

New York City Transit Riders Council

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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 NY Marriott at the Brooklyn Bridge November 7, 2012

Good Evening. My name is Stuart Goldstein. I am a member of the New York City Transit Riders Council (NYCTRC), the legislatively mandated representatives of the New York City Transit riders. I am a Brooklyn resident and daily subway commuter, appointed to the Council by the Governor on the recommendation of the Mayor.

We believe that the level of increases contained in this proposal is unjust to the users of the NYC Transit system. MTA riders already pay the highest percentage of the cost of their rides of any transit users in the nation, for subway riders 72 percent of the operating expenditures required to provide service. In contrast, the average figure for large US transit systems is 38 percent. An increase of fares in excess of 7.5 percent will reinforce a shift of more and more of the burden of supporting the system to the riders.

The Council recognizes that this proposal follows from a 2009 understanding between the MTA and State that riders, drivers, and the State would all contribute to resolve the funding crisis caused by plunging subsidies in a soft economy and to avoid crippling service cuts. Within a short time, the new funding sources were generating less than State projections and were under attack by lawmakers, the State was taking \$243 million in existing funding from the MTA, and the ill-advised service cuts of 2010 had begun. Only the riders kept up their end of the bargain, saddled with fare increases that far exceeded the inflation rate.

We acknowledge that riders share responsibility for funding increased operating costs. When riders are called upon to pay their share in bridging the gap between rising costs and revenues, however, this Board must understand that any increases will most greatly affect the NYC Transit system's most frequent riders and must ensure that these riders are protected as much as is possible.

Two years ago, this Board declined to raise the base fare, but placed the burden of fare increases on riders using 7 day and 30 day MetroCards and purchasers of bonus MetroCards. Tourists and occasional riders saw stable fares while daily commuters faced double digit cost increases. We have seen the MetroCard bonus eroded over the years, increasing the burden

on the regular riders who pay by the ride. This cannot happen again. If more is to be asked from riders, any fare increase must include adjustments to the base fare to moderate its impacts on the system's best customers.

We also need to have an MTA fare structure that makes sense. In our present fare system, there is more interoperability between NYC Transit and Westchester County's Bee Line system than between Transit and the MTA's other operating agencies. In Brooklyn we have Long Island Rail Road service that has the potential to serve many more riders than it presently does. The problem is that, especially when riders must pay a fare to travel to or from a commuter rail station, using the LIRR may be unaffordable, forcing riders to choose less direct and efficient routes that nonetheless require only one Transit fare.

The time is right to institute a new fare to allow riders to use any MTA service to travel from point to point within a given area. We call our concept the Freedom Ticket, and it would, at a cost that is greater than a standard subway fare but less than a commuter rail fare, allow a rider to take any combination of bus, subway, and commuter rail routes to travel from point to point within the City. We believe that, particularly as commuter rail options expand and new fare technology is implemented in the coming years, this concept is workable at all times on all days. The time to start is now with a positive commitment from this Board that our buses, commuter railroads, and subways constitute a single system that should be used to transport riders as efficiently as possible.

For many years, we have said that the revenues supporting the MTA and NYC Transit must be stable, reliable, and able to grow to meet increasing costs, but our current mix of funding does not meet this standard, in fact \$1.8 billion in annual State funding has been ruled to be unconstitutionally enacted. The MTA must work with our elected representatives to reconsider this mix of fares, tolls, local support, State subsidies, and federal funding and arrive at a formula that is fair to all who benefit from the system. Our Council asks this Board to join us in pressing this issue with our elected leaders.

We note that the toll increases in this proposal are likely to further distort traffic flow and result in more congestion, more pollution and more fuel use as drivers increasingly divert to untolled river crossings to avoid the higher charges. The time is now to take a fresh look at a rational system of crossing charges that promotes efficient traffic flow and supports the transit system that makes driving feasible. Everything must be on the table to ensure that transit remains affordable.