



Meeting Minutes of

April 22, 2021

A virtual meeting of the New York City Transit Riders Council (NYCTRC) was convened at 12:00 pm on Thursday, April 22, 2021 via Zoom.

Member Attendance

Andrew Albert (Chair)	Present
Burton M. Strauss Jr. (Vice Chair)	Present
Stuart Goldstein	Present
Christopher D. Greif	Present
William K. Guild	Absent
Marisol Halpern	Present
Sharon King Hoge	Present
Trudy L. Mason	Present
Scott R. Nicholls	Present

Staff Attendance

Lisa Daglian (Executive Director)	Present
Bradley Brashears (Planning Manager)	Present
Gav Mazurek (Research Intern)	Present
Shaul Picker (Research Intern)	Absent

Non-Member Attendance

<u>Name</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>
Andrew Pollack	Concerned citizen
Eric Wollman	Concerned citizen
Andrew Kurzweil	Concerned citizen
Ron Troy	Concerned citizen
Clifford Hymowitz	Concerned citizen
Jasmine Meltzer	Concerned citizen
Mira Philipson	Concerned citizen
Mike Howard	Concerned citizen
Quemuel Arroyo	MTA
Sara Bahri	MTA
Rachel Cohen	New York City Transit
Cate Contino	New York City Transit
Rob Marino	New York City Transit

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Approval of Agenda for April 22, 2021 meeting.

Approval of Minutes for March 25, 2021 meeting.

Chair and Board Report

A. Albert: Since yesterday's board meeting was one day in advance of Earth Day, it was important to show that our transit system contributes to the region's clean air. We were told 17 million tons of dangerous emissions are prevented by our transit system.

Deep cleaning is continuing, even with the two-hour shutdown. We were hoping to hear an announcement for the restoration of 24/7 service but did not get it. We seem to believe it will be soon but have gotten no dates yet. They are embarking on a Take-the-Train campaign to get riders back into the system.

There was a long debate about the crime statistics, in which Chief O'Reilly and Interim President Sarah Feinberg did not see eye to eye on what they mean. Chief O'Reilly said major crimes were down, and Feinberg kept saying that while that was great, if people do not feel safe, they will not come back, and that we need more police officers. 644 officers have been added. Chief McGrann, the MTA police chief, reported that serious crimes remain down on the commuter rail lines. Vandalism is up, with ticket and MetroCard Vending Machines being vandalized.

The State Budget is \$143 million favorable now, with an additional \$98 million from the 2020-2021 budget that was restored. David Keller reported that farebox revenue is \$264 million favorable, toll revenue is \$273 million favorable, and subsidies are \$311 million favorable. They are still significantly below pre-pandemic levels.

We got an amazing presentation yesterday on the Penn Station Master Plan from Janno Lieber. There is a version of the plan with two levels, and one with one level, which has a sweeping atrium with tons of light and lots more space for stores and movement.

L. Daglian: An interesting piece of information put in the slides was that although the number of people between now and 2038 on MTA commuter services to Penn will increase, the percent of riders using the MTA to go into Penn Station will decrease significantly as NJT's ridership will increase significantly. Amtrak's numbers will also go down percentage-wise as many of their riders will use Moynihan.

A. Albert: There are plans for increased Amtrak service on the corridor into the station. New faster Acela trainsets are being obtained and will be put into use this year.

On Central Business Tolling, the Traffic Mobility Review Panel has not yet been selected, but informational sessions have been provided to the Board on where the sensors will be placed.

The Mail and Ride program on the LIRR is being migrated to eTix and electronic payment. The number of people using Mail and Ride has been declining over the years. Almost everyone is using the mobile apps now, so the LIRR is gearing everyone towards that.

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President Eng of the LIRR held a press conference in Oyster Bay a few days ago, and they will be testing battery-powered M7 trains so people living in diesel territory will have a one-seat ride to their city destinations rather than having to change trains.

L. Daglian: The LIRR would be the first railroad in North America to try this technology, which is already used in Europe. Metro-North hopefully is not that far behind. This is an eight-month trial. If it proves successful, the LIRR will test it on two M7 cars on the Oyster Bay Branch without passengers to see how long battery life is, how it runs under specific track conditions, including inclement weather.

A. Albert: The keys to the experiment will be how long the batteries are good for, whether they can be charged en-route, and whether they could work on a three-hour long trip. I asked President Eng whether this technology could be used on the M9s, and he said that it should be transferable. This pilot is being done by Alstom.

Transit ridership is continuing to go up. On April 20, we hit 2,000,049 riders in one day. They are continuing to do work to reduce overtime. Now that work on the Capital Program has resumed, CBTC work is resuming on Queens Boulevard West, and the Culver Line. There will have to be some GOs for 8th Avenue Line CBTC soon.

T. Mason: For those who did not monitor the Board meeting, I wanted to congratulate you on your statement that the public does not pay attention to the statistics. The numbers do not mean anything to them. A PR person once told me that the facts are irrelevant, it is the perception that counts. On good authority, I have it that congestion pricing is on Secretary Buttigieg's agenda. Maybe we should send another communication to help the DOT push it along. They really want to get the study done and moving, despite what the New Jersey people are trying to do to block it.

L. Daglian: I have had some discussions with people working on the project and offered our assistance in any possible way, including with outreach. They are moving along at a very good pace and are having high-level meetings. My understanding is that they are internally very pleased, almost giddy, with how things are going. There is some work the City DOT needs to do, and they are moving forward on that.

T. Mason: The people I have been talking to say that another little push from us couldn't hurt. I am talking about the Federal level. Because of the squabble the New Jersey delegation in Congress is doing, it would not hurt to do another nudge, or indicate in writing how important that this is to move along as quickly as possible. This should go to Secretary Buttigieg.

Action item: Write a letter to Secretary Buttigieg stressing the importance of congestion pricing

L. Daglian: One of the issues we have been working on is WageWorks pre-tax transit benefit dollars. Gerry Bringmann, chair of the LIRRCC, has been raising this issue for a year now. People have money in their WageWorks or TransitCheck accounts but haven't been able to use them since they are not commuting and would like to access their money. There is no mechanism for the IRS or Treasury Department to refund their money. There have been some articles in the papers in the past year about problems the companies that run the program were giving people. There was an article not long ago in The New York Times about it that we helped

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shepherd through, and a lot of legwork that the LIRRCC did to bring forward some customers who have \$1,000 here, \$800 here stuck in these accounts, and the MNRCC as well.

We wrote a letter on April 15th to the IRS and the Treasury Secretary, asking that they find a regulatory mechanism for a one-shot amnesty or arrangement to allow people to take money out of their accounts and pay taxes on them or to have some flexibility with those funds.

We are continuing to work with local and national advocacy partners on our platform for the Transit Reauthorization Bill. This includes ensuring transit gets sufficiently funded, that it includes operating money; that it is more reflective of transit as a percentage, as opposed to the current formula, without pitting urban areas against rural areas; that there is an understanding of how transit is a more equitable form of transportation; and that climate goals are considered. We recently signed on to a letter other groups locally have signed on to in support of those goal.

A. Albert: There is a zoning text amendment, known as Zoning for Accessibility, that will be presented to all of the city's 59 community boards. It was presented to my community board last night. ZFA gives developers a bonus for providing either an easement or elevator access for subway access, with the bonus varying depending on which of those two things they get, how far away they are from the subway, and what the existing zoning permits.

B. Brashears: I am in the last few hours of wrapping up the preliminary Freedom Ticket expansion report. Next week we will begin our outreach with the MTA and its operating agencies as we always do with our reports. We want to hear their thoughts and concerns. Once we get these meetings arranged, we can finalize the report, incorporate their concerns, and present the final report to the entire group, and start our outreach effort with elected officials, the public, and do a public launch and get this thing going, and hopefully get a strong coalition for it. There is a lot of talk at the MTA Board about restructuring fares and providing fare discounts.

A. Albert: The report is fabulous, and it is definitely ready for prime time, and the time to launch is probably ripe now with the need to get riders back on board and to present riders with more options. OMNY may actually end up doing away with 7- and 30-day ride passes as fare capping could be implemented, which might be better for riders, and give people an incentive to take discretionary trips.

S. Goldstein: Will our report reference the world of OMNY?

B. Brashears: We talk about OMNY in it, and the fact that it will make the fare structure much easier and can provide discounts such as this. One recommendation speaks to OMNY, and we want to get the MTA and the railroads' perspectives on those specific recommendations.

S. Goldstein: Do we support what they are proposing by eliminating those others tiers? I think we should take a position on that when we get more details on it. If they are not in before the report comes out, we should just talk about it in a general way.

A. Albert: I need to see the fine details for fare capping first. We reserve the right to comment once we see the proposal.

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L. Daglian: We don't go into that level of specificity, but if there is another opportunity to comment on it before fare hike discussions, those conversations would then take place.

Presentation: *Quemuel Arroyo, MTA Chief Accessibility Officer*

T. Mason: As you probably know, Edith and I worked together for many years and was a dear friend. I wanted to thank you for your wonderful words and all that you have been saying about her. I am not sure if anyone has spoken to you about naming the refurbished elevator at the 181st Street station the Edith Prentiss memorial elevator.

Q. Arroyo: Thank you for your comment. Edith actually wrote a letter of recommendation for this job for me. To your point, concerning naming the elevator, it is something we are all talking about. A lot of the naming of physical assets has to come from the state so we are looking at alternate ways to honor her ourselves without needing to involve the state or others, although her name is known up north in Albany, and even in D.C.

T. Mason: I just want to let you know that I have a few contacts upstate also and have spoken with Mark Levine and Ydanis Rodriguez about doing this, and they both think it is a great idea, and Maria Luna. It has gone the community board route and has gone the City Council route. Please do whatever you can to make this happening. It would be a great way to remember her.

Q. Arroyo: Conversations are active.

J. Meltzer: I represent Good Neighbors of Park Slope. We have 600 members who are all in the aging community and are now going to be the beneficiaries of an elevator at 7th Avenue. I understand that it is difficult to do, but the priority seating signs in the subway do not include older adults or those less able to stand.

Q. Arroyo: It is definitely something that I have thought of before and have had several conversations with the team. We are working on something to that effect.

S. Goldstein: The tactile strips, like those at Jay Street in the presentation, were great when they were first put in for someone who relied on them, and you couldn't miss them, but now they are really faded with cleaning and people walking all over them. Is your team working with other groups in the TA about exploring other materials as a result?

Q. Arroyo: It is something we discussed in one of our meetings earlier today. We are looking at permanent materials to convey this information and are having this conversation.

S. Goldstein: Perhaps this could be embedded in the tiles?

Q. Arroyo: That is the direction we are exploring.

M. Howard: There are buses from 2008-2018 that do not have digital audio navigational systems for passengers. I know that they have some on some buses, but not all.

Q. Arroyo: It is something I have heard before and see as I ride the bus. We don't all have access to all of these enhancements and rely on those announcements from the driver. It is something we train for, and hope they remember every day.

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S. Bahri: We are working with the depots to check that we know which buses have announcements and which don't and are working with the Division of Buses to make sure that the buses that do not have it have a schedule to get retrofitted or be phased out. In the very near future, many of the new buses with the screens will be phased in.

R. Troy: Is ADA work planned for Hunters Point Avenue on the subway and Hunterspoint Avenue on the LIRR?

Q. Arroyo: We are working on how we can be more strategic with these enhancements.

M. Halpern: Could I have access to the presentation, and could it be given on the borough-wide level so everyone can understand what the MTA is doing on the issue for accessibility?

Q. Arroyo: We had another ZFA presentation with the disability community this morning. That team is undergoing over 59 community board presentations, so there is a lot coming to each borough. We can definitely share this presentation with you.

L. Daglian: You mentioned there is \$5.5 billion in the Capital Program for accessibility projects. Does this include the money for the 70 stations, and how does state and city money fit into this?

Q. Arroyo: That money is everything we have planned for this Capital Plan and was under the assumptions we had for the Capital Plan pre-COVID. We are having active conversations to know what the city and state portions look like. Today, I do not have \$5 billion, and do not know how much money we have. It is the same conversation the MTA is having as a whole.

S. Hoge: You mentioned tourists arriving from JFK, but there are also people from Penn Station, Grand Central, and LaGuardia hauling luggage around. I hope you can include this in your definition of disability.

Q. Arroyo: Absolutely. As someone who used to walk and carry luggage through Penn Station, I understand their hardship, and include them in my definition of the people I am looking out for.

Old Business

S. Hoge: The police on duty are in clumps. At least one is on a cellphone and is engaged in what does not appear to be official business at Lexington/59th. Every morning there are four or five of them together on the uptown end, while it is the downtown end which has no booths, which is where everyone is jumping over the turnstile. I hope some care could be taken where they are dispersed during their tours of duty.

S. Goldstein: At a prior session I had asked about the cleaning schedule for stations. I had acknowledged that I see they are doing a wonderful job in the mornings, and somewhat towards the end of the day. I don't really see progress at some major stations, particularly in the downtown area. Did we ever see how the cleaning schedule changed in the last part of COVID?

A. Albert: I asked for it, but don't believe I have ever gotten it, but I have heard announcements that they are cleaning trains and stations twice a day and don't know the times.

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S. Goldstein: Fulton Street on the A C is still very dirty. It is not clean with regularity, at the station and mezzanine level. I am not talking about the Fulton Center end of the station. I have made similar observations at West Fourth Street and other larger stations. There continues to be a significant amount of homeless people in the Fulton Center and the other end.

C. Greif: There still are stations that I do not see cleaned. Some train cars themselves are not being cleaned. I don't see them cleaning much on the Q leaving Stillwell.

Action item: Look into the schedule of cleaning stations and into whether Q trains are being cleaned at Stillwell Avenue.

New Business

C. Greif: Is there going to be anything regarding any plans in the next month about getting passengers back on trains? Can the Transit Riders Council do announcement, because if riders see us on coming back on board, we could encourage others to get back on board.

A. Albert: We can ask who is putting together the campaign and see if we can say something.

Action item: Find out more about the Take the Train campaign and see how we can get involved.

Action items:

- Write a letter to Secretary Buttigieg stressing the importance of congestion pricing.
- Look into the schedule of cleaning stations and whether Q trains are being cleaned at Stillwell Avenue.
- Find out more about the Take the Train campaign and see how we can get involved.

Adjourned

This meeting was conducted via Zoom Conference Call: [Zoom Video](#)

The meeting was adjourned at 2:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Lisa Daglian
Executive Director