



PCAC

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PCAC Testimony at the MTA Board Meeting Freedom Ticket Expansion Needed Now More than Ever September 15, 2021

Good morning board members. I am Bradley Brashears, Planning Manager at the Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA (PCAC). I am here to speak in support of expanding commuter rail discounts with transfers to subways and buses, as we detail in our forthcoming report, Freedom Ticket Phase II.

Building on the LIRR's Atlantic Ticket Field Study, which has lowered commuter rail fares at ten select SE Queens and Brooklyn stations, Freedom Ticket Phase II is needed now more than ever. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed travel dynamics and established the need for a more equitable system for riders.

While commuter rail ridership numbers are breaking pandemic records daily, they are still less than half of pre-pandemic levels. And though riders are returning to the system faster than the forecasts by McKinsey & Company, ridership is still expected to reach just 80-90% of pre-pandemic levels by 2024. Even as the region reopens and more people return to school and work, hybrid schedules will likely be the new norm, further compounding changing travel times and patterns.

The Board has signaled an interest in restructuring fares to promote equity and help get riders back on board, while bringing in much-needed revenue for the MTA. This model already exists within the Atlantic Ticket program, which provides weekly ticket options with transfers to subways and buses for the low price of \$60 – a 44% fare reduction when factoring in both commuter rail and subway fares. This allows thousands in SE Queens to reduce their once 2-hour one-way commutes to just 45 minutes. Riders elsewhere in our region deserve the same options. From our pre-pandemic analyses, we know there are available seats; ongoing review continues to prove that to be true. Expansion projects like East Side Access, LIRR's Third Track, and Penn Station Access will provide even more available capacity and flexibility.

The PCAC strongly recommends three overarching actions: One: make the Atlantic Ticket program permanent and improve marketing and purchasing options; Two: expand Freedom Ticket discounts with subway and bus transfers to all city commuter rail stations for both MNR and LIRR; and Three: provide off-peak and reverse peak discount programs in the suburbs as well.

We believe Freedom Ticket will be good for riders, good for the region, and good for the MTA.

Thank you!