



THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
OFFICE OF THE COMPTROLLER  
BRAD LANDER

**New York City Comptroller's Office Testimony to the City Council Regarding Heliport Operations  
November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2022**

On behalf of the NYC Comptroller's Office, thank you to the Committees on Economic Development and State and Federal Legislation for convening this hearing. We would also like to thank Chair Farias and Chair Abreu for the opportunity to provide testimony on heliport operations in New York City. Comptroller Lander has long called for a ban on private helicopter trips from NYC heliports, due to the established quality-of-life, safety, and climate-related costs of the industry imposed on New Yorkers. Our office continues to support an end to these flights in the city.

54,000 flights took off from city-owned heliports in 2021, nearly all of which were deemed non-essential including 30,000 tourist trips originating at the Downtown Manhattan Heliport at Pier 6. These trips are a major source of noise pollution for communities near heliports and in the vehicles' flight paths. Helicopter-related noise complaints to 311 have skyrocketed in recent years, jumping from 10,359 complaints filed with 311 in 2020, to 25,821 in 2021. This increase reflects the scale of disruption and negative impact on quality of life for residents of waterfront communities where trips and complaints are concentrated. Notably, these disruptions are generated largely by an industry accessible only to those able to pay thousands of dollars for a non-essential trip.

The use of private helicopters also imposes steep environmental costs on the City. The amount of carbon a typical charter helicopter emits in one hour is equivalent to over forty cars in the same timeframe. This translates to city heliports burning over 50,000 gallons of fuel each month, generating a disproportionate level of greenhouse gas emissions to power a relatively small number of non-essential trips. Allowing these flights to continue operating out of city-owned heliports runs counter to longstanding sustainability and greenhouse gas reduction goals.

In 2016, the City created new regulations governing helicopter trips, limiting tourist trips to the downtown heliport and flying over waterways, and banning such flights on Sundays. These restrictions do not apply to charter or commuter helicopter trips, which continue to fly unrestricted throughout city airspace.

The private helicopter industry compensates the City for the use of the heliports at Pier 6 and East 34th Street. These agreements generate about two to five million dollars in revenue for the City each year – a modest amount considering the quality of life and environmental costs and disruptions borne by residents.

The Comptroller commends the City Council, for proposing legislation to prohibit non-essential helicopter trips from taking off at city-owned heliports, limit helicopter-related noise pollution, and calling upon the Federal Aviation Administration to ban both tourist and chartered helicopter flights over New York City airspace. We would like to thank Council Member Brewer, Council Member Powers, and Council Member Restler for their leadership on this topic. We strongly support Int. 773, Int. 0551, and Res. 0291.

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony.