

**Testimony of the New York City Transit Riders Council to the
Board of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority
On Proposed Fare Increases and Service Reductions
Lovinger Theatre, Lehman College, Bronx, NY
February 4, 2009**

My name is Jessica Gonzalez-Rojas and I am a member of the New York City Transit Riders Council (NYCTRC). The Council was created in 1981 to represent the users of the New York City Transit system and consists of fifteen volunteer members appointed by the Governor upon the recommendation of the Mayor, the Public Advocate and the five Borough Presidents.

As representatives of transit riders in New York City we find the proposed fare increases and service cuts that are before you to be unacceptable. We also know that in the face of inadequate funding this Board has little choice but to propose substantial fare increases, but this reality does not make the fare increases any more acceptable. It is particularly offensive to hold paratransit customers, many of whom can scarcely afford their current cost of travel, hostage to a potential \$6.00 fare. We have called and will continue to call forcefully upon our elected representatives to support new funding sources for the MTA that will ensure that these unacceptable fare increases will no longer be necessary. We demand that each MTA Board member does the same.

On top of the proposed fare increases under consideration, the Bronx faces substantial service cuts as well under these proposals. We are definitely not in favor of these fare increases, but we are even more concerned that the services that riders depend upon would be eliminated or severely reduced under these proposals. In the Bronx, not only would entire neighborhoods would lose critical services, but service cuts in other parts of the City would also have a major impact on the Borough's transit users. Transit in New York City is a system, and you cannot compromise major elements of the system without damaging the whole. New Yorkers depend on transit to get around the City twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. This level of service that is proposed is simply not adequate for a city that is open for business at all hours.

The severe service cuts proposed in off-peak hours are a serious threat to the safety and reliability of the system. Extending waiting time between trains to 30 minutes in the overnight hours on some lines would make the system all but unusable. Would you

choose to enter a desolate subway station in the early morning hours, knowing that your wait for the next train could be as long as half an hour? Combine these new schedules with the elimination of five bus lines, full or partial weekend service on three others, and late night service on another line, and you are making overnight transit service in the Bronx an even more unpredictable and daunting experience. In the midday and evening off peak hours, increases in loading guidelines would mean fewer and more crowded trains on the lettered "B Division" lines. Increasing use of transit instead of automobiles is a positive way of reducing pollution and its health impacts, but reducing service will cause riders to seek other means of transportation. Is that what we want to do?

We are also greatly disturbed that our subway stations will become even more lonely and dirty under these proposals. Eliminating Station Customer Assistant and agent positions may make sense on paper where there is a staffed booth elsewhere in a station, but in reality that staffed booth may be far from much of the station and not accessible without returning to street level and locating the appropriate station entrance. Many stations in the subway system already suffer from a lack of human presence, and reducing staffing will only exacerbate this condition. In addition, experience has shown that reduced station area track cleaning will lead to increased flooding and track fires. It is important to take into account the costs that these delays will incur before adding up the savings from these actions.

We fully support increasing efficiency in the system, but these proposals cut muscle and bone rather than fat. When NYC Transit justifies eliminating services like the Bx34 bus on the grounds that there are subway lines in the area of this bus route, it ignores the fact that these buses and subways often serve distinct groups of users. Many bus riders are unable to use the subway system due to mobility constraints, and the subway system is far from fully accessible. The sad fact is that these ill considered cuts do not even make a large dent in the MTA's deficit, as in 2009 they close less than 5 percent of the \$1.2 billion hole in the Authority's finances. For example, eliminating summer shuttle bus service from the 6 line Hunts Point Station to the Barretto Park Pool would save only \$62,000 but would be a major blow to pool users.

The New York City Transit Riders Council calls upon this Board to consider the resources that are needed to provide an acceptable level of service and to take decisive action to pursue these resources. We reject a budget that raises fares dramatically only to keep the transit system on life support.