

Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council

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Testimony of the Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council to the Board of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority on Proposed Fare Increases Hilton Garden Inn, Newburgh, NY November 14, 2012

Good Evening. My name is Richard Cataggio. I am a member of the Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council (MNRCC), the legislatively mandated representatives of Metro-North Railroad riders. I was appointed to the Council by the Governor, representing Orange County. I ride the Port Jervis Line, as well as the Hudson Line.

The job that Metro-North did in restoring service following the recent storm was truly exceptional. Recovery West of the Hudson was slowed by major damage to the overall NJ TRANSIT system, but many West of Hudson commuters were able to use Hudson Line service, which was restored more quickly than we expected upon hearing the reports of damage. I want to extend thanks to all Metro-North staff for putting the riders first and bringing the system back for those who rely on it.

Even before this area sustained a serious economic blow from Hurricane Sandy, our Council had serious concerns about the affordability of these fare proposals. Many of our fellow riders are struggling economically. They certainly have not received large salary increases and may have seen their earnings reduced. They may have faced job losses and may now be unemployed or underemployed. This is simply not the right climate in which to raise Metro-North fares an average of 8 to 9 percent, particularly since many of our riders will also face increases to the NYC Transit fares that they must pay to reach their final destinations. Further, depending on NJ TRANSIT's actions, West of Hudson riders could face further increases in the future. These increases represent real hardships for our fellow riders.

We are also concerned that riders are bearing more than their fair share of increasing operating costs. Metro-North riders pay the highest percentage of operating-related expenditures of any of MTA's operating agencies and, with fares making up 59.6 percent of operating expenditures last year, Metro-North riders' support was higher than any other large transit agency nationally. It also significantly exceeded the average figure for large U.S. transit agencies of 38 percent. These fare increases, if the MTA's other sources of support do not provide additional resources, will only result in riders bearing a greater percentage of operating expenditures.

We are not opposed to riders paying their share of operating costs. In fact, we have for many years advocated that any necessary fare increases should be structured so that they

are regular and moderate and provide for riders to pay their fair share of increasing operating costs. The MNRCC firmly believes that those who benefit from the system should pay for its support. This includes riders, but also property owners, businesses, and the wide range of New Yorkers who share in the economic benefits of the MTA system.

The MNRCC believes that we need to fundamentally reexamine how the MTA is funded. We have consistently held that the MTA's funding sources must be stable, reliable, and able to grow to meet increasing costs. We believe that with funding cuts, unpopular taxes under attack, and dramatic drops in revenue from some sources our present funding mix is failing this test, and we ask for your commitment as Board members to work for funding that meets this standard.

Until MTA funding can be improved, we ask that this Board to commit to do all you can to ease the burden on our riders and hold the line on other commuting costs that it can control, such as station parking. We also ask you to consider creative changes in the fare structure that will attract new riders and make the system more useable for the people of the region. For example, one roadblock to using Metro-North as an alternative in areas of New York City without convenient subway service is that, even though riders pay a higher fare for a premium service, getting to a final destination may require an additional NYC Transit fare, making it unaffordable.

We believe that Metro-North provides excellent service and the past weeks have demonstrated that the Railroad is an exceptional organization. MNRCC asks that you heed our comments as we work toward a financial structure that is fair and equitable for all who benefit from Metro-North Railroad and the MTA system as a whole.