

# Uber vs. de Blasio in fight over access to NYC streets

July 17 2015, by Jonathan Lemire

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A dispute is simmering between the ride-booking service Uber and Mayor Bill de Blasio's City Hall, an increasingly pitched disagreement playing out on smartphones, over the airwaves and in the press over a fundamental question: Who controls access to the streets of the nation's largest city?

By the day, more and more Uber cars have taken to Manhattan's streets, summoned by smartphone apps to pick up passengers who enjoy their convenience and consent to pay additional surge pricing during peak hours.

The de Blasio administration is attempting to put the brakes on the robust expansion, saying that the flood of new cars could further ensnarl Manhattan's clogged streets and arguing that the Uber system isn't equitable for drivers and residents. Uber, however, accuses the mayor of being in the back pocket of the yellow taxi industry, attempting to stifle free enterprise and innovation while hurting the low-income neighborhoods that make up the core of his political support.

A pivotal moment in the feud could come as early as next week, as the City Council considers legislation that would put a cap on Uber's growth.

"We cannot afford to have unlimited, unregulated growth of Uber," said First Deputy Mayor Tony Shorris. "We have real concerns about congestion."

"We are already seeing traffic speeds in Manhattan falling," said Shorris. "That is already having an impact on the city's economy, on air quality and potentially an impact on public safety. And at least one reason why that might be true is the enormous growth of Uber."

The company has spread across the globe and become wildly successful, worth an estimated \$40 billion, while dispatching 25,000 cars on New York's streets, as opposed to 13,000 yellow taxis. It's also become a political flashpoint, as Republican presidential candidates hail it as a model of the free market while some Democrats—including de Blasio—have expressed reservations.

San Francisco-based Uber has howled at the de Blasio administration's attempts to slow its growth. Its leaders, including chief adviser David Plouffe, met with Shorris on Monday but, after the meeting failed to yield a resolution, the company sharpened its attacks.

It debuted a "de Blasio" mode on its app that projects increased wait time if a cap is instituted. And on Friday, it aired a TV commercial that claimed the cap would hardest hit minorities in outer-borough neighborhoods who sometimes have trouble getting yellow taxis.

"Mayor de Blasio's plan to stop Uber will cost 10,000 jobs, hurt undeserved areas and make wait times for Uber cars skyrocket," Plouffe said this week. "It's not progressive and not right."

Uber claimed that City Hall is acting under pressure from yellow cab operators who are worried about falling taxi medallion values—and who are significant donors to de Blasio and some council members.

The administration scoffed at the idea, noting that Uber has sparked unrest and litigation in London, Paris and California. Shorris also noted that Uber cars are not as accessible to disabled riders as yellow taxis and

do not have a surcharge that helps fund the region's transit network.

"I don't think we need to take any lectures about concern from people in the outer boroughs from this \$40 billion California-based company and its lobbyists," Shorris said.

The City Council plan, which has the administration's support, proposes limiting Uber's growth for a year while a study is conducting the impact the service has on the city's traffic. Uber, which opposes all limits to its growth, is against the measure.

A vote on the legislation in the City Council could happen as early as next week.

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