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POWER TO THE COMMUTERS

NEW YORK CITY'S INCOMING MAYOR, MICHAEL BLOOMBERG, can strike a blow for better quality of life by repealing an arbitrary, monopolistic law that severely limits the ability of commuter vans to serve the public. When entrepreneurs began offering van service to New Yorkers in the 1980s, customers flocked to them like the thirsty to an oasis. Fares were reasonable, and the vans would drop you off or pick you up in front of your apartment. Entrenched interests were outraged. The bus workers' union saw vans as a threat, and in 1993 and 1994 it successfully pushed for onerous restrictions on van service. For example, vans are prohibited from picking up and dropping off passengers along established bus routes. Talk about "the public be damned."

Many municipalities have regulations that limit competition in various services, à la New York's van laws, and those ought to go, too.

Remove This Roadblock In 1994 the New York City Council began imposing debilitating regulations on commuter vans. These restrictions hurt New Yorkers because vans both take people to work and put people to work. Without the vans, thousands of people would not have a safe, affordable, reliable way to commute. Many riders work minimum-wage jobs that require a two-leg commute each way each day. Inexpensive, dependable vans enable them to reach their jobs—and self-sufficiency. The vans operate without public subsidies. And unlike the public buses, they provide riders with door-to-door service. This flexibility is especially important for women, the elderly and all commuters who can't walk long distances. Even the limited competition vans pose to public buses has sparked improvements. Free bus-to-train transfers have reduced fares for many commuters and more buses have been added to shorten waiting times. Vans [should] be recognized as essential to meeting the city's transportation needs [and] the Council should lift the restrictions on vans.

—CHIP MELLOR, president and general counsel, Institute for Justice, *Daily News* (New York)

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