

Communication from Public

Name: LA Tour Bus Operator Coalition
Date Submitted: 10/23/2019 01:20 PM
Council File No: 17-1115
Comments for Public Posting:

LOS ANGELES
TOUR BUS
OPERATOR
COALITION



October 22, 2019

The Honorable Mike Bonin.
Chair of the Transportation Committee
City of Los Angeles
200 N. Spring St.
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Re: TOUR BUS ROUTE RESTRICTIONS – CF#17-1115

Dear Councilmember Bonin and Members of the Transportation Committee;

Tourism provides an enormous contribution to our local economy and is essential to the culture of Hollywood and to the City of Los Angeles. In 2018, Los Angeles hosted a record 50 million visitors who collectively spent \$22.7 billion in direct spending, with an overall economic impact of \$34.9 billion.

Despite the tremendous interest and economic value of tourism to Los Angeles, the Hollywood area was rated last in Trip Advisors top 100 destinations to visit in 2018, and Hollywood has seen a 16% decline in its local economy. Clearly, the City needs to do more to address the public safety and health issues facing the Hollywood area and create programs that will support local business and tourism.

The LA Tour Bus Operators Coalition is very concerned about the proposed policy to regulate tour bus operations on City streets. While we understand the need to work with the City to ensure that sightseeing tour operations do not infringe on the rights of Hollywood residents, we believe that this regulation is overly broad and gives LADOT too much discretion to prohibit streets without any clear process, notification to stakeholders, or opportunity for appeal.

The LA Tour Bus Operators Coalition would like an opportunity to be a part of the process in developing these regulations and respectfully request that the following issues be reviewed and addressed by this committee:

- (1) The City's definition of "tour bus" goes beyond the State Code and essentially eliminates any for-hire vehicle visiting or viewing places of interest on public streets.***

The State Code defines “Tour bus” as a bus, which is operated by or for a charter-party carrier of passengers, as defined in Section 5360 of the Public Utilities Code, or a passenger stage corporation, as defined in Section 226 of the Public Utilities Code. “Tour bus” includes a bus described in subdivision (a) that has had its roof substantially structurally modified or removed.

The City definition includes “any for-hire vehicle that is used primarily for the conveyance of passengers over the public streets for the purpose of visiting or viewing places of interest”.

The City’s definition now includes all vehicles not just tour buses, including private vehicles such as an uber or lyft carrying several tourists following a Hollywood star map, or even a group of tourists in their own rental vehicle. Any of these situations could be cited based on the City’s definition. The definition essentially eliminates all guided sightseeing by a tour bus or individual tourists’ attempt to visit or view places of interest on public streets.

Whether the intent is to eliminate certain types of tours or not, this language does exactly that. It will put out of business tour operators that currently provide “Hollywood Star Tours,” to more than 350,000 visitors to our City each year.

The LA Tour Bus Operator Coalition requests that the definition of “tour bus” for the City remains the same as the State Code.

(2) The LADOT proposal’s qualifying conditions for prohibiting the streets a tour bus can operate are overly broad and could qualify almost any public street, therefore giving LADOT complete unchecked discretion to restrict streets.

The LADOT proposal suggests that tour bus operation (any type of tourism even in a private vehicle) should be prohibited, once LADOT has received a request in writing from a Council office, Neighborhood Council, LAPD, or school and after one or more of the qualifying conditions are verified to exist.

These qualifying conditions include roadway width, crash patterns, roadside vegetation, curved roadway, inadequate parking, narrow parking lanes, roadway grade, school zone, pedestrian safety, among others. These conditions are designed to allow the prohibition of streets particularly in the Hollywood Hills area but arguably could apply to most streets in the entire city.

The LA Tour Bus Operator Coalition would like to have the opportunity to discuss the public safety issues LADOT is trying to address and help identify streets that are a problem and those that might be alternatives so that they can continue to operate their tour services.

(3) The LADOT report and proposal leaves out any mention of working with the tour bus operators or including the business community or local associations as stakeholders in the evaluation of streets and restriction process.

The LA Tour Bus Operator Coalition has been left out of this process and discussion entirely. While there were several neighborhood council meetings that a few operators did attend, none were constructive welcoming environments where they felt comfortable sharing their positions. Most were hostile angry neighbors who do not recognize the need or the value for operating tours in the Hollywood Hills. A service requested by over 350,000 tourists in the past year.

In addition, the LADOT proposal suggests that they worked with the industry to create the criteria however that does not include the 30 plus operators in Hollywood that were never invited to the table. It seems LADOT spoke with only the largest single operator in Hollywood, who does not represent the position of the many others that will potentially be harmed by these restrictions.

The LA Tour Bus Operator Coalition requests that any process to create restricted or recommended streets for the tour industry include an opportunity for the operators to weigh in. If the City intends to move forward with the current proposal, we ask that there be a process created for notification of the operators and a hearing and appeal process.

(4) In San Francisco, tour bus operations are permitted and regulated, and the City has created a map of “restricted and recommended streets” so that operators can plan their tours based on the size and weight of their vehicles.

San Francisco has successfully created a tour bus operator program that supports tourism and the great value of tour bus operators to the economy. Not only has San Francisco designed a network of tour bus-only loading and parking zones near major tourist attractions, they also have street regulations based on public safety that allow operators to plan out their tours. San Francisco has 3 types of street restrictions based on vehicle capacity size and vehicle weight and provides a map of the City with the designated restricted streets and recommended streets, so that operators can create tours for their clients that comply with these restrictions.

The LA Tour Operators Coalition recommend that the City and LADOT work with the industry to identify specific restricted streets and recommended streets based on public safety criteria so that the industry can continue to provide their service to tourists.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our concerns and thoughts about how to move forward with a balanced enforceable policy that weighs the needs of Hollywood residents and the services desired by the millions of tourists visiting our great City.

We look forward to working with the City to create a tour bus operator program that works for everyone.

Sincerely,

The LA Tour Bus Operator Coalition.