

**Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the Metropolitan
Transportation Authority**

2003 ANNUAL REPORT

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

PCAC

New Officers and Staff Changes. In June 2003 Governor George Pataki appointed and the New York State Senate confirmed James Blair as the Metro-North Rail Commuter Council nonvoting MTA Board member. Mr. Blair replaced Ronnie Ackman, who very ably represented Metro-North riders on the MTA Board for close to eight years.

Implementing CityTicket. PCAC/MTA Board members James McGovern, James Blair, Andrew Albert, and PCAC Executive Director Beverly Dolinsky were part of a working committee with MTA Board member Susan Kupferman, MTA Executive Director Katherine Lapp, and Long Island Rail Road and Metro-North Railroad staff to develop PCAC's CityTicket proposal. The CityTicket, a 2001 PCAC recommendation, gained momentum as a mitigating measure to the 2003 fare increase. With the endorsement of Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg and MTA Chairman Peter S. Kalikow, the CityTicket, a pilot program is scheduled to begin in January 2004. On weekends only, fares on the commuter railroads entirely within New York City will be \$2.50. This special fare will allow customers, particularly in areas not well served by New York City Transit, to use the best mode of transportation to get them to their city destination.

Improving Customer Service. In November the PCAC released ***Best Foot Forward: Training Front Line Personnel to Provide Quality Customer Service***. This report urges the MTA and its operating agencies to share best customer service practices and institute measures to ensure greater consistency in front line personnel hiring, training, evaluation, and retraining practices. The report recommended that the MTA make it a priority to improve communications technology for front line agency employees and customers. In response to the report, the LIRR said that it would introduce a customer services exam for candidates for the ticket clerk position.

Proposed MTA Restructuring. During the year PCAC members and staff held meetings and also met with MTA senior staff to review the proposed MTA

restructuring legislation and Assemblymember Richard Brodsky's bill to increase the MTA's accountability and transparency. The PCAC did not take a position on either bill, but did voice its many concerns about combining the railroads and splitting buses and subways, and how these changes would affect service to customers. PCAC will continue to examine these proposals as they move forward in the legislature.

MTA Fare Increase. PCAC members and staff testified against the MTA fare increase at all ten public hearings and before the MTA Board. In February the PCAC wrote to MTA Chairman Kalikow about the unclear speaking registration process and poor choice of locations for the MTA's public hearings, specifically in Nassau and Suffolk Counties. Chairman Kalikow responded that he was disappointed that riders had difficulty with reaching the sites and the speaking registration process. He said the MTA would take PCAC's "constructive critique" into consideration for future MTA public hearings. In April the PCAC sent Chairman Kalikow a letter about the manner in which the MTA disseminated information about the fare increase. The letter stressed the importance of quickly improving communication between the agency and the riding public to restore public confidence in the MTA.

Lower Manhattan. The PCAC regularly monitored activities of civic, government, and private groups involved in rebuilding transportation in Lower Manhattan. In February Executive Director Beverly Dolinsky testified before the New York City Council Committee Hearing on the Vision for Transportation Infrastructure Downtown: Improved Transit Connections and Facilities in the Rebuilding of Lower Manhattan. Ms. Dolinsky stressed the need for East Side Access and the Second Avenue Subway projects to take precedence over other proposed projects, such as, the 7 Subway extension, LIRR commuter one-seat service to JFK, and depressing West Street. In April PCAC Associate Director Katherine Brower testified in support of the MTA's Fulton Street Transit Center, preserving the historic character of the area, and building a future Second Avenue Subway connection. In June Ms. Dolinsky testified in support of the 7 Subway expansion, but expressed concerns about the project's potential negative impact on MTA normal replacement and state-of-good repair, capital needs, and on the rebuilding of Lower Manhattan.

TEA-3. During the year staff was involved with New York State DOT and other transportation organizations in the reauthorization of the federal transportation legislation. In June Ms. Dolinsky went to Washington with MTA Deputy Executive Director Chris Boylan and members of the Empire State Transportation Alliance to meet with Senators Hillary Rodham Clinton and Chuck Schumer and other legislators to advocate for federal transportation funding. In July Andrew Albert and Ms. Dolinsky participated in a press conference convened by Senator Schumer to advocate for an increase in the federal transit benefit to \$190, equal to that of automobile users.

Promoting PCAC's Work. In February Ms. Dolinsky and staff met with the Coro Fellows, a national post-graduate fellowship program that prepares participants to be more effective in public affairs. Ms. Dolinsky described PCAC's role and accomplishments. In November Ms. Dolinsky participated in an interactive workshop as part of the third annual Rail Users Network conference. Ms. Dolinsky provided a history of the PCAC, and discussed how the organization functions and its accomplishments.

LIRRCC

New Officers and Members. The LIRRCC began the year by electing James McGovern as chair and Gerard Bringmann as vice chair. In July Barbara Josepher resigned from the Council after ten years, having served as chair of both the LIRRCC and PCAC during her tenure. In 2003 Daniel Garvey, the Council's representative from Queens for the past four years, and newly appointed Suffolk County representative Todd Scott Shapiro resigned.

LIRR Report Card. In December the Council released its seventeenth annual Long Island Rail Road Report Card, a rider survey of LIRR service and conditions. The report found that riders who felt service is better (33%) decreased by 12 percent over 2002. Those who think it is worse (21%) increased by 11 percent. Riders gave railroad service a grade of C+ overall, the same grade they have assigned since 2000. One key factor that influenced riders' dissatisfaction in 2003 is the MTA's fare increase. LIRR President James Dermody said, the agency would look at the report card and determine what can be done.

Passenger Safety Concerns. In April the Council contacted the LIRR about numerous customer reports of icy conditions on platforms and stairs. Thanks to member Gerry Bringmann's untiring efforts to determine whether the city or the railroad was responsible for shoveling and cleaning the sidewalks at Hunterspoint Avenue, the LIRR has committed to shoveling the sidewalk. During the year, members also wrote letters to the LIRR about several incidents on the Montauk branch involving engineers missing station stops, failing to platform cars, and overshooting station platforms.

Port Jefferson Branch Yard. In November members testified at scoping meetings for the LIRR's Port Jefferson Branch Yard Environmental Impact Statement. The testimony was in support of the LIRR's proposal for a new electric train yard between Huntington and Smithtown. Members stated that every year in the LIRRCC Report Card, Port Jefferson Branch customers express a need for more frequent service; however, the LIRR says that it cannot provide the service without a storage facility. The Council does not have a position on a specific site.

Riders Voice Concerns. At its annual President's Forum in April, acting LIRR

President James Dermody responded to a number of issues raised by LIRR customers, including problems with ticket agent courtesy, train and station announcements, signage, and pedestrian safety, bi-level trains, and requests for additional service.

MNRCC

New Officers and Members. In August the MNRCC re-elected Richard Cataggio as chair and Francis Corcoran as vice chair.

West of Hudson. In March MNRCC and NYCTRC members toured New Jersey Transit's new Secaucus Transfer station with NJTransit and MNR officials. West of Hudson commuters to midtown eagerly awaited the December opening of this facility, which was expected to shave 20 minutes from their commute. Over the course of the year the Council sent many letters to MNR President Peter Cannito including a thank you and further suggestions for schedule improvements and expansion to the Harriman and Tuxedo parking lots. MNR promised to share information on upcoming schedule changes both East and West of the Hudson.

Passenger Safety and ADA Concerns. The Council expressed concern about the safety of new signs on the platforms at Grand Central Terminal due to their transparency. The signs were installed to meet ADA requirements. MNR agreed to paint or tape the signpost bases with a "safety yellow" color. The Council also pursued more informative announcements for low-vision customers, such as, having conductors announce the arrival track number and signage enhancements in Grand Central.

MNR Service. Members pursued giving customers the ability to print their own e-tickets as an option to receiving tickets by mail. They also reported car maintenance problems and emphasized the importance of on-board announcements particularly for discretionary customers. Members toured Highbridge Yard, MNR's state-of-the art facility, which enables hot water cleaning and special hoses at each station.

Riders Voice Concerns. The 2003 President's Forum was one of the best attended. Rider questions and issues focused on conductor announcements, public information, station maintenance, safety and security, improved access to the railroad stations, and platform amenities.

Participation in Planning Studies. During the year members continued to monitor the progress of the I-287/Tappan Zee Bridge Study and the Penn Station Access MIS/DEIS. Staff and members attended the scoping meetings for the I-287/Tappan Zee Bridge Study and heard a presentation from the project managers.

NYCTRC

New Officers and Members. In June the NYCTRC re-elected Andrew Albert as chair and William Guild as vice chair, and Michael Sinansky, Stephen Wilder and Mitzie Wilson to the Executive Committee.

Testimony at Public Hearings. Over the course of the year, the Council testified at a number of public hearings on issues, such as, the MTA's proposed fare increase and subway station booth closings, the Vision for Transportation Infrastructure Downtown, the MTA's Plans for the Fulton Street Transit Center, and Second Avenue Subway, the takeover of the New York City private bus companies by the MTA, the proposed #7 subway extension, and the proposed new subway service plan for the Manhattan Bridge.

Bus Issues. During the year members followed up on driver courtesy, stop and rear door announcements, bus bunching, and damaged MetroCards. Other concerns were increasing M34 and M42 service to the Javits Convention Center and proper notification to local communities of bus route and stop changes. The Council was adamant at a number of hearings and in letters to Chairman Kalikow, Governor Pataki, and Mayor Bloomberg that any takeover of the private bus lines be at no cost to bus and subway riders.

Subway Issues. The Council continued to follow up on conductor announcements and station subway service disruption notices to improve communication and minimize passenger confusion. Members met with NYC Transit to discuss its proposed plan for the restoration of Manhattan Bridge service and testified in support of the plan at NYC Transit's public hearing. In September NYCTRC members attended the hearing and signed on to a letter of support for the South Ferry Terminal project. In response to the NYCTRC's suggestion to give riders a choice of refilling an existing MetroCard or receiving a new one, NYC Transit modified the MVM menu to make the choice more clear for customers.

ADA Compliance. During the year the Council attended the ADA compliance meeting hosted by NYC Transit and followed up on Access-A-Ride reservations and pick-ups. In March and October PCAC Research Associate Karyl Berger and Ken Stewart, a concerned citizen, who are both visually impaired bus users met with bus operators at the 126th St. and Hudson Pier depots to highlight the importance of making required bus stop announcements.

Riders Voice Concerns. The annual subway and bus forums were filled to overflowing with customers who wanted to be heard. At the subway forum riders focused on conductor and station announcements, cleanliness, safety, and security as well as a variety of service issues. Bus forum attendees filled two rooms. Riders were concerned about the mix of local and express buses, cars parked in bus stops, schedule adherence, and the lack of bus operator announcements.

Reports

- ***Best Foot Forward: Training Front Line Personnel to Provide Quality Customer Service*** (November, PCAC)
- ***The Long Island Rail Road Report 2003*** (December, LIRRCC)

[All documents listed are in PDF format.]