

**Testimony of the Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council
Before the MTA Board on Proposals for Fare and Crossing Charges and
Service, Station, and Administrative Changes
Westchester County Center, White Plains, NY
January 28, 2009**

Good Evening. My name is Douglas McKean. I am a member of the Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council (MNRCC), the legislatively mandated representatives of the Metro-North Railroad riders. Over the past 25 years, Metro-North has risen from a collection of castoff passenger lines to a preeminent position among American railroads. Our members are alarmed that you would consider implementing the proposals before you, which are a direct threat to Metro-North's outstanding reputation and its contributions to the economy and quality of life of our region and State.

The Council stands strongly opposed to the proposed fare increases, both in percentage and absolute terms. Under these proposals monthly tickets would increase by as much as \$106, resulting in a monthly ticket price as high as \$478. Buyers of other types of tickets would face harsh increases, generally in the range of 25 to 28 percent. While we understand the serious budget shortfall that confronts the MTA, these proposals go far beyond the increases for which any prudent customer would reasonably have planned and will impose a severe financial burden on many customers, especially given the short time since the last fare increase and the current economic conditions facing the region and nation.

The Council is also extremely concerned about those Metro-North commuters who will be burdened with two fare increases, as many also use NYC Transit to complete their trips. According to Metro-North, 44 percent of Railroad customers also use NYC Transit services, and under this proposal they will incur substantial increases in the both their railroad and transit fares. Our Council is worried that the hardships created by these extreme fare increases could derail the Railroad's long term trend of substantial increases in ridership.

In addition, the Council feels very strongly that the Railroad can ill afford to implement the customer service and maintenance reductions contained in this

proposal, as they would seriously compromise the quality of service which customers have come to expect. We are concerned that deferred maintenance may never be restored to its proper schedule and that reducing the materials, equipment, and staffing available for maintenance will compromise the quality of service far out of proportion to the marginal cost savings achieved. We reject the suggestion that this strategy is an acceptable way to control costs.

Beyond maintenance deferrals, the MNRCC is troubled by the proposed elimination of the eleven car cleaning positions, which will require changing the cleaning cycle from 60 to 90 days; and, the proposed elimination of two station cleaning positions, which will mean that there will be no cleaning service on weekends on the Harlem and New Haven lines. We are concerned that increased loading standards and reductions in the number of cars per train will damage the riding experience, and that closures of ticket offices, reduced ticket window hours, reduced customer information staffing, and deferral of credit and debit card acceptance for on board sales will make using Metro-North far less convenient and attractive.

Worst of all, the reductions in this proposal threaten to degrade the quality of life in Metro-North's crown jewel, Grand Central Terminal. Whether we are discussing the closure of the Grand Central North Station Master's office, deferred maintenance, reductions in cleaning in the Terminal, or closures of ticket windows, this proposal fails to appreciate the value of Grand Central Terminal to the Railroad and its central position in building the identity of Metro-North. To sacrifice this asset for a few dollars of savings is a poor bargain indeed.

We know that this Board does not totally control its financial destiny. For that reason our Council is reaching out to our representatives in the State Assembly and Senate, who for many years have failed to provide necessary funding for the MTA and its operating agencies. We are urging them to enact a funding package that will meet the long term operating and capital needs of Metro-North and the MTA. We will be forceful, and we demand that you be forceful, in seeking the resources that will allow Metro-North to fulfill its potential in serving our communities, our region and our State.