

PCAC Quarterly Report July - September 1997

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Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee (PCAC)

New Research Associate Joins PCAC

Sarah E. Massey joined the PCAC in September, replacing Albert Baime. Ms. Massey holds a BA in International Studies and is currently pursuing her Masters of Urban Planning at Hunter College. Her professional background includes research writing, graphic design, and editing.

PCAC Supports the Building Efficient Surface Transportation and Equity Act (BESTEA)

As part of our ongoing effort to make sure that our region receives its fair share of transportation funding, the PCAC sent letters of support for BESTEA to the New York State Congressional delegates in September. BESTEA, introduced by Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chair Bud Shuster, retains many of the elements of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) that are critical to New York's transportation users and provides increased funding for highway and transit programs.

PCAC Acts on "Worst Bridges" Rating for New York State

In early August, the PCAC wrote to Senators John Chaffee, John Warner, and Max Baucus urging them to preserve the Bridge Replacement and Rehabilitation Program. On August 1, it was reported that New York State has the worst bridges in the country. The program is vital to New York's ability to continue to improve its bridges.

PCAC Monitors East Side Access Study

The PCAC continues to monitor the progress of the Long Island Rail Road East Side Access study. In recent months, staff and members attended advisory committee meetings for the project, which is nearing completion. Work is wrapping up on the draft environmental impact statement for the recommended alternative, connecting the LIRR into the lower level of Grand Central Terminal. Once this document is complete, the

railroad will hold public hearings on the proposed connection. The PCAC and its constituent councils will testify at these hearings.

PCAC Testifies Before New York City Council Task Force

In September, PCAC Transportation Planner Jonathan Sigall testified at the first in a series of public hearings of the New York City Council's Task Force on Regional Planning. The purpose of these hearings was to solicit comments on how the region's mass transit system can be improved. In his statement, Mr. Sigall said that transportation planning in the region is too fragmented, with agencies often working at cross purposes. He noted that the process needs to be coordinated better in order to ensure that any projects that are undertaken complement each other. In addition, he expressed concern about recent cuts in New York City and New York State aid for the MTA. Mr. Sigall noted that in response to the reductions, the MTA developed a financial strategy that was balanced through fare increases, service cuts, and a high level of borrowing.

Assemblywoman Nolan Meets with the PCAC

New York State Assemblywoman Catherine Nolan was the guest at the September PCAC meeting. She addressed members' concerns regarding transit and commuter rail service in downstate New York. Members voiced concerns on a number of issues, including the need for improved bus service in New York City and the importance of placing Long Island Rail Road and Metro-North workers under the jurisdiction of the Taylor Law. Subjecting workers to the provisions of the Taylor Law would make it illegal for them to strike.

Long Island Rail Road Commuters Council (LIRRCC)

LIRRCC Releases 12th Annual Long Island Rail Road Report Card

At a September 29 press conference, Council Chair Lawrence Silverman released the results of the 1997 Long Island Rail Road Report Card. Long Island Newsday, Daily News, and several television and radio stations covered the Report Card. This year, council members collected over 2,000 report cards during the morning and evening rush hours in April and May. Several continuing trends, both positive and negative, were noted. The railroad's overall grade remained at C+; of the 45 subjects graded, improvements were noted in 15, while 7 declined. This year seating availability was riders' number one concern, while it was only third in importance last year.

Conditional Support for Long Island Rail Road Pilot Alcohol Program

On September 1, the Long Island Rail Road began a pilot policy to restrict alcohol consumption on trains to the fifth and sixth cars. The program is being conducted on the Port Washington Branch until the end of the year. The LIRRCC gave its conditional

approval and will monitor the railroad's findings. The program grew out of the LIRRCC's 1994 report card, which found that most customers wanted some type of restriction on alcohol consumption.

Council Supports Joint Ticket Discount

The LIRRCC testified at a fare hearing on September 4, supporting a discounted joint commuter monthly rail pass/MetroCard to be offered to Mail-and-Ride customers. The LIRR began selling joint tickets in January of 1997. Next January, purchasers will receive a discount on the MetroCard portion, which will be priced at 40 times the base fare -- equivalent to the 11-for-10 discount that will be offered to New York City Transit customers in January. The commuter rail portion will have an equivalent discount of 9.1%. This discount will be offered only to Mail-and-Ride customers who buy a monthly pass, because selling tickets by mail saves the railroad money.

LIRRCC Establishes Hot Car Hotline

The LIRRCC set up a telephone hotline to collect specific car numbers that riders considered to be too hot. At the July 10 council meeting, members voiced their frustration about cars without air conditioning. The general consensus was that this summer was worse than previous years on the railroad. LIRR Chief Mechanical Officer Hector L. Perez attended the August 14 meeting and said the age of the fleet is critical to the air conditioning issue. The cars are from twelve years old to forty years old.

As a result of the hotline, the council reported more than 150 cars with inadequate air conditioning to the railroad. The railroad reported that it investigated all of the cars the council reported and made appropriate repairs.

Council Views Airport Access Design

Three guests from the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey attended the July 10 meeting; Patty Clark, project manager, New York Airport Access; Robert Davidson, chief architect; and Elyse Bankler, chief architect for Airport Access. The guests discussed goals of the light rail link between JFK Airport and Jamaica. The light rail link will reduce buses to the airport, relieve congestion in the airport by replacing shuttle buses, and provide a transportation alternative to the airport. Mr. Davidson said the trip from Jamaica to JFK will take eight minutes, and the rail cars will accommodate baggage. The link will capitalize on New York's current transit systems. For example, the new system will employ standard gauge steel rail so that it will be compatible with the Long Island Rail Road and New York City Subway.

Press Coverage

The joint efforts of Chair Lawrence Silverman, Nassau County Executive Thomas Gulotta, Suffolk County Executive Robert Gaffney, and Long Island Association President Matthew Crosson were supported by an editorial in the July 30, New York

Newsday. The coalition has been lobbying the MTA to adopt a free transfer for the Long Island Rail Road commuters and the Metro-North Railroad commuters who transfer to New York City subways and buses. Currently, Long Island Rail Road and Metro-North Railroad customers who purchase monthly tickets by mail are able to buy their monthly tickets with a MetroCard on the reverse side.

In reference to the LIRR hot cars, Chair Lawrence Silverman was quoted in Long Island Newsday saying, "It becomes very clear when you are standing in a packed car and the air conditioning isn't working"

Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council (MNRCC)

Metro-North Railroad President's Forum Proved Productive

The MNRCC's President's Forum was held on September 18. The plan to hold an evening forum proved to be successful, as thirteen riders delivered their opinions on Metro-North's services and approximately 50 people attended. In general, customers were happy with Metro-North service. There was a former Long Island Rail Road customer who was pleased to be a new Metro-North commuter. Most poignant was a man who came to thank Metro-North for saving his life. On July 3, at 11:00 am, he went into cardiac arrest in Grand Central Terminal. Metro-North employ-ees, with the help of a defibrillator, saved his life.

Mid-Harlem Third Track Project Promoted

The council has continued to support Metro-North's efforts to construct a third track on the Harlem Line between the Mount Vernon West and Crestwood Stations in order to meet current and future demands for increased service. Although the new track would be built entirely within Metro-North's right-of-way, owners of several homes along the right-of-way oppose the project. PCAC Associate Director Alan Foster appeared on WKCR radio's Late City Edition program to discuss the need for the third track.

Council Monitors New Program

In July, Metro-North Railroad established a guaranteed ride home program for Tappan ZExpress subscribers. Through this program, people can take a free taxi ride to and from the Tarrytown station during hours that the Tappan ZExpress is not running. The service is provided on weekdays only, with Metro-North picking up the tab for the ride and customers limited to two rides per month. The MNRCC is monitoring the usage of the program, with the support of the railroad, and is pleased to see that it has been highly successful. The number of rides was 113 through September 30, representing 33 rides in July, 31 in August, and 49 in September.

Council Meetings

Metro-North President Donald Nelson was the guest speaker at the council's July 17 meeting. Mr. Nelson briefed the council on Metro-North's new service contract with New Jersey Transit, which provides Metro-North's West-of-Hudson service. The new agreement, which has long been advocated by the council, gives Metro-North much more control over the quality and quantity of service. The agreement was approved by the MTA Board and New Jersey Transit's Board of Directors in September.

New York City Transit Riders Council (NYCTRC)

Council Member Confirmed

In September, Mitzie Wilson received official confirmation from Governor Pataki as a member on the council. Janet Eriv, a Mayoral nominee, is awaiting confirmation. Her approval will bring the council to full membership. This is the first time in many years that there has been the full complement of 15 members.

New York City Transit Riders Council Releases Subway Signage Survey

In July, the New York City Transit Riders Council released its Subway Signage Survey, a follow-up to a survey done in 1987. Members surveyed 100 stations. Although the study reports that signage has improved over the last decade, 82% of the stations surveyed had at least one signage problem. The NYCTRC held a press conference on July 29, which received broad media coverage, including articles in the Daily News, Newsday, The New York Times, The Urban Transport News, The World Journal, The Midtown Resident, and coverage on many television and radio stations. New York City Transit has already corrected several of the deficiencies noted in the report.

Transit Riders Council Recommendation on East River Crossing Study Accepted

In recent months, the council has been an active participant in New York City Transit's East River Crossing study. Work on the study concluded in September, with the selection of the preferred alternative for improving transit service between Brooklyn and Manhattan. The primary elements of this option are a connection between the B, D, and Q subway lines and the Rutgers Street subway tunnel, which carries the F train, and new transfers in Manhattan between the uptown Broadway-Lafayette Street and Bleecker Street subway stations and the Jay Street-Borough Hall and Lawrence Street stations in Brooklyn. The consultant for the study accepted the council's recommendation that New York City Transit consider establishing over-the-street transfers between these stations, with customers using their MetroCard to make the transfer. Such transfers could be used as an interim measure until physical connections are built or be made permanent, if they are successful.

One Person Train Operation (OPTO) Backed by New York City Transit Riders Council

In August, the NYCTRC sent letters in support of the OPTO. The council also reminded NYC Transit that one of OPTO's original goals was to supply customers with more frequent, shorter trains, resulting in shorter waiting times for customers.

New York City Transit Riders Council Surveys Mayoral Candidates

The NYCTRC, along with the Straphangers Campaign, and the Committee for Better Transit, sent a ten question survey to the major mayoral candidates. Manhattan Borough President Ruth Messinger stressed her advocacy for fare discounts and the need to add service. City Council Member Sal Albanese also responded, saying that he would like to see a transit fare reduction. Mayor Guiliani said that he would not respond until after the primary.

Focus Groups Display Public Opinion on Mail-and-Ride

In August, PCAC Transport Planner Jonathan Sigall observed focus groups which were held to determine customer attitudes towards a possible MetroCard Mail-and-Ride program for the general public. New York City Transit is currently testing Mail-and-Ride for half-fare MetroCard users and is considering expanding it to everyone. The focus group participants had mixed feelings about Mail-and-Ride. They were concerned that they could lose control of their finances and that the system could be used to track their movements.

New York City Transit Riders Council Meets With Millard Seay

PCAC Executive Director Beverly Dolinsky and Transit Riders Council members met with Millard Seay, NYC Transit senior vice president, Department of Buses, and John Tucker, NYC Transit, chief of operations planning, to discuss several issues relating to bus service. Issues discussed included steps NYC Transit is taking to accommodate increased bus service demand resulting from the free intermodal transfer and included concerns about cutbacks in service on the M1, M7, M104, and other lines.

Three-Leg Bus Transfer Recommended

New York City Transit Riders Council has asked New York City Transit to consider adding three-leg transfers on additional routes, including the Bx55 and the Bx29 to City Island. The current policy allows riders to make two transfers only on a few buses, limiting the benefit of the intermodal transfer.

Council Meetings

At the July meeting, New York City Transit Stations Program Manager William Madden gave a presentation about the subway station rehabilitation program. Mr. Madden is responsible for design and rehabilitation of the stations. Mr. Madden reported that New York City Transit's goal is to have all 468 stations in a state of good repair by 2017.

Carol Florio, New York City Transit's senior director of facilities planning and car appearance, was the guest at the August meeting. Ms. Florio reported on a downward trend of car cleaning staff. This year, the staff was cut 9% across the board at every maintenance shop, in anticipation of WEP workers. Since this program never materialized, authority has been given to hire 200 car cleaners to bring the work force up to the 1996 level. Ms. Florio addressed problems with scratchetti, reporting that glass scratching is a problem all over the world and that there is no transparent glazing material that cannot be scratched.

New York City Transit Executive Vice President Barbara Spencer was the guest speaker at the council's September meeting. Ms. Spencer is primarily responsible for the Office of Management and Budget and oversees several other departments, including Operations Planning, Materiel, Supply Logistics, Security, and Human Resources. She answered members' questions about the New York City Transit's cost savings efforts. Chair Andrew Albert suggested that New York City Transit come to the council whenever it plans to adopt a new policy or make significant changes to its operations, noting that the council provides important feedback on proposed initiatives.

Press Coverage

Ms. Dolinsky and Mr. Albert spoke about a number of transit issues on an August 31, WCBS radio show. The topics included the free intermodal transfer, service, and finances.

In July, Mr. Foster was interviewed on Channel 4 regarding the expected impact of the free intermodal transfer on illegal vans. Mr. Foster said that he hoped that this would encourage van operators to serve areas currently unserved by transit, rather than skimming riders off city bus routes.

Mr. Foster was quoted in a Daily News story about increases in bus and subway ridership since the introduction of the free transfer. He noted that NYC Transit must ensure that it provides enough bus service to accommodate the growing demand, otherwise it risks alienating riders.

Mr. Sigall was quoted in a New York Post article on the East River Crossing study. He noted that the recommended alternative should help to improve transit service between Brooklyn and Manhattan. Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA