

New York City Transit Riders Council

347 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10017 • 212/878-7087 • Fax 212/878-7461
E-mail: mail@pcac.org • World Wide Web: <http://www.pcac.org>

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Testimony of the New York City Transit Riders Council to the Board of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority on Proposed Fare Increases St. George Theater Staten Island, NY September 16, 2010

My name is William Henderson and I am the Executive Director of the New York City Transit Riders Council (NYCTRC). The Council was created in 1981 to represent the riders 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 Boroughs.

As our Council has already noted, we are generally opposed to the fare proposals before you and I won't repeat our reasons for opposition. Tonight I want to talk about a few aspects of the proposals and some actions that could lessen their impact on the riders.

We have already stated our opposition to caps on the number of rides available for 7 and 30 day MetroCards. This element of the fare proposal seemingly ignores the fact that many riders face daily commutes that require the equivalent of two fares, in some cases caused by this year's service cuts. Other riders have situations that require them to interrupt their trips to work. For these riders, the unlimited time based cards work well, but the cap will not work for them. Consider a parent who drops off and picks up a child on the way to and from work. If a transfer between buses or between bus and subway is needed at a location other than the child's school, a complete one way trip requires the equivalent of two fares. In a month with 22 workdays, this would use 88 of a 30 day MetroCard users 90 trips, leaving virtually nothing for other travel.

Elimination of two fare zones was a great policy that paved the way for the ridership boom of the past two decades. We believe that the time is now right to look at a system of transfers that is based on time, rather than on the number of segments in a trip, similar to those used in many transit systems. Our belief is that to penalize the rider for a mismatch between transit routes and his or her origin and destination is to add insult to injury. A shift to time based transfers

would benefit pay per ride riders, as well as capped time based MetroCard holders. NYC Transit uses special rules to provide an additional transfer in several cases, such as the M10/M20 bus and Staten Island Rapid Transit. We believe the time is now to use time based transfers to accommodate all who require a three legged trip in traveling to their destination.

Another way of making service more flexible is to expand the CityTicket program, which at the urging of the PCAC created a special fare for off-peak commuter rail trips within New York City. Currently this fare is available only on weekends, but we advocate its expansion to off peak hours generally. The Council has frequently raised this idea in the form of a “freedom ticket” that would allow riders to use the most appropriate MTA service to reach their destinations within New York City. Such an initiative could provide more convenient and flexible travel for riders, many of whom are in areas lightly served by transit, at a modest premium over NYC Transit fares.

The fare proposal also provides for additional charges for purchasing fares on a single ride ticket or new MetroCard. While we agree that reducing litter and avoiding the cost of issuing new MetroCards are worthy objectives, we believe that these charges far exceed costs and could have unanticipated consequences, such as increased number of riders seeking to exchange old cards for new after a misswipe in a turnstile or misread in a bus farebox. The MTA’s energies would be more productively spent to speed progress toward a smart card based fare system, which would make issues of litter and new cards largely moot. Transition to a smart card system would also open the discussion to a whole new universe of fare products, such as daily maximum charges, which could stimulate ridership while improving the rider’s experience.

There is a rich history at the MTA of introducing innovations to benefit the rider in conjunction with fare increases. The bonus applied to pay per ride MetroCards is one example of this. We encourage you to consider changes that can make the system more flexible to riders while increasing efficiency and encouraging increased ridership in periods where system capacity is available.