



# Long Island Rail Road Commuter Council

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**Testimony of the Long Island Rail Road Commuter Council to the  
Board of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority  
on Proposed Fare Increases  
The Milton G. Bassin Performing Arts Center at York College  
94-20 Guy R. Brewer Blvd, Jamaica, NY**

**December 3, 2014**

Good Evening. My name is Matthew Kessler. I am a resident of Queens and a member of the Long Island Rail Road Commuter Council (LIRRCC), the legislatively mandated representatives of the Long Island Rail Road riders. The LIRRCC was established in 1981 by the State Legislature to represent the LIRR riders. Our volunteer members are recommended by the Nassau and Suffolk County Executives and the Brooklyn and Queens Borough Presidents and appointed by the Governor. I begin by noting that the Long Island and Queens fare hearings are being held on the same date, making it impossible for MTA Board members to hear in person all of the public comments addressing LIRR fares made at these hearings. We have raised this issue in the past and are disappointed that hearings were not held on separate days.

I am here this evening to discuss the proposed fare increases before you. It seems like we are in the same place that we were following Superstorm Sandy in 2012, although this proposal is less onerous than the 2012 proposal. We continue to have many of the concerns that we expressed about this previous fare increase. We firmly believe that LIRR riders must shoulder their fair share of the load to support the operations of the Rail Road but must not stand alone in this effort. We do not see a commitment on the part of other stakeholders to join us in doing more to support the MTA's operating and capital needs and those of the Long Island Rail Road and thus cannot support this proposal.

There are several issues that particularly affect Long Island. First, many riders will be subject not only to an increased fare on the LIRR, but will also see the NYC Transit fares that they need to complete their travel rise as well. While there are small discounts for combined monthly LIRR tickets and MetroCards, the discount does little to soften the blow of rising fares on both systems. Long

Island will also soon face the loss of the New York Islanders, leaving Nassau and Suffolk Counties with no major league professional sports teams. We recommend that, working with the area's professional sports team the LIRR implement a "Fan Fare" to encourage Long Islanders attending sporting events in Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Queens to use the Rail Road as an attractive alternative to driving to these venues.

We also hear from many riders that they would like to take the LIRR for weekend family outings but find that once their children become 11 years of age and are required to have full fare tickets for passage. Changing this policy may seem to threaten a loss in revenue, but in fact many of these families choose to drive to their destinations, depriving the LIRR of all revenue unless the family uses an MTA-operated crossing. Charging commuter college students full fare when capacity is available arguably depresses ridership and revenue, as potential riders drive or use less convenient bus services. We need to carefully analyze the LIRR fare structure and how it may depress ridership, particularly at times and on routes when capacity is available. Other transit systems in the region find ways to accommodate these kinds of riders, why can't we do so here?

The current funding structure of the MTA is rooted in a May 2009 agreement between the State and MTA that provided for increased State financial assistance through new taxes and fees on motorists, taxi users, and business and increased rider support through a program of regular fare adjustments. Planned service cuts were taken off the table as a part of this agreement, but shortly afterwards MTA finances turned negative when new revenues failed to meet projections and money promised for the operation of MTA services was used to eliminate deficits in the State's general fund. The result was substantial service cuts, many of which have at last been restored. This practice continues to the present day, as the State this year raided dedicated transit funding to pay debt service that had previously come from its General Fund and promises to do so again. All the while, riders are being held to their substantial responsibilities under this arrangement.

Most significantly, these fare proposals do not address the fundamental issues facing the MTA. Riders already pay a substantial share of the cost of operations, recently estimated by MTA management at 55.2 percent for 2015. This is above 2014's projected farebox operating ratio of 54.6 percent and far higher than other large American transit systems providing similar services. Add to this the chronic failure of State and local government to provide for MTA capital improvements, which results in their financing through bonds serviced from operating funds, and riders face a bleak future. Yet another blow to the riders is on the horizon, as the MTA's proposed 2015-2019 Capital Program contains a funding gap of \$15 billion. The MTA can characterize this plan as a starting point for discussion, but it's going to take a lot of talk to find sources other than riders to meet this shortfall.

Riders need the MTA Board to take an active stance and respect its responsibilities to the riders. The Board must seriously and carefully consider the implications of its financial actions and refuse to shrink from telling elected officials that more resources are required. If we do not find alternative means of providing resources to the MTA and LIRR, every two years we will be facing a steady shift of the cost of operating the system to riders. We call on you to join with us in advocating for the MTA system and its riders.

The LIRRCC knows that this Board is in a difficult position with costs that are often beyond its control and has a need to borrow heavily to provide for the necessary replacement, rehabilitation, and expansion to the system. We ask you to understand that riders are also being stretched beyond their limits economically and to stand with them.