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**Testimony of the Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council
To the Board of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority
on Proposed Fare Increases
Palisades Center - Adler & Besso Community Rooms
West Nyack, NY
December 8, 2014**

Good Evening. I am Richard Cattagio, an Orange County resident and a member of the Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council (MNRCC). I have served on the MNRCC for almost 30 years and as a West of Hudson resident, I recognize the importance of Metro-North service to the people and economic health of Orange and Rockland Counties.

The past several years have been difficult ones for Metro-North, including the damage caused to the Port Jervis Line by Tropical Storm Irene, the impacts of Superstorm Sandy, and the series of incidents through 2013 that culminated the National Transportation Safety Board's recent report. We recognize that there is much to do, but we are confident that under new leadership the railroad is equal to the challenge.

Today, however, we are concerned with the impacts of this fare proposal on the riders and on Metro-North's operations. This Council's position has long been to support predictable, moderate fare increases that are designed to have riders pay their fair share of increases in operating costs. While the previous increases have averaged 8 to 9 percent over a two year period, we believe that the increase under discussion today, at 4 percent, is more in line with general increases in the cost of living and more manageable for our riders. Nevertheless, we must also raise the revenue from other funding sources to prevent Metro-North riders from paying an ever increasing share of the cost of operation. This fare proposal is projected to raise Metro-North's farebox operating ratio to 62.8 percent, over five percentage points above its level in 2013.

We also must strive to keep fares affordable. We applaud this Board's action to reduce parking fees by 91 percent for the next year, but many commuters still remain financially strained by even a moderate fare increase. Metro-North's fare structure also makes it difficult for some families to use the railroad for leisure travel, and for some it can prove less expensive to drive to make family trips. It is to this end that we again recommend a "Family Fare" type pass for weekends and holidays that would enable a family with children to ride for a flat fare. This system has proved viable elsewhere: Chicago's Metra offers a \$7 Weekend Pass, which allows unlimited riding on Saturday and Sunday, and in Los Angeles, Metrolink sells a \$10 Weekend Pass that is valid either on Saturday or Sunday.

We also believe that capacity issues for West of Hudson riders need to be addressed through projects including the completion of as-yet unbuilt Pascack Valley Line passing sidings and additional cross-Hudson capacity, which may include extending the 7 Line Extension to Secaucus Junction. The latter is particularly important in view of Amtrak's conclusions that it must soon perform major repairs on its North, or trans-Hudson tunnels.

Ultimately New York State must reexamine how the MTA is funded. The Council's consistent position has been that the MTA's funding sources must be stable, reliable, and able to grow to meet increasing costs. We believe that our present unstable funding mix is failing the test, and we ask for your commitment as Board members to be forceful advocates with our elected representatives for improvements.