

**New York City Transit Riders Council
PCAC Meeting
Chair's Report-Andrew Albert
June 12, 2014**

At its May meeting, the MTA Board approved New York City Transit's contract with its workers represented by the Transport Workers Union Local 100. 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.

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 remove \$40 million from the Metropolitan Mass Transportation Operating Assistance (MMTOA) fund was especially disturbing. Last year, the State raided the MMTOA fund to the tune of \$20 million, but this year the Executive Budget proposed to take twice as much from MMTOA to pay debt service on MTA State Service Contract bonds. The State promised to service these bonds on behalf of the MTA, and the necessary resources have previously been provided through the State's general fund. Riders and advocates recognized this move as an attempt to use dedicated transit tax revenues to meet a general obligation of the State. Ultimately, \$30 million was taken from the fund for the current budget year, but this is of little comfort to riders who need additional service.

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 in March. 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. This 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 was first 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 will open in late 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.

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.

NYC Transit is proposing two new bus services. One of these is a West Side Manhattan route operating between Columbus Circle and the West Village. The second is a new express route operating between Eltingville on Staten Island and Midtown Manhattan. Both routes are planned to begin operations in September 2014. The MTA held a public hearing, which I attended, to receive comments on these proposed services and weekend service improvements to the existing M8, Q31, and the Q77 routes on May 14.

NYC Transit opened new B44 SBS stations at Avenue L and Gates Avenue in response to pressure from the public and elected officials for additional SBS stops in the Nostrand Avenue corridor. Unfortunately, at the scheduled opening of the stations on April 21,

off-board fare machines at the stations were not yet operational, making it necessary for SBS buses to transport passengers to the next stop with a functioning fare machine so that they could pay their fares for a period of about a week.

At our April meeting we had a question about the selection of Kone as the suppliers of the escalators and inclined elevators for the 7 extension project. The choice of Kone was made via a subcontract with the prime contractor for the station, an EE Cruz and Tully joint venture. The responsibility for selecting subcontractors, and the risk if they do not perform, falls to the prime contractor for the project, who may be subject to liquidated damages for delays as specified in the contract.

In May, 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 may 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, at least when they are not in bright sunlight. 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 NYCTRC for further comments when they have developed signage having these features.

Also in May 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 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. Chris Greif plans to attend NYC Transit's official opening of the elevators at the Utica Avenue station on the A and C lines later this week, although riders have had the pleasure of using these elevators since late May. 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.

On May 16 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. Bill Henderson and Trudy Mason, who helped organize the event, were in attendance.

The M60 bus line was converted to Select Bus Service status on Sunday, May 25. Many of you may be familiar with the M60 as the 125th Street bus to LaGuardia Airport. If you've ever used the previous local service, you know that the speed and reliability left something to be desired. The conversion to SBS is an attempt to improve the experience for airport travelers and others who are making longer trips in the corridor. Unfortunately, the bus lanes for the service extend only as far west as Lenox Avenue, limiting the efficiency of the service.

On May 30, Bill Henderson represented the NYCTRC at the Brooklyn Developmental Disabilities Council's Family Support Fair. Chris Grief works with the Council and played a major role in organizing the Fair.