



## NYC's Big HEART Platform for carriage horses.

**Health, Enforcement, Accountability,  
Regulations, Training.**



***A pro-horse platform for NYC to celebrate, embrace, and protect  
the beloved Central Park carriage horses - and keep the 164-year-old tradition  
of carriage horses being ambassadors of our great city.***

The HEART platform includes better oversight by NYC, starting with the city's hiring of a full-time equine veterinarian to check on the health and welfare of the horses. The NYC Department of Health's equine veterinarian - who routinely scrutinized the horses in the stables and the park - left more than a year ago and the position has remained vacant.

The platform envisions additional regulations and requirements on the horse-carriage tourism industry, improves city oversight, provides enhanced driver training, and keeps the beloved Central Park carriage horses in the heart of the city, in Central Park with a new state-of-the-art stable.

### **The Big HEART Platform**

**WHEREAS, Horses have lived on the island of Manhattan for nearly four hundred years.** Land-marked Central Park was designed by Frederick Law Olmsted to be seen from the back of a carriage on its winding carriage drives, and the horses moving on them were intended to “animate the landscape.” Horses helped build our city. It would not exist as we know it without our equine partners in our shared civilization – no subways, no grid streets, no bridges, no “Big Apple.”

**WHEREAS, There is immense educational, historic, emotional, cultural and economic value to maintaining carriage horses in Central Park.** There are 68 licensed horse carriages that essentially are mom-and-pop businesses that provide income for blue-collar carriage owners, drivers, stable workers, farriers, horse transporters and others. These jobs put food on the table, help pay the rent, and help put kids through college. Carriage rides are one of the most popular outdoor attractions in the city, drawing many tourists — and New Yorkers — to the park and surrounding businesses. The advent of mechanized and polluting technologies increasingly distanced many people from any connection to the land, nature, and animals. For millions of New Yorkers, the only horses they have an opportunity to interact with are the carriage horses in Central Park.

**WHEREAS, Horses are massive, incredibly strong animals that were bred by people over thousands of years for a purpose: to transport objects and people, very often in the urban cities they helped build.** These domesticated animals are mentally and physically hard-wired for physical activity working alongside people. For a horse weighing up to 1,800 pounds, propelling a carriage on large wheels along paths designed for that purpose is not abusive or arduous; it's analogous to a human being pushing a shopping cart.

**WHEREAS, Tens of thousands of horses are slaughtered every year because they don't have owners with the will or the financial resources to provide adequate food, shelter, and medical care.** Taking care of a horse can be very expensive. But horses that have a purpose, like providing

trail rides or carriage rides, help generate revenues that primarily go back into their care. Carriage horses and other working horses are the horses least likely to need to be rescued from neglect or slaughter. Horses have increasingly become luxury recreational items for those with the resources to keep them outside the city. When the personal incomes of such owners falter, their horses can wind up homeless and at auction.

**WHEREAS, The horse-carriage industry is a city-regulated industry, currently overseen by five city agencies.** The extensive regulations found in the Administrative Code and the Rules of the City of New York have a decades-long track record of protecting the welfare of the horses. The city has the ability and responsibility to govern effectively through these regulations in order to protect the horses who live and work here.

**WHEREAS, New York City government has the most extensive set of carriage-horse regulations in the country but strives to do better for the horses, in order to enhance their welfare, we advance and support these initiatives and reforms:**

### THE BIG HEART PLATFORM

**Better oversight.** The city needs to retain a full-time equine veterinarian who makes the rounds in the stables and park, checking on the health and well-being of the horses, and flagging issues of concern that should be addressed. The Department of Health had a full-time equine veterinarian, but the veterinarian left – and the position has gone unfilled for more than a year. The city should establish a minimum number of spot checks of horses in the park and stables to be conducted by an equine veterinarian or another qualified DOHMH equine expert.

**More, and more thorough, physical exams.** Increase the number of required physical exams by an equine veterinarian from two times a year to four times a year. Two by the city-hired veterinarian, two by private veterinarians retained by horse owners. Also, review the scope of the physical exams to make possible improvements in the items checked by the equine veterinarians. The city vet should be the one to either perform or review initial physical exams for new carriage horses to ensure their fitness to work.

**Explore a new stable. The city should explore building of an equestrian facility in Central Park without taking land used by the public for recreation.** If such a stable that could accommodate the entire existing carriage industry of 68 small businesses were feasible, this would eliminate the need for carriage horses to commute through traffic.

One possible location: a city-owned building by the 86th St. Transverse that is used now as a sign manufacturing shop. This was previously suggested as an appropriate site for a stable by former Mayor Bill de Blasio, and many City Council members supported the concept. It is located next to the Central Park Police Precinct – which used to be a horse stable.

**More expert advice.** A law enacted in 1981 mandated creation of the Rental Horse Advisory Board to advise the Health Commissioner on issues pertaining to the health, safety, and well-being of horses. The board hasn't met in more than five years. The carriage-industry seat has been vacant for five

years. (The board is supposed to have five members: a representative of the carriage industry, a representative of the commercial riding horse stables, two members of the public, a veterinarian, and a representative from an animal welfare organization.)

**Update driver's training manual, driver's course and exam.** The Department of Health, Rental Horse Advisory Board, and carriage industry members should collaborate on updating and modernizing the manual and driver's course, ensuring it includes all the vital and relevant horse knowledge needed to drive a carriage horse in New York City, not irrelevant and arcane information. The city or an internal industry committee should administer the practical skills portion of the exam to better ensure competency. Currently, any licensed carriage driver can administer the practical skills portion of the exam to a trainee driver who has passed the written exam and completed an apprenticeship.

**Additional training.** Fund and/or provide additional training and refresher training for carriage drivers on carriage operations, best horse-health practices, first aid and other subjects.

**Additional heat protections.** Carriage rides are now suspended when the temperature hits 90 degrees, which taxes understaffed DOH and NYPD MU resources charged with measuring the temperature. Instead, service would be suspended whenever there is a National Weather Service 'heat advisory.' If the NWS declares a heat advisory for three consecutive days, the horses would be prohibited from providing rides for the entire period, even when temperatures are below 90 degrees. "Heat advisories" are neutral forecasts made by the NWS, taking into account danger from both heat and humidity in NYC's prevailing climate.

**Earlier start times allowing horses to work during the cooler morning hours.** Carriages should also be allowed to begin work at 7 AM Monday instead of 10 AM through Friday, while continuing to limit total number of hours worked by any individual horse to 9 hours.

**More shade,** and other improvements. Renovate all hack stands to create more shade by planting trees, improve drainage, and install a water spigot at each hack stand to maximize the comfort level of horses.

**Greater access to water in the park: Install a water trough at the 7th Ave. carriage stand and along carriage routes.** Only two of the three carriage stands in the park have water troughs: East Drive near 5th Ave. and Grand Army Plaza, 6th Ave / Center Drive. Carriages leaving on rides from the 7th Ave stand do not have access to a water trough unless they take a longer than necessary, circuitous route that may entail leaving the park and entering traffic.

**New safety posts.** Install hitching posts at carriage stands so drivers can tether their horses. This would prevent the rare occurrence of a startled horse bolting from the park and running loose. Hitching posts also are a good training tool to help new horses familiarize themselves with their carriage stands and expectations. They also allow drivers to safely take bathroom breaks.

**Restore** Central Park's horses to their rightful, historic spot. Close Grand Army Plaza at 5th Ave and 60th St. to traffic so that carriages may park in the area that Olmsted designed for them to wait for fares, and finally make Central Park truly car-free. Improve signage around the carriage stands to ensure the safety of horses and pedestrians on drives shared with bicyclists, e-scooters and pedicabs.

**Retirement program.** Establish an industry adoption program that identifies and vets possible retirement options for retiring carriage horses, including sanctuaries, private farms/stables, and individuals. Provide transition funds for shipping and board between when a horse leaves the business and then

finds his/her retirement home.

**Establish a fund to benefit the Central Park carriage horses.** Carriage rides are one of the most popular outdoor attractions in the city. People from around the world come to Central Park take rides. Millions of Americans are horse owners and horse lovers. There would be great interest in contributing to a fund that could defray costs of park infrastructure improvements, veterinary oversight, an adoption program, etc.

