

**Testimony of the New York City Transit Riders Council to the
Board of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority
on Proposed Service Reductions
College of Staten Island, Staten Island, N.Y.
March 2, 2010**

Good evening, my name is Tom Jost, and I am the Staten Island Borough President's representative on the New York City Transit Riders Council (NYCTRC). The Council, which was formed in 1981, consists of fifteen (15) Governor appointed volunteer members to represent the needs and views of the users of the New York City Transit system.

The MTA is proposing the discontinuation of five express bus lines – the x6, x9, x16, x18 and x20 as well as two local lines - the s60, the s42. Thousands of commuters rely upon this bus service to get to work – many have no other viable options. The bulk of Staten Island commuters travel to Manhattan. The elimination of the W Train to Lower Manhattan and reductions to the headways on the 1 during midday and off-peak periods will further complicate and lengthen an already arduous mass transit commute for Island residents.

The MTA is also looking to phase out the student pass, an action that would have far-reaching implications to City school operations. This is an incredibly near-sited cost cutting maneuver that will cost our children and our families in the long run. The responsibility for student passes is a shared obligation between the City, the State and the MTA and it is one of the best examples of the complete lack of coordination and integration between the layers of government that manage this region to the detriment of its taxpaying public. The City, the State and the MTA should be working together during this crisis. They all need to stop the finger pointing, and stop raiding each-others budget obligations in order to fix their own problems.

According to the most recent US Census, Staten Islanders face the 2nd longest average commute in the entire nation and commute time factors greatly into people's living and lifestyle decisions. Mass transit is vital to the economy of Staten Island. The difficult, expensive and often unreachable mass transit system is the single greatest impediment to our economic growth. The MTA needs to recognize and embrace its obligation as the region's leader in promoting mass transit alternatives to automobile usage. The MTA should be at the forefront of transit expansion, especially to underserved areas such as Staten Island who stand to gain so tremendously from an economic standpoint from shorter and consistent mass transit commutes. That economic gain will do much more to promote a sustainable financial plan for the MTA than the circus of service cuts and fare increases that the MTA subjects it's riding public to on a seemingly annual basis. The opportunity to bring a viable mass transit system to Staten Island that would promote fundamental change to the commuting habits of its populace has been available to the MTA for decades, and the MTA has consistently ignored the opportunity.

The MTA's financial crisis is not the result of providing too much service. These deep service cuts that will significantly impact many Staten Island mass transit users will only bring minimal relief to the yawning deficit faced by the MTA. The total projected savings from across-the-board bus service reductions in all five boroughs totals \$60 million. The proposed State funding cuts set forth in the Governor's Deficit Reduction Program are more than double this amount at \$143 million. The MTA is also projecting shortfalls of \$229 million and \$400 million in 2009 and 2010 tax receipts. These service cuts are not going to close that gap. I am not minimizing the importance of making the system as efficient as possible, but these proposed service cuts are largely a matter of cutting muscle and bone rather than fat. There is a purpose and demand for each of the services that is being eliminated. The NYCTRC strongly urges the MTA to reconsider these steep service cuts as the severity of the reductions is inconsistent with the minimal savings that would be realized.

The financial impact of these cuts has been documented; what we now need to do is examine what is actually being lost to the riding public in the process, whether the savings generated can justify the impact on riders, and what alternatives to these actions exist. We are asking this Board to critically examine this issue along with the NYCTRC. We stand ready to work with you in an honest examination of our options.