

## **Statement of PCAC Executive Director William Henderson on the 2008 MTA Budget and Fare Proposals**

MTA Board Meeting

December 19, 2007

Good morning. I'm Bill Henderson, the Executive Director of the Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA. As was the case for many of you, I spent a lot of time last month in hotel meeting rooms and public auditoriums listening to people talk about the MTA plans for fares and tolls. Among the usual parade of remarks calling for firing half of the MTA payroll, cutting the salaries of the remaining workers, and reducing subway and bus fares to a dollar, there were a number of thoughtful comments from everyday riders who took an evening away from their lives to have their voices heard.

What I heard from these riders is that service is very important, and that there is a willingness out there to trade off a moderate fare increase for improvements to the system that will improve riders' lives. Do nothing to improve service, and you lose that willingness to live with a moderate fare increase. The Service Enhancement Program is an important downpayment on the improvements that are needed in the system and an element of the partnership between the Authority and its customers. To single out the Service Enhancement Program to be deferred until a review of tax receipts through March 2008 is to break faith with these riders. Adopt a financial plan with this deferral provision and you will move from "we're moving forward" with "we'll see".

The PCAC has long worked to take the broad view of MTA service and finances and we firmly believe that the MTA best serves its customers when it operates in an atmosphere of partnership and mutually beneficial trade-offs. In this financial plan, we don't see partnership, and we don't see trade-offs based on mutual commitments. Riders already pay an inordinately high proportion of the cost of their ride and State and City assistance has not kept pace with needs. Riders are willing to pitch in and help lift the system, but they don't see anyone lifting beside them or anyone improving service to make the lift easier. Until we see real commitments from the MTA's funding partners and real commitments for service enhancements, we can't support the riders' shouldering the whole load.

I think that you need to listen to the riders; the people who are saying, "I don't want to pay more for my bus or train ride, but if we get something back through improvements to the system, we can live with it." I hope that your final resolution is something that riders can live with.