

PCAC Quarterly Report October - December 1997

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Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee (PCAC)

Beverly Dolinsky, Stephen Dobrow named New York One's New Yorkers of the Year

The year for transit advocacy was 1997, according to a New York One cable news program. PCAC Executive Director Beverly Dolinsky, NYC Transit Riders Council Member Stephen Dobrow, along with the Straphangers Campaign, were honored for their efforts to achieve unlimited-use transit passes, which will soon be a reality. The program featured interviews with the transit advocates who, together, represent 90 years of efforts of trying to get a fare break.

Staff Changes at the PCAC

PCAC Associate Director Alan Foster and PCAC Transportation Planner Jonathan Sigall moved on to new positions. Mr. Foster has accepted a position as Manager of Policy Development for the MTA, while Mr. Sigall has been promoted to PCAC Associate Director. Mr. Foster has been with the PCAC for five and a half years, two and a half as the Associate Director. Mr. Sigall has been with the PCAC since June 1996.

PCAC Opposes Minimum Allocation Amendment to Senate ISTEA Reauthorization Bill

The essence of ISTEA will be lost, if an amendment that would guarantee each state a certain percent return on its gasoline tax dollars is passed. The PCAC wrote to key administration officials and legislators urging them to oppose this amendment this fall. The proposal would divert transit funds away from metropolitan areas, where the funds are most needed, to areas which are not dependent on transit, where these funds will be used for highway construction projects. This would defeat the purpose of federal transit funding and reward states for increased automobile use.

Access to the Region's Core Study Critiqued

The PCAC submitted comments on the study Access to the Region's Core Study in December. A joint project of the MTA, the Port Authority, and New Jersey Transit, the study is exploring options for improving public transit service to midtown Manhattan from the east and west. In its comments, the PCAC expressed concern about the scope of the commuter rail option that has emerged as the favored alternative. This option would expand capacity into and at Penn Station and connect the facility with Grand Central Terminal. The PCAC noted that the alternative could be prohibitively expensive and urged the project leaders to narrow it to include only the most critically needed elements. In addition, the council questioned the decision to eliminate improved rapid transit service from further consideration, noting that such markets as Queens and west midtown need new subway links.

PCAC Suggests Investigations into MTA Issues

MetroCard misswipes, misreads and passenger accidents on the Metro-North Hudson Line invite investigation. The PCAC wrote to the Inspector General in October proposing several issues that would be appropriate for audit, such as the reliability of MetroCard readers at subway station turnstiles. With increased MetroCard transactions due to free transfers, council members have observed an increased number of passengers having difficulties with the turnstiles. Another suggestion was a study of passenger accidents on Metro-North's Hudson Line. Figures reported by Metro-North in the fall show twice as many customer accidents on the Hudson Line as the other lines. The Inspector General is reviewing the PCAC's suggestions for inclusion in the department's annual work plan.

Long Island Rail Road Commuters Council (LIRRCC)

President's Forum Shows Results

The LIRRCC convened its Annual President's Forum on November 19. The forum was held separately from the other councils this year in order to increase focus on LIRR issues. President Thomas Prendergast and Long Island Rail Road staff answered a broad range of questions, making the forum one of the most productive for the LIRRCC. Exemplifying the power of communication, LIRR staff acted immediately on a suggestion and installed a shelter at the Glen Street Station. Member Michael Shaffer had pointed out the need for the shelter at the forum.

LIRRCC Addresses Shoe Beam Incidents with LIRR President

Last year, the Long Island Rail Road reported to the Federal Railroad Administration that shoe beams were involved in a number of fires. Shoe beams are the wooden supports for rail shoes. An incident occurred on October 8, when a fire caused by debris on the track resulted in significant delays. An LIRR employee was injured during an attempt to restore power to the third rail. The LIRRCC followed-up the incident with a letter, after learning that a shoe beam had been involved. At a November meeting with Mr.

Prendergast, the LIRRCC viewed a video explaining the problems with the shoe beams and how the railroad is addressing the problems.

LIRRCC Opposes Elimination of Forgotten Ticket Policy

The forgotten ticket policy gives a break to passengers on the LIRR, and the MTA board faced a vote on whether to terminate the policy in December. The LIRRCC wrote letters to New York State Governor Pataki, LIRR President Thomas Prendergast, and MTA Chairman E. Virgil Conway urging them to maintain the policy. The council advocates customer-oriented services like the forgotten ticket policy, which refunds a passenger's one-day round-trip, if the monthly commutation ticket is misplaced or forgotten. The vote on the policy was postponed.

Chairman Lawrence Silverman was quoted in a December 14, New York Newsday article about the LIRR's proposal to eliminate the forgotten ticket policy, saying that the railroad's real reason for ending the policy is to save nickels and dimes on the refunds. Mr. Silverman was also quoted in a December 15 New York Times article about the policy.

Emergency Simulation Observed

Alan Foster and Jonathan Sigall attended a snow emergency simulation at Jamaica Station in December. The railroad simulated plans for rerouting passengers to buses in the event that service is suspended both east and west of Jamaica Station.

Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council (MNRCC)

Gap to be Shortened at Croton-Harmon Station

Five years of diligence pay off as Metro-North begins construction on the platforms at the Croton-Harmon Station. The MNRCC first brought its concerns about the large size of the vertical gaps at the Croton-Harmon Station to the attention of Metro-North in 1992. The council felt that customers might get injured, because the large gaps between the platform and the cars are dangerous. Metro-North reported that it will soon award a contract for the needed construction.

Melrose Station Surveyed

Council members and staff have been actively involved in the Melrose Station Study, which is exploring options for improving this station. The Melrose Station is located on the Harlem Line in the Bronx and is in need of repair. In October, Beverly Dolinsky, Alan Foster, and Jonathan Sigall toured the station with MTA staff and the project consultants. The group reported that there are many problems with the station. The station sits under an apartment building, is dark, and poorly maintained. It is also not

clearly visible from the street: the entrances are at 162 Street, instead of 161 Street, a heavily trafficked street, and there are no wayfinding signs directing people to 162 Street. Metro-North is concerned that substantial improvements would trigger Federal Americans with Disabilities Act requirements. Given the layout of the station, meeting these requirements may be too costly or not possible.

MNRCC Supports Openable Windows

Due to past air-conditioning failures, the council decided to write to the railroad in support of openable windows on its new fleet of rail cars. The railroad replied that the M-7 rail cars are currently under development, and the Federal Railway Administration is developing new rules for passenger rail cars that may affect the design of the windows.

Guaranteed Ride Home Program Attracts Riders

The MNRCC continues to monitor monthly patronage data for the Guaranteed Ride Home Program from Tarrytown Station. The program offers free taxi rides home, twice per month to uniticket customers, when the buses over the Tappan Zee Bridge to Rockland County are not running. Unitickets are monthly passes for the Tappan ZEEExpress Bus and Metro-North Railroad. Preliminary results for July through December 1997 indicate an increase in ridership on the Tappan ZEEExpress of five to seven percent and a correlating increase in Metro-North riders. The goal of the program is to offer better service and attract more riders from Rockland County and neighboring Orange County. Metro-North Railroad and Tappan ZEEExpress Bus riders that may want to remain in the city later in the evening or return home in the afternoon now have a rail option. Guaranteed Ride Home is funded by a \$50,000 federal grant from the Congestion Mitigation/Air Quality program.

Wassaic Extension Program Breaks Ground

After approval from the Federal Transit Administration, Metro-North began work on its Wassaic Extension in mid-October. The railroad is responding to growing ridership on the upper Harlem Line. The MNRCC has been a supporter of the project which will bring new service and parking facilities north of Dover Plains on the Harlem Line. The construction plans include an extension of the line to a new station north of Wassaic, where a layover yard, maintenance building, and 250 space parking lot will be constructed. A smaller passenger station with a 50 space parking facility will also be constructed in the vicinity of the Taconic Developmental Center.

Council Meetings

The Grand Central Terminal Revitalization Program is one of Metro-North's most visible projects, and the MNRCC continues to monitor the railroad's progress. The MNRCC viewed a presentation at its October meeting made by John Dragan, Metro-North manager, Grand Central Terminal, about the history of the Terminal and the revitalization program. John Seaboldt, Metro-North deputy director, Construction Management,

reviewed the GCT renovations and the North End Access projects. The council will tour the construction in January. Robert C. MacLagger, Metro-North Operations Planning, discussed the latest schedule changes and holiday schedules at the meeting.

New York City Transit Riders Council (NYCTRC)

Unlimited MetroCard Passes Realized

As the fall MetroCard revenue figures were reported, transit advocates lobbied the MTA for more fare breaks and better service. The NYCTRC supported unlimited use passes as one way the transit system can attract more riders and give a fare break to frequent users. On November 17, Jonathan Sigall testified to the New York City Transit Committee about its budget surplus, urging the agency to use the funds to test a monthly transit pass and to expand service. In December, New York State Governor George Pataki announced his support for unlimited use passes and proposed a plan for monthly, weekly, and daily passes. On December 18, NYCTRC Chairman Andrew Albert and Mr. Sigall testified at an MTA board meeting, supporting the unlimited pass proposals. Mr. Albert encouraged the MTA to do even more by introducing a "Family Fun Pass," for \$10, which would include unlimited transit use for a family of four for one day. The MTA Board approved the Governor's plan, and the passes will go into effect this summer.

NYCTRC President's Forum Well Attended

Transit riders voiced their opinions to NYC Transit President Lawrence Reuter on October 22. This was the first time that the NYCTRC convened its forum at night. The forum was well attended by a devoted group. Issues discussed included crowding on the Lexington Avenue subway line and options for service on the N Line while the Manhattan Bridge is closed. Due to time constraints, not everyone who wanted to had an opportunity to speak. They were encouraged to write letters to NYC Transit.

NYCTRC Meets with NYC Transit President Lawrence Reuter

The operating budget, service increases, MetroCard misreads, One Person Train Operation, and subway car purchases were the topics at an October 10 meeting with NYC Transit President Lawrence Reuter. NYCTRC members and staff met with Mr. Reuter for their quarterly meeting. NYC Transit plans to close a \$104 million budget gap by saving in non-operating services, not cutting service, reported Mr. Reuter. A plan for \$15 million in service increases includes additional service on eighteen bus routes, additional dispatchers, reduction of headways on the 7, A, and Q lines, and 190 new car cleaners.

Saving the M1 Bus Line

Alan Foster testified at the December NYC Transit meeting, requesting that the NYC Transit not modify the route for the M1 bus. The proposed rerouting would have eliminated M1 service from Park Avenue South in order to provide additional bus service on Fifth Avenue. NYC Transit President Lawrence Reuter said the decision on the M1 route will be tabled until early 1998.

Hands-Free Microphone Broadcasting

NYCTRC members and PCAC staff visited the 126 Street Depot to view a hands-free microphone being tested for use on buses. The microphone system allows for announcements to be broadcast inside and outside the bus and should improve the quality of bus announcements since it makes it easier for drivers to make announcements over the speakers. NYC Transit plans to install a switch that allows drivers to turn down the volume of the external broadcasts at night. The agency plans to equip all buses with the system.

NYCTRC Advocates Over-the-Street Transfers

In December, Community Board 2 adopted a resolution urging NYC Transit to adopt the NYCTRC's recommendation that NYC Transit adopt free subway-to-subway transfers between stations that are in close proximity but not physically connected. Later that month, the NYCTRC wrote to New York City Council members asking that they support its proposal. The MetroCard transfers would provide riders with greater flexibility to transfer between lines and would be especially helpful when there are service disruptions.

Council Meetings

Keith Hom, NYC Transit deputy director, Office of Management and Budget, explained the 1998-2002 Strategic Business Plan to the council. Aspects of the plan include improved safety for customers and employees, improved customer satisfaction, and improved efficiency. One strategy is to introduce NYC Transit - Long Island Bus transfers in 1998 and evaluate MetroCard expansion to NJ Transit, PATH, and Westchester County.

The November council meeting guests were Beverly Morris, NYC Transit acting chief Paratransit and ADA, Carol Zwick, NYC Transit senior director, Paratransit, Augustine Angba, director, ADA Compliance, and Herbert Lambert, NYC Transit general superintendent, Rapid Transit Operation. The group from the Paratransit office updated the council on their efforts to meet the transit needs of people with disabilities. Mr. Lambert reported on procedures for dealing with sick passengers on the transit system.

At the NYCTRC's December meeting, Peter Cafiero, NYC Transit assistant director, Rail Service Design, Ann Cameron, NYC Transit deputy director, Creative Services, and Norman Silverman, NYC Transit senior director, Route and System Planning, discussed the Lenox Avenue Invert Project. An underground stream has eroded the trackways at Lenox Avenue from 110th Street to 116th Street. NYC Transit plans to pump out the

water, lower the water table, dry the structure, rebuild the track structure, and replace the tunnel with a water-proof structure. The council's main concerns with the large disruption of service were whether NYC Transit had planned for every conceivable diversion and whether its communications with the public are adequate.

Press Coverage

The NYCTRC was highly visible in the press as the NYC Transit's surplus revenue became public. Members advocated for the proposed unlimited monthly, weekly, and daily MetroCard passes. Mr. Foster was quoted in a December 9 New York Times article about the Governor's proposed transit passes. He said, "The Governor definitely gets some of the credit, because if he didn't want it to happen, it wouldn't have happened. . . . But we have to remember the Governor didn't provide the money for it, the riders did." Mr. Sigall was interviewed for a December 4 New York Times article about the proposed fare cuts. He said that monthly transit passes will attract new riders.

Mr. Sigall was quoted in a Queens Newsday article referring to the increase in bus ridership since the introduction of the free bus-to-subway transfers.

Mr. Albert, Mr. Foster, and Mr. Sigall were quoted in a December Daily News article about the Lenox Avenue Invert Project. Mr. Albert said, "This will probably be the biggest service disruption since the last strike." Mr. Sigall noted that in a city as transit-dependent as New York, it is not possible to shut down service entirely on a line. Service diversions are necessary. Mr. Foster said, "It's going to be a real nightmare . . . Unfortunately, I don't have a better suggestion on how to do it."

Ms. Dolinsky appeared on CBS, NBC, and New York One about a number of issues this fall. Ms. Dolinsky was on CBS about the bus accident on Fifth Avenue, on NBC about the Lenox Invert Project, and NY One about the bus signs and advertising-wrapped buses.

Ms. Dolinsky was interviewed on NBC news in reference to Mayor Giuliani's proposal to lower bridge and tunnel fares after 9 pm. Ms. Dolinsky said that New York's transportation goals should not include encouraging driving in the city.

Ms. Dolinsky was quoted in a November 23, New York Post article on poor bus service on-time performance saying, "I think they are trying to do the best they can under the circumstances . . . until they buy more buses, they have a real problem."