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**Testimony to the MTA Board
December 3, 2020
Fare Hearing
Not the Time to Discuss Fare Hikes
By Gerard Bringmann
Chair, Long Island Rail Road Commuter Council**

Hello, my name is Gerard Bringmann and I am the Chair of the Long Island Rail Road Commuter Council. This is clearly a year like no other. We recognize the MTA's dire fiscal situation and urge Congress to pass a stimulus package that includes relief for riders. The alternative is inconceivable.

It's almost impossible to comment on fare increases when we don't know what service will look like: we've heard cuts up to 50-percent. We know that in any other cycle it would be time to consider fare increases. But this year is different. Many riders don't need to travel the same way, and it may be years before they do again – if ever. It isn't the time to give them an excuse to stay off trains, but to encourage them to come back. We need stimulus, we need congestion pricing, we need access to all the funds Washington can provide. But we don't need talk of a fare hike.

Paying up to 4.3 percent more for monthlies and 5.9 percent for weeklies for half the service is a huge disincentive to getting back on board. We cannot support these proposed increases. Under other circumstances we could support a nominal increase for other ticket types with limited or no service cuts – but these are not other circumstances.

In this year like no other there is an opportunity for creative thinking and ticketing that reflects the changing way we travel. We would support a discounted 20, 40 or 60 trip ticket with a longer expiration time – say 6 months – that could replace the traditional monthly. We'd like to see off-peak fares retained until 50 percent weekday ridership returns and we also recommend that you further incentivize off-peak travel.

We'd also like to hear more about what alternate revenue streams the LIRR is looking at and cost saving measures being undertaken to offset fare increases. It makes the bad news more bearable.

Finally, we're not in the habit of commenting on subway and bus fares, but again, this is a year like no other. With so many LIRR riders traditionally buying MetroCards, we support maintaining the 30-day unlimited subway and bus fare option.

Thank you.