
Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee

to the Metropolitan Transportation Authority

OCTOBER–DECEMBER 2000 QUARTERLY REPORT

Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee
Long Island Rail Road Commuters' Council
Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council
New York City Transit Riders Council

PCAC

PCAC Mourns Loss of Esteemed Member and Friend, Martin Goldstein

With great sadness, the PCAC mourns the passing of esteemed member and friend Martin Goldstein. Mr. Goldstein had been an MNRCC and PCAC member since December 1991. For a number of years during his tenure he served as vice-chair of the MNRCC and on the PCAC Executive Committee, most recently serving as PCAC second vice-chair.

Executive Director Beverly Dolinsky, PCAC Chair Barbara Josepher, and NYCTRC Chair Andrew Albert, along with hundreds of others, attended Mr. Goldstein's funeral. Both the rabbi and Mr. Goldstein's son, Jay, spoke very movingly about his commitment to life and to the many causes in which he was involved. Beyond public transit advocacy, Mr. Goldstein took part in a number of other public-spirited organizations including the Masons, Little League, where he was a team manager, and the New Rochelle Planning Board.

A moment of silence was held in honor of Mr. Goldstein at the PCAC meeting in December. PCAC also placed an obituary notice on Mr. Goldstein's behalf in the New York Times and sent a contribution in his name to the Masonic Medical Research Laboratory. The family requests that contributions in Mr. Goldstein's memory be sent to the laboratory.

MNRCC Vice-Chair James Blair will serve in Mr. Goldstein's stead on the Executive Committee until June 2001 when elections for PCAC officers will be held.

State Transportation Bond Act Fails Despite Strong Local Support

By a slim margin, voters rejected the State Transportation Bond Act in November. The act received strong support from the New York City region, and was supported by the MNRCC and NYCTRC. However, it received a lukewarm reception from upstate voters.

The act's rejection is unfortunate for all New Yorkers, because the more than \$3 billion in funding the act would have generated would have been divided almost evenly between transit and roadway projects. In terms of public

transportation in the New York City region, unless alternate funding sources are identified, the MTA will be short \$1.6 billion for its 2000-2004 capital plan. By law, the MTA must now submit an amendment of its 2000-2004 capital plan to the State's Capital Program Review Board. However, no legal guidelines exist regarding the time the MTA has to do so.

PCAC Discusses Internet Technology with MTA Corporate Affairs Head

In December, the PCAC welcomed Christopher Boylan, MTA deputy executive director—Corporate Affairs and Communications, to discuss MTA Internet technology. Currently, MetroCards and some Metro-North tickets may be purchased over the Internet, and schedule and diversion information on the MTA website have been continually improved over the past year. However, unlike most other major transit organizations worldwide, the MTA still does not accept e-mail from customers. The PCAC strongly supports the acceptance of customer e-mails, and recommended this in its spring 2000 analysis of the MTA's handling of information requests, **Mixed Signals**. According to Mr. Boylan, a pilot program for customer e-mail will begin in mid- to late-2001.

PCAC Polls Commuter Railroads on Cell Phones, Finds Few Restrictions

In response to growing rider concern over the misuse of cell phones onboard commuter trains, the PCAC contacted more than a dozen commuter railroads in the U.S., Canada, and Europe to learn whether cell phone restrictions exist in other cities. Although some cities request that riders speak softly or avoid the use of foul language, none of the commuter railroads explicitly

restricts the use of cell phones. However, several of the railroads noted that complaints regarding onboard cell-phone usage are growing in number. The MTA's commuter railroads will address the issue of considerate cell-phone use in upcoming customer campaigns, as both the LIRRCC and MNRCC continue to closely monitor the situation.

One City, Many Fares?

During the quarter, the PCAC reviewed the final report of the Metro-North Melrose Station Study and interim documents from the Southeast Queens Local Area Transportation Study. Both studies seek to improve elements of public transportation in economically challenged areas of New York City. However, although MTA commuter rail service is prominent in both areas, neither study has examined the existing fare structure.

Currently, one-way rush-hour trips into Manhattan from Metro-North's Melrose Station in the Bronx or Long Island Rail Road stations in southeast Queens cost between \$4.75 and \$5.50, far above NYC Transit's \$1.50 fare for similar trips. As a result, few city residents utilize MTA commuter rail service for trips into Manhattan. More affordable commuter-rail fares might change that fact. Thus, it would be useful for both studies to examine the benefits and costs of fare structure.

In written comments regarding the two studies, the PCAC requested the examination of fare policy, a request with which the Federal Transit Administration concurred at its quarterly oversight meeting with MTA Planning. However, the MTA remains reluctant to examine the issue.

Albany Renews PCAC Representation on MTA Board

Late in the quarter, Governor Pataki signed legislation renewing for six years the law that places non-voting rider and union representatives on the MTA Board. Because of its legislative mandate to represent MTA riders, the PCAC has represented riders on the MTA Board since the original Board-representative legislation was enacted in 1995. Had the legislation not been renewed, PCAC's seats on the MTA Board would have expired January 1, 2001.

Under the law, a PCAC member is entitled to sit on the full Board and most Board committees. In practice, the Councils share the Board membership. Each of the three Councils selects a representative to sit on the relevant operating committee of the MTA Board. Each of these individuals, in turn, also represents the entire PCAC on the full Board and on other committees, for a rotating period of 18-months.

LIRRCC

Council Releases 2000 LIRR Report Card: Grade Improvements Best Ever

The Council released its **2000 LIRR Report Card** report in October, to wide media coverage. Riders gave the railroad an overall grade of C+, an improvement over 1999. Improvements in grade were more numerous than ever before, with grades in most categories showing significant improvement over the previous year. The positive results were primarily due to the full implementation of popular, new bi-level diesel coach service and the lessening of air-conditioning problems. Problems

with older diesel coaches and air conditioning were major factors in 1999's poorer grades.

Council Congratulates New LIRR President Kenneth Bauer, Meets to Discuss Wide Range of issues

In December, Kenneth Bauer was named LIRR President by MTA Board Chairman E. Virgil Conway. Mr. Bauer had been serving as Acting President since May, when former President Thomas Prendergast left the agency. Mr. Bauer has been with the MTA family of agencies for 27 years, serving as MTA Deputy Chief Financial Officer and LIRR Chief Financial Officer prior to his current appointment. The Council sent a letter of congratulations to Mr. Bauer in December, noting that Mr. Bauer has been quite well received by riders due to frequent outreach activities.

In November, the Council met with Mr. Bauer to discuss several service and policy issues, including possibilities for a customer-courtesy campaign on cell-phone use, policies regarding the requirement that holders of free passes stand on crowded trains, technical problems on bi-level coaches, and a recent spate of third-rail shoe-beam fires. Mr. Bauer assured the Council that the railroad was on the verge of implementing a fix for the shoe-beam fires, pending the approval of the Federal Railroad Administration. Since the Council's meeting with Mr. Bauer, no further shoe-beam fires have been reported.

Council Monitors East River Tunnel Safety

In December, the Council met with John Coulter, LIRR vice-president—Service Planning Technology and Capital Program Management, Jose

Fernandez, vice-president–System Safety, and John Sheehan, superintendent–Penn Station Central Control, to discuss East River tunnel fire safety. A recent USDOT Inspector General report highlighted serious deficiencies in tunnel safety in the event of a fire, including inadequate ventilation and emergency stairs. The report faulted Amtrak, which owns the tunnels, for being slow to fund improvements. The report raised much concern for the Council, given the recent spate of third-rail shoe-beam fires.

The railroad officials assured the Council that the LIRR is doing everything possible to improve fire safety in the East River tunnels, including working with Amtrak on jointly-funded ongoing ventilation and stairway improvement work to be fully completed within the next five years. The railroad also has a full set of emergency plans should a fire occur before then and regularly inspects the tunnels. It was acknowledged that the main problem is Amtrak's lack of a multi-year capital funding plan, which makes it difficult for the company to properly address major construction projects. However, the railroad continues to bring pressure to bear on Amtrak, and the officials noted that the release of the USDOT report is helpful in this area.

After Much Council Effort, Northport Parking Finally Funded

During the quarter, the MTA Board voted to pay \$1.2 million for parking rehabilitation efforts at Northport station. Disagreements between the Town of Huntington and the railroad over funding responsibility stalled work on the project for more than a year. Throughout 2000, the Council sought a funding commitment from the LIRR, agreeing

with the Town that the agency had previously indicated that it would fund the work. Approximately 450 spaces will be rehabilitated and overall capacity of the lot will be improved. The lot is jointly owned by the LIRR and the Town of Huntington, but is operated by the Town.

Council Requests East-End Service Improvements

During the quarter, the Council wrote to and spoke directly with LIRR President Kenneth Bauer regarding possibilities to improve railroad service to East End communities on Long Island. Although East End population has grown steadily, LIRR service has remained the same for years. The railroad responded that East End service improvements are a good idea, but new through service cannot be implemented until main line capacity improvements are put in place further to the west, most especially East Side Access. However, the Council believes that shuttle-type services, using either rail or bus, could be rolled out sooner.

MNRCC

Council Meets with Metro-North President Peter Cannito

In November, the Council welcomed Metro-North President Peter Cannito. Mr. Cannito answered questions on a variety of issues, including the challenges of an increasing ridership, new M7 electric cars, parking development, and the impact of Amtrak's high-speed Acela service. The Council appreciated Mr. Cannito's frankness, especially concerning car availability.

Because Metro-North ridership is rising so quickly, the railroad must keep older

ACMU 1100 electric cars in service until replacements arrive in 2002. The Council has frequently complained about breakdowns in air-conditioning and ventilation systems on these cars, and finds the cars to be less comfortable than newer coaches. However, Mr. Cannito assured the Council that the railroad will continue to do all it can to keep the cars in working order until they can finally be retired.

Council Continues to Research Idea for Metro-North Adjudication Bureau

The Council continued to look into the idea of creating a Metro-North adjudication bureau for misdemeanor offenses committed on board trains and along the Metro-North right-of-way including graffiti and dumping. Currently, offenses must be prosecuted in the municipality in which they occur, making it difficult for Metro-North and the MTA Police to follow-up on all offenses. An adjudication bureau would allow offenses to be prosecuted in a single arena, making it more expedient for the railroad to deal with offenders. A similar adjudication bureau already exists for NYC Transit. The Transit Adjudication Bureau is self-supporting through the collection of fines and could be used as a model for Metro-North.

During the quarter, the Council sought opinions on the issue from MTA officials, the MTA Police Department, and local legislators. However, statistics received from the MTA Police did not seem to warrant an adjudication bureau.

Council Expresses Support for New Ticket Vending Machines in GCT

The Council wrote to the NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission in November in support of the placement of new-technology Ticket Vending

Machines (TVMs) in Grand Central Terminal. At its November meeting, Metro-North President Cannito informed the Council that the railroad was seeking to install new TVMs in the terminal, and noted possible locations. The Council suggested that the TVMs be located in the vacant retail space beneath the Vanderbilt Avenue balcony, and asked that Landmarks do all in its power to expedite the approval process.

Council Continues Participation in Metro-North Planning Studies

In October, the Council met with John Kennard, Metro-North director—Capital and Long-Range Planning, to discuss the railroads planning studies. During the quarter, Metro-North finally received a Record of Decision from USDOT, approving the long-delayed Mid-Harlem Third Track Project. The project, which has the Council's strong support, will provide an express bypass track on Metro-North's Harlem Line between Mt. Vernon West and Fleetwood stations. When completed, the railroad will be able to provide increased service to both inner and outer Harlem Line stations and better meet the needs of a growing ridership.

Progress was also made in the Penn Station Access Study. The Council reviewed the Initial Screening Results report for the study. Weekday-peak and off-peak and weekend alternatives for all three lines have been combined into a smaller number of alternatives for analysis. In the near future, the remaining alternatives will be analyzed for feasibility and usefulness, and possibilities for one or more new Metro-North stations will be examined.

Less promisingly, in November Metro-North shelved the Beacon Line

Feasibility Study, which the Council had monitored since its inception in 1999. Metro-North determined that it would not be economically beneficial to implement Metro-North service along the now-defunct line between Hopewell Junction and Brewster North. Although the corridor in question is experiencing steadily increasing levels of traffic, the \$200 million project was forecast to attract only 1,195 new riders. By contrast, it would cost between \$16 and \$40 million to build 1,195 new parking spaces for this ridership at existing Harlem Line stations, depending on whether lots or parking structures were used. Thus, the railroad will concentrate on parking strategies instead.

Door Closed on Openable Windows

In December, the Metro-North Committee of the MTA Board officially announced that the railroad would forgo openable windows for its new M7 electric fleet. The fleet is being built as part of a dual LIRR/Metro-North car procurement. According to Metro-North President Cannito, the railroad must expedite delivery of the new fleet in order to meet growing ridership demands. That will only be possible if Metro-North's cars are as similar to the LIRR's cars as possible. Because the LIRR has chosen to forgo openable windows on its M7 cars, Metro-North must follow suit in order to avoid delays.

Further, an analysis performed by the MTA's independent engineer found no technical rationale for openable windows, given the nature of the HVAC (Heating, Ventilation, Air Conditioning) system on the new fleet. The system will have a two-hour battery backup, and broken HVAC modules will be able to be quickly swapped with working ones,

allowing HVAC modules to be repaired while keeping cars in service.

MNRCC Board representative Ronnie Ackman spoke at the committee meeting at great length, expressing the Council's longstanding support for openable windows. However, committee chair Edward Vrooman noted that Metro-North felt it had thoroughly researched the issue, as it had promised the Council to do in 1999.

Council Continues to Monitor Capital Improvements

Throughout the quarter, the Council continued to monitor the progress of capital improvements to Metro-North stations. The Council was pleased to see two issues approach resolution. In November, the pathway between platforms and parking at Cold Spring station was repaved and better illuminated. In addition, rehabilitation work on the Lexington Avenue exit from Grand Central Terminal's Graybar Passageway will begin in March 2001, including redesigned doors and flooring and a redesigned pedestrian approach.

NYCTRC

Council Discusses Major Subway Service Changes with Transit

In December, the Council met with Norman Silverman, NYC Transit senior director—Operations Planning, and Peter Cafiero, director—Operations Planning, to discuss upcoming service changes in Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Queens due to new 63rd Street Tunnel service and the closure of the Manhattan Bridge Brighton line tracks. In order to improve capacity, in summer 2001, F service between Queens and Manhattan will be shifted to the 63rd Street tunnel. A new

local route, the V, will replace F service through the 53rd Street tunnel. The G will be permanently cut back to Court Square, but will receive frequency improvements.

In addition, due to NYCDOT work, the Sixth Avenue tracks over the Manhattan Bridge will close for approximately three years and the Broadway tracks will reopen. The Brighton and West End lines (currently the B, D, and Q) will remain in express service over the bridge. However, in Manhattan the lines will operate along Broadway instead of Sixth Avenue. B and D service from the north will terminate at Herald Square. In order to avoid confusion due to this bifurcated service, Brooklyn trains will receive separate route designations. All Brooklyn Brighton trains will be designated Q trains, and West End trains will become W trains.

The Council expressed concern over the scope of some of the changes, but felt satisfied with the level of service that will be provided, given the constraints. The Council was assured by Messrs. Silverman and Cafiero that service improvements will be considered once new R143 subway cars begin to arrive in late 2001. Council Chair Andrew Albert will testify regarding the changes at a public hearing in January.

Council Continues Dialogue with Transit on Bus Issues

In October, the Council met with Millard Seay, NYC Transit senior vice-president–Department of Buses, to discuss a wide range of bus service issues. Of particular interest to the Council during the quarter was the implementation of articulated bus service on crosstown routes in Manhattan. In October, the Council

commenced a small study of articulated service on the M79 and M86 lines. Results of the study are expected in early 2001.

In December, the Council wrote to Transit to request that the agency examine possibilities to improve weekday offpeak and weekend express bus service in southwestern Brooklyn, including the areas of Bay Ridge and Dyker Heights. The letter came in response to a request made to the Council by NYC Council member Martin Golden to look into the issue. The Council has made similar requests to Transit on several previous occasions in 2000, but each time was told that Transit felt existing subway service obviated the need for express-bus improvements.

Council Reviews Subway Signage Policies

In November, John Montemarano, NYC Transit director–Station Signage, and Victoria Fischer, assistant director–Station Signage, discussed platform and wayfinding signage with the Council. They reported that Transit changes about 10,000 signs yearly, to update or improve information, and tries very hard to be accurate. Mr. Montemarano requested that the Council inform his office when it spots signage problems.

Negotiations Continue Between Council and Transit on New Performance Measures

During the quarter, Council Chair Andrew Albert and the full Council staff, joined by Straphangers Campaign Staff Attorney Gene Russianoff, met with senior NYC Transit officials to discuss the proposed new performance measure, wait assessment. Over the summer, the Council voiced concerns

that the measure would be far more permissive than the one it would replace, allowing Transit to claim better bus and subway service reliability than actually existed. At the meeting, Transit expressed a strong interest in the Council's input and promised to meet again to discuss the issue. In the interim, informal discussions continue and Council staff have researched performance measures at other transit agencies.

Recent MetroCard Vending Machine Glitches Raise Council Concern

Early in the quarter, two MetroCard Vending Machine (MVM) glitches caused concern regarding proper debugging of MVM software. At the end of Daylight Saving Time in October, the entire MVM system crashed for several hours, forcing each machine to be restarted manually. The problem occurred on a weekend and lasted mostly during overnight hours. Had the problem occurred a day later, it would have affected thousands of riders travelling into Manhattan for the Yankees victory parade. During the quarter, it was also disclosed that a now-closed loophole existed in the MVM fare-purchasing process, allowing farebeaters to load large sums of money onto MetroCards without paying.

Both of these problems were attributed to software glitches. This raises concern for the Council because the Automated Fare Collection (AFC)

program, of which MVMs are a major part, has historically had the best-performing software of all NYC Transit programs. Other major Transit efforts—including Communications Based Train Control, Automatic Vehicle Location and Control, and the Public Address/Customer Information Screen program—have experienced years of delay due to software problems. The Council hopes that the AFC program will continue to maintain its high level of reliability into 2001, when MVM installation will be complete at all stations.

Toll-Free Number for Info on Working Elevators/Escalators to Be Posted in Subway Cars

At the request of Executive Director Beverly Dolinsky, car cards showing the toll-free number to call to hear a recorded announcement about elevator and escalator problems will be posted in the subway. The 24-hour number, 800-734-6772, allows access-challenged riders to find out whether elevators and escalators along their route will be working before they start their trip. Ms. Dolinsky also requested creation of a 24-hour number for riders to call to report problems to a live operator. A live customer service line dedicated to accessibility information currently exists, but the line is not staffed at all hours.

About Us

The PCAC is the coordinating body and funding mechanism for the three riders councils created by the New York State Legislature in 1981: the Long Island Rail Road Commuters' Council (LIRRCC); the Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council (MNRCC); and the New York City Transit Riders Council (NYCTRC). The Councils were created to give users of MTA public transportation services a say in the formulation and implementation of MTA policy and to hold the MTA Board and management accountable to riders.

To learn more about us, or to download reports and documents, including our **Frequently Asked Questions** pamphlet and documents noted in this Quarterly Report, visit our homepage, www.pcac.org.

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Stephen F. Wilder
First Vice Chair

James Blair
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Joshua L. Schank
Transportation Planner

Mary Whaley
Administrative Assistant

Position Announcement

The PCAC currently seeks candidates for the available position of part-time Research Associate. The successful individual will conduct research on an as-needed basis and perform various other data collection, analysis, and writing tasks, including synthesizing MTA and federal planning documents, writing internal memos, and recording meeting minutes.

The successful individual is ideally an urban planning graduate student with strong research, writing, analytical, and communications skills. In addition, the ability to work well independently and knowledge of public transportation and the federal environmental review process are essential. Must be available 20 hours per week during business hours, including Thursdays. Position becomes full time (35 hours) during summer months (June through August). Compensation is \$15-\$20 per hour, based on qualifications and experience, and does not include benefits.

For consideration, send cover letter, resume, and writing sample (research reports strongly preferred), either in hard-copy or electronic form.

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