

**Statement of the Long Island Rail Road Commuter's Council
to the
MTA Long Island Committee**

December 10, 2008

Good morning, I am William Henderson, the Executive Director of the Long Island Rail Road Commuter's Council, which was created by the State Legislature in 1981 to serve as the representative of Long Island Rail Road riders.

The Council is dismayed by the proposed 2009 MTA budget and its impacts on the Long Island Rail Road. The proposed 23 percent fare yield increase has received the most attention in the press, but we believe that this budget contains a number of other alarming actions that could degrade the quality of service on the Rail Road both now and far into the future.

The proposed fare increase that would follow from the adoption of this budget is a body blow to Long Island commuters and other Rail Road riders. At a time that many Long Islanders are struggling to remain afloat financially, this budget is not a life preserver but an anchor thrown their way. A fare increase of this size could truly leave many without viable choices, unable to afford the commute to travel to the job that they need to survive.

As for the proposed service reductions, we may at some point see a decline in ridership that justifies changes in schedules, but the fact remains that through October, we haven't seen that decline yet. Even if ridership edges lower, the packed trains that commuters see every day is testimony to the high levels of ridership that we will still have. If these cuts will be made on less crowded services, we ask where the displaced riders will go. It is likely that they will shift to the already overtaxed remaining trains.

Although they do not have the same immediate impact, we are equally concerned with the deferrals of maintenance that are part of this proposal. You cannot tell us that reducing graffiti removal and station maintenance, eliminating bridge painting with operating funds, reducing right-of-way maintenance, cutting back on toilet maintenance and repair crews, and extending M7 maintenance cycles to the point of that federal waivers are required will not impact the quality of service. We have no desire to go back to the bad old days, and if the quality of service on the LIRR declines, it will greatly harm Long Island's ability to attract new economic activity, to maintain property values, and to retain and attract residents, especially Long Island's young people, whom the area is losing at an alarming rate.

To the members of the members of this Board we say that we expect more than a statement that there is no other choice; we expect you to vigorously seek other solutions. To our elected officials, who recently said that they should be asked for additional resources for transit, we are now demanding that help. We stand at a crossroads, and it is vital that immediate action be taken to preserve the future of Long Island and of our region.