

PCAC Quarterly Report

January - March 1998

You may jump down the document by clicking on the appropriate link below:

- [Long Island Rail Road Commuters Council](#)
 - [Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council](#)
 - [New York City Transit Riders Council](#)
-

Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee (PCAC)

Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee (PCAC) PCAC Mourns Loss of Member

The council regrets to announce the passing of NYCTRC member and friend Janet Eriv. Ms. Eriv passed away on March 31. She will be profoundly missed. The PCAC made a donation in her name to the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation at St. Vincent's Hospital.

New Planner Joins PCAC

The PCAC welcomed Michael T. Doyle in February to the position of Transportation Planner. Mr. Doyle is a Master of Urban Planning candidate at Hunter College and is specializing in transportation, environmental issues, and professional ethics. Mr. Doyle holds a BA in Political Science from Hunter College.

PCAC Holds Forum on Airport Access

Access to New York's LaGuardia Airport and Kennedy Airport was the topic at a special PCAC forum in February. The forum was well attended and resulted in a substantive discussion of the issues related to providing rail service to New York City's airports. A panel of five experts spoke on the topic. The panelists were moderator Robert Olmsted, a transportation consultant; Patty Clark, director of New York Airport Access for the Port Authority; Seth Kaye, director of the Mayor's Office of Transportation; PCAC Member William Guild, representing the Committee for Better Transit; and MTA Planning Director William Wheeler.

Later that month, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) approved the Port Authority's application to pay for the proposed Kennedy rail link with funds from the Passenger Facilities Charge. However, the Air Transport Association has sued the FAA to prevent the use of the passenger facilities charge on the light-rail system, saying the fees can only be used for airport projects. Before work begins, the project must go through New York City's Uniform Land Use Review Procedure process, which should be complete by December 1998. The MTA also will conduct two studies on airport access:

an 18-month look at extending the N line to LaGuardia; and a study of connecting the Kennedy light-rail line to Manhattan.

Budget and Subsidies, Key Issues for Future of Mass Transit Hearing

Associate Director Jonathan Sigall testified before the New York State Assembly Subcommittee on Mass Transit in January at a hearing on the future of mass transit in New York City. Mr. Sigall called upon New York State to do more to support the MTA's capital and operating needs. Although 1997 was a positive year for the MTA, particularly in the area of fare discounts, outlying years could be difficult. Debt service expenses will rise sharply after 1999, and the MTA may be hard-pressed to meet its future capital needs because of uncertainties about how the 2000-2004 capital program will be funded.

PCAC Counsels on Commuter Access to Lower Manhattan

Executive Director Beverly Dolinsky, Transportation Planner Michael Doyle, and NYCTRC member Judith McClain attended the first technical advisory committee meeting of the Lower Manhattan Access Alternatives study in March. The study seeks to ease suburban commuter access to lower Manhattan by either ameliorating intermodal commuter-rail/subway connections or providing a one-seat commuter-rail ride. One aspect of the study is to identify low-cost and easily implementable options for improving Lexington Avenue subway service, to benefit both city and suburban customers. Another alternative being studied is the construction of a new lower Manhattan subway.

Federal Transit Legislation Means Funding for New York

The PCAC actively followed the developments and debates on the renewal of federal transportation legislation this quarter and spoke out when it looked like funding for mass transportation was going to be cut. ISTEA has helped to revitalize the New York metropolitan region's transportation system, and the on-going support of the Federal Government is vital if the MTA is to continue its rebuilding efforts and to undertake critically needed system expansion projects. ISTEA 2 (the Senate proposal) and BESTEA (the House proposal) are the federal transportation bills that were debated and approved. Key Senators received letters from the PCAC as ISTEA 2 was to include an additional \$26 billion in highway funding, giving priority to highway construction, not mass transit. The PCAC asked that the Senators reconsider and maintain the pattern of allocating 20% of any increased transportation funding to transit. BESTEA was also supported by the PCAC and letters were sent to key representatives. Members of both houses will meet to work out the differences in the bills and will send one version to the President for approval.

PCAC Supports Exhibiting at the Coliseum

The PCAC wrote to MTA Chairman E. Virgil Conway in March, urging the MTA to reopen the Coliseum building as an exhibition site. Located on the West Side of Manhattan, the Coliseum was closed in preparation for redevelopment. The PCAC would like to see

the building used as a revenue-generating exhibition space, until such time as the redevelopment of the site precludes it from being used in such a fashion.

PCAC Involved in Intelligent Transportation Systems Task Force

The PCAC continues to participate in a task force that is developing a strategic plan for deploying an intelligent transportation systems (ITS) network in the metropolitan area. ITS is state-of-the-art technology that enhances transit service. One example of this technology is the automatic vehicle locators that track where buses are located. Council staff serve on a committee formulating an outreach plan for persuading leaders in the region to support and fund development of this network. During the quarter, staff attended meetings of the committee and reviewed and commented on marketing material being developed to promote the benefits of ITS.

Council Meetings

James Harris, Executive Director of the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council (NYMTC), was the guest at the March PCAC meeting. NYMTC is the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the New York metropolitan region, and in this capacity, is responsible for distributing federal highway and transit funds in the region. Mr. Harris gave background on NYMTC's roles and organization. For every area with a population of 50,000 or more, an MPO is required by federal law. NYMTC represents the New York area, which has a population of over 11 million. NYMTC's mission is to be a collaborative forum and take an overall view in regional transportation issues. The focus is to enhance transportation in the area using collective planning activities, said Mr. Harris.

Press

The MTA is considering selling fares and EZ Pass tags over the Internet. "I think it's a great idea," said Beverly Dolinsky in a March New York Post article. "It's a great way to bring costs down."

Jonathan Sigall was quoted in a Daily News article about using the Internet for selling MetroCards. "Any way they can make it easier to buy a MetroCard is good, especially if they phase the token out."

Long Island Rail Road Commuters Council (LIRRCC)

Short Consists and Fleet Failures Addressed at Long Island Rail Road Committee Meeting

Because of increasingly crowded conditions on the Long Island Rail Road (LIRR), the LIRRCC urged the railroad to explore interim solutions such as leasing cars or

reallocating cars from less popular lines to over-crowded lines. At the February LIRR Committee meeting, Associate Director Jonathan Sigall offered these two solutions to fix the problem of trains that are short cars. The railroad's January operating report stated that there was not a single day that month in which either the M1/M3 electric fleets or the diesel fleet operated with a full consist of cars.

Battle Won to Keep LIRR Forgotten Ticket Policy

As 1997 drew to a close, the LIRRCC wrote to New York State Governor Pataki, LIRR President Thomas Prendergast, and MTA Chairman E. Virgil Conway, urging them to maintain the forgotten ticket policy (FTP) on the LIRR. The FTP is a customer-oriented policy which refunds passengers' one-day round-trip, if their monthly commutation ticket is misplaced or forgotten. In January, the vote on revoking the policy was withdrawn from consideration.

LIRRCC Grades Rail Road Service

Once again, the LIRRCC will conduct its annual report card, a survey of LIRR riders. New questions about the on-train conduct of other commuters, timeliness and usefulness of on-board announcements, and a hypothetical monthly fee of \$25 for a guaranteed parking space were introduced on this year's card. Last year, seating availability was riders' number one concern.

LIRRCC Acts on News Story, Prompting Inspector General Investigation

Following up on a letter from LIRRCC Chair Lawrence Silverman, MTA Inspector General Roland Malan is looking into problems presented by a WABC-TV news story broadcast in mid-January. A section of in-use LIRR track near Garden City that was marked as defective was featured in the story. Also at issue was a leaked internal memo that alerted LIRR management to the marked rail. The story raised fears that the rails near Garden City were unsafe and management had not acted on the advice of the maintenance workers. The LIRRCC followed up with Long Island Rail Road immediately. LIRR President Thomas Prendergast assured all that the rails at Garden City were safe.

Late Night Police Necessary, Says LIRRCC

The LIRRCC has been actively examining passenger safety on late night trains. Riders have reported that passenger rowdiness has returned, since police coverage dropped off at the end of 1997. The LIRR had received a grant from Nassau County to fund police coverage on late night trains. This program received positive feedback from riders and was extended to the end of the year by the railroad. The LIRR is pursuing another grant from Nassau County and assigning officers to problem trains. The LIRRCC is also following up with a letter to the Nassau County District Attorney.

LIRRCC Opposes Closing of Southampton College Station

The LIRRCC championed the cause of the Long Island University Southampton Campus to oppose the closing of the LIRR Southampton Campus Station this quarter. After surveying stations for ridership, the LIRR selected this stop as one of ten for March closing. The college protested, because enrollment is higher than it was two years ago, when the ridership survey was done. The LIRR went ahead with the closing.

The View is Enhanced as Windows are Washed

Sometimes it is a little thing that counts a lot. At a January LIRR Committee meeting, LIRRCC Chair Lawrence Silverman requested that the windows on the diesel cars be cleaned. The railroad took action and the view is much clearer.

Council Meetings

Wayne Ugolik, director of Travel Demand Management for the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT), discussed the Long Island Transportation Plan 2000 study (LITP 2000) at the January council meeting. LITP 2000 is a comprehensive transportation plan for Long Island being undertaken by NYSDOT. Earlier this year, NYSDOT held a televised Town Hall meeting on the study. LIRRCC member Cesar Malaga attended the meeting.

Press

Lawrence Silverman was quoted about the MTA's plan to fine mail-and-ride purchasers \$10 who pay over ten days late, describing the policy as "draconian," in the January 29, 1998, Long Island Newsday.

Mr. Silverman was interviewed for a March Long Island Newsday article about East Side Access, saying, "This is not just a matter of convenience. It's essential to the future growth of Long Island." In March, the MTA began soliciting bids for design, management, and environmental consultants for the project.

Mr. Silverman was also interviewed about East Side Access for a March Daily News article, saying, "It will save a lot of riders time and it will save a lot of people that second trip on a subway that they would have had otherwise taken to the West Side."

Mr. Silverman was interviewed about "The Map," the MTA's latest subway and commuter rail map, in the February 15, 1998, Long Island Newsday, saying it promotes the notion that one can travel from a point in Long Island to any point in the New York metropolitan area and beyond.

Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council (MNRCC)

Council Inspects Grand Central Terminal North End Access

The MNRCC hiked through debris to have another look at the huge, underground construction project in January. A project that promises to save commuting time for Metro-North riders who work north of Grand Central Terminal, North End Access is a series of walkways giving passengers new points of access north of East 45th Street. The terminal is currently structured so that all disembarking passengers must walk south before they exit. The MNRCC has been an ardent supporter of the project. Metro-North announced that it will try to open the walkways in stages, a council recommendation. They may begin with the opening of the East 47th Street and Madison Avenue entrance.

MNRCC Remarks on New Surveys

In February, the MNRCC submitted comments on Metro-North's new quarterly and trip-based customer surveys. The council members identified several areas that they felt could be improved upon, and the railroad included many of the suggestions in the final version. The council supports Metro-North's efforts to understand the needs and preferences of its customers better.

Staff Tours West of Hudson Lines

In January, Executive Director Beverly Dolinsky and former Associate Director Alan Foster attended a Metro-North West of Hudson Tour. The day-long trip covered the complete operation of the Port Jervis and Pascack Valley lines. The group stopped at the Secaucus transfer station and viewed the work there. The tour group also viewed the Woodbine yard, a facility in Rockland County that Metro-North uses to store its Pascack line trains.

Free Taxis for Guaranteed Ride Home Participants

The council continues to monitor Metro-North's Guaranteed Ride Home Program. Tarrytown Station monthly Uniticket holders, those who use Metro-North and the Tappan ZEEExpress bus, can receive two free taxi rides per month home from the train station during hours when bus service is not available. In January, Metro-North released data for the Guaranteed Ride Home Program for the months of July through December, 1997. Preliminary results indicate an increase in ridership on the Tappan ZEEExpress of five to seven percent and a correlating increase in Metro-North ridership as a result of the program. Plans to extend the Guaranteed Ride Home program to the Pascack Valley Line were approved in March. Midday and late night service from Hoboken is limited and those riders may take the Hudson Line to Tarrytown and get a free taxi ride within 30 miles of the station. This program is funded by a Congestion Mitigation Air Quality grant from the New York State Department of Transportation.

Council Suggests New Stop for Recreationalists

At the February council meeting, council member George Zobelein said the Breakneck Ridge and Appalachian Trail limited service stops are working out well and suggested that Metro-North look into working with the Interstate Park Commission to create a stop at Schunemunk Mountain for park goers. Metro-North Railroad President Donald Nelson responded, saying that the railroad is looking at many alternatives for access to recreation. Public meetings about access to the Hudson River are being held in February and March, and the railroad has been asked to run a canoe car on the Hudson Line. People could put in their canoes at Poughkeepsie and be picked up at a point south on the Hudson by the railroad.

Staff Attend Focus Groups

Staff members observed Metro-North's focus groups on train scheduling for the New Haven Line in March. Participants were asked which trains they take to get to and from work and how they might be better served by train frequency.

Council Meetings

Donald Nelson, Metro-North President, visited the February council meeting to receive a goodbye gift. The council thanked him for his excellent leadership. This quarter, Mr. Nelson accepted a position with CSX Norfolk/Southern. MNRCC Chair Richard Cataggio spoke at Mr. Nelson's farewell party.

Jeffrey Olwell, MNR Manager of Market Research, was a guest at the February meeting. Mr. Olwell discussed Metro-North's 1997 customer satisfaction survey. He said that the 1997 results of the customer satisfaction survey were similar to the 1995 results, before the railroad's poor performance during the 1996 blizzard brought ratings down. The ratings for on-time performance and public communications returned to earlier scores. Car cleanliness scores dropped, however. Conductors received the highest ratings.

Metro-North Railroad Executive Vice President Genevieve Firnhaber, Donna Evans, director of Corporate and Media Relations, Mel Corbett, director of Special Projects, and Joseph Zilembo, director of Operations Administration, were also guests at the MNRCC February meeting. The group discussed snow emergency procedures. Ms. Firnhaber said that the railroad has revised its plans on how to deal with snow emergencies since the blizzard of 1996. Primarily, the railroad has worked on organization, internal communication, and communication with customers.

Press

Mr. Cataggio was quoted in a February Rockland Journal article about Metro-North Railroad President Donald Nelson, saying, "It (Metro-North) was the worst railroad in the '80s, and in the '90s it is the best run railroad in the country. . . . You've got to give him credit for that."

New York City Transit Riders Council (NYCTRC)

Council Opposes Sale of Walnut Bus Depot

While NYC Transit has been struggling for months to find parking spaces for its bus fleet, a decision was made to sell Walnut Depot in the Bronx, home to 220 buses. The sale was passed by MTA's Real Estate Committee as a last-minute agenda item, and approved by the MTA Board without any response to the 16 community representatives who spoke at the Board meeting in opposition to the closure. The council has asked the MTA Inspector General to examine the process that the MTA used to make its decision. The council has also written to MTA Chairman E. Virgil Conway to request that the sale be delayed until the completion of the Inspector General's investigation. The sale will have a negative impact on several communities. NYC Transit has been working hard to meet increased demands in bus ridership since the advent of the free intermodal transfer and the move might increase service delays. Because the buses will be moved to depots in Upper Manhattan and have to travel back to routes in the Bronx, waits for buses in that borough may get longer. Upper Manhattan already has several crowded bus storage facilities; adding 220 more buses to these depots will worsen air quality and traffic congestion in these neighborhoods. Executive Director Beverly Dolinsky voiced the council's opposition to the sale in interviews on New York One and in the New York Times.

B, Q Brochures Confusing to Riders

The New York City Transit Riders Council regularly examines NYC Transit's public communications regarding service diversions. In March, Associate Director Jonathan Sigall wrote to Margaret Coffey in NYC Transit client services about communications regarding the 63rd Street tunnel project. Mr. Sigall found inconsistencies between two customer brochures. One brochure prominently displays "Special S Shuttle" on the front, which might be confusing to B and Q riders as it does not refer directly to those lines and those riders may not know that the brochure applies to them. The other brochure does refer to the B and Q disruption on the cover. The two brochures are produced by different offices and should be better coordinated. The council is following up.

NYCTRC Supports More State Funding for NYC Transit

As State legislators were preparing to sit down and hammer out the 1998-1999 budget, the NYCTRC wrote to Governor Pataki, urging him to seek additional State operating aid for NYC Transit. The NYCTRC believes that NYC Transit will need additional governmental assistance to meet demand for additional service. Ridership has increased as a result of the free-intermodal transfers and the 11-for-10 MetroCard discount, and NYC Transit has taken many steps to meet this growing demand for service. It has restored service on several bus and subway routes and expedited its plans to purchase

buses. This July, the new unlimited-ride passes will be introduced, and NYC Transit has estimated that the passes will attract 100 million new riders per year.

NYCTRC Meets with NYC Transit President Lawrence Reuter

Council members and staff discussed key transit issues with NYC Transit President Lawrence Reuter at the Quarterly Transit Advisory Group Meeting in February. One major topic was the completion date for the Public Address/Customer Information Screen project, which continues to be delayed. The estimated completion date has changed from 2002 to 2003 or 2004. The Public Address/Customer Information Screen project will bring better communication to riders. At the meeting, Beverly Dolinsky also raised the issue of NYC Transit's reliance on capital bond funding for the next five year program, suggesting that NYC Transit reduce its reliance on bonding. Other issues discussed were passenger notification procedures for planned and unplanned service disruptions and policy guidelines for battery runs (making up for service delays by skipping intermediate station stops).

Marketing Strategy Developed for New MetroCards

The MTA held one-on-one interviews with transit riders this quarter to solicit feedback on the promotional material for the unlimited-ride passes, and the NYCTRC was there to observe. Beverly Dolinsky, Jonathan Sigall and Transportation Planner Michael Doyle attended the sessions. Material being tested included radio ads, print ads showing the different types of MetroCards available, and an informational brochure designed to help people choose the option that is best for them. The participants reacted favorably to the passes, and those who do not use MetroCard now said they would buy the passes. Of the print ads, participants preferred a "then" and "now" ad that highlights the differences between MetroCard Gold as it is now and as it will be when time-based passes are introduced. Participants said that this ad best communicates the new advantages that will become available with the passes. The weekly, monthly, and \$120 express bus passes will be introduced on July 4, but the daily passes will be delayed. The passes will not look different from the current MetroCard Gold. The NYCTRC opposes the sale of undifferentiated farecards, because many riders will have both pay-per-ride and unlimited-ride cards in their possession at the same time. The NYCTRC maintains that the burden of telling the cards apart should not be the customers' responsibility.

NYCTRC Opposes Pedestrian Barricades

Following the January council meeting, the NYCTRC wrote to the Mayor's Office about its opposition to the pedestrian barriers program. Barriers were installed on corners of popular intersections in midtown to direct the flow of pedestrians to other corners. The NYCTRC feels that the program improves travel for auto users at the expense of pedestrians. Seth Kaye, Mayor's Office of Transportation director, replied, stating that this is a pilot program to enhance pedestrian safety.

Blocking Bus Stops Deserves Larger Fine

One-hundred dollars might deter motorists from parking in bus stops, says the NYCTRC. In March, the council wrote to Melinda Katz, New York State Assemblywoman, proposing that the state wide fine for blocking a bus stop be increased from \$55 to \$100. The NYCTRC believes a three-figure penalty will better deter drivers from blocking bus stops. With the increase in bus ridership, resulting from the free intermodal transfer and the 11-for-10 fare discount, NYC Transit is revising its bus service plan to meet the demand. The State can help to improve service by sending a message that blocking bus stops is not only illegal but poses a danger to people who need curbside access to buses.

NYC Transit's Web Site Improves with NYCTRC Suggestions

While web viewing on the NYC Transit site, Jonathan Sigall noted a few areas that could be improved. Mr. Sigall suggested that they more prominently display the links for the 63rd Street and Lenox Avenue Invert projects. The changes were made.

Council Meetings

The council's January guest was Atefeh Riazi, NYC Transit Vice President & CIO-Technology Division. Ms. Riazi discussed various aspects of automated fare collection, MetroCard misswipes, and automatic vending machines. One of the transportation goals for the New York area is to provide seamless travel on the different systems, said Ms. Riazi. For example, New Jersey PATH trains might adopt the MetroCard technology. Long Island Bus adopted the technology and implemented a free intermodal transfer in January.

Kenneth Stuart, director of NYC Transit Marketing Research and Analysis, and Wally Wentworth, computer specialist for NYC Transit Marketing Research and Analysis, the council's February guests, described focus group findings on six subway stations that have been recently rehabilitated.

Norman Silverman, NYC Transit Senior Director for Route and System Planning, discussed how bus service revisions are made at the March NYCTRC meeting. He distributed information on how and why NYC Transit makes bus and subway service changes. Mr. Silverman said that adjustments to lines are routine and that NYC Transit decision-making is dynamic, with service regularly changing to meet demand.

Press

Jonathan Sigall was quoted in a Daily News article about the extra 100 million riders expected to use the transit system as a result of the unlimited passes. Mr. Sigall expressed concerns about NYC Transit's ability to accommodate the ridership generated by the pass.

NYCTRC Chair Andrew Albert was interviewed in March for a Daily News article about new MetroCard vending machines, saying NYC Transit should provide many places to buy fare media, both above ground and below, so people do not have to climb the stairs.

Mr. Albert was also interviewed for a Daily News article about the summer bus service changes. He noted that the changes, almost exclusively additions, are a good first step, but that NYC Transit may need to do more to accommodate the continued increased bus ridership.

Ms. Dolinsky was interviewed for a New York Times article on the ridership increase and appeared on Channel 4 in stories about bus parking and NYC Transit's budget surplus.