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Statement of the New York City Transit Riders Council Before the New York City Council Transportation Committee Oversight Hearing on Evaluating the Latest Mitigation Plans for the 2019 L Train Tunnel Closure.

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Good afternoon, my name is William Henderson. I am the Executive Director of the Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA (PCAC), which is an umbrella organization established by the New York State Legislature to coordinate the activities of three legislatively-mandated Councils that represent the interests of riders of the Metro-North Railroad, Long Island Rail Road and New York City Transit system. I am speaking today on behalf of the New York City Transit Riders Council.

We appreciate the opportunity to discuss the current state of mitigation plans for the L line closure beginning in April 2019. While a number of steps, such as shortening construction duration to 15 months and preparing other subway facilities for increased traffic, have been taken to reduce the impacts of the L line closure, this process is going to be extremely challenging for riders. Unlike the R train, which was broken into two segments for tunnel repairs in 2013 and 2014, there are no subway lines that can by themselves closely substitute for the service that the L train provides between Williamsburg and the West Side of Manhattan. Keeping New York City moving during the L line shutdown requires that the majority of riders who are displaced will move to other subway lines, but there are firm limits established by where other trains are, where they go, and their remaining capacity. These limits prevent them from completely replacing the L line west of Bedford Avenue. Walking, cycling and use of new and existing ferry services will take some pressure off, influenced by weather conditions, but transit must bear the bulk of the burden.

What is likely to be the main determining factor in whether these mitigation plans succeed or fail is the performance of substitute bus service during the shutdown period. This will, of course, require that New York City Transit operates existing and new bus service efficiently and effectively, but this in turn depends in large part on the actions that the City takes to facilitate movement of buses across the Williamsburg Bridge and in the 14th Street corridor. Without the partnership of NYCDOT and the NYPD, shutting down the L train for this critical repair work simply would not be possible.

We believe that the basic plan is sound. The restrictions on the use of 14th Street between 5 AM and 10 PM, combined with HOV 3+ restrictions on the Williamsburg Bridge during the same hours, can create the space that the bus network needs to do its job. It is also possible to make some adjustments to this plan if the areas where buses must operate experience significantly greater or lesser stress than anticipated. What is absolutely critical, however, is providing actionable information about traffic restrictions and alternative travel paths to potential drivers in this corridor. Of even greater importance is the vigorous enforcement of traffic restrictions designed to clear the way for buses. While a concentrated enforcement effort may appear harsh, a single driver flaunting the rules has ample potential to disrupt the travel of tens or even hundreds of bus riders. We ask that the members of this Committee insist that City departments and agencies support this mitigation plan to the greatest extent possible.

In closing, we believe that New York City Transit and the City must take the plan that has been developed and any refinements that may be added over the next nine months and implement it effectively. This will require flexibility to make adjustments needed to make the plan work, nimbleness in deploying resources to respond to unforeseen and changing circumstances, and a large and dynamic campaign of public information that guides drivers away from the Williamsburg Bridge and 14th Street corridor and guides L train riders to effective transit, cycling, and pedestrian alternatives that will allow them to travel with the minimum inconvenience possible. We especially cannot afford to shift riders to transportation network companies or taxis because they feel they have no alternatives. It is critical that this mitigation plan work effectively, but we believe that with close cooperation between NYC Transit and the City, riders can carry on with their lives without major disruption.