

**Statement of the Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA
Before the MTA Board Meeting
December 16, 2009**

I am William Henderson, Executive Director of the Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA. The PCAC is composed of the members of three riders' councils established by the State legislature in 1981 and addresses regional issues as well as coordinating the work of the councils.

We are disappointed in the recommended budget that is before you today and we do not believe that it should be implemented. We fully acknowledge that conditions that led to the difficult choices before you today are not of the MTA's making. The Board and staff in good faith assumed that the new revenue sources enacted this year would generate the revenues that the State had projected and that Albany would keep its commitments to fund mobility in the economic center of the State. Now last month's cautious optimism has been swept away by a \$229 million shortfall in new state taxes and a \$143 million diversion of funding in the State's Deficit Reduction Plan.

The riders do not question that you need to take action to deal with this shortfall; instead, they question the choices that have been made. The most significant proposed response in the budget, in terms of financial impact, is the reimposition of the service cuts proposed and withdrawn this spring. These service cuts were unacceptable in March, and they are unacceptable now. They will impose severe hardships on riders who are struggling to get to and from work, school, and other obligations even with current service levels.

A second significant means of closing the budget gap is the phasing out of free and reduced student fare passes. This will create an exceptional burden on families, particularly those with more than one school aged child. I cannot believe that these families will feel that there has been no fare increase when they are paying thousands of dollars per year to provide school transportation for their children. We are also extremely concerned about changes to paratransit. Access-A-Ride fares might not be scheduled to increase in 2010, but under this budget for many riders the level of service received will decrease as they may no longer be provided door to door transportation. We agree that the City needs to bear more of the cost of these services, but is the wrong way to pursue this funding.

The commuter railroads will see cuts as well. The LIRR will halve off-peak service on the Port Washington line, eliminate weekend service on the West Hempstead line, and cancel two trains, combine two others with existing services and truncate service on another train. These changes would affect over 13,000 riders. On Metro-North, up to eight trains would be canceled, with another five trains combined with existing services. These changes would affect over 3,000 riders.

While this budget proposes the elimination of two subway lines and scores of bus routes to generate \$62 million in 2010, it still sets aside \$50 million in pay as you go also capital funding. The budget also fails to take advantage of provisions in federal stimulus legislation permitting use of 10 percent of funds awarded for operating expenses, which could redirect \$91.5 million to operating uses. We recognize the need for adequate capital funding, but in present circumstances exceptional measures need to be on the table. In the long run, the only acceptable solution is creating a package of MTA funding sources that is stable, reliable, and able to grow to meet increased costs and demands for service. In the interim, however, we cannot allow a temporary downturn in the general economy to inflict permanent damage on our transit system, region, and riders.