

**Testimony of the Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council
Before the MTA Board on Proposals for Fare and Crossing Charges and
Service, Station, and Administrative Changes
Palisades Center, West Nyack, NY
February 2, 2009**

Good Evening. My name is Gerard Kopera. I am the Vice Chair of the Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council (MNRCC), the legislatively mandated representative of Metro-North Railroad riders. Over the past 25 years, Metro-North has risen from a collection of castoff passenger lines to a preeminent position among American railroads. Our members are alarmed that you would consider implementing the proposals before you, which are a direct threat to Metro-North's outstanding reputation and its contributions to the economy and quality of life of our region and State.

The Council stands strongly opposed to the proposed fare increases, both in percentage and absolute terms. Under these proposals monthly tickets would increase by as much as \$106, resulting in a monthly ticket price as high as \$478. Buyers of other types of tickets would face harsh increases, generally in the range of 25 to 28 percent. In the West of Hudson area riders would be hit with several intermediate trip fare increases of up to 75 percent, designed to prevent riders from combining NJ Transit and Metro-North tickets to avoid a portion of this massive fare increase. We understand the serious budget shortfall that confronts the MTA, but these proposals go far beyond the increases for which any prudent customer would reasonably have planned and will impose a severe financial burden on many customers, especially given the short time since the last fare increase and the current economic conditions facing the region and nation.

The Council is also extremely concerned about those Metro-North commuters who will be burdened with two fare increases, as many also use NYC Transit to complete their trips. According to Metro-North, 44 percent of Railroad customers also use NYC Transit services, and under this proposal they will incur substantial increases in the both their railroad and transit fares. Our Council is worried that the hardships created by these extreme fare increases could derail the Railroad's long term trend of substantial increases in ridership.

In addition, the Council feels very strongly that the Railroad can ill afford to implement the customer service and maintenance reductions contained in this proposal, as they would seriously compromise the quality of service which customers have come to expect. We are concerned that deferred maintenance may never be restored to its proper schedule and that reducing the materials, equipment, and staffing available for maintenance will compromise the quality of service far out of proportion to the marginal cost savings achieved. We reject the suggestion that this strategy is an acceptable way to control costs.

Beyond maintenance deferrals, the MNRCC is concerned that reduced service, increased loading standards, and reductions in the number of cars per train will damage the riding experience and make using Metro-North far less convenient and attractive. Port Jervis line customers would lose express service, adding 10 to 20 minutes to an already arduous commute. Weekend service on the Pascack Valley line, which has been stunningly successful since its introduction a year ago, would also be reduced. There is a strong demand for these services and momentum for further ridership increases, but these proposals ignore these positive signals in pursuit of relatively small cost savings.

While West of Hudson customers are not directly affected, we also are extremely disturbed by reductions in this proposal that threaten to degrade the quality of life in Metro-North's crown jewel, Grand Central Terminal. These proposed reductions fail to take into consideration the value of Grand Central Terminal to the Railroad and its central position in building the identity of Metro-North. To sacrifice this asset for a few dollars of savings is a poor bargain indeed.

We know that this Board does not totally control its financial destiny. For that reason our Council is reaching out to our representatives in the State Assembly and Senate, who for many years have failed to provide necessary funding for the MTA and its operating agencies. We are urging them to enact a funding package that will meet the long term operating and capital needs of Metro-North and the MTA. We will be forceful, and we demand that you be forceful, in seeking the resources that will allow Metro-North to fulfill its potential in serving our communities, our region and our State.