

CRAIN'S

NEW YORK BUSINESS

[NEWS](#) › [Transportation](#)

June 27, 2017 3:49 p.m. Updated 06/28/2017

Councilman calls to 'level the playing field' against Uber

Ydanis Rodriguez said he will introduce a bill to require half of Uber and other black cars to be wheelchair accessible, just like yellow cabs



By [Matthew Flamm](#)

[8 Comments](#) [Email Print](#)

49 14 0



Photo: Buck Ennis

As the taxi industry continues to reel, City Council Transportation Chair Ydanis Rodriguez called for new rules to "level the playing field" between cabs and ride-hail operators like Uber,

including requiring half of all app-based vehicles to be wheelchair-accessible. He also plans to establish a "blue-ribbon commission" to "investigate the fall in the value of medallions and what stands in the way of a comeback."

Rodriguez spoke Tuesday at a conference on the future of the medallion—a day after state regulators announced that [LOMTO Federal Credit Union](#), based in Woodside, Queens, had been placed in conservatorship. It is the third taxi lender to be seized by the state in the past two years as a result of losses from owners defaulting on medallion loans.

Rodriguez's words offered some comfort to medallion owners and their allies in the disability community, who have long complained of inaction on the part of elected officials to defend the industry.

Despite the friendly audience at the event, hosted by the University Transportation Research Center, his proposals face an uphill battle. A bill to have the 50% wheelchair-accessibility mandate apply to ride-hail operators and not just taxis was submitted to the City Council in 2015, but went nowhere.

While praising Uber as an innovative company, Rodriguez, a former livery car driver, said he'd like to see the Taxi and Limousine Commission create a new category to regulate only e-hail services.

He also wants Uber and other app-based operators to conduct environmental impact studies when they put large numbers of new vehicles on the street. He pointed out that the city had always been required to issue an environmental impact statement before selling new medallions.

"When tens of thousands of new for-hire vehicles hit the street causing traffic in Midtown Manhattan we see no measure of their impact on our environment," Rodriguez said. "We need to require that those who put the most cars on our streets are accounting for the impact." He added that he planned to introduce legislation on this issue "very soon."

He also said he was working on legislative language for a bill that would obligate operators in the for-hire vehicle sector to provide wheelchair-accessible service. That bill will be coming to the council in the coming months.

The aim is to "bring the same requirement to black cars and others that we are mandating for yellow and green cabs," Rodriguez said. "We need to require everyone to play a role in providing services to wheelchair users."

The mandate to make 50% of yellow cabs wheelchair-accessible by 2020 has been [a central issue](#) for medallion owners, who say it has made them less competitive in the all-important battle to attract drivers. Uber has [introduced a program](#) to fund wheelchair-accessible cars and says it has close to 200 of them on its app. But advocates say that is not enough. There are more than 13,500 medallion cabs and 60,000 black cars, nearly 80% of which use Uber's app, in the city.

Uber declined to comment.