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# Uber, Lyft, and Revel Curfew Shutdowns Leave Riders Stranded

Essential workers may be exempt from curfew orders, but their commute options are not



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Photo: Drew Angerer/Getty Images

**On** Tuesday nights, Glen Livingston normally walks from his home in New York City's South Bronx neighborhood to his 11 p.m. shift as a supervisor at a homeless shelter in East Harlem. It's a trip the 34-year-old Bronx native has been making

for years. But when New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio announced a citywide curfew earlier this week in response to protests over the murder of George Floyd, Livingston's usual late-night walk suddenly became a potential crime.

He decided to take an Uber, but there were none to be had. Along with other ride-hailing services across the city, it was suspended for the night. "Leaving me with no choice but to walk in fear of being racially profiled or harmed by people disobeying curfew," Livingston, who is Black, told *OneZero*. "I was scared that night. For the first time, I knew I could possibly not make it back home."

As cities across the country institute a variety of fast-changing curfews in response to protests, they are also cutting back or completely shutting down the public transit countless individuals use each night to make their way home and to work. Even private transportation services like ride shares, which have long advertised themselves as transit solutions by shoring up urban transit and making cities safer and more convenient, are temporarily shuttering.

From Lyft and Uber rides, bike and moped shares, to the scooters that litter some city sidewalks, private transit companies are complying with city orders to shut down — in some cases hours before curfew begins — or voluntarily suspending service. Essential workers may be exempt from curfew orders, but in many places, their commute options are not.

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**O**n Tuesday, de Blasio announced that the city's 8 p.m. to 5 a.m. curfew would remain in place at least through the week. The next day, Revel, which had recently expanded its fleet of shared electric mopeds in order to service more essential workers during the coronavirus crisis, and Lyft-owned CitiBike announced that they would be shutting down their services at 6 p.m. — two hours before city-mandated

curfew orders went into effect. Both companies said they were directed to close early by the mayor's office.

In interviews, New York Police Department Chief Terence Monahan has repeatedly blamed the shared bikes and mopeds for aiding looters and vandals across the city.

“They use them as scouts to see where we are,” Monahan told ABC7 New York. “If we cover one area heavy, they are looping around to see where we are.”

But the ban also impacts everyone else who relies on CitiBike and Revel vehicles and who are now effectively stranded each night. “We know this is disruptive to those who rely on Revel during these hours, including essential workers, and we're working to find solutions that will help,” said a company representative. Revel has also limited operations to comply with Oakland's evening curfew hours and has completely suspended service in Washington, D.C.

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The smaller scooters are facing even bigger problems. Lime and Bird pulled their electric scooters from cities across the country in March, as shelter-in-place orders meant to curb the spread of the coronavirus went into effect. Just as the companies were poised to ramp up business again, this wave of protests engulfed the nation.

Bird has removed vehicles from several cities in the wake of curfews and paused service and adjusted operating hours at officials' requests. Lime has pulled its scooters from Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., Dallas, and other cities. “Safety is our top priority and we are actively working with cities to balance this with the need for affordable transportation options,” a company representative said.

But sudden closures of ride-hailing services have likely had the greatest impact on many essential late-night commuters. Just as with the curfew orders themselves, the private

transit shutdowns vary from city to city and by the hour. In Oakland, no pickups or drop-offs are allowed in the city's downtown area. In San Francisco, drivers are instructed to only transport essential workers to and from their job sites. In Santa Monica, Minneapolis, and New York, ride-hailing services are banned during curfew hours entirely.

“Some cities have requested that we suspend operations during curfew hours while others want to ensure Uber is available for essential services,” said an Uber representative.

“We'll be following local guidance around the operation of our services,” a Lyft representative told *OneZero* in a statement. “In some areas, we have been asked to temporarily pause operations while curfews are in place.”

In response to the coronavirus pandemic, Lyft launched a program to provide free and reduced cost rides for some essential workers — after all, ride-hailing was considered to be the safer transportation choice compared to buses or subways in limiting wider exposure to the virus. In Oakland, that program is continuing during curfew hours in partnership with the mayor's office. But in New York, those workers have been left stranded and pleading with the mayor to be allowed to use the transit on which they've come to rely.

## Riders have reported extreme surge pricing, up to double normal ride rates.

Taxis are still allowed in New York City during curfew hours — but of course, you have to find one, and you have to be on the street potentially in violation of curfew to do it.

The orders aren't just preventing people from going to or from work, but also impacting some workers' ability to earn at all. Even where they are allowed to drive for Uber and Lyft, drivers in San Francisco have been instructed that they can't be on the road between rides, meaning they would have to return home in between each and every fare.

Still, the system is working for some. With fewer drivers on the road in places where they are allowed to operate in an extremely limited capacity, riders have reported extreme surge pricing, up to double normal ride rates.

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**T**hese are all services that were pitched as making urban transportation more robust, cities more accessible, and residents safer. Once hailed as alternatives to the financial burden of private vehicle ownership without giving up safe and consistent mobility, the curfew has revealed that these transportation solutions are only as capable as the municipalities they operate in.

Monday is Glen Livingston's overnight shift at the homeless shelter. If the curfew orders and ride-hail shutdowns continue, he plans to chance it and walk again from the Bronx to Harlem. He'll carry a fully charged phone, ready to stream live, he said. "I know people would watch and share if something happened to me."

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