



July 28, 2021

Sarah Feinberg, Interim President  
MTA New York City Transit Authority  
2 Broadway  
New York, NY 10004

Dear President Feinberg:

Thank you for your immediate response to our letter regarding shared rides for Access-A-Ride -- both by arranging for a meeting with AAR staff and by communicating with us directly in writing.

In the three weeks since the MTA announced its plan for what it called a gradual return to shared rides, the number of COVID Delta variant cases has increased dramatically in New York City and across the country. In response, the federal government issued new, stricter recommendations for mask use and warned that the variant spreads more easily, even to people who are vaccinated.

In light of the worsening situation, we again call on you to reverse your decision about shared rides so that Access-A-Ride users and drivers are kept safe. While the state has yet to invoke the NY Heroes Act in response to this latest outbreak, the MTA should nevertheless use the utmost caution in protecting its customers, employees and contracted workers.

In fact, given that individuals who use AAR have no other transit options and are not able to choose whether or not to share an AAR ride, and given the close proximity of AAR drivers and riders during the ride, eliminating shared rides is just as critical today as it was at the onset of the pandemic.

In addition, it is important to note that it was primarily because of shared rides prior to the pandemic that AAR riders could never rely on getting from Place A to Place B in anything even remotely resembling a short or reliable timeframe. And if you can't reliably get from one place to another, you cannot keep important appointments and, most critically, you cannot hold down a job.

As shared rides are reintroduced, we again are hearing reports from riders encountering problems. For example, we recently learned of:

- An AAR customer who was made part of a two-person shared ride, but the second rider had another passenger so that there were three riders crowded into the vehicle and the driver refused to wear a mask;
- An individual taken 30 minutes out of his way to drop off a second rider, even though the individual's destination was on the way to the second rider's destination (this kind of ride has long been a source of anger and frustration for AAR riders);
- An individual made part of a three-person shared ride who arrived late to a medical appointment; and
- An individual made part of a three-person shared ride who arrived late to a cultural event.

We made several suggestions in our June 25 letter about how the MTA might mitigate the risk to riders and provide better service by restricting the use of shared rides. Unfortunately, while we were told that there would be an attempt to limit the use of shared rides and that AAR would provide the "most direct" ride "as much as possible." , we did not receive specific responses to our suggestions, which we reiterate here. We proposed that the MTA:

- 1) Strictly limit how much time a shared ride pick-up can add to a person's trip. No rider should be required to undertake a shared ride that adds more than ten minutes driving time to a trip. Transit representatives at our June 28 meeting were unable or unwilling to describe the parameters that would be used to identify rides appropriate for combining.

- 2) Limit the number of pick-ups to one additional pick-up, rather than the three or more that riders used to endure. Transit representatives at our June 28 meeting were silent on whether this was part of the agency's plan.
- 3) Limit the use of shared rides only to longer trips. Many AAR trips are short hops, but they become much longer trips when there are one, two or three pick-ups along the way. Transit representatives at our June 28 meeting were unable or unwilling to describe the trip characteristics that would be used to identify rides appropriate for combining.

At a minimum, if you do not intend to halt shared rides entirely in light of the surge in, and the prognosis of, the Delta variant, we urge you to adopt these suggestions.

In addition, we do not understand how New York City Transit is in fact going about its resumption of shared rides. The Transit representatives at our June 28 meeting would not define what they meant by "phasing in" shared rides. We ask you to tell us precisely how Transit has been going about re-instituting shared rides, including the precise number of shared rides offered and the routes of those rides.

Finally, while we were pleased that the MTA's accessibility advisor, Quemuel Arroyo, agreed to include a solicitation of feedback from riders when NYC Transit announced the resumption of shared rides, no such solicitation was made (see attached announcement). We therefore ask that a follow-up communication be sent to riders right away to gauge their experiences and determine if they are encountering any problems.

We much appreciate your interest in providing appropriate services to New Yorkers with disabilities, and we look forward to working with you to resolve the issues presented by re-instituting shared rides.

Sincerely,

*Ruth Lowenkron*

Ruth Lowenkron  
Director, Disability Justice  
NY Lawyers for the Public Interest  
on behalf of AARRG!

Encl.