

It's not just the proliferation of parking [permits](#) that irk New Yorkers but the doling out those official cars that clearly become perks for those those who get the “assignment.” The administration appears not to have things under tight control. It behooves an administration that made some noise making cutting back on cars to get real and revisit vehicle use the same way it allegedly looks now at the vaunted permits. To the extent agency flacks defend car use by city staffers, no city pol or bureaucrat who gets the benefit of a vehicle and/ or a permit should question the need of New Yorkers who depend on their personal car or the small business folk who require cars to get around to service customers or to deliver goods.

[http://www.nydailynews.com/ny\\_local/2009/11/18/2009-11-18\\_their\\_free\\_ride\\_on\\_your\\_dime\\_more\\_than\\_2400\\_workers\\_commute\\_in\\_the\\_citys\\_cars.html](http://www.nydailynews.com/ny_local/2009/11/18/2009-11-18_their_free_ride_on_your_dime_more_than_2400_workers_commute_in_the_citys_cars.html)

NYDailyNews.com

## DAILY NEWS

# Free ride on your dime: More than 2,400 workers commute in city's cars

BY [Adam Lisberg](#)

DAILY NEWS CITY HALL BUREAU CHIEF

Wednesday, November 18th 2009, 4:00 AM



*A stretch limousine parked in the city. (Dunand/Getty)*

More than 2,400 municipal workers commuted back and forth to work in city cars last year, taking free rides at your expense.

The list, culled from tax records, includes:

- 441 workers at the Department of Environmental Protection
- 264 at the Housing Authority

- 231 at the Buildings Department

Top officials at many city agencies also get a car as a perk - and the city is defending the practice.

"To save time and resources, inspectors can take their vehicles home at the end of their shift," buildings spokesman [Tony Sclafani](#) said. "They can perform inspections at the beginning of their shift the following day."

DEP spokeswoman [Anne Canty](#) defended it as a way to save time getting to far-flung locations. "They are expected to respond to off-hours emergencies," she said. "It can be more efficient to let people go directly."

[Deputy Correction Commissioner Stephen Morello](#) reported \$11,549 worth of commuting last year, more than any other worker.

Like other city officials at the top of the list, he said he is on call 24 hours a day, frequently travels between agency locations and often starts or ends his day at meetings away from his office.

[David Berkowitz](#), former head of school cafeterias for the [Department of Education](#), valued his free rides at \$9,970.

[Robert Townsend](#), executive director of the Financial Services Information agency, reported \$7,289 in free rides to and from his [New Jersey](#) home, while his deputy, [James Festa](#), got \$5,257 worth.

"He's an agency head," explained spokesman [Jason Post](#). "He uses it for commutation, traveling to outside meetings and because he's part of the agency disaster mitigation plan."

Those high-ranking officials have to pay taxes on the mileage of their commutes, as well as the services of any chauffeur, because it is considered a taxable fringe benefit.

Lower-ranking workers with take-home cars must pay taxes as well, but at a reduced rate - valuing each trip at just \$1.50 for tax purposes.

For all 2,410 workers who commuted in city cars last year, the total taxable value of the free rides was less than \$1.4 million, according to tax records obtained by the Daily News.

[Dick Dadey](#) of the watchdog group Citizens Union was outraged. "It's an employee perk the taxpayer can't afford," Dadey said. "It's not just that in tough fiscal times it shouldn't be allowed - it shouldn't be allowed at all."

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