



City of Cambridge

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VICE MAYOR MALLON



CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL

Alanna Mallon
Vice Mayor

To: Cambridge City Council
From: Alanna Mallon, Vice-Mayor
Date: February 3rd, 2021
Subject: Data Collection from Transportation Network Companies

To the Honorable, the City Council,

When I filed [a policy order](#) with former Councillor Kelley and former Vice-Mayor Devereux in 2019 asking the City to partner with a research institution to collect data on Transportation Network Companies (TNCs), I hoped to better understand the impact ride hails are having on our community, especially as it relates to transportation and sustainability. Now, over a year and a half later, we have not come any closer to finding those answers, even though our pre-COVID, and certainly post-COVID traffic levels and climate change vulnerability demand a sense of urgency.

TNCs, such as Uber and Lyft, were originally marketed as a way to decrease car ownership and thus get more cars off the street and, yet [7,879,235 trips started in Cambridge in 2019 alone](#). That number has grown by 16% since 2017, and does not account for rides that end or pass through Cambridge, nor time drivers spend idling as they wait for their next pickup. With an average of 74.9 rides started per person in Cambridge, our City has the highest per person ride count in the entire state. With such high rates of ridership, it is clear that TNCs must have a considerable effect on our community, but we need specific data to paint a fuller picture of their impact. Simply put, we cannot understand nor devise data-driven ways to address TNCs without this critical information.

As communities across the world grapple with the impacts of climate change, the City has set several goals to mitigate our impact on the environment, many surrounding sustainable transportation. [Envision Cambridge](#) highlights “[achieving] a carbon neutral transportation system” as a major goal, yet TNCs

make it easier for residents to opt for private, single-rider car trips that emit considerable amounts of greenhouse gases. If the nearly eight million TNC trips that start in Cambridge each year are hindering our sustainability goals and threatening the health of both the environment and our residents, we should understand by how much.

Similarly, mobility and access is an issue the City is working to address through a number of initiatives, such as [the Parking and Transportation Demand Management Ordinance](#). We cannot, however, develop responsible, meaningful strategies to reduce congestion if we do not know how much congestion originates from ride hailing. In San Francisco, [ride hailing services increased traffic delays by 40%](#), and while we may colloquially see countless Ubers and Lyfts in our squares during rush hour, we need concrete numbers. More broadly, we must assess how the additional wear-and-tear of having so many TNC trips on our streets impacts residents' ability to efficiently travel in the City, and how the associated road upkeep translates into additional costs to the City. As more residents opt for walking and bike riding over taking public transportation during this pandemic, and as the City has set our [Vision Zero](#) goals, we must also determine how TNCs impact the safety of our streets, especially for vulnerable road users.

The prevalence of TNCs is a complex, multi-faceted issue that must be considered holistically as we begin to gather data. Some potential data points that could be collected include:

- What percentage of rush hour and off peak traffic do TNCs account for?
- How many TNC drivers operate in Cambridge each day and how many miles do TNC drivers travel in Cambridge each year?
- How much time does the average TNC driver spend “deadheading” on Cambridge streets each day?
- Are TNCs more prevalent in certain neighborhoods than others? Is there a relationship between TNC use and the lack of availability of public transportation or separated bike lanes in a neighborhood?
- How much carbon is released by TNCs in Cambridge each year? What percentage of carbon released in Cambridge annually from cars originates from TNCs? How many TNC drivers in Cambridge use electric vehicles?
- How often do TNC users choose “pool” options, rather than single rider options?
- How many crashes or incident reports originate from TNC trips each year in Cambridge?

As we, as a City Council and as a City, advocate for more sustainable modes of transportation that ease traffic congestion, the continued prevalence of TNCs begs the question: what gaps do TNCs fill in our transit infrastructure? With a lack of leadership at the state level to collect this data, the City must step up to gather this information, and craft data-driven strategies to fill in those gaps while moving towards our transportation and sustainability goals. If TNCs are hindering our progress towards achieving the City's goals, we cannot continue to leave them unchecked. I am hopeful that partnering with MIT to collect this data will grant us a deeper understanding of the role TNCs play in our community, as it is difficult to ascertain what mitigation policies could be implemented from data that has not yet been captured.

Thank you,



Alanna Mallon
Cambridge Vice-Mayor