



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN

**MANHATTAN BOROUGH PRESIDENT GALE A. BREWER
TESTIMONY ON INTRO 950
COMMITTEES ON TRANSPORTATION & CONSUMER AFFAIRS
SEPTEMBER 26, 2016**

Thank you Chairs Espinal and Rodriguez for the opportunity to testify today in support of my bill, Intro 950, to amend the administrative code of the city to limit the number of sightseeing bus licenses.

It has become clear to me in my role as Manhattan Borough President, through countless conversations with business owners, residents, and Community Board Members, that many in our borough are frustrated with the proliferating sightseeing bus industry. According to the New York State Department of Transportation, the number of double-decker sightseeing buses in the city more than tripled from 57 to 194 between 2003 and 2013. And that number keeps growing—according to the most recent numbers provided to my office by the Department of Consumer Affairs, there are 237 such buses in operation today, held by eight different companies.

There is no question that the sightseeing bus industry has become a vital component of the tourism industry. However, these “hop on, hop off” sightseeing buses now often operate well below capacity, needlessly contributing to pollution and congestion. Some companies, moreover, disregard pre-determined bus stops approved by the Department of Transportation, and drivers will park or idle illegally in MTA bus lanes, or outside popular tourist destinations like the 9/11 Memorial and Strawberry Fields in Central Park.

It is with these problems in mind that Council Member Margaret Chin and I introduced Intro 950, which would cap the number of sightseeing buses at 225. I’ve spoken at length with advocates including TWU Local 225 who have concerns that instituting such a cap will result in the loss of jobs. However, no current licenses or jobs would be taken away under this plan. Rather, once the current number of sightseeing buses dips to 225—naturally, through attrition—no additional licenses would be granted.

I would also like to voice my support for Intros 529-A and 713-A, which would, respectively, strengthen licensing requirements in the sightseeing bus industry, and require bus operators to submit operating plans to the Department of Consumer Affairs. It’s important to note that not all bus companies are guilty of operating in the ways described above. Creating stricter rules for licensing and collecting relevant information, as these bills propose, can help city agencies target their efforts on the “bad actors” within the industry.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to working with members of this committee to ensure proper oversight and enforcement of regulations with respect to the sightseeing bus industry.