



NYCTRC

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Statement of the New York City Transit Riders Council Before the New York City Council Transportation Committee Oversight Hearing on Improving the New York City Subway System

Tuesday, December 5, 2018

Good morning, my name is Ellyn Shannon. I am the Associate Director of the Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA (PCAC), which was established by the New York State Legislature in 1981 and is the official voice of NYC Transit, Metro-North and Long Island Rail Road riders.

The transit system that we rely upon is still severely stressed. To remain a world class city, it is more important than ever to have a reliable system that keeps trains and riders moving smoothly to where they need to go. The subway and bus systems have still yet to recover fully from the 2010 service and workforce cuts, let alone the damage sustained in 2012 from Superstorm Sandy. We cannot afford to let the transit system go backwards to the bad old days. It's time to move forward.

Therefore, we appreciate this opportunity to discuss the steps necessary to improve the transit system and the merits of New York City Transit's Fast Forward plan. The timing is particularly relevant as the MTA is in the midst of fare hearings. While raising the fare would help close the budget gap and support the system, much more funding is needed to set it on the right path.

We appreciate that the City of New York and the State stepped up to the plate with the Subway Action Plan, and there is evidence that some parts of the system did stabilize from the downward trajectory. The Fast Forward plan goes further, and it's critical that it be sufficiently funded. We have reviewed the plan and have delved into deeper levels of the system than ever before to better understand what it will take to turn it around. It is with this understanding that we come in full support of the Fast Forward plan as the only way New York can rebuild its transportation system into one that leads other globally competitive cities. We have watched as Mr. Byford has assembled a highly skilled and inspired team, placed the focus where it belongs – on riders – and worked to collapse the many layers of Transit's organization chart to get at root causes of problems, both efficiently and effectively.

But the magnitude of the problem that has occurred from decades of insufficient funding is simply larger than a one-time effort could stop. The answer must be in finding recurring and sustainable funding for the transit system, including – but not only –

Congestion Pricing. Restoring and improving the subway system requires a bold new way of thinking accompanied by an increased commitment of resources. Some of those resources could and should come from Amazon, which must be considered as a viable funding source to improve the transit infrastructure in Long Island City. More people will mean more congestion in stations that are sorely in need of repair, upgrades, and accessibility. We look forward to upcoming Council hearings on this topic. Similarly, there is great opportunity in capturing the added value that transit brings to real estate developments, and we strongly support the MTA's efforts in that area. It is also important that everyone pay their fare: fare beating costs the system hundreds of millions of dollars a year, putting added pressure on fares and service, and hurts all New Yorkers. Equitable enforcement is needed now more than ever.

Much concern has been said in the press about reducing MTA waste and inefficiencies, and we are pleased that steps are being taken from within to address two key structural issues by the two board working groups led by Scott Rechler and Charles Moerdler. But a ship as large as the MTA does not turn on a dime. That work is on-going and is integral to gaining public trust.

The MTA can't simply tinker around the edges or make significant cuts without hitting bone. That's just not an option. Increasing funding does work when it's applied in a well thought out and evidence-based way. Since the Subway Action Plan went into effect thanks to a city-state collaboration, the number of subway delays has declined markedly. Other indicators paint a similar picture, as the Mean Distance Between Failures (MDBF) of subway cars has gone from steadily declining to improving. Performance on the busiest lines that was leading to train cancellations and less service available to riders is also improving. The SAP has led to measurable successes, but there is so much more that needs to be done to restore the system – and New Yorker's faith in it. That's where the Fast Forward Plan comes in.

At the end of the day, it is in the interest of both the City and State to ensure that the system functions well, and ensuring that it is appropriately funded is key. We cannot afford to wait decades for modernization efforts such as improved signals and CBTC to be completed and must find ways to accelerate them, as laid out in the Fast Forward plan. Subway and bus riders need the City and MTA to work as partners to ensure that the transportation system that is the lifeblood of this region is maintained and improved. We look forward to a vigorous discussion of what needs to be done and how to pay for it, and encourage the members of the City Council and this Committee to fully participate in this dialogue.

The Fast Forward plan cannot be implemented without the State's and City's financial support and commitment. We look forward to any questions that you may have. Thank you.