



January 19, 2021

Consumer Protection and Enforcement Division
Transportation Licensing and Analysis Branch
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San Francisco, CA 94102-3298
Email: TNCAccess@cpuc.ca.gov

RE: Protest regarding Lyft's Advice Letter 4A Requesting Offsets pursuant to the TNC Access for All Act

To the Transportation Licensing and Analysis Branch:

Thank you for the opportunity to protest Lyft's Advice Letter 4A requesting retroactive offsets against the quarterly Access Fee payments collected to improve wheelchair accessible vehicle service in Quarter 3 of 2019. Disability Rights California, the Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund (DREDF), and the Center for Accessible Technology (collectively, the "Disability Advocates") protest this advice letter pursuant to Section 7.4.2 of General Order 96-B.

Lyft submitted Advice Letter 4A on December 28, 2020. Pursuant to General Order 96-B protests are due within 20 days from the day the Advice Letter is filed. This protest is therefore timely.

The Disability Advocates protest Lyft's Advice Letter 4A on the grounds that the relief requested in the advice letter would violate statute or Commission order, or is not authorized by statute or Commission order on which the regulated entity relies, pursuant to Section 7.4.2 of General Order 96-B.

A. Relief requested would violate statute or Commission order, or is not authorized by statute or Commission order

The TNC Access for All Act (the Statute) requires a Transportation Network Company (TNC) to make a showing of presence and availability of wheelchair-accessible vehicles (WAVs), as well as a showing regarding outreach to inform potential customers about the availability of WAVs, and a full accounting of funds spent to provide and promote WAVs in order to be eligible to claim offset funds. Section 5440.5(a)(1)(B)(ii) of the California Public Utilities Code provides:

In order to offset amounts due pursuant to this subparagraph in a geographic area, the commission shall require a TNC, at a minimum, to demonstrate, in the geographic area, the presence and availability of drivers with WAVs on its online-enabled application or platform, improved level of service, including reasonable response times, due to those investments for WAV service compared to the previous quarter, efforts undertaken to publicize and promote available WAV services to disability communities, and a full accounting of funds expended.

Lyft has not made these necessary showings in Advice Letter 4A and thus awarding the relief requested in Advice Letter 4A is not authorized by the TNC Access for All Act.

Presence and Availability: The statute requires TNCs that seek to retain funds collected pursuant to the TNC Access for All Act to demonstrate “the presence and availability of drivers with WAVs on its online-enabled application or platform.”¹ Lyft has not made this showing due to the extremely small number of WAV rides it actually provided during this period. The paucity of rides provided contrasts sharply with the large sum (over a million dollars in funds) that Lyft seeks to offset. In addition, a significant portion of the WAV rides that were requested went uncompleted, and no rides were available during several hours each day.

Given such dismal results, Lyft did not make an adequate showing of presence and availability and should therefore be found not to be eligible for offset funds.

¹ California Public Utilities Code Section 5440.5(a)(1)(B)(ii).

Outreach: Under the TNC Access for All Statute, TNCs must “demonstrate” outreach efforts to inform potential customers about the availability of WAV service, and the Track 2 Decision requires TNCs to “provide evidence of their outreach effort.”² Lyft’s Advice Letter 4A provides what appears to be – it is unclear from Lyft’s materials – information sent to other organizations. Some of these PDF pages look odd, with large blacked-out areas, leaving it unclear whether important information is being obscured.

These PDF pages explain, among other things, that one must change a Lyft app *setting* for the WAV option to even appear on the app. Very few people will know to do this. In other words, Lyft has *built in* an obstacle to receiving WAV service. The DAs’ Reply comments in Track 3 discussed this very problem:

In order to obtain WAV service via Lyft, a person must change the default settings of the app; if they do not know to do that, they will not even be able to see the option of requesting a WAV ride. The Disability Advocates have received multiple queries about this issue. If a potential WAV customer cannot easily find the way to call for WAV service on a TNC’s app, demand for the service will be artificially lowered. This is termed a “capacity constraint” under the Americans with Disabilities Act and is the opposite of what the TNC Access for All Act requires, which is sufficient outreach to raise awareness of WAV capability among TNCs. The Disability Advocates reiterate that the Commission should require TNCs to ensure that it is straightforward and easy for a customer to indicate that they need WAV service from their online-enabled applications, and it should also require TNCs to report on the steps a person requesting a WAV ride needs to take. TNC apps must plainly show all of the options available to customers, including WAV rides. This requirement, and an easy to view WAV option, will also help raise awareness of the availability of WAV service.³

The fact that Lyft has built in an obstacle to users of its app even knowing of the existence and availability of WAV rides has surely contributed to Lyft’s low WAV ride numbers, and worked at cross-purposes to its required outreach efforts. A TNC that has created obstacles to access within its own

² California Public Utilities Code Section 5440.5(a)(1)(B)(ii); D.20-03-007 at p. 21.

³ Disability Advocates, Track 3 Reply Comments at p. 7.

app should not be permitted to offset funds collected under the TNC Access for All Act.

Full Accounting of Funds: Under the Statute, TNCs must present “a full accounting of funds expended.”⁴ At a minimum, a “full accounting” should provide an understanding of what Lyft is spending funds collected for a public purpose on. The information provided in the Advice Letter does nothing of the sort – it simply lists three broad categories for expenditures: (1) “fee with partnership(s) to gain preferred access of utilizing vehicles,” (2) “Consultant fees to help with implementation and compliance of the WAV program,” and “26 [or 25] employees of various positions (from engineering to operations) working on WAV (519 [or 855] hours total).”⁵ It is inappropriate to award offset funds to Lyft based on this limited showing. In the real world of contracts or of public accountability, such large numbers with no further detail would never be considered a full accounting. The reporting does not even meet the level of detail set forth in the template provided by CPED. For instance, the template suggests that, if a TNC seeks to offset funds for staff, the TNC must provide details of the individuals’ position and duties, such as “5 customer service reps responding to WAV complaints.”⁶ By contrast, Lyft’s report on staff time simply says “various positions . . . working on WAV.”⁷

Conclusion

Offsets funding is only intended to be provided to a TNC that has met its obligations to demonstrate presence and availability of WAVs, that has conducted and reported sufficient outreach, and that has provided a full accounting of funds expended to support improved WAV service. Because Lyft has not met its obligations, the Commission should determine that Lyft is not eligible to offset funds for Q2 2020.

The Disability Advocates request that the Industry Division review this protest and refer it to the Administrative Law Judge Division if the Industry Division is unable to resolve the objections.

Thank you for your time and consideration of these protests.

⁴ California Public Utilities Code Section 5440.5(a)(1)(B)(ii).

⁵ “Funds Expended” Tab to Lyft AL 4A Supplement Data Spreadsheet.

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*

Sincerely,

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