

Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee

to the Metropolitan Transportation Authority

1999 ANNUAL REPORT

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

PCAC

The PCAC strengthened its Internet presence in 1999 with the launch of a revamped web homepage at www.pcac.org. Visitors to the site are greeted by a visually striking front page that is the springboard to many exciting features, including the ability to download PCAC and Council reports for immediate reading. Visitors can browse calendars of upcoming meetings, visit information pages for each Council, and access more than two dozen links to regional and national transportation organizations.

In March, the PCAC released a major research report, *Privatizing MTA Services, Cost Savings or Political Buzzword?*. The study examined options for the MTA to partner with the private sector to expand capital and operating funding in an era of constrained resources. Although the report found little benefit in contracting out services, it did find dividends in using private or joint-development money for capital activities, including station rehabilitation work.

The proposed MTA 2000-2004 Capital Program was the focus of PCAC activity at the close of the year. The plan, released in September, contains \$16 billion in transit and commuter rail funding and allocates resources for system rebuilding and expansion. Key elements of the plan include a project to connect the Long Island Rail Road to Grand Central Terminal and a Second Avenue subway that would run to 63rd Street and then to lower Manhattan via the N and R lines. Although satisfied with many elements of the plan, the PCAC feels that there is room for improvement and brought its message to the MTA and lawmakers. The Committee urged leaders not to truncate the Second Avenue subway, but to have it extend all the way downtown to serve east side commuters better. The PCAC also feels that the plan relies too heavily on borrowing. As the plan is considered in 2000, the PCAC will continue to advocate for improvements.

The broader regional planning process was a theme for the PCAC as well. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) invited the Committee to participate in its triennial review of the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council (NYMTC). The PCAC reiterated its long-held view that NYMTC should be run by an independent organization. When the FTA sought comments on its proposed criteria for evaluating new build rail projects, the PCAC suggested several measures that would give New York credit for having the largest transit ridership in the country.

In other activities, the PCAC hosted John Cartledge, assistant secretary of the London

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Regional Passengers Committee. Mr. Cartledge discussed several issues, including London's experience with privatizing bus and rail service. PCAC Executive Director Beverly Dolinsky was a guest speaker of the New York Bar Association's Transportation Committee, and at the invitation of the Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, she presented an award honoring Jane Garvey, administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration.

LIRRCC

The LIRRCC gained an important voice in Queens with the appointment of Bayside resident Daniel Garvey to the Council in June. An engineering professional, Mr. Garvey commutes on the Port Washington Branch. His seat and one in Brooklyn were established by state law in 1998 to give city riders representation on the Council. Over ten percent of LIRR passengers are from Brooklyn and Queens.

The Council released its annual report card in October, and the results demonstrate continued customer dissatisfaction with LIRR service. The grade for overall service declined to a C, the lowest mark since 1995. Ratings dropped in 24 out of the 46 categories that commuters grade and improved in only one area: home station ticket selling hours. Some categories did fare well in the survey, particularly bi-level coaches and train crews, which received the highest scores. Although satisfaction should increase as the LIRR phases out its older rail cars, the LIRRCC urged the MTA and lawmakers to do whatever they can in the interim to improve service.

The LIRRCC's "Happy Rails to You" campaign was featured in the June edition of *Keeping Track*, the LIRR's monthly customer newsletter. The campaign is an outgrowth of the Council's 1998 report card, when respondents were asked to identify the aspect of other riders' behavior they find most bothersome. The campaign asks passengers to be more sensitive to one another's needs and focuses on loud cellular phone conversations, feet on seats, and litter.

The Council met with LIRRCC President Thomas Prendergast twice during the year to discuss service issues. Chief among the issues discussed were the delays in introducing the new bi-level coaches and the railroad's schedule for implementing direct service to Penn Station. Mr. Prendergast also addressed Council concerns about poor air conditioning on trains. The LIRRCC has sought improvements in this area for several years, with its advocacy prompting an MTA Inspector General report that led to many changes in the railroad's practices.

Mr. Prendergast fielded customer comments directly when he presided at the Council's annual President's Forum in November. Over thirty riders spoke, with comments touching on such issues as the need for the LIRR to expedite replacement of its outmoded rail cars and the railroad's plan to cancel the 5:17 pm train from Hunterspoint Avenue. The train was replaced by a dual-mode train from Penn Station; the Council wrote to Mr. Prendergast after the forum expressing its concerns about the change.

MNRCC

The MNRCC regained its voice in Dutchess County in 1999 when Beacon resident Andrew Forman joined the Council in February. Mr. Forman, a finance professional, filled a vacancy that had existed since the early 1990s. The MNRCC has two open seats: one from Westchester County and one from the Bronx.

The Council welcomed a new Metro-North president in May: Peter Cannito, former vice president of rail and transit programs at Raytheon Infrastructure. In October, Mr. Cannito met with the MNRCC to discuss his goals, which include a continued emphasis on customer service. Mr. Cannito was the guest speaker at the Council's annual President's Forum, where he fielded comments on issues ranging from plans to improve the Melrose Station in the Bronx to the need for improvements to Connecticut service. The forum featured representatives from the Connecticut Department of Transportation and the Connecticut Metro-North Railroad commuter council. They were invited for the first time specifically to respond to concerns about Connecticut service.

Council input led to the publication in October of the first-ever combined schedule for Metro-North's Port Jervis and Pascack Valley Lines. The new timetable consolidates information from separate schedules, emphasizes the New York State portion of the two lines, and contains more detail than had appeared in previous schedules. Mr. Cannito praised the MNRCC for the idea, noting that the first time he went to Hoboken he wondered why there was no joint timetable for the railroad's West-of-Hudson services.

Thanks to the persistence of the MNRCC, Metro-North commuters will be able to get a breath of fresh air on the railroad's next generation of electric cars. The cars will have windows that riders can open, a feature that Metro-North agreed to include after months of campaigning by the MNRCC. The railroad's older cars have openable windows, which offer ventilation in case of air conditioning problems.

In August, the MNRCC applauded the opening of Grand Central North, a long-awaited project that enables commuters to exit directly to the north of Grand Central Terminal. The Council had closely monitored the progress of the project, going on several tours of the construction site with Metro-North officials. The project is important to the MNRCC because it saves riders fifteen or more minutes per day in walking time and is expected to increase railroad ridership.

Working with a visually impaired rider, the MNRCC approached Metro-North in the summer with several suggestions for making signs in Grand Central Terminal easier to see. The railroad is considering many of the recommendations, including posting track numbers on the lower level in more prominent locations. The MNRCC will continue to work with Metro-North on the issue in 2000.

New Haven Line riders now enjoy more frequent local service on Saturdays, and customers travelling on the Upper Hudson Line should see another evening train—both ideas that the MNRCC advocated. On the New Haven Line, Metro-North has added six additional trains serving Stamford, increasing service from hourly to half-hourly. Metro-North has said it plans to add another train to Poughkeepsie between 5:30 and 6:00 pm when it receives more rail cars in 2000.

NYCTRC

Throughout 1999, the NYCTRC played a leading role in the debate on the Second Avenue subway. The Council wrote to elected officials and testified at public hearings advocating construction of a line that extends the full length of Manhattan and connects into the other boroughs. In November, the NYCTRC met with New York State Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver to seek his continued support for the longer route. The NYCTRC was also a key participant in the Empire State Transportation Alliance and the Manhattan Borough President's

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, www.pcac.org, or call us to request our Fact Sheet.

Second Avenue Subway Task Force, two groups that are seeking a similar commitment for the proposed line.

After more than two years of campaigning by the Council, New York City Transit announced in late 1999 that it would begin in early 2000 to roll-out a mail-and-ride program for reduced-fare MetroCard customers. Participants will benefit tremendously from the program, which enables them to set up accounts to prepay their transit fares. Currently reduced-fare customers must go to subway stations to refill their cards, which can be especially difficult for senior citizens or people with mobility impairments.

In July, the NYCTRC released a report that documented its long-held view that NYC Transit does a poor job in notifying subway riders of planned service diversions. For the project, *NOT Going Your Way: A Study of New York City Transit's Service Diversion Notices*, the Council surveyed 44 subway stations to see whether notices of diversions are adequately posted. The results were disappointing, with 90% of the fare control areas surveyed missing at least one notice and almost no notices posted at platforms. The NYCTRC reviewed the content of notices and found that many were confusing or did not give riders the best alternative travel directions. NYC Transit concurred with several of the Council's recommendations, including the suggestions to word notices more clearly and to post notices at street level when one or more lines at a station are not running.

The Council held a series of forums in 1999 to give bus and subway riders the chance to share their concerns directly with top management at NYC Transit. The NYCTRC's annual bus forum was in April. For the first time, the event featured officials from the New York City Department of Transportation and the New York Police Department to respond to questions about issues under the city's jurisdiction. In June, the Council held its second Staten Island transit forum. The need for expanded express bus service topped the list of issues discussed. The NYCTRC's final forum, with NYC Transit President Lawrence Reuter, took place in November. Topics ranged from complaints about bus service reliability to concerns about the poor condition of paratransit vehicles.

When NYC Transit shut down Williamsburg Bridge subway service for four months, it incorporated some Council suggestions into the project. For affected riders in Williamsburg, the agency printed a Yiddish version of the brochure for the diversion, and to ensure that there was enough L train capacity for customers boarding at East New York, NYC Transit started some L trains at Atlantic Avenue.

In other activities, the Council spoke out against several service changes that it feels will do a disservice to riders. One of these changes will substitute 5 train service for 2 service at Bronx stations between 180th and 149th Streets. Service frequency for riders in this corridor will be cut in half. The TRC will focus on this issue again in 2000.

Reports

Privatizing MTA Services, Cost Savings or Political Buzzword? (March 1999, PCAC)

NOT Going Your Way: A Study of New York City Transit's Service Diversion Notices (July 1999, NYCTRC)

1999 Long Island Rail Road Report Card (October 1999, LIRRCC)

[All reports are available by mail or may be downloaded from the PCAC website at www.pcac.org.]