

# Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA

347 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10017 • 212/878-7087 • Fax 212/878-7461  
E-mail: mail@pcac.org • World Wide Web: <http://www.pcac.org>

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Deborah Morrison - *Administrative Assistant*

## STATEMENT TO THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION REGARDING PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION FOR SPORTING AND SPECIAL EVENTS

My name is William Guild. I am Chair of the Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the Metropolitan Transportation Authority. The PCAC is the coordinating body for three riders councils created by the New York State Legislature in 1981: the Long Island Rail Road Commuters Council (LIRRCC); the Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council (MNRCC); and the New York City Transit Riders Council (NYCTRC).

The councils were created to give users of MTA subway, bus, and commuter rail services a voice in the formulation and implementation of MTA policy and to hold the MTA Board and management accountable to riders. The PCAC and its councils hold regular public meetings and forums, undertake frequent research projects, and maintain a support staff of transportation planning professionals. Since 1995 the PCAC has held a non-voting seat on the MTA Board.

The 38 authorized members of the PCAC are required to be regular users of the MTA system, and serve without pay. Members are appointed by the Governor's office, upon the recommendation of county executives and, for New York City, the mayor, public advocate, and borough presidents.

As a representative of MTA riders, the PCAC applauds efforts to increase the use of public transportation to provide access to professional sports and other major public events. Public transportation is the most efficient, effective, and convenient means of moving large numbers of spectators to and from stadiums and arenas. Transit should be viewed as the preferred alternative to the cost and traffic congestion associated with driving to games or special events. The attractiveness of transit to fans can be illustrated by the City's experience with Mets games at Shea Stadium. In 2006 an average of 6,700 riders took the #7 train to regular season games, up almost one quarter from ridership of 5,400 in 2005. During the 2006 playoffs an average of 13,300 fans took the train, accounting for 25 percent of all fans at the games.

Promoting Increased use of public transportation to sporting and special events will help to build new markets for public transit agencies and attract new riders. These events often begin or end in non-peak hours for transit systems and increase their utilization. Promoting public transportation use brings into the system persons who are not typically transit customers. If their experience is favorable, they will be encouraged to use the system again or more frequently.

Increased use of public transportation also serves to reduce the negative impacts of large scale events. Traffic congestion and pollution are reduced, along with the City's costs for accommodating additional automobile traffic. These costs can be quite substantial, as anyone who has followed the efforts to build parking in conjunction with the new Yankee stadium will understand. Using transit to reduce needed parking makes sense from both planning and financial perspectives.

We in New York City are in a strong position to take advantage of public transportation in providing access to major sporting and public events. Madison Square Garden is built over the largest rail transportation hub in the nation and is served by the Long Island Rail Road, NJ TRANSIT, and New York City Transit subways, with PATH rail lines only a short walk away. Brooklyn's Barclays Center will be built over that borough's major transit hub, served by the Long Island Rail Road and New York City Transit. The present and future Yankee Stadiums are served by two New York City Transit subway lines, and in 2009 the new Yankee Stadium will be accessible to Metro-North Railroad customers through a new station. Shea Stadium and its replacement Citi Field are conveniently accessible by both New York City Transit and the Long Island Rail Road, and efforts are underway to improve LIRR access to the site. Each of these locations and services is unique and deserves its own service plan. There is no "one size fits all" strategy for serving these venues.

Some members of the PCAC have expressed concerns regarding access to the new Yankee Stadium, to be built north of the existing ball park and north of 161<sup>st</sup> Street. While we are pleased that the Stadium is finally to have its own Metro-North station, it will be located south of the existing ball park and significantly further away from the new facility. We are also concerned about maintaining convenient access to the #4 subway line, which runs on an elevated structure just beyond the bleachers. When the original Stadium opened in 1923, the 161<sup>st</sup> Street station had been in operation for over five years. To handle the thousands of subway riders attending games, the platforms were extended to the south and an extensive system of auxiliary stairs and fare control areas was constructed right outside the Stadium. These facilities are open only for baseball games or other events, at which times trains stop several car lengths south of their normal positions. Since these special facilities point south, to serve the existing Stadium, we believe an improved structure must be planned and built at the north end of the 161<sup>st</sup> Street station so that subway riders will have at least as convenient access the new Yankee Stadium as they have enjoyed since 1923. We are aware of no plans for such an improvement, however, and urge the Transportation Committee to look into this apparent oversight.

We have several more general observations about transit service for special events. Of course, the MTA agencies must provide sufficiently frequent service to meet customer demands if they are to succeed in attracting sports fans and those attending other large special events. If passengers are unable to board trains because of crowding or if they are left waiting on the platform for long periods of time, they will begin to think about other means of travel; thus, it is important to provide frequent and convenient service.

Since the time of peak travel to many sporting events coincides with a portion of the weekday afternoon peak period for the region's public transportation system, it may not be feasible in some cases to add more trains where lines are at or near maximum under

current operating rules. Fortunately, spectators tend to arrive at sporting events over a fairly long time frame. While trains may be crowded around game time, peak hour traffic affects motorists even more severely. Addition of transit service in the shoulder of the peak period, which would not require additional equipment or changes to operating rules, may spread travel demand more broadly over time.

Since sporting and other public events generally do not end during peak travel periods, the MTA agencies have greater flexibility to provide frequent and convenient service. The “get away” service at the end of Mets and Yankees baseball games, where equipment is positioned to provide a steady flow of trains, is an example of how this service can be provided effectively.

The physical environment of the stations and their surrounding areas is also important. New York City Transit found that the location of its turnstiles at Shea Stadium was impeding travel at the ends of games, and so these turnstiles were moved from the stadium plaza to the station. The City can have a great influence here, as it owns or impacts, through design review and permitting processes, many of the physical facilities required for efficient movement of passengers to their trains.

Finally, our efforts must go beyond merely *providing* public transportation to large scale public events; meaningful action must be taken *to promote the use* of public transportation as a viable --- indeed, the preferred -- option for those attending such events. At Shea Stadium last season, when there was a reduction in available parking, substantial advertising campaigns drew spectators to public transportation. Such campaigns can be quite successful, as seen in the growth in transit use for access to Mets games and the U.S. Open tennis tournament last summer.

Public transportation should not be viewed as a last resort when parking is unavailable: it should be recognized as the preferred option. This is especially important with facilities such as the Barclays Center being constructed over the Atlantic Yards in Brooklyn and Madison Square Garden. As the preferred transportation option for large sports and entertainment venues, public and private support facilities, amenities and operating procedures should reflect these priorities.

While the MTA has an important role to play, we need cooperative efforts involving the management of the teams and facilities as well as the City. Encouraging transit use for ball games and special events should be part of the City’s standard operating procedures and traffic management plans developed for these events and venues.

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Respectfully submitted,

William K. Guild, *Chair*  
Permanent Citizens Advisory  
Committee to the MTA