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Private Trash Haulers Endorse Mayor's Vision Zero

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Mayor Bill de Blasio's pro-traffic-safety "Vision Zero" plan is getting some free advertising. Some 2,500 private garbage trucks will bear bumper stickers promoting the city's new speed limit of 25 miles per hour.

The bumper-sticker campaign is the brainchild of the New York City chapter of the National Waste and Recycling Association, which endorsed Vision Zero at a summit meeting with city officials and transportation advocates in Queens Thursday.

The stickers read "I DRIVE 25" in reference to the signing of a new law by Mr. de Blasio in July that reduced the citywide speed limit to 25 mph from 30 mph. NW&RA represents 90 companies operating 2,500 garbage trucks in all five boroughs.

Tom Toscano, chief financial officer of Mr. T Carting and the chapter president of NW&RA, said his group has made strides in improving driver and pedestrian safety in recent decades, "and embracing the Vision Zero initiative will help us build on this momentum."

"We're proud to have local partners stepping forward with a message of safety to their own members and the broader public," a spokesman for the mayor said. "Vision Zero depends on all of us stepping forward to make this city safer, and we do that one driver, one street and one community at a time. We are very appreciative of this endorsement."

Both public and private garbage trucks have been involved in numerous crashes and pedestrian fatalities, including several this year. There is no definitive study on the number of traffic deaths caused by garbage trucks, but advocates maintain that trash haulers have a higher fatality rate compared to other vehicles on the road.

The association could be hoping that its endorsement of Vision Zero will pay political dividends down the road. The group is opposed to a bill currently being considered by the City Council that would cap the amount of the city's waste that can be handled by transfer stations in four community districts (two in the Bronx, one in Brooklyn and one in Queens). The bill is supported by environmental-justice advocates, who aim to reduce truck traffic and improve quality of life in neighborhoods with a disproportionate number of waste-transfer stations.

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"Some facilities will go out of business" if the bill passes, said David Biderman, vice president of government affairs for NW&RA.

The group is also against an effort to impose a commercial-carting franchise system with competitive bidding, as is being introduced in Los Angeles. Currently, businesses contract individually with carting companies, so it is not uncommon for a series of trucks from different haulers to service the same block night after night. The city's Department of Sanitation collects residential trash.

Mr. Biderman said the city should at least wait until its new marine waste-transfer stations open, as well as for the citywide rollout of its food-waste composting program, before deciding on a franchise system. Those initiatives and various industry trends, such as lower-emission trucks, could render such a system unnecessary, he said.

A franchise system is supported by the Alliance for a Greater New York as well as the Citizens Budget Commission.