

September 18, 2023

Chair Carl Weisbrod
120 Broadway
31st Floor
New York, NY 10271

Dear Chair Weisbrod,

We, the undersigned representatives, request the Traffic Mobility Review Board (TMRB) to adopt an exemption for licensed commuter vans serving immigrant communities in New York.

In 2018, an estimated 100,000 New Yorkers used commuter vans daily, with many of these riders traveling into Manhattan from low-income immigrant communities in Flushing, Elmhurst and Sunset Park and lacking access to safe, reliable, and affordable transportation. For Asian New Yorkers, the commuter van network offers language-accessible, culturally-competent transportation between their communities, and it acts as a social and economic bridge between these immigrant enclaves.

Commuter vans typically carry an average of 15-20 riders, and therefore are an alternative form of mass transportation that provides a uniquely beneficial service to immigrant enclaves in Queens, Brooklyn and Chinatown. Exempting commuter vans from congestion pricing tolls will protect and support New York's Asian community while still contributing to New York's goal of reducing congestion and vehicle emissions.

Imposing tolls on commuter vans will inevitably make the cost of these rides higher and financially burdensome for low-income Asian New Yorkers who depend on their services as an alternative mode of transportation. Many Asian New Yorkers from the outer boroughs use commuter vans to access their jobs in Lower Manhattan, and the direct route they provide between Brooklyn, Queens and Chinatown often cuts their commute times in half. A toll on commuter vans will make it more difficult for the workers using these vans to access their jobs. Commuter vans are also frequently used by Asian New Yorkers in the outer boroughs to access the unique restaurants and stores in Chinatown, and a toll would make these trips more difficult,

too. By introducing additional costs to both workers and customers, a toll on commuter vans would also make it increasingly difficult for small businesses in Chinatown, which depend on a broad Asian base from across New York City's boroughs, to survive.

The introduction of a toll that increases costs for commuter vans will strain the social networks Asian communities rely on. Asian communities in New York also rely on commuter vans to travel back and forth from Manhattan to connect with friends and family. Living in New York as an immigrant can be challenging and isolating, and these residents use commuter vans to maintain relationships that provide them comfort and quality of life. Many Asian seniors and residents with disabilities in Manhattan depend on visits from friends and relatives from the outer-boroughs for care and support.

Asian New Yorkers fear for their safety on subways and buses, and they use commuter vans as a safe, culturally competent alternative. Due to the dramatic rise in anti-Asian hate that has taken place in New York over recent years, commuter vans have become a preferred means of safe transportation for Asian New Yorkers. Since the pandemic, anti-Asian hate crimes have increased by over 300% in New York City, leading to a series of violent attacks against Asian Americans in New York subways, including the fatal attack on Michelle Go last year, and an attack on a woman in the Chambers Street Station in Lower Manhattan this past month.

Policies surrounding congestion pricing should recognize and respect New York's diversity and not overburden our most-vulnerable, low income, immigrant communities. **We look forward to seeing TMRB move forward with this proposal to ensure New York's congestion pricing program is fair and inclusive for all New Yorkers, including the Asian community.**

Sincerely,



Grace Lee
Assemblymember
New York State Assembly District 65



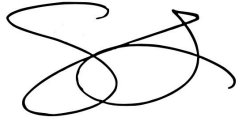
John Liu
Senator
New York State Senate District 16



Brian Kavanagh
Senator
New York State Senate District 27



Iwen Chu
Senator
New York State Senate District 17



Steven Raga
Assemblymember
New York State Assembly District 30



Ron Kim
Assemblymember
New York State Assembly District 40



William Colton
Assemblymember
New York State Assembly District 47



Nily Rozic
Assemblymember
New York State Assembly District 25



Christopher Marte
City Council Member
New York City Council District 1