

**Statement of PCAC Chair William Guild
On
NYC Transit's Rider Report Card Initiative**

Committee on Transportation
Council of the City of New York

January 10, 2008
10:00 a.m.
14th Floor Hearing Room
250 Broadway, NY

Good morning. I'm William Guild, Chair of the Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA and I want to thank you for the opportunity to comment on New York City Transit's Rider Report Card initiative.

Let me begin by saying that PCAC supports any effort to gather feedback from Transit riders and address identified problems. It is always good to have as much information as possible. However, we have reservations about the ultimate effectiveness of the Rider Report Card program.

Our first concern is with process. PCAC and the Transit Riders Council are legislatively mandated advisory bodies representing riders. While we were given the opportunity to review the draft survey instrument, the NYC Transit Riders Council was not invited to participate in the planning or execution of the surveys, analysis of results, or devising solutions to exposed issues. This "top down" approach with lack of input from those affected is uncomfortable at best.

Secondly, the methodology used does not lend itself to unbiased results. Respondents are a self-selecting universe and those most motivated to fill out a survey instrument are those with complaints. There is nothing to prevent a REALLY frustrated straphanger from filling out multiple report cards. Also the distribution of surveys in the atmosphere of a proposed fare increase could have easily fueled these feelings of dissatisfaction. When the NYCTRC asked Transit about statistical analysis, we were told that there would no adjustment or control for "ballot stuffing."

Third, we feel that the letter grades given to line performance are essentially meaningless. There's no grading standard or "curve." As we just pointed out, simple mean calculations will be skewed by repeat voters. We also objected to the categories of "pretty good" and "not so good" as too vague and

recommended simplifying the measures to “Good”, “Satisfactory” and “Unsatisfactory.” These choices are clearly understood and are quite adequate for general trend analysis. Further, an abbreviated choice selection would possibly entice more riders to respond.

Our final observations are related to the actions taken to date in response to rider concerns: Specifically, increasing service on the 7 line during “shoulder” hours and creating line managers for the 7 and L subway routes.

We feel that the increase in service on the 7 line during the hour before and after rush hours, the so-called “shoulder” periods, is an excellent move and we will monitor its usage. If riders in significant numbers elect to travel earlier or later to take advantage of the extra elbow room, this could be a model for other lines now operating at capacity at the peak of the peak. Of course, more service will cost money. If there are not enough resources to provide this additional service across the system, a fundamental inequity will result that no amount of platform sweeping is going to solve or hide.

On the other hand, we feel that restructuring responsibility for line performance by the creation of line managers is very problematic. It is hard to see what benefits there will be in what must remain a tightly integrated system with multiple “lines” sharing tracks and operating through complex interlockings. Further, as a pilot program these lines will most likely receive priority resources, thus insuring a successful outcome which may be very difficult to replicate across other lines.

In sum, we are generally skeptical about the benefits of the Rider Report Card. We feel there are too many flaws that will invalidate its usefulness, making it nothing more than a “PR” campaign. We encourage Transit to continue to seek ways to obtain rider opinions and we hope that in the future PCAC and the Transit Riders Council will be able to contribute in a meaningful way to such efforts.