

**STATEMENT TO THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND
COMMITTEE ON TECHNOLOGY IN GOVERNMENT
October 11, 2007**

My name is William Guild. I am Chair of the Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the Metropolitan Transportation Authority. The PCAC is the coordinating body for three riders councils created by the New York State Legislature in 1981: the Long Island Rail Road Commuters Council (LIRRCC); the Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council (MNRCC); and the New York City Transit Riders Council (NYCTRC).

The councils were created to give users of MTA subway, bus, and commuter rail services a voice in the formulation and implementation of MTA policy and to hold the MTA Board and management accountable to riders. The PCAC and its councils hold regular public meetings and forums, undertake frequent research projects, and maintain a support staff of transportation planning professionals. Since 1995 the PCAC has held a non-voting seat on the MTA Board.

The 38 authorized members of the PCAC are required to be regular users of the MTA system, and serve without pay. Members are appointed by the Governor's office, upon the recommendation of county executives and, for New York City, the mayor, public advocate, and borough presidents.

The PCAC and its constituent Councils, including the Transit Riders Council of which I am a member, support in principle the current initiative to make cell phone service available to subway customers in underground stations. Such service is generally available through the commercial cell phone system on elevated and other above-ground segments of the rapid transit system, as it is on the commuter railroads. Only stations would be equipped for cell phone service below ground; there is no proposal to wire the tunnels between stations, and service would be available only in stations. We understand that equipment and service will be provided by communications firms without cost to the MTA, and with no increased operating expense. Indeed, the system is expected to generate some operating revenue to New York City Transit.

We believe that the convenience of subway customers, who would be able for the first time to communicate in subway stations as they have for years in other public places, clearly outweighs any possible annoyance to other passengers, the main objection we have heard to this proposal. We do

urge New York City Transit to initiate a public advertising campaign to enlighten and inform prospective cell phone users in the subways about the common sense rules of cell phone courtesy, to minimize unnecessary annoyances to fellow subway riders. This advertising campaign should start before cell phone service becomes available in the subway's underground stations.

In addition to routine calls, cell phone infrastructure in the subway's underground stations will enable riders to notify families, employers and others in the event of delays, and also to report emergencies or security issues. Conversely, the MTA and New York City Transit can develop instant messaging and other techniques to supplement existing email service advisories, which currently provide information to subway riders only on routine or planned service changes, and only where email service is available. LIRR's current service alerts and advisories, including notice of major service disruptions, can be sent to any device with an email address – cell phones, pages, mobile PDAs, etc.

The Transit Riders Council urges New York City Transit to proceed forthwith to initiate a system of text-messaging for transit users who sign up, so that close-to-real time text message alerts can be received. Enhanced versions of these services can and should be made available to subway riders on a real time basis by utilizing the wireless infrastructure which will be required to support cell phone use.

We see this as a win-win opportunity and urge the City Council to support the proposal.

WILLIAM K. GUILD, *Chair*
Permanent Citizens Advisory
Committee to the MTA