

**Testimony of the New York City Transit Riders Council
to the Board of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority
on Proposed Fare Increases
Baruch Performing Arts Center, Mason Hall
Manhattan, New York, NY
November 13, 2012**

Good Evening. My name is Edith Prentiss. I am a member of the New York City Transit Riders Council (NYCTRC), the legislatively mandated representatives of the New York City Transit riders. I am a Manhattan resident and a regular bus, subway, and commuter rail rider appointed to the Council on the recommendation of the Public Advocate.

We want to acknowledge the extraordinary efforts of all those at the MTA and New York City Transit who worked so hard to bring the system back after Hurricane Sandy. The Council appreciates all that you have done and the personal sacrifices you have made during this difficult time. We also know that full recovery will take some time and that NYC Transit was among those hardest hit by the storm, and that large parts of NYC Transit remains in temporary locations.

The NYCTRC is opposed to this level of increases in New York City Transit fares. Riders, like all who benefit from the MTA system, should share in paying for increases in its cost of operations. These fare proposals, however, continue to shift the burden of funding MTA operations more greatly onto riders. This path is unaffordable for riders, out of the national mainstream, and patently unfair. The MTA's funding was cut to bail out the State's General Fund, resulting in service cuts, and recently enacted subsidies are under court challenge and generating less revenue than projected, but riders have kept their commitments to financially support the system.

MTA riders already pay the highest percentage of operating expenditures of any transit users in the nation. Last year this figure was 59.4 percent, compared with 38 percent for large systems nationally. Subway riders pay a stunning 72 percent of operating expenditures. The proposals presented here will reinforce the shift of a greater proportion of the cost of supporting the system to the riders.

The options in this proposal that rely disproportionately on raising 7 and 30 day MetroCards and reducing the MetroCard bonus, which has already been eroded over time, would most greatly affect the Transit system's most frequent riders. Two years ago, this Board declined to raise the base fare and instead placed the burden of rising costs on these riders, while tourists' and occasional riders' fares remained stable. This

must not happen again. If more is to be asked from riders, the solution must balance increases in time-based MetroCards and the base fare to moderate its impacts on the system's best customers.

The Chairman has spoken about building "one MTA," and we agree that the resources of the entire MTA system should be used to serve all riders as effectively and efficiently as possible. This means a commitment to increasing the accessibility of the system rather than meeting minimum legal requirements. This also means using all of the assets of the MTA system creatively to transport riders where they need to go.

As we plan and implement a new fare collection system, we call on this Board to make a commitment to breaking down the barriers between MTA agencies and allowing riders to make best use of their services at an affordable fare. We believe that one way this could be done is through a concept that we call the "Freedom Ticket." This new fare would cost more than a standard subway or bus fare but less than a commuter rail fare, allowing a rider to take any combination of bus, subway, and commuter rail routes to make a single trip from point to point within the City.

With expanding commuter rail options and new more flexible fare technology we believe that this concept could be a major step forward for riders. As this concept would affect the planning of service and technology going forward, we ask this Board to now make a positive commitment to riders that our buses, commuter railroads, and subways constitute a single system that is to be used to transport its users as efficiently as possible.

We must not neglect the funding of the MTA system. For many years, we have said that the revenues supporting the MTA and NYC Transit must be stable, reliable, and able to grow to meet increasing costs, and our current funding mix fails to meet this standard. We ask for your commitment as Board members to be forceful advocates with our elected representatives for changes in MTA funding.

The MTA must work with our elected representatives to reconsider the mix of fares, tolls, local support, State subsidies, and federal funding that supports the MTA and to develop a new formula that is fair to all who benefit from the system. As part of this review, our State must also look to create a rational system of vehicle crossing charges that promotes efficient traffic flow and supports the transit system that makes driving feasible. As it is, the toll increases contained in this proposal will only cause drivers to divert to untolled bridges and further distort traffic flow, with more congestion, more pollution, and more fuel use.

We need to ensure that our transit system remains affordable and continues to serve the needs of this region. To meet these objectives, we can do far better than these proposals.