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MNRCC Testimony Presented to NY State Senate Hearing on Metro-North and New York's Transit Systems March 8, 2019

Good afternoon, my name is Randy Glucksman and I am the Chair of the Metro-North Commuter Council and a non-voting member of the MTA Board. Created by the state legislature in 1981, the MNRCC is the voice of Westchester, Rockland, Orange, Putnam, Dutchess and Bronx county Metro-North riders.

I come before you today to speak on behalf of those more than a quarter million daily riders. As riders and rider representatives, we support the plans put forth by the current Presidents of the MTA Operating Agencies, including *Metro-North Way Ahead*. It is critical that funding be identified to modernize signals, replace rolling stock, upgrade infrastructure and accessibility, and improve safety by increasing inspections across the systems. These improvements are not a wish list for riders, but are fundamental needs to ensure the railroad's viability. Unfortunately, significant underfunding and disinvestment have left the system – and the riders – in a precarious position. I am here today to underscore the importance of finding new and sustainable funding sources to save riders from bearing the brunt of years of disinvestment, combined with bureaucratic bloat. All any of us are asking for is a safe, affordable and reliable way to get where we are going. That's just one of the reasons we continue to support legislation for cameras at grade crossings, and for cameras in stations.

Starting in April, when the fare hikes go into effect, the majority of riders will be paying more to get where they're going. West-of-Hudson riders were spared from a fare increase, but bear the brunt of the delays and cancellations that have generally been caused by problems with New Jersey Transit. Service has been particularly abysmal in the past week: on Monday morning, NJ Transit cancelled more than 50 trains – some attributed to the weather but the majority due to crew shortages. This has been an ongoing problem and we had hoped the worst was behind us, but clearly the issue persists. In fact, we had been informed that NJ Transit would begin restoring service that had been subject to what it calls temporary service adjustments. We're still waiting.

To ensure that the needs of the riders are heard when priorities are being set, we hereby renew our request that the three rider representatives who sit on the MTA Board be given a vote. Currently, each of the three commuter councils that make up the Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee – the LIRR and Metro North Commuter Councils and NYC Transit Riders Council – have a State Senate-confirmed representative on the Board. However, we have no right to a vote. To regain the riders' faith that the MTA Board hears them, give us – their legislatively-mandated representatives – a vote. We also reaffirm our support for full voting rights for the so-called Quarter Pounders – whose constituents pay the full one-quarter percent tax the other counties pay, but don't get full representation on the Board.

We also ask for a seat at the Regional Transit Committee, or Mass Transit Advisory Council, proposed by the Governor, if either or both are enacted. We share your concerns about the exclusion of representation from the lower Hudson Valley and Long Island, and appreciate the concerns you voiced

about congestion pricing – which we do support. We recognize the dire need for the \$15 billion it is expected to raise but those of us who live and work in the Hudson Valley need assurances that funds will also come to Metro-North and benefit all riders – including reverse commuters. We continue to urge the MTA to tell us what improvements we can expect to see, and were glad to hear some details today. We do agree with and have sought for years “lockbox” assurances to ensure these and other revenues and funds set aside for capital projects are not diverted to pay for other operating expenses.

We believe that having strong, full time and independent leadership at the MTA is the best first step to re-instilling confidence in the agency. We are hopeful that a new Chair will be appointed soon who will help guide the restructuring that is being considered and already underway. However, we don't think any restructuring has to fit into an arbitrary June deadline and ask for a longer, multi-stepped approach, leading to a well thought out proposal with input from stakeholders – and which comes before the Board for approval.

They say that desperate times call for desperate measures. These are desperate times and now's the time to look at every possible revenue source. Metro-North and the MTA as a whole need to do a better job of capturing all the value that proximity to transit adds. Agreements with developers and better use of MNR-owned and adjacent land could net significant sums for the agency. Mechanisms already exist for these types of agreements; they should be expanded.

The MTA is also getting precariously close to overwhelming debt – in fact, debt service is through the roof. Borrowing money that is not backed by income takes a huge chunk out of the MTA's operating budget – and the debt is expected to grow up to \$3 billion over the next two-to-three years. The next capital plan must address the MTA debt issue and start figuring out ways to ratchet debt DOWN.

It is clear that the MTA must do its part to regain the trust of the legislature, and the faith of the riders it serves. The New York region is built around a robust transit system. It's critical that it remain the driver that supports our growth, vitality, and identity. Metro-North riders are doing their part, and despite the problems, ridership is up. We need the State and the MTA to do their part and help riders so we can continue to use Metro-North now, and into the future.

Thank you.

