

**Statement of the Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council
Before the MTA Board Metro-North Committee
December 15, 2008**

I am William Henderson, Executive Director of the Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council. The MNRCC, which was established in 1981, is the legislatively mandated representative of Metro-North Railroad riders.

The Council is very concerned by the proposed 2009 MTA Budget. This budget is a serious threat to the efficient, high quality, and affordable service that riders have grown to expect from Metro-North. In its first quarter century, Metro-North's management and staff have transformed a collection of failing commuter lines into a leader among American railroads. Riders want Metro-North to maintain its leadership, but this will require resources not provided in the MTA's proposed 2009 budget.

We have a number of concerns with the proposed budget. The issue that has received the most public attention is the stunning 23 percent fare yield increase that would take effect in June 2009. In today's economic climate, increasing fares will be a very bitter pill for many to swallow. This situation is made all the more difficult because raising fare yields by 23 percent will require a fare increase that is several percentage points greater, to account for ridership losses resulting from increased fares.

The Council is also concerned with proposed reductions in funding for the customer amenities and service that has set Metro-North apart. Reductions in station and Grand Central Terminal cleaning, closing the Grand Central North Station Master office and outlying ticket offices, and reducing ticket window hours do not affect train schedules, but these cuts do impact the quality of service provided. Coupled with actual service reductions contained in the proposed budget, the measures that have been developed to respond to the MTA budget deficit represent definite erosion in the quality of service.

These proposals come at a particularly inopportune time. Metro-North's track record has allowed it to capture the a large share of the commutation market from the northern suburbs to Manhattan, and the Railroad is now developing additional markets such as reverse peak service and inbound service from the Bronx. With the help of connecting services such as the Ulster Link buses, new

riders are finding Metro-North. In order to continue to attract new riders and improve linkages throughout our region and beyond, adequate resources must be made available. The Council is disappointed to conclude that the State has failed to provide sufficient funding for Metro-North to fulfill its potential.

We understand the need to approve a self sustaining budget, but we expect more from this Board than a statement that there is no choice other than to reduce service and increase fares. The time is short for Board members and MTA management to vigorously make the case to our elected officials for additional funding. We will be making this case and hope that we can work together. Now is the time for our elected representatives who have long stated their support for Metro-North to step forward and provide the funding that is needed to maintain quality service.

We appreciate the opportunity to present our views. Thank you for your time and attention.