

New York City Transit Riders Council
Chair's Report
May 22, 2014

As I'm sure you have all heard, the MTA Board yesterday approved New York City Transit's contract with its workers represented by the Transport Workers Union Local 100. I'll discuss this further in the Board Report, but the broad outlines of the settlement are that NYC Transit workers will receive an 8 percent raise over five years extending back to 2012 and some additional health and welfare benefits, but will modestly increase their contribution toward health care costs, from 1.5 to 2.0 percent of base pay. The workers' ratification of the agreement by a large margin was confirmed on Monday and the MTA Board approved the contract at yesterday's meeting.

Earlier this month, Edith Prentiss, Chris Greif, Ken Stewart and Karyl Berger were asked to give input into proposed new destination signs for Select Bus Service (SBS) buses. As you recall, last year there were challenges to the use of the blue blinking lights that had designated SBS buses from the beginning of the program. The issue was that the use of blue lights on vehicles is reserved in State law for volunteer firefighters, and although there are only a few volunteer fire companies within the five Boroughs, elected officials who are generally considered hostile to SBS complained. As a result, NYC Transit disabled the blue lights on SBS vehicles.

As an alternative, NYC Transit has designed a new style of destination sign that is intended to be very visible from a distance and very clear in displaying the route. This group was asked by the Department of Buses to comment on these signs and found that they achieve these objectives.

While at the presentation of the new signs, the group also discussed with Department of Buses staff proposed signage for the interior of buses to display the bus number. The group recommended that this signage have white lettering on a black background to provide high contrast, as the sign would be placed on a partition next to the front bus steps or directly behind the bus operator's seat. Transit staff took the group's input and will contact us for further comments when they have developed signage having these features.

Also this month, Edith Prentiss, Chris Greif and Karyl Berger attended NYC Transit's ADA Compliance Coordinating Committee. The main topic of discussion was the changes that have been implemented in the Access-A-Ride program over the past year. As you may know, the MTA has been tightening procedures for establishing eligibility and strictly tailoring the paratransit services provided to a user's assessment. As a result, some riders who might have received a door to door paratransit ride in the past are now offered transportation to a nearby accessible subway station. In large part because of these changes, the growth rate in paratransit usage has dropped dramatically.

At this meeting Griselda Cespedes, NYC Transit's ADA Program Officer – Capital Program Management announced that as a result of the NYCTRC report *Bridging the Gap: It is Further Than You Think*, NYC Transit is looking at different options for signage and markings identifying boarding areas for wheelchair users on subway platforms. Ms. Cespedes stated that she would contact us for our input when they have identified workable solutions.

On Friday, May 2, Queens subway riders had a shock when an F train derailed in Woodside. The derailment affected service through the weekend, but normal E and F line service was restored in time for Monday's rush hour. The cause of the derailment is still under investigation, but Transit is focusing on a broken rail found at the site of the accident as a potential cause. In spite of the difficult situation, first responders and NYC Transit personnel did an excellent job of evacuating the affected train and directing other riders to alternative transportation. Chris Grief was on the scene that morning, and we can discuss the matter further under New Business.

On May 9 our member Edith Prentiss attended the ribbon cutting for new ADA improvements at the Forest Hills-71st Avenue station. The improvements allow riders needing an accessible station to access both the northbound and southbound platforms of the station and include ADA boarding areas with tactile warning strips and signage, and reconstructed platform edges to comply with all ADA requirements. This opening brings the number of ADA accessible stations to 12 in Queens and 81 in the New York City Transit system as a whole. Next on the agenda is a project to add accessibility at the Ozone Park-Lefferts Blvd station on the A line, scheduled for completion in 2016.

We can look forward to hearing some new voices, and instruments for that matter, in the subways. On May 13 the Music Under New York program held auditions for performers for the following year. While we have raised issues about performers in the subways, they have not involved those involved with Music Under New York, as they perform in specially selected areas that do not impede the transportation function of the stations. We're looking forward to seeing the next Ebony Hillbillies or saw player among the 20 groups and individuals that will be added to the Music Under New York roster from these auditions.

This past Friday, Bill Henderson and Karyl Berger attended a discussion between former MTA Executive Director Lee Sander and Richard Ravitch at NYU's Rudin Center. The occasion for the event was the release of Mr. Ravitch's new book *So Much to Do: A full Life of Business, Politics and Confronting Fiscal Crises*. Mr. Ravitch recounted his time as MTA Chairman and his work on creating a stable funding package for the MTA in 2008, along with comments on the current challenges faced by the MTA, especially with regard to funding capital improvement needs. Mr. Ravitch remains a plain speaking advocate for the MTA

system and his viewpoint is valuable as we move toward the next Capital Program.

Also on Friday, Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney joined MTA Capital Construction President Michael Horodniceanu and City and State elected officials to give an update on the progress of the first phase of the Second Avenue Subway. The update was good news, as the project is under budget and on schedule, with a projected completion date of December 2016. The project is currently about 65 percent complete. Our member Trudy Mason was instrumental in organizing the update and Bill Henderson attended the event.

For many years we have been calling for a new fare collection system on NYC Transit, and it seems that we will be waiting until at least 2016, if not later, for a new fare system, with a possibility that MetroCard could be with us until 2023. A presentation given at Monday's Capital Program Oversight Committee meeting is included in your packets today. We can discuss this under Old Business, but we are currently several years from the selection of a vendor to supply a new system and operating on a schedule that the Board's Independent Engineering Consultant regards as very aggressive and subject to delay.

Finally, riders' calls for increased service seem to be gathering momentum. NYC Transit announced plans to increase service on the L and M lines this fall, supplementing the already announced service enhancements on these lines. You have a copy of the announcement in your packets today, but the increased weekend and evening service on the L and weekday service on the M will be welcome relief for Brooklyn and Queens riders. There are also efforts to increase service at the Board level, and I'll touch on those in my Board Report.