

New York City Transit Riders Council
Chair's Report
March 27, 2014

I'm sure that most of you have heard the recent news that 2013 ridership on the subways was at its highest level since 1949. Average weekday ridership for 2013 stood at 5.5 million, which is the highest since 1950, and average weekend ridership was 5.8 million, which is the highest level since these statistics began to be recorded in 1946. As one might expect, 2013 ridership was substantially higher than 2012 because of the days lost during and after Superstorm Sandy, but even adjusting for the days where no subway service operated or no fares were charged, weekday ridership increased 1.6 percent, while weekend ridership increased by 2.5 percent. This is a clear indication of the value of transit to New York City and establishes our system as the leader in the nationwide trend of increasing transit ridership.

With all of this new ridership, the Governor's proposal to take \$40 million from the Metropolitan Mass Transportation Operating Assistance (MMTOA) fund is especially disturbing. Last year, the State raided the MMTOA fund to the tune of \$20 million, but this year the Executive Budget proposes to take twice as much from MMTOA to pay the debt service on MTA State Service Contract bonds. The State promised to pay the debt service on these bonds on behalf of the MTA, and the necessary resources have previously been provided through the State's general fund.

Riders and advocates aren't buying the Governor's justification of this move on the basis that the raided MMTOA funds are being used for transit debt service. Instead they recognize this move as an attempt to use dedicated transit tax revenues to meet a general obligation of the State. The Chairs of the PCAC and its Councils sent a letter to legislative leaders suggesting that they start restoring this raid on MMTOA by providing the MTA with \$14 million in funding for service improvements, which would be equal to the toll relief that will be provided to Verrazano-Narrows Bridge users. In your packets today is an assortment of news and opinion pieces on this issue, and we can discuss it and our response under new business today.

The expansion of technology is continuing at NYC Transit. The Bus Time system is receiving positive reviews since it expanded to all buses in the system earlier this month. We look forward to future expansions and uses of this system. Also, technology is preventing missed transfers between late night and early morning subways and buses at the Stillwell Avenue terminal. Stops for the B36 and B82 buses at the terminal have been outfitted with holding lights that inform bus operators that a train is arriving and that departure should be delayed a few minutes to give riders an opportunity to leave the subway station and make their way to the buses. This system addresses the common frustration of riders who narrowly miss their bus at intermodal transfer points, which is a major issue for those who use multiple travel modes.

Our Council has often discussed the need to generate more non-fare revenue from subway stations. On March 3 ten digital advertising screens went live at stations in Manhattan. One of these screens is installed in the Grand Central subway station near the Chrysler Building, if you want to see one first hand. These screens are the first digital advertising screens placed inside of subway stations and are expected to be an increasingly important part of the advertising mix in stations and critical in increasing revenues, which have more than tripled since 1997.

This system uses the Transit Wireless network to stream real-time content, and this capability is first being shown by using the monitors to provide coverage of the NCAA men's basketball tournament. The monitors will also be available to display information to riders in the event of an emergency, as is the case with advertising displays at station entrances. Digital advertising displays will also be used extensively at the Fulton Center, which is projected to open in June.

We received a response to our request that NYC Transit replace its current height-based child fare rules with an age-based criterion. The response stated that Transit will not return to an age-based criterion because of the complexity of its system, but acknowledged the equity issues that we raised. As a result, Transit has committed to reevaluate its policy to determine whether an adjustment of the height limit for free fares is warranted. A copy of the response is in your packets.

We also received an answer to our question about the process for reporting sidewalks needing to be cleared near subway stations but outside of NYC Transit's area of responsibility. Where an uncleared sidewalk adjoins the NYC Transit property line, but is outside of the three foot area around entrances that NYC Transit is responsible for clearing, the station supervisor or manager informs the City of the problem by a courtesy call via the 311 system. This process would also apply where a rider informs Transit of an icy condition. In this case the station agent or cleaner receiving the report would pass it along to his or her supervisor or manager, who would report the condition via 311. There are also some limited cases where NYC Transit has assumed responsibility for maintaining additional areas around stations by a Memorandum of Understanding, and in these cases NYC Transit does the cleaning.