the Midtown Community Justice Center. Court bifurcation creates inconsistency in the application of the law. Neither court tracks repeat behavior or reports summonses to DCWP, so there is no escalation of consequences or shared driving record between responsible agencies. This type of reporting would be challenging because infractions are tied to people who often have similar names and incorrectly documented birthdates rather than pedicab licenses. Comprehensive regulatory and enforcement reforms would alleviate much of the strain on the criminal court system, OATH, and the NYPD, which currently regulates the industry through a high volume of summonses.<sup>[6]</sup> This will require:

- Police officers recording vehicle VIN numbers or other identifying serial numbers on summonses.

- A tiered system of enforcement escalation tied to licenses and pedicab ownership, rather than as criminal matters.
- Removing jail as an option for pedicab-related offenses under the NYC Administrative Code. Although municipal code violations are exempt from the discovery requirements under Article 245 of the New York State Criminal Procedure Law, such violations are not exempt when the sentence includes a sentence of jail (CPL 245.10[a][iii]), which includes pedicab-related offenses. The failure to certify discovery compliance leads to dismissal of the majority of these cases at trial in criminal court.
- Sharing information about criminal summonses and driving records between the courts and TLC once a summons has been resolved with a guilty finding or plea and appeal time has expired. A final adjudication is needed to provide sufficient link to a violation against a licensed driver and business.

## 8

## Create infrastructure to support fair working conditions for drivers.

With no legal locations to stop for breaks or to use the bathroom, even drivers who otherwise operate legally must break the rules and risk receiving tickets for illegal stopping during a 10-hour shift. Remedying this will require:

- Working with the Department of Transportation to utilize existing infrastructure for taxi drivers to identify safe and legal places for drivers to stop, rest, and use the bathroom.
- Providing battery charging stations where drivers can safely charge legal batteries for electric motors.

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## Next Steps

Reforming the pedicab industry will save city law enforcement and court system resources, reduce frustration among Midtown-area businesses and residents, protect tourists from exploitation, and allow legal drivers to avoid unnecessary legal system involvement and unfair competition with those operating illegally. By implementing achievable changes in legislation, policy, oversight, enforcement, and infrastructure, the pedicab industry could thrive. Pedicabs could offer a greener alternative mode of transportation, as originally envisioned by the founders of the industry, and provide tourists with a memorable and safe experience in the heart of New York City.

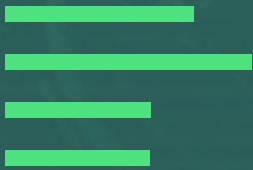
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## Endnotes

- [1] In 2025, the City's 311 system received 172 complaints related to pedicabs. Of those, 86 reported overcharging and another 35 reported an unlicensed pedicab operator.
- [2] Sources include: [\*Time's Up! Environmental Organization\*](#); [\*amNew York \(2008\)\*](#); [\*ABC7/7 On Your Side \(2018\)\*](#); [\*New York Post \(2024\)\*](#); [\*Gothamist \(2023, 2025\)\*](#); [\*NYC Council hearing transcripts \(March 2025\)\*](#); [\*NYC Administrative Code §20-249 et seq.\*](#); [\*Arizona Law Review \(pedicab regulation study\)\*](#); [\*NYC Mayor's Office press releases \(2025\)\*](#); [\*New York Pedicab Alliance\*](#); [\*NYC Council Intros 0077-2026 and 0673-2026\*](#).
- [3] Council Member Powers' term ended on December 31, 2025. Council Member Virginia Maloney currently represents Manhattan Council District 4.
- [4] Council Member Bottcher resigned from the City Council on February 4, 2026. The special election to fill his seat will be held on April 28, 2026.
- [5] Many of the recommendations listed in this report will require changes to the New York City Administrative Code through legislation in the City Council.
- [6] In 2025, 2,059 pedicab summonses were docketed at the Midtown Community Justice Center, the vast majority of which were dismissed. At least 697 pedicab summonses were returned to OATH; however, that figure is likely an undercount. As an impartial tribunal, OATH does not track or analyze its case data by respondent type (i.e. individual or business, etc.). Cases that come before OATH are decided on a case-by-case basis. Unless the type of respondent is a necessary element of the allegations on a summons, respondent type is not a factor considered at a hearing.

## Photo Credit

Original photos courtesy of the Central Park Conservancy. Edited by Samiha A. Meah.



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