

Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee

to the Metropolitan Transportation Authority

2000 ANNUAL REPORT

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

PCAC

In 2000, the PCAC gained several new faces, honored its own, and said good-bye to old friends. In June, the PCAC awarded longtime MNRCC member Robert Schumacher a plaque for a lifetime of dedication to public transportation. In December, the PCAC mourned the passing of esteemed MNRCC member Martin Goldstein, who freely gave of his time to many public-service causes beyond the PCAC and will be greatly missed. Earlier in the year, former Associate Director Jonathan Sigall left the PCAC for a position with the Long Island Rail Road. Transportation Planner Mike Doyle was promoted to Associate Director, and the PCAC welcomed its new Transportation Planner Joshua Schank. Research Associate Sarah Massey also moved on to pursue a full-time position at West Harlem Environmental Action.

Throughout 2000, the PCAC concentrated on the MTA 2000-2004 capital plan, approved by New York State's Capital Program Review Board in the spring, and on the State Transportation Bond Act, which ultimately was rejected by voters. The PCAC and staff discussed these issues on several occasions with MTA Budget Director Gary Caplan, Grants Director Gregory Kullberg, and Planning Director William Wheeler, consistently voicing concern over the capital plan's heavy reliance on debt and the level of debt service that will be present in outlying years. The PCAC also weighed in on the capital plan at MTA Board and committee meetings, through its nonvoting seat on the MTA Board. At year's end, PCAC's Board seat was renewed for an additional six years by Governor Pataki.

The PCAC also voiced concern over the handling of customer information requests by MTA agencies in its June report, **Mixed Signals: An Assessment of the MTA's Handling of Customer Inquiries Received via Mail, Phone, and Web**. While the PCAC praised Metro-North for setting what may be the national standard for efficiency and customer-friendliness in this area, it faulted the MTA for a continued refusal to accept customer e-mail. Acceptance of customer e-mail has been standard practice at most major U.S. and international transit agencies for several years. In December, Christopher Boylan, MTA deputy executive director—Corporate Affairs and Communications, told the PCAC that the MTA expected to commence a pilot program for the acceptance of customer e-mail in mid-to-late 2001.

Over the course of the year, the PCAC continued its regular participation on the advisory committees of the MTA's planning studies and capital projects and attendance at quarterly Federal Transit Administration planning-progress meetings. Most notably, the PCAC discussed the MTA's overarching Long Range Planning Framework with MTA and agency plan-

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ning officials at its meeting in March. The PCAC criticized the MTA for not better coordinating its planning projects, and questioned whether inadequate coordination led to duplicative activities, wasted monies, and studies possibly working at cross-purposes to each other. The year ended with these comments seemingly taken to heart by the MTA. It was expected that in early 2001 the MTA would enter into an agreement with the FTA to plan for a full-length Second Avenue subway through a heightened coordination of the Manhattan East Side Transit Alternatives and Lower Manhattan Access Alternatives studies.

During 2000, the PCAC also continued in its role as an advisor on regional transit issues. In February, NYC Public Advocate Mark Green invited Executive Director Beverly Dolinsky to participate in a roundtable discussion on transit issues. Over the summer, the PCAC submitted comments to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in support of new clean-air diesel engine and fuel regulations and provided input to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) on proposed changes to the metropolitan transportation planning process that would in part have required public representation on metropolitan transportation planning boards. Unfortunately, the latter requirement was ultimately not pursued by the FTA. In addition, planning officials from the Chicago Transit Authority looked to the PCAC as a model for enhancing the role of CTA's own transit advisory body.

LIRRCC

In 2000, the LIRRCC welcomed new LIRR President Kenneth Bauer. From the outset, the Council found Mr. Bauer to be markedly open to rider input, and met with him several times to discuss issues including cell-phone abuse, continuing technical problems on the bi-level fleet, and free-pass holders who refuse to stand for paying customers. The Council also took a keen interest in a rising number of shoe-beam fire incidents and the need for full funding for fire-safety improvements in the Amtrak-owned East River tunnels, discussing both issues with Mr. Bauer and senior railroad staff.

In October, the Council released the results of the **2000 LIRR Report Card** to wide media coverage. Riders gave the railroad an overall grade of C+, an improvement over the C received in 1999. Moreover, significant grade improvements were seen in most categories. The positive results were largely attributed to the full roll-out of the bi-level diesel coach fleet and improved air-conditioning maintenance practices.

Over the course of the year, the Council monitored various LIRR capital projects. Council intervention was instrumental in the obtainment of a funding agreement for parking rehabilitation at Northport, stairway improvements at Manhasset, and the rejection of a site in residential Greenlawn as a candidate location for a new rail yard. As well, Council members and staff attended focus groups and received presentations on the design of new M7 electric railcars and Ticket Vending Machines.

The Council also called for improvements in service in 2000. In meetings and correspondence with the railroad, the Council requested an increase in direct bi-level service to Penn Station, as well as improvements in service to the East End of Long Island. Further, throughout the year the Council was troubled by an increasing abandonment of funding for LI Bus on the part of Nassau County. LI Bus is an integral part of Long Island's public transportation system and is used by many LIRR riders. Through its seat on the MTA Board's Long Island Committee, the Council called several times for the identification of a secure funding stream for the bus system.

Finally, the Council discussed a wide range of issues with LIRR staff at meetings throughout the year. Among the issues covered were the railroad's procedures for handling customer inquiries, renovation activities at Flatbush Avenue, customer-service training for LIRR employees, and systemwide parking development.

MNRCC

In 2000, the MNRCC monitored numerous service and capital issues, at both Grand Central Terminal (GCT) and outlying stations. At GCT, the Council followed the progress of the design for the upcoming renovation of the Graybar Passageway street exit, helped bring about a consultant study of Terminal signage for the visually impaired, secured a Mail & Ride drop-box on the lower level, alerted the railroad to a glitch affecting 30-second long-distance payphones, and supported the planned installation of new-technology Ticket Vending Machines. The Council also toured the GCT seat-upholstery workshop.

Beyond the Terminal, Council involvement spurred the installation of lights and better paving along the Cold Spring station's north platform pedestrian path, stairway canopies and better lighting at Ossining, and a closer examination of cleaning practices for the newly renovated Harlem-125th Street station. The Council also explored the creation of a Metro-North adjudication bureau that would allow for the prosecution of minor on-board and right-of-way offenses in a single forum.

At monthly meetings throughout the year, the Council met with senior Metro-North officials, culminating in a discussion with Metro-North President Peter Cannito in November. Items discussed with President Cannito included the railroad's upcoming M7 electric fleet, growing ridership needs, systemwide parking issues, and the possible impacts to the New Haven Line of Amtrak's new, high-speed Acela service. Council Chair Richard Cataggio also spoke before the Metro-North Committee of the MTA Board in favor of parking improvements at Harriman and new service to Woodbury Common, two areas with strong population growth.

Late in the year, the Council learned that the new M7 electric fleet will not include openable windows, in order to expedite delivery of the cars to meet growing ridership demands. The cars will have battery-supported, modular ventilation systems. However, the Council has long supported openable windows as a low-tech ventilation option that could complement automatic systems in the event of an emergency, and spoke out in favor of them at the December meeting of the MTA Board Metro-North Committee. The Council was further disheartened to learn, in a meeting with President Cannito, that the railroad may need to keep its old ACMU 1100 electric cars in service even after the arrival of the new M7 fleet. The Council understands that the railroad is hampered by the success of a rapidly growing clientele, but finds the Johnson-era cars to be woefully problem stricken, with frequent outages of public-address, lighting, and heating systems.

In 2000, the Council also continued its participation in Metro-North planning studies. The Council attended advisory committee meetings for the Penn Station Access Study, queried the railroad on the possible effects to Metro-North service of the LIRR East Side Access Project, and followed the Hudson Line Extension and Beacon Line Feasibility studies to their conclusion. During the year, both studies were deemed infeasible.

NYCTRC

Throughout 2000, the NYCTRC led debate on several high-profile issues of interest to riders.

NYCTRC

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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; the Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council; and the New York City Transit Riders Council. 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, visit our homepage at www.pcac.org and download our "Frequently Asked Questions" pamphlet, or call us to request a printed copy.

You may also call or e-mail us to request to join the mailing list of any of our Councils or of the full PCAC. Please be sure to specify whether you wish to receive PDF documents via e-mail, or printed documents via U.S. post.

January 2001

The year began with the release of the report, **Analysis of Alternative Fuel Technologies for NYC Transit Buses**, which supported the development of a wide range of new fuel technologies beyond compressed natural gas. In summer, the Council reviewed subway service reliability in its report, **Timing Is Everything**, and opened a continuing dialogue with NYC Transit senior management on possible new reliability measures.

The Council's voice was heard most strongly in opposition to a proposed change in Bronx 2 and 5 subway service that would have increased commuting times and transfers for many Bronx riders. The Council alerted Bronx Borough President Fernando Ferrer and several other local officials about the proposed change, leading to a great deal of media attention and public scrutiny of the proposal. In August, MTA Chair E. Virgil Conway directed NYC Transit to shelve the issue for at least the next two years.

The Council also held its first-ever Brooklyn bus forum, at Brooklyn Borough Hall in spring. The forum was very successful and was followed by numerous discussions of bus issues by the Council, including a conversation with Millard Seay, NYC Transit senior vice-president—Department of Buses, and the commencement of a study of new articulated bus service on crosstown routes in Manhattan, for release in 2001.

At meetings throughout the year, the Council received presentations from NYC Transit officials on a variety of important issues including the MetroCard and Automated Fare Collection projects, station signage, and major renovation projects at 72nd Street, Atlantic Avenue, and Times Square. The Council also met with new MTA Board NYC Transit Committee Chairman Barry Feinstein in September.

Notable policy changes were also brought about in good measure due to Council intervention. At the behest of Executive Director Beverly Dolinsky, the planned rollout schedule of the new Reduced Fare MetroCard Mail & Ride program for seniors was expedited from several years down to one year. The Council also supported the provision of half-fare privileges for SSI recipients with a diagnosis of severe mental illness and secured a promise from NYC Transit to post in trains a toll-free number to check on working elevators and escalators.

However, one significant problem from 1999 remained prominent in 2000. Throughout the year, the Council continued to find errors on subway service diversion notices and found many notices misplaced or missing. Such problems are unacceptable given both the strong ridership growth of the past four years and the large number of diversions underway at any given time. Beginning in 1999, the Council decided to inform NYC Transit President Lawrence Reuter of all diversion-notice problems it witnessed, and will continue to do so in the coming year until all problems are resolved.

2000 Reports

Analysis of Alternative Fuel Technologies for New York City Transit Buses (February, NYCTRC)

Mixed Signals: An Assessment of the MTA's Handling of Customer Inquiries Via Mail, Phone, and Web (June, PCAC)

Timing Is Everything: A Field Study of Subway Service Reliability (August, NYCTRC)

2000 Long Island Rail Road Report Card (October, LIRRCC)

[All reports are available online in PDF format from the PCAC website at www.pcac.org, or by mail.]