

**Testimony of the New York City Transit Riders Council to the
Board of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority
on Proposed Fare Increases and Service Reductions
College of Staten Island, Staten Island, N.Y.
January 26, 2009**

My name is Edith M. Prentiss, and I am a member of the New York City Transit Riders Council (NYCTRC). The Council was created in 1981 to represent the users of the New York City Transit system and consists of fifteen volunteer members appointed by the Governor upon the recommendation of the Mayor, the Public Advocate and the five Borough Presidents.

As representatives of transit riders in New York City we find the proposed fare increases and service cuts that are before you to be unacceptable. We also know that with inadequate funding this Board has little choice but to propose substantial fare increases, but the MTA's financial position does not make these proposals any more acceptable. It is particularly offensive to hold paratransit customers, many of whom can scarcely afford their current cost of travel, hostage to a potential \$6.00 fare, especially on Staten Island where transportation options are limited.

In addition, these proposals would cancel the scheduled takeover by the MTA of Atlantic Express' publicly subsidized X24 express bus service, which is currently not accessible to persons with disabilities. Under these proposals, those who would at last have received accessible NYC Transit express bus service will now have to be content with paying as much or more for far less convenient Access-A-Ride service.

We likewise reject the service cuts in the proposals before you. Fare levels are a secondary concern to the rider who finds that service he or she depends upon is no longer available. If these proposals are implemented, many transit users will find themselves in this position. Transit in New York City is a system, and you cannot compromise major elements of the system without damaging the whole. New Yorkers depend on transit to get around the City twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. This level of service that is proposed is simply not adequate for a city that is open for business at all hours.

Combine the new subway schedules with the reductions or eliminations in off-peak bus service on many routes, and you are making overnight transit service a frightening and dangerous experience for riders, many of whom have no other viable choices. The MTA has the franchise to serve the ENTIRE city, not just the profitable parts. These proposals eliminate weekend service to Sea View Hospital, the only New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation inpatient facility on Staten Island. Grimes Hill residents would no longer have weekend S60 service and would face a steep climb home from other bus routes. While Staten Island has no subways, the elimination of W train service and closure of four stations in Lower Manhattan in late night hours would stand as a major loss to Staten Islanders who travel to Manhattan by transit.

We are also greatly disturbed that subway stations will become even more lonely and dirty under these proposals. Eliminating Station Customer Assistant and agent position may make sense on paper in cases where there is a staffed booth elsewhere in a station, but in reality the staffed booth may be far from much of the station and not accessible without returning to street level and locating the appropriate station entrance. Many stations in the subway system already suffer from a lack of human presence, and reducing staffing will only exacerbate this condition. In addition, we cannot believe that reduced station area track cleaning will not take its toll in terms of increased flooding and track fires. We must take the costs of delays from these causes into account before adding up the savings from these actions.

We are fully in favor of increasing efficiency in the system, but the service changes that have been proposed are largely a matter of cutting muscle and bone rather than fat. The sad fact is that even these ill considered cuts do not even make a large dent in the MTA's deficit, as in 2009 they close less than 5 percent of the \$1.2 billion hole in the Authority's finances.

The New York City Transit Riders Council calls upon this Board to consider the resources that are needed to provide an acceptable level of service and to take decisive action to pursue these resources. We have called and will continue to call forcefully upon our elected representatives to support new funding sources for the MTA that will ensure that these unacceptable fare increases will no longer be necessary. We demand that each MTA Board member does the same. We reject a budget that raises fares dramatically only to keep the transit system on life support.