

**NEW YORK CITY TRANSIT RIDERS COUNCIL**  
**MINUTES OF FEBRUARY 28, 2008**

A meeting of the New York City Transit Riders Council (NYCTRC) was convened at 12 noon on February 28, 2008, in the 5<sup>th</sup> floor Board room, MTA headquarters, 347 Madison Avenue, New York City. The following members were present:

Andrew Albert	Thomas Jost
Shirley Genn	Trudy L. Mason
Jessica Lila Gonzalez	Edith Prentiss
William K. Guild	Sharon Santa Maria
Marisol Halpern	Michael Sinansky
John M. Hunter	Burton Strauss

The following members were absent:

Toya Williford (E)

(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
Dan Bianco	-PCAC Consultant
Thomas Savage	-MTA Bus
Norman Silverman	-MTA Bus
Nathan McNeal	-MTA-OIG
Linda Black	-DFTA
Joseph Garber	-O.P.A.A.A.
George Haikalis	-Concerned citizen
Alan Flacks	-Concerned citizen
Yvonne Morrow	-Concerned citizen
Ken Stewart	-Concerned citizen
Meg Reed Mian	-Concerned citizen

***Approval of Agenda and Minutes***

The agenda for the February 28, 2008 meeting was approved. The minutes of the January 24, 2008 meeting were approved as amended.

***Chair's Report***

**The Chair's Report is attached to these minutes.**

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### ***Introduction of Thomas Savage, President – MTA Bus Company and Norman Silverman, MTA Bus Company Vice President – Operations Planning***

A video about the creation of the MTA Bus Company was shown.

Mr. Savage indicated that the video has been well received and that the primary purposes of producing the video were to tell how the seven companies were combined to form the MTA Bus Company and to develop a common history for the Company.

Mr. Savage said the transition was not easy in that there was a lot of misinformation going around, but noted that only one senior manager from the original companies did not join MTA Bus as the companies merged. He said that most of the facilities and equipment operated by the seven companies had deteriorated and that it would require a lot of capital investment to bring them up to speed.

Mr. Albert noted that there was always a huge disparity between the levels of quality of service provided by the different companies. Mr. Savage noted that, as of March, MTA Bus will be able to compare service performance on a month to month basis, since March 2007 was the first month that the operations of all seven companies had been combined under the auspices of MTA Bus. He said that there has been a 10 percent increase in weekday ridership and a 15 percent increase in weekend ridership.

Mr. Savage said the quality of supervision is a top priority. He said the focus is on quality control and treatment of customers, including how disabled customers are served. He said they have made a huge effort to listen to their customers and conduct ongoing discussions with elected officials.

Mr. Savage reported that the relationship between the City and MTA Bus is much better than it was between the City and the seven separate companies. Mr. Savage explained that workers at five of the companies were affiliated the Local 100 of the Transit Workers Union (TWU) and workers at the remaining two companies were represented by different locals of the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU).

He said that they have not yet signed any labor agreements and are still working under the ones that were in place prior to the companies coming under the MTA.

In response to Ms. Mason's question as to how MTA Bus currently functions with so many different unions and what he sees in terms of a resolution, Mr. Savage said that the complex situation will be resolved, but currently they are using established work rules. He said they have spent a lot of time to standardize the fixed rate times that specify the amount of time needed to perform equipment maintenance or repair jobs.

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He said that the pension issues between the Company and its workers went to arbitration and that the resolution of health benefit issues resulted in all MTA Bus workers using the Transit Workers Union platform for health benefits.

Tom Jost stated that prior to the creation of MTA Bus, there was some talk that some Staten Island private bus services would be folded into MTA Bus. He asked whether there are plans to further integrate MTA Bus with other parts of the MTA family. Mr. Savage said the agency heads have been talking to each other through MTA Headquarters and noted that Executive Director and CEO Lee Sander has made it clear he is interested in the concept of a regional bus operation. This initiative would include sharing of resources, including road operations and joint procurements for buses. He said the situation of the MTA operating agencies is similar to the airlines in that the MTA does not want to combine bus operations without first negotiating labor agreements to ensure that the consolidation would work smoothly. He noted that Long Island Bus would be included in the mix and that bus system expansions in the City could involve either MTA Bus or New York City Transit.

Ms. Prentiss asked what MTA Bus is doing to address the flap issue that is specific to Braun wheelchair lifts on the older CNG buses. Mr. Savage said he and his staff met with Michael Harris and Jean Ryan to discuss issues involving wheelchair access, including the changes that would be required to deal with larger wheelchairs. He said that MTA Bus will build specifications into the new fleet purchases in order to accommodate new larger wheelchairs.

Mr. Savage said that MTA Bus has 1,380 buses in its fleet and that of the total number 475 are express buses and 284 are hybrids. He said they put the buses inherited from the private operators into a wheelchair lift maintenance program, but these buses are very old and the equipment has not been well maintained.

Ms. Prentiss noted that it is her understanding that if modifications are made to the wheelchair lifts with the flap issue, the manufacturer's position is that this will void the warranty on the lifts. She questioned how MTA Bus plans to address this problem. Mr. Albert said staff will look into this issue.

Ms. Prentiss asked if there was any truth to the rumor that MTA has plans to take over Suffolk Transit. Mr. Savage reported that there is nothing currently happening on that issue but noted that Mitch Pally has made it clear he wants Suffolk County bus service to be wrapped into the MTA.

Ken Stewart asked if MTA Bus has studied the accident rates of hybrid versus conventional buses. Mr. Savage said the operators who drive the hybrid buses require more training as these buses accelerate differently from diesel buses. Norman

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Silverman said that he did not have specific accident statistics on the different models of buses.

George Haikalis asked about the cost difference between providing local and express service and the subsidy per ride for each type of service. Mr. Silverman said that express service is much more expensive than local service. He said the numbers are similar to that of New York City Transit, where several years ago an express bus ride was estimated to cost \$10 to provide.

Mr. Haikalis also asked when the MTA Bus routes would be incorporated into the NYC Transit bus maps. Mr. Savage said they are working on it and new maps should be issued soon. The drafts for Queens and the Bronx have been finished. Mr. Silverman suggested that it would be helpful if the Council inquired about the status of the maps with Margaret Coffey, NYCT Assistant Vice President – Marketing, who is responsible for producing the maps. He noted that the introduction of Bus Rapid Transit service in the Bronx is slowing the process down and said putting all the routes that serve a borough on a single map helps make the system more seamless.

Marisol Halpern asked if MTA Bus is looking at any new routes; in particular, she was interested in new east-west service. Mr. Silverman said that with the introduction of Bus Rapid Transit in the Bronx, which is scheduled to commence this year, they have put on hold additional work on bus routes in the Bronx.

Burton Strauss asked what is in the Capital Program for MTA Bus. Mr. Savage said the \$363 million for MTA Bus is predominantly slated for work on depots and new buses including 253 electric hybrids, 62 articulated buses and 189 express buses. He said there is nothing elaborate about their needs, but noted that the average age of the fleet is down by four years and this is definitely a sign of progress.

Mr. Albert said bus operators must do a better job of changing destination signs because he sees so many that are incorrect. Mr. Silverman agreed that this is a problem and said that it is now going to be addressed by road operations.

### ***Board Report***

Mr. Albert briefly reviewed the MTA Capital Program that was released the day before at the MTA Board meeting. He said it now spans from 2008 to 2013 and has a price tag of \$29.5 billion. He said that it has been divided into three parts, including a core program, completion of expansion projects underway, and new system expansion projects, and that \$20 billion in funding has been identified.

Mr. Albert reported that he learned at the recent Rail Users Network meeting that the Port Authority has agreed to extend PATH to Newark Airport. He said that this initiative

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removes the pressure to undertake a rail link between Lower Manhattan and JFK airport.

Ms. Mason announced that she was collecting donations in memory of Jon Schachter that would be sent to the Midtown East-Stuyvesant Community Emergency Response Team, one of the many organizations Jon was involved with for many years.

### ***Old Business***

The members voted unanimously to approve the change to the By-Laws regarding absences from meetings.

Bill Guild gave an update on the Access to the Region's Core (ARC) Regional Citizens Liaison Committee meeting that he attended. He said there were no significant changes from the last public meeting. He said that Alternative G, which included a connection to Grand Central Terminal, had been preferred, but in 2003 it was eliminated and that the connection to New York Penn Station was eliminated from the preferred alternative in 2007. Mr. Guild reported that decisions were made by agencies based on publicly funded studies that were conducted but never publicly released. He noted that because these reports have been kept in draft form they don't have to be officially released.

Mr. Guild said that the last interlocking linking the ARC project and existing Amtrak-owned tracks on the New Jersey side of the Hudson River is west of the Passaic River and so the Northeast Corridor and ARC become two separate railroads that come into New York. He said that New Jersey Association of Railroad Passengers (ARP) is ready to take action over the changes.

Ms. Mason made a motion stating that the Transit Riders Council opposes the current plan and the process by which ARC planners made their decisions without fully consulting the public. Mr. Albert said staff would write a letter and circulate it to the members for review.

Ms. Genn asked if we had followed up about the delays in contracts for transit projects. Mr. Henderson said that he was waiting to see the results of Mysore Nagaraja's thirty-day review of MTA Capital Projects, which had promised to shed some light on the issue, but has since been told that the results of the review had been wrapped into the Capital Program. Mike Sinansky suggested that in addition the letter should ask about the number of contractors have been financially assessed for delays. Mr. Albert said staff will write a letter with these concerns.

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### ***New Business***

Ms. Genn said that at 9:30 that morning, she took the 7 train from Fifth Avenue to Grand Central and was very upset to find that both sets of escalators at the west end of the platform were out of service. She said there was no one there to direct customers or signs indicating where other escalators were. She walked up the escalators and went to the station booth and told the clerk who indicated that men were coming to fix them shortly. Ms. Prentiss noted that she saw they were out of service on the escalator/elevator portion of the MTA website as of 6:30 am that morning.

Mr. Strauss suggested that staff draw up a form so people can write complaints down and not take up valuable meeting time with these issues. William Henderson said staff would design a form for complaints and that it was a good idea.

Mr. Garber noted that graffiti is a major problem at the Marcy Avenue station and asked if he could have a copy of the minutes of the recent meeting when Chief Hall was the Council's guest.

### ***Adjournment***

The meeting was adjourned at 2:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Karyl Berger  
Research Associate

### **Follow-Up Items for February 28, 2008**

- Ask about accident statistics for hybrid buses – In thank you letter
- Write letter on Council concerns with Access to the Regions Core alternatives/process – referred to PCAC 3/6 meeting
- Write letter asking for information on contracts and delays, including how contractors are held responsible for delays and cost overruns, the number of contractors assessed for liquidated damages or penalties for delays.
- Write letter calling for better information to customers about alternatives when an escalator or elevator is out of service.
- Draw up complaint form for meetings.
- Send a letter to NYCT Marketing about status of MTA routes n borough bus maps.