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 **Hostos Community College Center for the Arts and Culture** Bronx, NY November 13, 2012

Good Evening. My name is Christopher D Greif. I am a member of the New York City Transit Riders Council (NYCTRC), the legislatively mandated representatives of the New York City Transit riders.

These proposed fare increases are an unjust burden on New York City's transit riders. We pay the highest percentage of the cost of providing transit in the nation, but since 2009 riders are being hit with fare increases that are far greater than the rate of inflation and certainly greater than increases in riders' incomes. Transit riders are being called upon to support more and more of the cost of running the system, and this is a hardship for many of us.

While we have been paying more since 2009, the State cut \$243 million in MTA funding, making the 2010 service cuts necessary. Riders should carry part of the load of increasing operating costs, but others that gain from the system, such as property owners, businesses, drivers, and all in the State and region who benefit from the economic advantages of our transit system, should contribute more as well.

Recent fare increases hit the Transit system's frequent riders hardest. When the 30 Day Unlimited MetroCard was introduced in 1998, it cost \$63. One proposal you are considering would raise this to \$125, only one dollar less than twice its original cost. This same proposal holds the base fare at \$2.25, 50 percent higher than it was in 1998. We don't want either Unlimited MetroCard prices or the base fare to increase, but if there has to be an increase, it must be balanced so that we don't have a situation where occasional riders and tourists pay no more, while the system's best customers face double digit percentage fare increases.

We also need to have less separation between the MTA's operating agencies. Here in the Bronx, there has been strong growth in Metro-North Railroad ridership, especially in areas near Metro-North stations but not convenient to subways. People are excited about the possibility of more commuter rail service in the future. The problem is that, while you can use a MetroCard for a trip that combines BeeLine buses in Westchester and NYC Transit, to take

a trip that uses both Transit and Metro-North to reach a destination means you have to purchase separate fares on both services. This doesn't make sense and can be expensive. We believe that riders should be able to use the MTA services that take them from point to point most efficiently, and to do this at an affordable fare.

Because a new fare system will take planning, we need to start working on better coordination of MTA agencies and fares now. Our Council has talked about a "Freedom Ticket" that would allow riders to choose the most efficient routing for a trip using any MTA service, and we are ready to work with you in further developing this concept.

Finally, we should not forget that fares and service are often threatened because of the way that the MTA is funded. The NYCTRC believes that funding should be stable, reliable, and able to rise to meet increasing costs. There are many problems with the funding mix that supports the MTA and its agencies. Some sources vary wildly in the money that they provide, depending on the health of the real estate market. Other taxes and fees that provide a large percentage of the MTA's funding are unpopular with many elected officials and residents in the region and are being challenged in court.

The MTA receives some funding through bridge and tunnel tolls, but often drivers wait in traffic to use nearby untolled crossings. The toll increases in this proposal will only cause more congestion, more pollution, and more energy use as more and more drivers find these tolls unaffordable and try to avoid them. We need to look at this system and make it more rational.

We must have a better mix of funding for transit and ask the members of this Board to advocate for change with our elected representatives, just as our Council will do. We must make sure that transit remains affordable and provides the service that our City needs.