



THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

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COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN AND BOROUGH PRESIDENT BREWER ANNOUNCE BILL TO LIMIT SIGHTSEEING TOUR BUSES CLOGGING OUR STREETS

Sensible limit of 225 licenses proposed that would allow tour bus industry to thrive while addressing issues of congestion, noise and air quality for residents

New York, NY – Council Member Margaret Chin and Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer announced legislation today that would institute a sensible limit on licenses issued to sightseeing tour bus companies in an effort to stem the increase in the number of tour buses – which has more than tripled in the last decade.

“Limiting the number of tour buses is the best way to address the growing problem of double-decker buses clogging narrow and congested streets in my district and across the city,” said Council Member Margaret Chin. “Often nearly-empty of tourists, these tour buses serve as rolling billboards for a captive audience of New Yorkers who are negatively affected by the noise, negative air quality, and congestion the buses create. Our legislation seeks to institute a better balance between accommodating tourism and ensuring the safety and well-being of residents in neighborhoods throughout our city.”

"Multiple tour buses piled up at curbs and near-empty tour buses cruising the streets have made it clear: we need to set ground rules for this industry," said Manhattan Borough President Gale A. Brewer. "Today we're putting forward a bill that gives our city agencies the tools they need to regulate the tour bus industry and address the related congestion and nuisance issues afflicting neighborhoods throughout Manhattan."

The legislation, Intro 950, introduced by Council Member Chin in the City Council yesterday, would limit the number of active license plates that the city Dept. of Consumer Affairs (DCA) can issue to sightseeing buses. Under the bill, the DCA could grant new sightseeing bus license plates as long as there are fewer than 225 active license plates.

Unlike many licenses issued by the city Dept. of Consumer Affairs, there currently is no limit to the number of licenses issued to sightseeing tour bus operators.

“Every day, New Yorkers are faced with excessive noise, air pollution, and traffic congestion,” said Council Member Corey Johnson. “This is exacerbated by a high volume of tour buses in certain neighborhoods. Council Member Chin's legislation will allow tour bus companies to operate profitably while prevent them from inundating our streets with half empty buses that seem to serve little purpose other than aggravating New Yorkers. This is commonsense, practical legislation that will serve our residents well. I thank Council Member Chin, Borough President Brewer, and my colleagues in City government who have pushed for this important set of regulations.”

"Ours is a complicated city and this is a welcome and important step toward finding a safe balance between accommodating tourism on the one hand and providing safe streets and livable neighborhoods on the other,"

said Manhattan Community Board 2 chair Tobi Bergman. “We still need to do more to protect residents and pedestrians on narrow streets where these large buses simply can't operate safely.”

“The streets of Community Board 1 suffer from increasing congestion and the growing number of sightseeing tour buses contribute greatly to the problem,” said Manhattan Community Board 1 chair Catherine McVay Hughes. “This cap is a welcome proposal to address the issues created by tour buses piling onto our narrow streets.”

“These buses not only cause traffic problems, but many of them fail to comply with the law requiring them to have sound limiting devices,” said Leigh Behnke, a member of the Broadway Residents Coalition, a group representing residents along the Broadway corridor between Houston and Canal streets. “We need controls on this industry. The rampant excesses and lack of respect for their access to do business in a mixed-use community have shown them to be unable to regulate themselves responsibly.”

“Tourism is one of the driving forces of our economy, and it is important that we welcome visitors to our city so that they can enjoy everything our neighborhoods – especially small businesses – have to offer. Fortunately, welcoming tourists and ensuring the safety of residents is not an either/or proposition,” said Wellington Z. Chen, executive director of the Chinatown Partnership. “This bill would allow hundreds of tour buses to continue to operate on our streets, while protecting residents and visitors alike from traffic, noise, and pollution.”

The bill cannot prevent the renewal or replacement of a previously issued license plate. Sightseeing bus licenses are required for any motor vehicle that hires and sells rides destined for special interest points and seat more than eight or more passengers.

According to the state Dept. of Transportation (NYSDOT), the number of double-decker sightseeing buses in the city more than tripled from 57 to 194 between 2003 and 2013. Today, there are approximately eight NYC sightseeing bus companies that operate a fleet of 229 – with nine plates currently pending. The number of active, registered sightseeing buses was as high as 299 in September 2014.

Complaints about noise, negative air quality, and congestion caused by tour buses have centered in Manhattan and Brooklyn neighborhoods with a high concentration of tourist sites such as Lower Manhattan, Hell’s Kitchen, and the West Village.

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