

How can we engage, educate & enforce taxi and for-hire drivers to help achieve Vision Zero?

In many cities, thousands of taxi and for-hire drivers log millions of miles on our roadways each year. With the increasing number of on-demand car services, these drivers can play a key role in creating safe streets and advancing Vision Zero. In this case study, we explore gains in New York City.

1. Elevating the importance of for-hire vehicles
2. Leveraging influence to engage stakeholders
3. Increasing traffic safety education
4. Shifting enforcement for greater impact
5. Embracing technology through pilot programming
6. Rewarding excellence to advance safety culture

Elevating the importance of for-hire drivers

In New York City, more than 150,000 taxi and for-hire drivers make up a sizable segment of city motorists. As Dawn Miller, Chief of Staff for the [New York City Taxi & Limousine Commission \(TLC\)](#), notes: “The mileage these drivers log makes them a high-impact group to engage in advancing Vision Zero.”

With the rise of Uber, Lyft and other on-demand, app-based driving services, the NYC TLC is issuing more licenses to for-hire drivers than ever before. “And that’s been growing tremendously over the past several years,” says Madeline Labadie, TLC’s Strategic Planning Analyst.

Unlike other cities, where the regulation of new driving services like Uber and Lyft is still an ongoing discussion, the NYC TLC has clear jurisdiction over all for-hire drivers. According to Labadie, ensuring the regulation of on-demand drivers like any other taxi service has critical implications for traffic safety and achieving Vision Zero. “Their drivers are treated the same as any other drivers we license,” Labadie says. “They have to attend TLC-required training and meet the same standards, including ongoing driver record monitoring, that other drivers do.”

Leveraging influence to engage stakeholders

Engaging all for-hire drivers and shifting their behaviors has been central since the start of [NYC’s Vision Zero initiative](#), with the TLC leading the effort along with the Department of Transportation and Police Department. “The for-hire service is so big here that we came to mind as the Mayor’s Office was rolling out the initiative,” Miller says of Vision Zero’s start in NYC in early 2014.

As a primary player in the City’s Vision Zero Task Force, the TLC hasn’t simply waited on legislation from the City Council to drive its engagement. “We have rulemaking and pilot program authority, so we have a variety of ways we can address Vision Zero goals,” Labadie says. “Over the past few years, we’ve been trying to experiment with what can we use to hit those goals in a variety of ways.”

For the TLC, that authority doesn’t exist in a vacuum. They have to keep in mind a wide variety of stakeholders, from everyday residents who weigh in at public hearings, to industry members with a strong lobbying presence, to its own Commissioners who pass any rule-making changes.

“We have to do a lot of stakeholder management when we pass a rule and we also have to engage with those stakeholders in terms of outreach,” Labadie says. It’s not enough to create policy — it’s critical to use the channels that most effectively convey that information to the drivers on the street, whether that’s a dispatcher or flier posted by company executives. “We have a lot of avenues we have to manage,” she says, “but that creates a lot of opportunity, as well.”

Increasing traffic safety education

Vision Zero has made a notable impact on the content and population impacted by TLC’s training requirements. “We’ve been working with DOT and advocates, and really broadening the group of drivers who receive special training,” Labadie says.

In December 2015, the TLC implemented a new requirement that all for-hire vehicle drivers — not just taxi drivers — attend 24 hours of training prior to licensure. This requirement also applies to 15,000 for-hire drivers who were licensed by TLC in the past year who will have to take the course in 2016 to renew their license. That number will grow by thousands each month, based on past trends, as new for-hire drivers apply for licenses for the first time.

Informed by Vision Zero, they [developed a new module](#) within that training to hone in on traffic safety, including an emphasis on specific behaviors, like speeding and failure to yield, that pose particular perils,

Rules of the Road: 25 MPH Speed Limit



- A driver at 40 MPH needs 300 feet to brake and avoid a crash— twice as far as a driver at 25 MPH, who only needs 150 feet
- A pedestrian struck at 25 MPH is half as likely to be killed as a pedestrian struck at 30 MPH



15,000 drivers

For-hire drivers, including Uber & Lyft, must attend traffic safety training to get or renew their licenses; more than 15,000 will need to attend training to renew their licenses in 2016.



350% increase

TLC issued 350% more traffic safety summonses in 2015 than 2013, including an increase in speeding violations from less than 10 in 2013 to more than 1,000 in 2015.

and increasing awareness on how to operate safely in proximity to people walking and bicycling. It also ensures drivers are aware of legal changes, like the decrease in the city's speed limit from 30 to 25 miles per hour, and how to navigate new streets designs, like protected bike lanes and curb bulbouts for people on foot.

The TLC also worked with City agencies and advocates to include an often-overlooked perspective: the victims of traffic violence. The video ["Drive Like Your Family Lives Here,"](#) shares the human toll of unsafe driving through the emotional stories of New Yorkers who have lost loved ones in traffic crashes. "It's very powerful as a focusing moment for drivers," Labadie says.



It's not a one-time training, either. The TLC also instituted a continuing education requirement, so for-hire drivers will need to attend a course at least every three years when they renew their licenses, as well.

In addition, TLC has taken key aspects of the safety training, including the video, into the field. In 2015 alone, the agency hosted 252 outreach events for professional drivers. "There's a real focus on traffic safety where there was less immediacy around that before," Miller says.

Shifting enforcement for greater impact

While its force of 200 inspectors is small compared to the thousands of city police officers, the TLC has proactively addressed traffic safety enforcement as well as education.

"While still focusing on TLC rule violations, like illegal street hails, we've expanded more into traffic safety," Labadie says. "But we've expanded more into the traffic safety realm for all of our inspectors and have a dedicated squad that focuses exclusively on safety."

That shift, along with the city-wide enforcement efforts of the NYPD, has had a major impact. The dedicated Safety Squad, made up of 12 TLC inspectors, issued more than 5,600 traffic safety summonses to taxi and for-hire vehicle drivers in 2015. Overall, the TLC issued almost 350% more traffic safety summonses in 2015 than 2013, including a dramatic increase in speeding violations, which are known to have the greatest impact on the severity of crashes and injuries — from fewer than 10 in 2013 to more than 1,000 in 2015.

That's not to gloss over the controversy that has erupted from some changes to enforcement. "We had protests in the street against council legislation that passed that increased enforcement," Miller says.

For instance, Vision Zero legislation has given TLC the power to suspend the licenses of drivers involved in a fatal crash. Since 2014, the agency has suspended the licenses of 15 for-hire drivers involved in critical-injury or deadly crashes. But the outcry against the enforcement measures did make clear that TLC had to improve its communications.

"People were very upset even though those are very infrequent," Miller says of the license suspensions. "But it was, in part, a matter of communications, explaining that the suspension would occur only if there were indications that the driver was at fault."



55 vehicles

TLC has partnered with seven private companies to test safety technology like collision avoidance sensors, driver monitoring technology, and driver alert systems in 55 vehicles.



500 awards

TLC has honored nearly 500 drivers who have, for five years or more, had no crashes involving injury or fatality, no TLC safety violations, and no DMV violations.

Embracing technology through pilot programming

Thanks to innovations in the private sector and the TLC's pilot program authority, the agency is testing new technology — at no expense to the city.

Launched in 2014, the Vehicle Safety Technology Pilot is partnering with private businesses that make products like collision avoidance sensors, driver monitoring technology, and driver alert systems. Cab and for-hire companies regulated by the TLC have volunteered to test those products on the road and, thus far, 55 vehicles have installed such technology.

The data is still preliminary, Miller stresses, but the findings are promising. For instance, [according to the initial report in 2015](#), vehicles with one of the driver alert systems (that detects behaviors like hard braking and excessive acceleration) saw their alerts decline by 80% over the course of the analysis period. The report also found that the cost of implementing and maintaining such systems might be offset by reduced insurance costs.

As part of the city's authorization of Taxi TV, the TLC also gets a certain amount of back-seat airtime in taxis, as well, to educate passengers. While previous PSAs tended to focus mostly on consumer issues, Miller says, Vision Zero has broadened messaging to include safety priorities. Thus far, TLC, NYC DOT, and NYC Media have produced short videos on drunk driving and seat belt usage, and is currently working on new spots to encourage safe driving and passenger behaviors.

Rewarding excellence to advance safety culture

Changing culture isn't solely about punishing bad behavior but applauding excellence — and elevating that as the new normal. That's what the TLC has done with its Safety Honor Roll, which recognizes drivers that have, for five years or more, had no crashes involving injury or fatality, no TLC safety violations, and no DMV violations. Over the past two years, the agency has honored nearly 500 drivers who have safely navigated millions of miles of NYC streets.

What's next?

While the TLC has made significant shifts in how it regulates its thousands of drivers, Miller and Labadie agree that it will take time to see those efforts result in measurable changes on the streets. The TLC's efforts are deeply in concert with other agencies, but they also recognize that they need to hone in on areas where they can have the most impact.

"We're using data to drive our decision making," Labadie says. "We're interested in narrowing down from broader outreach to really targeted, focused work." That means looking at the company level to identify how drivers are performing as relates to safety, and tailoring efforts to the companies and drivers who need the most support to improve their safety records. It also means addressing topics that might be difficult to measure.

"In particular this year, we're working on driver fatigue, which is an important safety issue for us," Labadie says. "We're looking at the data in terms of how long drivers are working, and figuring out some enforceable rules, and what type of education and outreach will work."

Thanks to the collaboration of the City's Vision Zero Task Force, the TLC is also eager to continue working with and getting new ideas from other city agencies — particularly those that manage the city's other fleets, including buses and private contractors.

[Read more about the TLC's work in the Vision Zero Year Two Report and on the NYC Vision Zero initiative website.](#)

Top Take-Away

Taxi and for-hire drivers play a key role in street safety and can be engaged in Vision Zero efforts through education, enforcement and other strategies. Consider exploring how your city can work with these important stakeholders.

Learn more and find additional case studies at www.visionzeronetwork.org