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**Testimony to the MTA Board
December 21, 2020
Fare Hearing
With Stimulus Coming, Doubling Down on No Fare Hikes
By Francena Amparo
Member, Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council**

Good morning, I am former Dutchess County Legislator Francena Amparo, representing the Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council. Thank you for the opportunity to testify at today's fare hearing.

Today's hearing comes as your quest for federal funding is finally becoming reality with a stimulus package that includes \$4B dollars for the MTA. Many thanks to Senator Schumer and all of our elected leaders who made that happen. While it does not solve all the MTA's financial problems, it will go a long way to stabilizing the MTA's fiscal situation through 2021. We are hopeful that additional funding will come through in the months ahead.

In light of this latest news, we are doubling down on our call for no fare increases at this time. The MTA now has the funding it needs to hold on – while many riders are still facing tumultuous times. We understand that the funding infusion means that the threat of dire cuts to Metro-North's service are off the table. We would like to have that commitment in writing. We need our train service to be there – and be whole – when we get to the next phase in our recovery.

However, we understand that the fare hikes are still up for a vote next month. Paying up to 4.3% more for monthlies and 5.9% more for weeklies is a huge disincentive to getting back on board. Under other circumstances, we could support a nominal increase for other ticket types, however these are not ordinary circumstances.

Many riders do not need to travel the same way, and it may be years before they do again – if ever. Now is the time to find creative ways to increase ridership and ticketing that reflects the change in which we travel. We would support a discounted 20, 40 or 60 trip ticket with a longer expiration time to replace the traditional monthly. We would like to see off-peak fares retained until at least half of normal weekday ridership returns, and we also recommend that you further incentivize off-peak travel by pursuing discounted pilot programs to accommodate commuters. Our future is starting to look brighter and it is critical that our transit system is there to support the region's – and riders' – next normal.

Thank you.