

PERMANENT CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE TO THE MTA
REPRESENTING MTA RIDERS SINCE 1981

**2008 Annual Performance Review
of
The MTA and Its Operating Agencies**

Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA)

Leadership

- Executive Director Elliot Sander continued to provide an atmosphere for open discussion at the MTA. His impressive State of the MTA address in January (the 40th anniversary of MTA) laid out an admirable vision for the agency in the coming years and set important goals for an integrated regional transportation network. In addition, we want to reiterate our support for his selection in 2007 of Howard Roberts and Helena Williams to head New York City Transit and the Long Island Rail Road, respectively; and, in 2008, his appointment of Howard Permut as president of Metro-North Railroad.

Despite these achievements, PCAC feels that there are still critical issues that have not yet been adequately addressed by the MTA leadership. There has also not been the level of interaction with advocacy groups anticipated when Mr. Sander first took his position.

Organization

- The corporate structure of MTA Headquarters still lacks rationale. In our 2007 assessment PCAC called for the creation of an executive level position for information technology (IT). An MTA technology program needs to be implemented across all agencies. In the same way, Real Estate should be recognized as another critical area that is vitally important across all of the MTA, and its leadership should be at the highest level. Beyond this, the MTA needs to initiate an organization audit whereby areas with too many or too little staff are highlighted. This would be particularly helpful to answer accusations by the outside world that the MTA is top heavy in management.

Capital Projects

- **East Side Access**
It is welcome news that the tunnel boring reached its goal of Grand Central Terminal in 2008. It is not clear, however, what the prognosis is for an on-time, on budget delivery of a completed station. Of concern, too, is the failure in 2008 to release the

LIRR Main Line Corridor Improvement Project DEIS. This project, to alleviate the bottleneck of train traffic between Hicksville and Queens Village by adding a third track, will be necessary to get the maximum benefit out of East Side Access.

- **7 Line Extension**

Over the past year there has been a failure to reach an agreement with New York City on responsibility for cost overruns for the 7 line extension. Further, there has been no visible effort to secure the necessary funding for a 10th Avenue station, a component critical to the functionality of the 7 line extension. This latter shortfall is particularly disappointing and ironic since the main goal of the extension is to provide subway service for development projects at the West Side Hudson Yards, which are now on hold due to the poor economy. On the other hand, the 10th Avenue location has already seen significant development and has many residents who would benefit greatly from ready access to the 7 line.

- **Fulton Transit Center**

A year ago the magnitude of the cost overruns and delays on this project were becoming painfully clear. By the end of 2008, after relocating over 100 local businesses, the deficits were approaching a half billion dollars and the completion date (originally 2007) was unknown. This project has been a disaster from the start and represents a monument to ineptness on the part of the MTA and the other largely uncoordinated agencies involved in this urgently needed project. Though the underground work has progressed, the Transit Center building remains problematic — there is little information with regard to the design other than it will be a glass box. According to the MTA, the failure to complete this project in a timely manner is laid on rapidly escalating land and construction costs. Unfortunately, project managers apparently did not respond to these conditions decisively and effectively. Now it is feared that the federal stimulus funds needed to clean up this mess and complete the project will be not only excessive, but will again be wasted if the work is not properly coordinated and closely supervised.

- **South Ferry Station Reconstruction**

It appears that there is no acceptable explanation for the “11th hour” platform gap problem at the South Ferry Station Reconstruction project. Whether due to poor design, poor construction or poor oversight, the station did not open at the end of 2008 as promised. Further, there has been no visible evidence that anyone at Capital Construction or NYCT Transit has been held accountable for errors in design and the resulting delays.

- **Security**

The slow pace of the installation of security cameras and the reticence to monitor them in real time is very disturbing. Moreover, as we noted in our 2007 Performance Review, the failure to implement the Integrated Electronic Security System (IESS/C3) in a timely fashion is totally unacceptable.

Communication

- **Information Accessibility**

In 2008 the MTA made very positive improvements in communication with the public: It launched a text messaging and email alert system; it partnered with Google to help customers navigate the transit system; and, new storm emergency protocols for communication have been established in light of flooding problems that have occurred in recent years. The website also has been improved: a bike page has been added, and information has been enhanced and expanded to better serve the disability community.

- **Origin and Destination Survey**

A valuable comprehensive survey of New York City riders' travel behavior was conducted by the MTA Planning Department in 2008. While it was necessary to gather this data to meet federal funding requirements, the benefits are wide-ranging as a tool for understanding the needs of riders. The MTA Planning Department should be recognized for the timely execution and completion of this effort.

- **Lobbying Efforts**

While there have been more visible efforts by the MTA in recent months to press the New York State legislature and the U.S. Congress for increased predictable financial support, these initiatives must be enhanced and sustained. As the largest transit system in the U.S., with a full agenda of needed improvements and rapidly growing ridership, the MTA must aggressively promote its critical role in the economic vitality of the New York City region. As part of that effort, MTA must do better in quantifying the number of jobs that will be created by its capital and state-of-good-repair programs. When its dire financial situation was accelerating in the fall of 2008, the MTA was slow to produce these figures and slow to publicize them. Information about the impact of service cuts on the constituencies of NYS legislators was also delayed. Finally, the Authority did not harness the energy of rider advocates who could serve as a powerful voice on MTA's behalf.

- **Availability of Monthly MTA Agenda Books**

Despite indications that MTA Board and Committee Agenda Books would be posted on the MTA website, this has not happened.

Agency-wide Initiatives

- **Shared Services**

The creation of the Business Service Center (BSC) is considered one of the best moves by MTA in the past year. This effort is led by Leonard DeSimone, formerly with Metro-North Railroad (MNR). Mr. DeSimone helped implement the MTA PeopleSoft system (a personnel software program) at MNR which is now being used in all the agencies. BSC anticipates a yearly \$50 million cost savings with full PeopleSoft implementation. Other projects include: Electronic Employment Screening program, a new timekeeping system and inventory management system

for MTA Bus, and E-Recruit for the Long Island Rail Road (LIRR). PCAC congratulates MTA on this new initiative.

- **Sustainability**

Over the past year, the MTA Sustainability Blue Ribbon Commission set out an impressive preliminary list of actions that MTA can take to reduce energy consumption and costs. PCAC looks forward to the final report to be issued in 2009.

- **Transit-Oriented Development (TOD)**

PCAC is pleased that MTA Headquarters has acknowledged the need to support TOD initiatives by hiring staff to create a working group, which includes members from the operating agencies. This long needed action is a welcome first step in recognizing the important land use–transportation connection.

- **Smart Card**

Despite a successful Phase 1 pilot project by NYCT in conjunction with CitiBank, MTA Headquarters has chosen to interrupt this valuable initiative by authorizing an additional study which will delay any system-wide implementation of a “smart card” fare payment system for another three years. This is extremely unfortunate and puts the MTA significantly behind other large transit systems such as CTA, WMATA, MARTA, MBTA, etc. where riders travel easily using a “Touch and Go” card linked to a credit card. We consider the failure to move forward based on NYCT’s program very shortsighted.

Long Island Rail Road

Leadership

- It is the position of the LIRRCC that the initial hopes for serious change in the operation of the Rail Road under new leadership has not materialized. To be fair, there were a number of positive actions that occurred in 2008 and they are highlighted in the text that follows. However, there are still major deficiencies in conditions affecting riders that need to be addressed and they too are highlighted. It appears there continues to be a disconnect between the management of the Rail Road and what is needed to improve the quality-of-ride issues that confront commuters everyday. Of equal concern to the LIRRCC is the eroding relationship between the Rail Road and advocacy groups. The high point of the LIRRCC President's Forum with Helena Williams in May 2008 has not been followed by any sustained interaction with the LIRRCC.

Organization

- There is a lack of clear organizational structure among management. New staff has been layered on top of existing positions. It has been difficult to determine who is in charge when trying to address riders' complaints and interpret policies and procedures. The LIRR organization chart on the MTA Intranet shows a confusing diagram of people with conflicting titles. There should be an organization audit to identify over- and under-staffed areas along with a review of department and job descriptions to better clarify roles.
- Particularly disappointing is the Rail Road's failure to hire an experienced specialist in land use and station planning. The LIRR significantly lags behind its regional counterparts in efforts to foster transit-oriented development and creative parking strategies to improve access to stations.
- While President Williams made a quick response denouncing the abuse of the U.S. Railroad Disability System by former LIRR employees, this behavior is indicative of entrenched patterns of attitudes and mindset. Unfortunately, there is no urgency for change and the "it's not my job" response still prevails.

Service Improvements

- **Various Improvements**
There have been some minor service improvements in 2008. PCAC was particularly pleased to see that additional stops were added to the St. Albans (Queens) station during peak hours. This was a major recommendation in PCAC's research study on underserved areas of NYC, *A Long Day's Journey into Work* (2007). Also positive are the new reverse peak train from Penn Station along the Hempstead Branch and added stops at Kew Gardens and Forest Hills.

- **East End Shuttle Service**

It was disappointing that the very successful East End Shuttle service was cancelled when the road work that required the Shuttle was finished. LIRRCC would like to see the Shuttle service returned, at least in the summer, in order to provide an alternative to automobile travel.

Capital Projects

- **Third Track DEIS**

The LIRR decision not to finalize and release the Main Line Corridor Improvement DEIS is totally unacceptable. The LIRR submitted the DEIS to the FTA and received comments back in the spring of 2008. This project needs to move forward expeditiously in concert with East Side Access. Long Island needs this critical transportation link for its economic survival.

Station and Equipment Improvements

- **Station Work**

There are 2008 station enhancements projects that should be noted: Renovation of the Seaford station began in February; a new temporary customer service office in Penn Station was completed while restrooms are currently under reconstruction; and in late fall the Woodmere Station renovation began, as did a new MTA Police headquarters facility in Central Islip.

- **Queens Interlocking**

LIRR is to be congratulated on the completion of the major modernization program known as the Queens interlocking, (albeit four years late and \$10 million over budget). It brings state-of-the-art technology to an important LIRR switching point between Queens Village and Bellerose. Summer service changes to accommodate this work were implemented with a minimum of disruption.

- **Diesel Fleet Performance**

While the Diesel Fleet Reliability Improvement Program has contributed to a 32% reduction in primary failures in 2008 compared to 2007, the fleet, at 18,000 Mean Distance Between Failures (MDBF), is still woefully below the 30,000 MDBF goal. Much more needs to be done to solve the diesel performance problem. The Rail Road should be reconsidering the wisdom of keeping the existing locomotives in this fleet.

Accessibility

- **New Freedom Funds**

The LIRR should be commended for obtaining a grant for \$2.95 million in New Freedom Funds (with a 20% LIRR match of \$737,653) in order to make additional accessibility improvements: detectable (tactile) warnings on platform edges, ADA-compliant handrails, curb cuts and signage at 11 LIRR stations (Bellmore, Bethpage,

Farmingdale, Flushing, Forest Hills, Freeport, Merrick, Queens Village, Valley Stream, Westbury and Wyandanch). LIRR completed its key station requirements in 1998.

- **Rosedale Station Elevator**

The completion of the elevator installation in May at the Rosedale station in Queens was a welcome amenity to this recently renovated station.

- **New Talking Kiosk**

LIRR has replaced the old free standing “talking kiosk” in Penn Station with a new, wall-hung version that has expanded functionality and offers an improved user interface.

Communication

- **Conductor Cell Phones**

In a strong move to help train crews get real time information about delays and other operational problems, LIRR equipped them with cell phones. The LIRRCC endorses this action but will be looking for a report on how this has helped the communication with riders.

- **Watch the Gap and Courtesy Campaigns**

LIRRCC is pleased that the Rail Road continues to support its important gap education program and courtesy reminders.

- **Rider Alert System**

The email alert system is working well, but the LIRR needs to continue to publicize how riders can sign up.

- **Customer Complaints**

The Council often receives webmails or phone calls from riders who have become frustrated at not receiving an answer or acknowledgement from the Rail Road when they have communicated a question or complaint. The LIRR must improve on their responses to riders.

- **Requests for Information**

Last year requests for information by the LIRRCC and the Long Island Transit Coalition for readily available origin and destination information took months and repeated phone calls to be resolved. The Rail Road’s poor cooperation with transportation advocacy groups is disappointing.

Community Outreach

- **Local Image**

Much more still needs to be done to reach out to Long Island communities. LIRRCC's discussions with Long Island legislators and other advocacy groups indicate that at the local level there is still lack of trust of the Rail Road.

- **Crime and Station Area Maintenance**

Crime at some stations and poor town maintenance of station areas are of major concern to the Council. The LIRR should be much more focused on these issues as they affect the comfort level of riders and their propensity to take the train.

- **TOD**

Only minimal progress has been made by the Rail Road in embracing transit-oriented development (TOD). A much more pro-active role needs to be taken when working with communities, developers, and state and federal resources.

Metro-North Rail Road

Leadership

- The MNRCC regretted the departure of long-time President Peter Cannito last July but was extremely pleased with the appointment of Howard Permut as his successor. Previously, Mr. Permut was Metro-North's Vice President of Planning, Development and Procurement and was part of the original team that created Metro-North out of the Conrail commuter operations in New York and Connecticut in 1983. His wealth of experience and management skills should ensure that MNR will continue to provide a high level of service and safety for riders and that MNR moves into the future with forward thinking and innovation.

Service Improvements

- **Pascack Valley line**
Thanks to new sidings installed in 2007, weekend and mid-day off peak train service enhancements on the Pascack Valley line have dramatically increased ridership from the three Rockland County stations: Spring Valley; Nanuet and Pearl River. In addition, cars were added to six Port Jervis Line trains, three in the AM peak and three in the PM peak, beginning last June, to provide additional seating capacity.
- **Other Improvements**
On the Hudson, Harlem, and New Haven lines a total of 67 new trains per week were added in the spring of 2008.

Station and Equipment Improvements

- **Stations**
We congratulate MNR on the completion of station improvements at Hastings, Dobbs Ferry, Ardsley, and Irvington. Also deserving recognition is the \$5.8 million restoration of the original roof on the landmarked Poughkeepsie train station that began in mid-2008. The building also is to get a much-needed upgrade to its original sewer system.
- **Parking Program**
MNR continued its long-standing comprehensive Parking Program to expand access to its stations by adding 100 parking spaces at MTA Metro-North Railroad's North White Plains Station.
- **Railcars**
The delivery of 380 new M-8 railcars for the New Haven line starting in 2010 is eagerly anticipated. A "mock up" of part of an M-8 was on display in New York and Connecticut in the spring. There is concern, however, that the needed storage yard for the new M-8s will be delayed due to lack of funding by the State of Connecticut.

The MNRCC recognizes that Metro-North works very hard to provide the best service under these difficult constraints. However, continued pressure must be put on the Connecticut legislature and DOT to contribute their fair share to the maintenance of the line.

Accessibility

- In its recent research study on accessibility at the MTA, PCAC and MNRCC found that MNR has met their key station plan, provides service and amenities for customers with disabilities, and continues to upgrade and improve station amenities for these passengers.

Customer Service

- **Hand Held Ticket Machines**

The riders were very pleased with the Hand Held Ticket Machines that were introduced in July. These new machines have replaced the old "duplex" ticket blanks used for on-board ticket sales. Using the new device, a conductor will select from a menu the departure and arrival stations. The device then calculates the fare and issues a receipt using a wireless printer. Another benefit of the hand held device is its ability to store ticket sales data that will simplify record keeping for conductors as well as produce a database of actual zone-to-zone ticket sales by ticket type, time, and train number.

- **Connecting Services Program**

The MNRCC applauds the ongoing efforts of the Railroad to facilitate access to stations: the new bus service from Ulster County to the Poughkeepsie train station (Ulster Poughkeepsie LINK); and the renewal of the Haverstraw-Ossining and Newburgh-Beacon Ferry Services for the next two years.

- **End-to-End Transportation Program**

Metro-North and Enterprise Rent-A-Car launched its joint venture in April to encourage people to take the train and complete the final leg of their journey by using a station-based rental car. Since the partnership began in April, usage has grown to more than 100 rentals a month. Enterprise rentals are offered at 23 Metro-North stations and receive a 5% discount off normal car rental costs. This innovative, collaborative program is an outstanding amenity for visitors to the Metro-North service areas.

Communication

- **125th Street Station**

Riders have soundly endorsed the new LED information signage at 125th Street station. This installation has greatly reduced customer confusion about which trains are in the station.

Community Outreach

- **Origin and Destination Report**
MNR's efforts to seek customer input are exemplary. The results of the most comprehensive origins and destination survey ever taken on Metro-North were released this past year. Some 93,000 customers responded to detailed questions about their travel patterns on Metro-North, how they get to and from the train station, the distances they travel to get to Metro-North trains, and their use of the trains during the weekends.
- **Opinion on M-8's**
On the New Haven Line, 50,000 flyers with comment cards were distributed to customers to solicit opinions on drawings of the interior and exterior of the M-8 new cars being built for the New Haven Line.
- **Annual Survey**
The annual customer satisfaction survey was conducted in the fall, providing valuable information that can be used to improve service.
- **Transit-Oriented Development (TOD)**
MNR's continued efforts to push TOD at its stations deserve recognition. This year more staffing was added to work with communities on land issues, and the Railroad unveiled its second targeted TOD campaign, "It's Happening in Harrison," in June. The Town/Village of Harrison and MNR hosted an open house for the public to review plans for redevelopment of the commuter parking lots and major improvements to station access and parking capacity. The proposal includes potential residential, retail and municipal uses, pedestrian plazas and a parking garage as well as streetscape improvements.

Sustainability

- MTA Metro-North Railroad has completed the conversion from bare, incandescent light bulbs to environmentally sustainable compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs) in Grand Central Terminal. With more than 1,700 CFLs installed throughout the public areas of the terminal, the railroad expects to save more than \$100,000 a year on utility bills and more than 100,000 kilowatt hours in electricity. Disposal of used CFL bulbs, which contain small amounts of mercury, will be done by Metro-North's waste management firm, Waste Technology Service of Lewiston, NY. The mercury, glass and metal all will be recycled.

New York City Transit

Leadership

- President Howard Roberts has continued to lead with openness, thoughtfulness and foresight. His appointment of Joseph Smith to lead the consolidated bus operations is praiseworthy.

Organization

- **Regional Bus Organization**
The combination of operations of NYCT Bus, MTA Bus and LI Bus has been a very strong and welcomed move. Under the guidance of President Joseph Smith, the Bus Company continues to improve operations and the rider experience.
- **Line General Manager Program**
This initiative, at first a pilot on the L and 7 lines and now expanded to the entire A Division (1,2,3,4,5,6,7 lines and the Times Square/Grand Central Shuttle), is to be commended for its “out-of-the-box thinking-trying something new” approach. It has imparted a sense of ownership to managers and helped quantify what it takes to provide a reliable level of service and well-maintained stations. However, it is still not clear how success is going to be measured.

Service Improvements

- **3 line**
The long awaited restoration of overnight service to northern Harlem was completed in July. Residents had been without this service since 1995 and had endured bus transfers requiring them to wait outside in the heat and humidity or the cold and snow. Trains will now operate between Times Square-42nd Street and Harlem-148th Street overnight on weekdays and weekends. This is one of the most commendable achievements by NYCT this year.
- **Improved Headways**
The shortened headways on the 1, 4, 6, and 42nd Street shuttle (S) lines were appreciated. These service adjustments will mean six additional trips for the 1 and 6 lines and ten additional trips for the 4 and S lines on weekdays.
- **Select Bus Service (SBS)**
This new service along the Bx12 route employs advance fare payment, dedicated travel lanes, and traffic signal priority to provide riders a 20% faster ride. As a joint MTA/NYCT project with the New York City Police Department and the New York City Department of Transportation, this is an excellent example of cooperation among various agencies. The NYCTRC is pleased to see this promising start to implementation of SBS throughout the City. There is concern, however, that a pilot

route in Queens has still not been identified. This is particularly troubling since half of Queens does not have subway service.

- **Express and Limited Stop Buses**

NYCT's first interstate bus service, the S89 limited-stop route introduced in 2007, links Staten Island with NJ TRANSIT's Hudson Bergen Light Rail (HBLR) line in Bayonne, New Jersey. Responding to the increasing popularity of this service, three daily trips were added in 2008. Elsewhere on Staten Island, in an effort to produce service reliability, there was an extension of the route for the X16. The NYCTRC recognizes these valuable additions to service levels.

- **Access-A-Ride Service**

Under an eight-month pilot program, NYCT's paratransit service, Access-A-Ride, was expanded into Nassau and Westchester Counties. Under this new service pick-ups became possible from Queens and the Bronx to all points within a ¾-mile corridor into these adjacent counties.

Station and Equipment Improvements

- **Myrtle-Wyckoff Station**

PCAC commends NYCT on the completion of this station renovation. It is an excellent example of station modernization.

- **Other Station Improvements**

In 2008, NYCT's ongoing station rehabilitation program included some needed structural work and replacements at Chambers Street/Nassau Loop. Unfortunately, this effort, costing \$30 million, hardly made a dent in the overall deleterious condition of this once beautiful station. There is severe water leakage damage, peeling paint, loose wires, and a general ragtag condition throughout the facility. This situation is hardly appropriate for the New York City Hall location which is above the station. NYCT needs to give the complete restoration of this station higher priority.

- **South Ferry Station**

NYCT needs to produce a full accounting about the embarrassing delays in the completion of the new South Ferry station due to design problems. The Agency needs to identify where and why these errors occurred and describe steps that are being taken to improve project management.

Accessibility

- **New Elevators**

The NYCTRC is very pleased that ADA elevators were installed in four stations: Myrtle-Wyckoff Complex; 135th St. (Lenox Avenue) on 2/3; the Church Avenue F station in Brooklyn; and, the Kew Gardens-Union Turnpike E/F in Queens. With the completion of the Kew Gardens station, NYCT met its phase one "key" station requirement (67 stations) well ahead of the 2010 deadline.

- **New Escalators**

NYCT completed the replacement of escalators at Herald Square-6th Av line and Roosevelt Island. While the Roosevelt Island escalators are working fine, showing a 97%–98% 24-hour availability rate in the fourth quarter 2008 NYCT Elevator and Escalator Quarterly Report, six of the 12 new Herald Square escalators are listed in that report as “out of service awaiting contractor to perform warranty repair work”.

- **Elevator and Escalator Availability**

While initiatives have been put in place to provide a better trained workforce and better reporting on availability status, the level of operation is still wanting. The 2008 4th Quarter passenger elevator availability report shows a drop to 2007 levels, and escalators showed a drop to 2006 levels. Clearly there needs to be continued efforts put into this area.

Communication

- **Rider Report Card**

NYCT has vigorously pursued the Rider Report Card survey on many different lines. This effort to seek more rider input is definitely a step toward providing a better rider experience.

- **Trip Planner**

NYCTRC welcomes the NAVTEQ[®] and Microsoft[®] enhancements to NYC Transit's online travel itinerary service. When a customer requests a map of walking directions developed for their travel itinerary, they will view the city via a new and improved street map. The new map is powered by NAVTEQ map data, while the 3D and aerial imagery is supplied by Microsoft Virtual Earth.

- **Improved Committee Meeting Books**

There have been some excellent improvements to the data reported in the Monthly Operations Report. Substantially more indicators in greater detail have been added to better assess On-Time Performance by type of service. In addition, the presentation has been made easier to read through larger and simplified charts. The NYCTRC commends NYCT on this initiative to provide a fuller understanding of its operations to the MTA Board and the public.

- **Public Address/Customer Information Screens (PA/CIS)**

The completed installation of the long delayed CBTC and PA/CIS system on the L line is an encouraging step for customer communication in subway stations. However, there are many stations still without public address systems and NYCT needs to move expeditiously to remedy this situation for the reassurance and security of all subway riders.

Sustainability

- **Hybrid-Electric Buses on Staten Island**

NYCTRC commends the introduction of 125 Orion VII New Generation Hybrid-Electric buses on Staten Island, part of a 850 city-wide bus order to be filled by 2010.

- **Green Escalators**

Thirty-five (35) green escalators have been installed at four subway stations across the city and other escalators have been programmed to go into a “sleep” mode when not in use. Not only does this save money from less power use, but it also increases the life of certain equipment components.