

New York City Transit Riders Council

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Testimony of the New York City Transit Riders Council to the Board of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority on Proposed Fare Increases College of Staten Island Center for the Arts November 28, 2012

Good Evening. My name is William Henderson. I am the Executive Director of the Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA and am speaking on behalf of the New York City Transit Riders Council (NYCTRC), the legislatively mandated representatives of the New York City Transit riders. I'm a Staten Island resident and commute daily using NYC Transit buses and subways as well as the Staten Island Ferry.

Members of the Transit Riders Council testified before this Board at each of the other Boroughs' hearings that the Council cannot support the level of increases in these proposals that rely too heavily on the riders for additional revenues. There has been public discussion in the last few weeks about the statistic that best reflects the level of rider support for the system, but the important thing is that, regardless of the statistic used, MTA and NYC Transit riders pay the highest percentage of the cost of operations of any transit users in the nation. If fare yields increase by 7.5 percent and there are not corresponding increases in subsidies and other support, the burden of supporting the system will steadily shift more greatly onto riders.

The current funding that supports the MTA is not sustainable in the long run, and there must be a wide ranging discussion among all stakeholders, including riders, the MTA, and its governmental funding partners. We must have stable and reliable funding that can grow to meet financial needs. We must ensure that riders, who have met their obligations, appropriately share financial responsibility for the MTA with all of those who benefit from the MTA system. We must wean the Capital Program from its extreme reliance on fare backed bonds, which add 30 years of debt service to the operating budget.

The MTA has made real progress toward breaking down the walls between operating agencies and looking holistically at our transportation system. We continue to call on you to make the fare system and travel more seamless for riders, even if multiple operating agencies are involved. We also need to look at how the MTA is supported by drivers' tolls and rationalize our current system of crossing charges, where some drivers pay nothing and others pay a great deal depending on where they live.

In terms of the fare options that you have proposed, we believe that if fares must be raised, the burden cannot once again fall disproportionately on the system's best customers. Base fares must be adjusted, although we recognize that this will be difficult for some riders. We simply cannot support essentially doubling the cost of a 30-day Metrocard from its original \$63 to \$125 while the base fare increases by 50 percent from \$1.50 to \$2.25 in the same period. If fares are to be increased, a balanced package should retain a MetroCard bonus, modestly increase time-based MetroCard costs, and increase the base fare.

The events of the past month showed the importance of our transit system and we must all work together to make sure that it is affordable and adequately funded.