
Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee

to the Metropolitan Transportation Authority

JANUARY–MARCH 2001 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 Welcomes New Members and Staff, Bids Farewell to LIRRCC Chair

The PCAC ushered in the new millennium by welcoming new members Dennis Baum and Gerard Bringmann. Mr. Baum, an investment banker from Bedford with a deep love of railroads and a commuter since 1974, joins the Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council. Mr. Bringmann, a senior executive at an interior renovation firm and long-time commuter from Patchogue, joins the Long Island Rail Road Commuters Council. Mr. Bringmann replaces former LIRRCC Chair Lawrence Silverman, who was serving at the pleasure of the Governor.

The PCAC was also pleased to welcome back Karyl Berger as Research Associate. Ms. Berger was the PCAC's Transportation Planner from 1987 to 1990 and is quite familiar with the MTA system.

PCAC Thanks Outgoing MTA Chairman, Congratulates Incoming MTA Chairman

On Monday, February 26, MTA Chairman E. Virgil Conway presided

over his final meeting of the MTA Board. At the meeting, PCAC Executive Director Beverly Dolinsky thanked Chairman Conway on behalf of riders for the many improvements to the MTA system accomplished under his watch including the implementation of innovative fare policies, the restoration of Grand Central Terminal and completion of Grand Central North, the implementation of EZ Pass, and the purchase of clean-fuel buses for NYC Transit and LI Bus as well as a new diesel fleet for Long Island Rail Road. At a ceremony in January, Ms. Dolinsky presented Chairman Conway with a Leadership in Transportation Award on behalf of New York University's Rudin Center.

In March, PCAC congratulated incoming MTA Chairman Peter Kalikow on his appointment and wished him success. In a letter to Mr. Kalikow, the PCAC outlined the priorities and concerns of the three Councils and requested that he meet with the PCAC Executive Committee to discuss them.

PCAC Supports Increase in Federal Tax-Free Benefits for Riders

Executive Director Beverly Dolinsky, Associate Director Mike Doyle, and

member Ronnie Ackman spoke at press conferences in White Plains and Mineola convened by U.S. Senator Charles Schumer to announce legislation to increase the federal tax-free commuter benefit from \$65 to \$175 per month. Participating employers are free to offer the benefit to employees who use public transit, thereby lowering commuting costs. However, current federal parking benefits far exceed transit commuter benefits, effectively encouraging automobile use. The PCAC applauded Senator Schumer's efforts, which hope to raise the level of benefits for transit commuters to a level commensurate with those received by automobile users.

PCAC Meets New MTA Inspector General

In February, the PCAC Executive Committee met with new MTA Inspector General Matthew Sansverie and several members of his staff to discuss his goals and priorities, his views on performance-based studies, and the role of the IG's advisory committee. Mr. Sansverie also attended the March PCAC meeting and was introduced to Committee members. Mr. Sansverie will be a guest speaker at a future PCAC meeting.

Greater London Assembly Delegation Meets with PCAC

In March, Executive Director Beverly Dolinsky, Associate Director Michael Doyle and NYCTRC Chair Andrew Albert met with four members of the Greater London Assembly (GLA), the equivalent of the New York City Council. The function of the GLA is to hold London's Mayor accountable for his executive decisions, to investigate matters of importance to Londoners, and to make proposals to the Mayor and government organizations. The

Assembly members requested the meeting to better understand key issues that affect MTA customers, particularly funding and service provision.

In 2000, former MTA Chairman Robert Kiley was hired to head Transport of London and oversee the privatization of the London Underground. In recent months, the PCAC has received many requests from London about Mr. Kiley, his associates, and our transit system.

PCAC Transportation Planner a Transportation Research Board Panelist

PCAC Transportation Planner Joshua Schank attended the 80th Annual Meeting of the Transportation Research Board in Washington, DC in January. Mr. Schank gave a presentation to the Subcommittee on Intercity Rail Passenger Intermodal Interface about the potential for reducing air traffic congestion through the use of high-speed rail, and also attended several TRB sessions

Executive Director Addresses David Rockefeller Fellows Program

Executive Director Beverly Dolinsky participated in a panel discussion, *Current Transportation Projects and Initiatives – How to Move Transportation Forward*, convened for the David Rockefeller Fellows Program. The Fellowship's principle objectives are to provide a forum for the development of private sector leadership in the public arena, and to broaden the next generation's understanding of the challenges facing the city. Ms. Dolinsky spoke about initiatives that are important to riders, such as real-time information and good communication. She also addressed the enormous ongoing

capital and operating needs of the MTA agencies.

Council Discusses Worldwide Transit Management with UTRC Director

At the March PCAC meeting, Dr. Robert Paaswell, director of the University Transportation Research Center–Region II, gave a presentation entitled **Changing Forms of Transit Governance: a World**. Dr. Paaswell discussed recent research regarding the needs and governance of transit systems worldwide based on work led by the University Transportation Research Center. Dr. Paaswell noted the emergence of new, customer-oriented organizational paradigms in other countries based on funding restrictions, the arrival of new technologies, and local institutional change.

LIRRCC

Governor Replaces LIRRCC Chair Lawrence Silverman

In January, Governor Pataki appointed Gerard Bringmann to the LIRRCC, replacing former LIRRCC Chair Lawrence Silverman. The Council notes that all members serve at the pleasure of the Governor. Vice Chair Barbara Josepher was named acting chair until ad hoc elections are held. In March, the Council questioned whether Mr. Silverman should remain the Council's representative on the MTA Board. The Council wrote to Governor Pataki and the MTA seeking clarification and direction.

The LIRRCC Wants YOU: Council Seeks Kings, Nassau Members

In an effort to fill Council vacancies from Kings and Nassau Counties, the Council

asked the LIRR to include an article in its monthly newsletter, *Keeping Track*. In response to the article, phone calls and e-mails from Nassau County commuters interested in applying for membership have inundated the Council office. In order to apply, interested commuters must write to their respective County Executive or Borough President seeking that a recommendation for appointment be made on their behalf to the Governor.

LIRR President Ken Bauer Guest at Annual President's Forum

In February, the Council held its annual President's Forum. LIRR President Ken Bauer and senior railroad staff responded to questions and comments from 15 riders. Mr. Bauer was very responsive to riders' concerns, which included the need for timelier and more informative announcements during peak-hour service delays and the planned schedule for implementing more through bi-level service to Penn Station.

Council Concerned Over East River Tunnel Safety

The Council wrote to President Bush and the Long Island congressional delegation stressing the need for a greater funding commitment on the part of Amtrak for East River tunnel fire-safety rehabilitation work. At a hearing in March, the Council submitted testimony imploring Congress to voluntarily do everything in its power to ensure the safety of riders who pass through the East River tunnels. Although the lion's share of tunnel users are LIRR riders, both Amtrak and the LIRR share financial responsibility for tunnel upkeep and safety rehabilitation work. However, because of an agreement between Amtrak and the

LIRR recognizing Amtrak's stake as the owner of the tunnels, most financial responsibility for the tunnels falls to Amtrak.

LIRR Responds to Council Criticism, Revises Employee Free-Pass Policy

For several years the Council has been very vocal about LIRR employees with free passes refusing to follow railroad regulations and stand for paying customers on crowded trains. In response, the LIRR recently revised its corporate free-transportation policy making it clear that employees must stand on crowded trains and establishing severe penalties. The Council thanked LIRR President Ken Bauer for instituting such a stringent policy.

LIRR Answers Council Call for Cell-Phone Courtesy Campaign

Since 1998 the LIRRCC has been pressuring the Long Island Rail Road to implement a campaign asking customers to be more courteous to one another and to focus on loud cellular phone conversations. In 1999, respondents to the Council's LIRR Report Card rider survey overwhelmingly indicated a desire for the railroad to undertake a cell-phone courtesy campaign. In March, the LIRR launched just such a campaign with a brochure reminding customers to take fellow riders into account and "talk low". The brochure included a special thank you from the Council.

Council Staff Observes Station-Announcement Focus Groups

During the quarter, staff observed rider focus groups regarding customer satisfaction with onboard and station announcements. Most participants felt that announcements on the trains and at

Penn Station were above average, but announcements at home stations in the morning peak were inadequate. All participants thought that delay announcements should be frequent, clear and concise.

Council Discusses Railroad Operating Budget

In January, the Council discussed the railroad's 2001 operating budget with Sheila Keller, LIRR director—Management and Budget. Ms. Keller walked the Council through the LIRR's budgetary process, noting in particular the importance of the overall MTA budget which determines the railroad's permissible level of expenditure for the year. The Council criticized the MTA for a long delay in the release of the MTA 2001 operating budget which forced the LIRR and other MTA agencies to place their own budgetary activities on hold until the very end of 2000. Ms. Keller also informed the Council that a consultant would be hired to elaborate life-cycle maintenance plans for the new diesel fleet and planned M7 electric fleet.

MNRCC

Annual President's Forum a Success

The Council held its annual President's Forum on February 8. The turnout was modest, but Metro-North President Peter Cannito and Connecticut DOT representative Harry Harris were able to discuss rider concerns in depth. Most comments centered on the need for increased service system wide and particularly on the New Haven line in Connecticut.

Council Advocates for Critical Parking Improvements at Harriman

The Council has been corresponding with and speaking to Metro-North staff including President Cannito about parking capacity and parking access/egress problems at Harriman. The Council is concerned that Metro-North will lose market share because of these problems. The Council has also contacted NYSDOT and was told that NYSDOT is hesitant to construct an additional driveway from Route 17 into the Harriman parking facility, citing safety concerns. Mr. Cannito responded to the Council stating that Metro-North has initiated a short-term project for the addition of a third lane to the access road, and that the railroad is working to expand all of the West-of-Hudson facilities to meet existing and future demand.

Door Shut on Openable Windows for M7 Fleet

Openable windows have long been a priority for the Council, but in January, members learned that the M7 car fleet, a joint Metro-North and Long Island Rail Road contract, will not include windows that open. Council MTA Board representative Ronnie Ackman spoke at length in favor of the windows. However, openable windows were rejected to make Metro-North's cars as similar as possible to the LIRR's in order to expedite construction and delivery of the fleet to more quickly meet growing ridership demands.

Station Signs Finally to Have Better Illumination

The Council has called for the illumination of station identification (ID) signs for some time due to concern that riders on evening trains cannot see where they are. At the Council's

February meeting, members learned that new station signage standards provide for more even lighting and ensure that every ID sign is lit. Thanks to Council member George Zoebelin for this suggestion.

Council Remains Concerned over Announcements on Old ACMU Fleet

Council member Jim Blair on many occasions has complained about the unreliability of announcements on trains, particularly on the ACMU fleet. Mr. Blair has stressed the importance of notifying customers about train destination and intermediate station stops. At the Council's February meeting, George Walker, MNR Vice President – Operations informed the Council that a wireless public address system is in development for the ACMU fleet.

Council Discusses Budget and Service Issues with President Cannito and Senior Management

MNR President Peter Cannito was the Council's guest at the January meeting. Mr. Cannito presented the railroad's 2001 operating budget. Mr. Cannito said that ridership is expected to reach 72 million, including 1.6 million West-of-Hudson riders. In response to concerns about standee problems, Mr. Cannito said that sometimes the problem appears worse than it is due to the reluctance of some customers to use the middle seat of a three-seat bench.

In February, George Walker, MNR Vice President – Operations, discussed a number of service related issues with the Council, including the negative impact of this winter's snowstorms. Mr. Walker explained that the M1 cars have the most trouble in the snow because their motors are not fully protected from the elements. Mr. Walker told the

Council that the M7 car specs address all the problems in prior models.

NYCTRC

Planned Service Changes Seem a Bridge Too Far for Many

NYC Transit entered 2001 amid controversy over major service plans to implement new 63rd Street tunnel service between Queens and Manhattan and reroute Manhattan Bridge service due to a lengthy NYCDOT bridge rehabilitation project. Attention centered on a planned permanent elimination of Queens G service beyond Court Square to allow room for a new, 63rd Street V train service to Forest Hills and Transit's refusal to hold formal hearings on its Manhattan Bridge Reroute Plan. Although Transit held many informal public meetings about its Manhattan Bridge plan, the agency's steadfast refusal to hold formal hearings in the face of a growing tide of community anger made the agency appear arrogant and out-of-touch in the eyes of many riders.

While the Council understands that Queens Boulevard service is in dire need of capacity improvements, it is not clear that G and V service cannot both be accommodated on Queens Boulevard. Further, the Council sees no reason why several route options called for by community leaders were left out of the Manhattan Bridge plan, including full-time and weekend M and W service between Brooklyn and Manhattan. Most disappointing to the Council, however, is Transit's insistence on basing both of these major service plans on outdated, 1980s era demographic data and ridership characteristics instead of

recognizing the population—and political—strides that have been made in the worst affected communities, including the Lower East Side and Greenpoint/Williamsburg.

The Council made its concerns widely known throughout the quarter. Council Chair Andrew Albert delivered testimony at Transit's public hearing on the 63rd Street plan in January and a State Assembly hearing sponsored by Speaker Sheldon Silver in March. In addition, Executive Director Beverly Dolinsky raised the issue in her role as the Council's representative to the MTA Board and many conversations took place between Council staff and senior agency management. The outcome of the two controversies remains to be seen.

Annual President's Forum Most Successful Ever

In February, the Council held its best-attended annual President's Forum ever in the Board Room at MTA Headquarters in Manhattan. More than 170 came to hear NYC Transit President Lawrence Reuter and about half-a-dozen senior Transit staff field questions and comments from riders. Attendance was so great that 35 riders had to wait for some time in the building lobby after the Board Room's fire-code limit was reached shortly into the forum. In addition, the speaking list was full five minutes after the forum began.

Many riders came to complain that Transit had removed the long-standing decorations from the elevators at the 190th Street A station in Washington Heights. This caused some unhappiness for other speakers who wanted a wider range of issues to be covered during the forum's limited time.

Out of 57 people who registered to speak, 38 were able to do so in the time allotted. Other issues included a request from Councilmember Stephen DiBrienza for public hearings on the 63rd Street plan, as well as rider concerns over the Manhattan Bridge Reroute Plan and bus access problems for disabled riders.

Council Releases Statement on Articulated Buses

After months of considered debate, in March, the Council released a **Policy Statement on the Use of Articulated Buses in Manhattan**. The statement reflects the Council's opinion that articulated buses can be useful on high-ridership routes on a case-by-case basis. However, increased headways between buses are unacceptable and represent a worsening of service. This represents a departure from the Council's previous position on articulated buses, elaborated in the early 1980s, that modest headway increases would be acceptable because they present cost savings. In today's climate of skyrocketing ridership, longer waits are simply not a customer-friendly option. The full statement can be downloaded from the PCAC website at: www.pcac.org.

Maybe You Can Get There from Here

In January, Council members and staff met with NYC Transit President Lawrence Reuter and a host of senior management staff to discuss accuracy and adequacy problems with service diversion notices and posters about which the Council has repeatedly complained over the past three years. A single diversion-notice error can easily lead thousands of riders astray. President Reuter informed the Council that a new initiative is underway to deal

with the problem. Under the plan, communication between all departments that have a hand in the creation of the diversion notices and their related service plans will be streamlined and monitored by senior management so that all parties will have accurate information. The Council was also invited to review draft notices for selected major diversions before they go to press. The Council appreciates Transit's renewed focus on this issue. True to its word, later in January, Council members and staff were invited by the agency to attend focus groups and review draft notices and posters for the Manhattan Bridge Reroute Plan.

Executive Director Helps Improve Information Aimed at Reduced-Fare, Mobility-Impaired Riders

Owing to the efforts of Council Executive Director Beverly Dolinsky, reduced-fare and mobility-impaired customers now benefit from two key improvements in the dissemination of payment and accessibility information. Upset over poor initial Reduced Fare MetroCard Mail&Ride enrolment, Ms. Dolinsky prodded Transit to improve the program's confusing enrolment brochure. The new brochure, entitled **A New Way to Pay**, was written with customer input and is much clearer about the benefits of the program. In addition, to help more widely publicize Transit's hotline for riders to call to find out about escalator and elevator breakdowns in the subway system, Transit agreed to a request made by Ms. Dolinsky to install posters in subway cars featuring the telephone number.

Transit Rebuffs Southern Brooklyn Clamor for More Express Bus Service

In January, NYC Councilmember Martin Golden spoke before the NYCTRC to

request support for the implementation of better off-peak and weekend express bus service between southwestern Brooklyn and Manhattan. The Council sent a letter to Transit, highlighting a petition of several thousand signatures in support of the service improvements collected by the Councilmember's office. Previously, the NYCTRC has also requested that Staten Island express buses make stops in southwestern Brooklyn neighborhoods on the journey to and from Manhattan. The response to both requests has been the same—Transit feels that existing subway service in the area obviates the need for additional express bus runs. This response ignores that fact that the subways serving southwestern Brooklyn, the N and the R, are notorious among area residents for long headways and unreliable service.

Council Reviews Operating Budget, Diversion Planning, Stillwell Avenue Rehab

At its regular monthly meetings during the quarter, the Council welcomed senior NYC Transit staff to discuss budgetary, planning, and capital issues. In January, Harvey Poris, NYC Transit

director—Management and Budget, and Keith Hom, deputy director—Management and Budget, presented the 2001 operating budget.

In February, Peter Cafiero, director—Operations Planning, led a slide show and discussion of the planned major rehabilitation of the Stillwell Avenue subway terminal in Coney Island.

In March, Lawrence Gould, acting senior director—Operations Analysis, briefed the Council on the many phases of coordination and decision-making that go into the planning of subway service diversions.

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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