

BY JOHN TOSCANO

City Councilmember John Liu, joined by colleagues Leroy Comrie and David Weprin, urged the Bloomberg mayoral administration last week to use some of the windfall profits from the recent taxi medallion auction to expand yellow taxicab service in communities outside the Manhattan central business district.

Liu (D-Flushing), chairman of the council Transportation Committee, stated: "The incredible profits from the recent medallion sale show that the taxi industry is robust and the city should use these profits to reinvest in the industry, create more opportunities for growth and make citywide taxi service a reality."

Liu introduced a bill last week to create taxi stands at major transportation hubs that would be financed by part of the approximately \$141 million the city raised from the sale of 308 medallions, he said.

The city had projected that it would raise about \$65 million from the taxi medallion sales, but the total sales skyrocketed to over \$141 million, Liu said. The ink was hardly dry on the sales documents before Liu and the other councilmembers started to draft the legislation for expanding cab service to the other boroughs.

"Taxi drivers like to be in Manhattan because they can easily pick up passengers," Liu explained.

## Seek Expansion Of Yellow Cab Service To Boros Outside Manhattan



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"But these new taxi stands [the legislation calls for] will create strategic locations where passengers and drivers come together. By matching supply and demand, the taxi stands will be a win-win effort."

Joining Liu, Comrie (D-St. Albans) stated: "This legislation is about fairness and equity in the transportation network."

Comrie, chair of the Consumer Affairs Committee, added, "We must transform a yellow taxicab system that only serves people in Manhattan into one that benefits all New Yorkers as well as the business community throughout the five boroughs."

Weprin (D-Hollis), Finance

Committee chair, noted, "Taxis are an affordable means of transportation that provide a great service to the people of New York City. I live in a district where most people have never had access to yellow cabs. This bill will help to correct that by increasing the availability of cabs to communities in the five boroughs."

Further support was voiced by Councilmembers Peter Vallone Jr. (D-Astoria) and James Gennaro (D-Fresh Meadows).

Vallone, who heads the Public Safety Committee, stated, "The outer boroughs have been neglected for too long and deserve the same yellow cab service the residents of Manhattan take for granted."

Gennaro, chair of the Environmental Protection Committee, declared, "The recent sales of accessible and green medallions have brought New York's taxi fleet forward into a new era and we need to continue that push forward with taxi stations."

With Liu's strong support, a taxi stand was established in his district in Downtown Flushing's transit hub in 2003, since then generating more than 51,000 rides. The new legislation would require the Taxi and Limousine Commission (TLC) to establish the new taxi stands at major transportation hubs currently underserved by yellow taxicabs, Liu said. The TLC could then examine the

success of these stands over a three-year period and use that information to make citywide taxi service permanent.

Local business leaders Peter Koo and Timothy Chuang, directors of the Flushing Business Improvement District (BID), as well as Jason Rosensweig, owner of the Linden Taxi Company near Flushing, also came out in support of the legislation.

Also speaking about the success of the Flushing Main Street experiment, Jean Barrett, director of the Metropolitan Taxicab Board of Trade, stated: "At Flushing Main Street, we have proven that yellow taxicab service exists in neighborhoods outside of Midtown Manhattan and that taxi drivers are willing to come here and help passengers complete their journeys to other points in Queens and beyond."

"We have learned what works and what doesn't work, and based on this model of success, we believe that dispatched yellow taxi stands can work at other busy transit hubs outside of Manhattan."

Yellow taxicab service provides metered taxi rides in cabs that can be hailed. Other than that, transportation service is provided by radio dispatched cabs. Charges are based on fixed fees for fixed distances. Other service is provided by private drivers operating at transit hubs or subway stations.

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**A**storia's Marie Magnani broke her leg last year and found a whole new career.

Unable to return to retailing, and not wanting to put up with the stress of a working environment anyway, she became a homestay hostess.

Homestay hosts and hostesses? There are hundreds of them across the city. They shelter international students who are in town to study English. The investment needed to get into the business is minimal. You must have a well-maintained apartment or home, an extra bedroom, a penchant for hospitality, and be open to communicating with people from different cultures.

"This really and truly was an answer to a prayer," Magnani says, juggling pans of sauce in one hand and sizzling meat in another. "You can't live just on Social Security. I can still be at home, I didn't have to go back into the work field, and I have an additional source of income. For me, it has worked very well."

In her past year as a homestay hostess, Magnani has served her delicious pasta to a female business executive from Italy, an aspiring dancer from Brazil and several young Japanese women. The students were sent to her by Rennert Bilingual, a

Manhattan-based language school. "It has kept me busy," she says, "and it's an education for me as well. I am learning the customs of other countries and how other people live."

She is a well-organized hostess and prints out directions for her guests. "I take them around in the car on their first day and show them where the busses and trains are and make sure they know which direction to go in," she says. In the mornings she serves her students a simple breakfast. In the evenings they savor her traditional Italian American cooking and the occasional culinary creation she gleans from hours of watching the Food Channel.

Magnani, who was born in Clinton Hill, Brooklyn, has lived in Queens for 33 years. Her mother's passing left an empty bedroom in her apartment. When she first considered a career as a homestay hostess she was concerned about losing her privacy. "I thought it would be a really big issue," she says. "But it hasn't been. They keep very much to their own room, and if they need anything, they ask."

In the meantime, while living in semi-retirement, Magnani is expanding her cultural horizons as well as earning an income. "I think doing this is worth it just for the experience it gives you," she says.

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