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For-Hire Vehicle Industry, Drivers Warn Gov. Hochul Proposal to Welcome Driverless Cars Threatens Jobs and Safety Across New York State

New York, New York (January 13, 2026) — Organizations representing New York's for-hire vehicle industry and its drivers today criticized Governor Kathy Hochul's proposal to expand the state's autonomous vehicle testing program to allow commercial, for-hire use outside New York City, warning that the move puts tens of thousands of driving jobs at risk and threatens the stability of the small businesses that support them across the state.

The groups, which include the Black Car Fund, Black Car Assistance Corporation, Long Island Limousine Association, Livery Roundtable, Livery Base Owners Association, and the Limousine, Bus, Taxi Operators of Upstate New York, warned that permitting driverless for-hire vehicles anywhere in New York is not a contained experiment, but a first step toward large-scale commercial deployment that would ultimately reach New York City, accelerating job displacement across the for-hire transportation industry statewide.

Allowing autonomous vehicles to transport paying passengers outside New York City represents a significant policy shift with statewide consequences. While framed as limited in scope, the proposal would normalize the commercial use of unproven technology on public roads and set a precedent that could be used to justify expansion into denser, more complex environments.

"This is not about geography. It is about trajectory," said **Ira Goldstein, Executive Director of the Black Car Fund**. "Authorizing driverless for-hire vehicles anywhere in New York sends a clear signal that the state is willing to put experimental technology on public roads at the direct expense of working drivers and the jobs they rely on. Once that happens, expansion is not hypothetical. It is inevitable."

Industry leaders also raised serious safety concerns, pointing to documented failures of autonomous vehicles in the very types of communities now being targeted for expansion. In other states, Waymo vehicles have driven into active police scenes, passed stopped school buses in violation of traffic laws, and frozen in place during power outages, blocking roads and emergency responders.

"These failures did not happen in unusually dense or chaotic environments," Goldstein added. "They occurred on ordinary streets, during routine emergencies, and under basic infrastructure stress. If this technology struggles under those conditions elsewhere, New Yorkers should ask what happens during a blackout, a snowstorm, or a severe weather event here."

As state leaders advance an affordability agenda, the groups emphasized that policies risking widespread job displacement run counter to that goal. New York's for-hire vehicle drivers are

overwhelmingly working-class immigrants whose livelihoods support families and sustain a broad ecosystem of small businesses statewide.

“My position is an absolute NO TO WAYMO, whether inside New York City or just beyond its borders,” said **Diana Clemente, President of Big Apple Car, President of the Black Car Assistance Corporation, and Board Member of the New York Black Car Fund**. “As the Independent Drivers Guild stated so clearly, “If we let them test it, they will take it. WE BUILT IT. WE PROTECT IT!” Allowing autonomous vehicles to test anywhere near New York is not harmless experimentation; it is the first step in undermining the livelihoods of thousands of professional drivers who serve this region every day. This is not progress. It is the deliberate erosion of good, middle-class jobs and a threat to public safety. Our industry was built by skilled workers, not algorithms, and policymakers have a responsibility to protect people and communities, not clear the path for technology companies that are unaccountable for the disruption they cause.”

“This proposal ignores how the for-hire transportation industry actually operates outside New York City,” said **Tom Gouldsbury, President of the Long Island Limousine Association**. “On Long Island and across the state, locally owned transportation companies operate on tight margins and comply with extensive regulations. Allowing driverless vehicles to compete for paying trips without clear standards would put responsible operators at a disadvantage.”

“The Livery Roundtable is not opposed to autonomous vehicles – we are opposed to the monopoly risk of allowing them to act as a for-hire,” said **Dr. Avik Kabessa, CEO of Carmel Car & Limousine Service and Head of the Livery Roundtable**. “What are now trips being dispatched to hundreds of thousands of drivers – supporting livelihoods through tens of thousands of small businesses and their employees – could become zero trips for drivers, with dispatch controlled by just two or three companies. We say yes to technology, but no to monopoly.”

“This proposal puts jobs and locally owned small businesses at risk,” said **Cira Angeles, Spokesperson for the Livery Base Owners Association**. “For decades, our drivers have served neighborhoods and transportation deserts that larger companies overlooked, by providing reliable, affordable rides so people could get to work, attend medical appointments, and stay connected to their families. New York has seen this pattern before: out-of-state companies treat the state as a testing ground, destabilize critical industries, and leave workers and small businesses to absorb the fallout and rebuild. Replacing these drivers with unproven technology doesn’t modernize transportation, it only shifts risk onto local drivers, small businesses, and the communities they serve.”

“Liberty Cabs has spent decades providing safe, reliable transportation while supporting local drivers and the small-business ecosystem that depends on them,” said **Bill Yuhnke, President of Liberty Cabs in Buffalo**. “We are deeply concerned that opening the door to driverless vehicles hands extraordinary power to a small number of technology companies at the expense of working drivers and community-based operators. Under this proposal, those trips risk being

consolidated into a handful of corporate platforms, eliminating jobs and hollowing out the industry.”

“Autonomous vehicle technology is advancing quickly, and New York is considering the next phase of its autonomous vehicle pilot program, including the limited deployment of commercial for-hire autonomous passenger vehicles outside New York City,” said **Kevin Barwell, President of the Limousine Bus Taxi Operators Of Upstate New York**. “However, serious concerns remain—particularly for regions like Western New York, where snow, ice, and severe winter weather are a regular reality. Autonomous vehicles have not yet been adequately tested in these conditions, raising questions about whether they can operate safely on our roads. Equally important is neighborhood safety. Before expanding this program, we must ask a fundamental question: Do we feel confident letting our children get off a school bus when autonomous vehicles are traveling our streets? Parents deserve assurance that new technology will not put children, pedestrians, or neighborhoods at risk. Any expansion of autonomous vehicle use must require clear proof of safety in real-world winter conditions, strong local support, and rigorous oversight by state agencies to ensure public safety comes first.”