

**Statement of the New York City Transit Riders Council
Before the MTA Board NYC Transit Committee
December 15, 2008**

I am William Henderson, Executive Director of the New York City Transit Riders Council. The NYCTRC, 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. The 23 percent fare yield increase contained in the proposed 2009 budget, which would result in somewhat larger increases in actual fares, is horrible news for the riders of NYC Transit. But this is not the only bad news in this budget. Express bus riders' fares would increase by 50 percent, from a base fare of \$5.00 to a base fare of \$7.50. Paratransit users would have it even worse, as their fares are proposed to be set at 200 percent of the cash transit fare. This would double these riders' costs even if there were no general fare increase, and in concert with a the level of fare increases contemplated in this proposed budget would result in paratransit users paying about two and one half times their present fare.

The closing of part time station booths and elimination of Station Customer Assistants (SCAs) raises serious concerns for many riders. Although the stated justification for eliminating the SCA is program is the low level of customer contact that these employees have, we submit that they provide an important presence in the subway system and that if they are not effective, the answer lies in improved management of the program, rather than its elimination. The closing of some station booths likewise eliminates an important human presence in the system. In many stations and complexes, a single full-time booth is simply not sufficient.

The most alarming element of the proposed 2009 budget, however, is its proposed service reductions. I don't have enough time here to comment on each of them, but a great strength of the NYC Transit system is that it provides options for riders having a variety of needs, resources, and abilities, and these proposed service cuts diminish our transit system.

As former MTA Chairman Richard Ravitch noted in his testimony before the New York State Assembly Committee on Corporations, Authorities, and Commissions last Thursday, service decisions have not been made on a strict cost per passenger basis, and there are legitimate reasons for not doing so. Some lesser used bus routes serve neighborhoods where residents have few other transportation options, and overnight service, while not carrying the passenger loads of rush hour buses and trains, is critical to the workers who need to reach their places of employment. Bus routes that appear to be redundant may in fact serve those who find it difficult or impossible to use the subway system because of its lack of accessibility.

As our sister councils have stated, we expect more than a statement that there is no choice. We expect Board members and MTA management to vigorously make the case for additional funding to our elected officials. This Council will be actively making this case and hope to work with you in this effort.