

**NEW YORK CITY TRANSIT RIDERS COUNCIL**  
**MINUTES OF JANUARY 24, 2008**

A meeting of the New York City Transit Riders Council (NYCTRC) was convened at 12:00 noon on January 24, 2008 in the 5<sup>th</sup> floor Board Room, New York City. The following members were present:

Shirley Genn	Trudy L. Mason
William K. Guild	Sharon Santa Maria
Marisol Halpern	Michael Sinansky
John M. Hunter	Burton M. Strauss, Jr.

The following members were absent:

Jessica Lila Gonzalez	Thomas Jost
Toya Williford	

E=Excused

In addition, the following persons were present:

William Henderson	-PCAC Executive Director
Jan Wells	-PCAC Associate Director
Ellyn Shannon	-PCAC Transportation Planner
Karyl Berger	-PCAC Research Associate
Marsha Desormeaux	-MTA Inspector General's Office
Patrick Gallahue	-NY Post
Pete Donahue	-Daily News
Marlene Naanes	-AM NY
Larry Furlong	-Concerned citizen
Matt Shotkin	-Concerned citizen
Bruce Zimmerman	-Concerned citizen
Erin Halpern	-Concerned citizen
Ellie Sankey	-Concerned citizen
Bette Dewing	-Concerned citizen
Yvonne Morrow	-Concerned citizen
Kay Dunham	-Concerned citizen
Ken Stewart	-Concerned citizen
Meg Reed Mian	-Concerned citizen
Alan Flacks	-Concerned citizen

***Approval of Agenda and Minutes***

The agenda for the January 24, 2008 meeting was approved. The minutes of the December 20, 2007 meeting were approved.

## **NYCTRC MINUTES JANUARY 24, 2008**

- 2 -

Shirley Genn noted that at the December meeting she had raised a question about the accountability of contractors who exceed their budgets and the time period that has been outlined to finish the project. Bill Henderson said that staff would write a letter to Transit about these issues and ask how many projects were impacted last year. Mike Sinansky suggested that a list of specific projects should be identified so they can address them directly.

### ***Chair's Report***

Michael Sinansky presided for Andrew Albert.

Karyl Berger noted that NYC Councilman Oliver Koppel remarked in the public hearing held to discuss the NYC Transit Rider Report Card that he was surprised that the PCAC was not a full partner in the development of the Rider Report Card.

### ***Board Report***

Mr. Sinansky gave the Board Report on behalf of Andrew Albert. Mr. Sinansky reported that due to massive cost overruns on the Futon Street Transit Center project, the size and scope of the building will be scaled back. He noted that this is an example of a project that only had one bidder. He said the approach that is being taken is to divide the contracts for the project in order to attract more bidders for smaller sized portions of the project.

### ***Old Business***

Matt Shotkin, a concerned citizen, noted that the automated sign at the M15 bus stop at 72nd Street at First Avenue is no longer working. Mr. Henderson said that Joe Smith, NYC Transit Senior Vice President – Department of Buses who was our guest at the December NYCTRC meeting, reported that because of a host of problems with the system the signs were permanently turned off.

Alan Flacks reported that nothing was ever done about restoring the 24-hour station booth to 168<sup>th</sup> Street/Broadway at the 168<sup>th</sup> Street/Washington Heights station. It was moved two years ago to 168<sup>th</sup> Street/St. Nicholas Avenue and he noted this makes no sense. Mr. Henderson said that staff would look into this issue. Mr. Flacks said there were Burgundy people at the other entrance but they are not there full time.

Ken Stewart, a concerned citizen, noted that the recent NYC Council report about transportation for people with disabilities did not portray the problems correctly. They highlighted the finding that most people were dissatisfied with Access-A-Ride service,

## **NYCTRC MINUTES JANUARY 24, 2008**

- 3 -

but he said this is not the case because the service has made great improvements. These improvements were not reflected in the comments contained in the report.

### ***New Business***

Kay Dunham, a concerned citizen, outlined some of the Brooklyn bus routes that need increased service. Mr. Sinansky said he was very interested in her B44 proposal Ms. Dunham put forth as he rides that bus very often.

Alan Flacks said he would share two complaints with Bill Henderson. He said one was a complaint that came from Councilwoman Gale Brewer regarding a constituent who had had a claim with the MTA rejected because it was not sent by certified or registered mail. Mr. Henderson said staff would inquire as to what the requirements are for submitting a claim.

Ken Stewart suggested that when someone is speaking, they should identify themselves so that someone who is not familiar with the participants would know who is speaking.

### ***Discussion of Change to NYCTRC By Laws***

After a brief discussion about excused absences, the members voted to move the motion for a vote at next month's meeting.

***Introduction of the Reporters Panel: Pete Donahue - New York Daily News; William Neuman - New York Times; Bobby Cuza - NY1; Marlene Naanes - AM New York; Patrick Gallahue - New York Post.***

The NYCTRC members and staff introduced themselves. Trudy Mason introduced Bette Dewing from Our Town newspaper.

Mr. Sinansky articulated four questions that he asked the panelists to comment on: 1) what have changes been like in the last year at the MTA. 2) What feedback do you receive on stories that you write? 3) How do you determine what stories are news worthy? 4) What could the New York City Transit Riders Council do better as an advocacy organization?

Mr. Donahue said it is much easier to get information than it was a year ago, but noted that all the exposure leads to MTA officials having something of a thin skin. He said that management expects to get better press since they have taken the initiative to make positive changes.

## ***NYCTRC MINUTES JANUARY 24, 2008***

**- 4 -**

Mr. Neuman agreed that MTA management has been more accessible, but only when they want to be.

Ms. Naanes and Mr. Gallahue have only been on the transit beat for six months so they have no past reference, but Ms. Naanes noted that she used to be on the crime beat and although it was a difficult to get information from the Police Department, she was shocked at how hard it was to get information from the MTA.

Mr. Gallahue said he is amazed how little he hears from readers about stories he does. Ms. Naanes also agreed that she gets little feedback

Mr. Donahue said feedback helps in deciding whether to do a follow-up story, but noted that often this decision depends on the type of story that was originally written. He said that blogs have somewhat replaced feedback from readers. Mr. Newman said he gets some feedback from readers.

In response to the question about what is newsworthy, Mr. Donahue said that it is not always scandals that are of interest. Mr. Gallahue said the scope of an issue makes it interesting and noted that narrow issues aren't covered as much.

Ms. Naanes said that some issues that might have been covered in print are now addressed on individual blogs

Mr. Donahue remarked that there is stiff competition for space in the newspaper.

Mr. Neuman noted that the MTA's Inspector General's report about the failure to seek reimbursement for warranty claims at the LIRR did not warrant any coverage because they had recouped the losses so there was really nothing to write about.

Mr. Cuza, who joined the session a bit late, noted that getting information during the last MTA administration could not have been worse and acknowledged that the flow of information is much better now, but said there are new barriers to getting the information that reporters need.

In response to a question about how the Transit Riders Council can be more effective, Pete Donahue said the Council should identify and focus on simple things that riders experience every day. He suggested that an analysis of the budget should be done from the riders' perspective.

## **NYCTRC MINUTES JANUARY 24, 2008**

**- 5 -**

Ms. Naanes said it is important to talk to the public as much as possible. Mr. Gallahue said it is helpful if the Council stays in touch with the reporters and inform them about what they are hearing.

Mr. Cuza reiterated the comments made by Mr. Gallahue. He said that often the reporters don't hear about things that are happening and that it would be helpful to hear from the Council about issues that are emerging.

Mr. Donahue said the Council should be more aggressive and forceful about putting out our positions on specific issues and said that the NYCTRC should spend more time talking to the press and getting the Council's name out.

Mr. Neuman said the story about lost and found operations at the MTA agencies was very attractive because it has wide appeal and interest to many groups.

Mr. Sinansky noted that the Straphangers Campaign seems to get much more coverage than the NYCTRC. Mr. Donahue said that Straphangers has a much wider focus. He said the stories that they generate are much more interesting.

Ms. Mason noted that the NYCTRC holds forums in the boroughs and they reach out in different ways to the riding public. She representatives from NYC Transit and MTA Bus Company attend the bus forums and provide answers to questions posed by the public. Mr. Donahue said it sometimes comes down to timing because the reporters have deadlines for stories and most of the Council events are in the late afternoon. By that time he has already done his work for the day.

In response to Karyl Berger's question about what the reporters see as the current big stories, Mr. Neuman mentioned that crowding seems to be a growing problem. Mr. Gallahue noted that the cost of expanding the system is going to be a big issue, and also the concern about adequate levels of service may be an important issue. Mr. Cuza said he is really interested in the whole issue of technology, especially with the installation of the Communication Based Train Control system that is now on the L line. Mr. Donahue also noted that crime in the stations and on the trains is still of concern.

Ms. Naanes asked if she could get email notices about the NYCTRC meetings. Mr. Henderson said he would put her on the list.

Ms. Genn said she would like to be able to give the reporters names to many of the organizations that she represents in Brooklyn. She emphasized that she is very concerned about the Access-A-Ride service and hope that it gets lots of coverage from the press. She also expressed concern than the subway stations in the outer boroughs are neglected and do not get the attention that the Manhattan stations get.

## **NYCTRC MINUTES JANUARY 24, 2008**

**- 6 -**

Ellyn Shannon suggested that the newspapers create a question column so that concerns like why trains are full can be adequately answered. Mr. Donahue said this was a good idea but they would need to enlist the cooperation of the MTA in order to answer the questions that are posed. Ms. Naanes noted that the questions could be seeds for stories.

Marisol Halpern asked the reporters if they take into consideration of the impacts of language differences in doing their stories. Mr. Newman responded that he speaks Spanish and that this skill can be useful in covering stories.

Mr. Donahue said he would be more interested in the guests who come to the Council meetings if they were more relevant to the issues of the day.

Ken Stewart asked the reporters how familiar they are with the PCAC. Mr. Donahue and Mr. Cuza both said they spoke to Beverly Dolinsky often and have spoken to Bill Henderson as well.

### ***Adjournment***

The meeting was adjourned at 2:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Karyl Berger  
Research Associate

January 24, 2008 Meeting Follow-Up Items:

- Vote on by-law change at February meeting.
- Send thank you note to reporters.
- Ask NYC Transit about accountability of contractors in meeting budgets and time lines for completing projects.
- Ask NYC transit about the restoration of a full time booth at 168<sup>th</sup> Street/Broadway.
- Follow up with Bridges and Tunnels about the EZ