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MTA Board Testimony – Expand the Freedom Ticket Concept Now! By Bradley Brashears, PCAC Planning Manager November 17, 2021

Good morning! I'm Bradley Brashears, Planning Manager at the Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA (PCAC). We're thrilled that service cuts and fare hikes are on hold for the foreseeable future. This decision is key for the region's recovery as the MTA tries to attract back its ridership. While this is a crucial step in the right direction, there is still more that must be done to attract riders back and provide a more equitable system in the near and long-term.

We have been calling for the formation of a fare restructuring task force to look at innovative fare policies and are happy that it's happening under Janno Lieber's leadership. Now that fare capping legislation is on the table thanks to Chair Lieber and Senator Gounardes, pairing OMNY with fare capping will encourage people to get back onboard and allow people of every income ability to benefit from unlimited access to transit.

We strongly urge the working group and the board to expand the LIRR's Atlantic Ticket program concept to all city stations for both the LIRR and MNR. The Freedom Ticket-inspired Atlantic Ticket program lets SE Queens and Brooklyn riders use the railroad at a discount with a weekly ticket option, providing free transfers to the subway and bus for \$60 – a 44% reduction from regular peak combined fares. Bronx, Queens, and Brooklyn riders should have the option to use the commuter rail infrastructure that passes through their neighborhoods for an affordable, faster commute. We have a unique opportunity to lure drivers out of their cars with lower fares as gas prices soar and we prepare for congestion pricing. Restoring commuter rail pre-pandemic peak fares would discourage riders from returning and drive them back into cars.

Peer systems like London, Paris, Boston, LA, and so many others have restructured fares with transfers between commuter rail, subways, and buses. These efforts have increased ridership and revenues. Now, it's time for the MTA to catch up to the rest of the world or get lost in the shuffle. Providing riders and essential workers with a more efficient and equitable system that incorporates all modes is key to our region's recovery and economic vitality. We strongly urge you to improve and expand the Freedom Ticket concept now – lowering fares does not mean lower revenues.

Thank you.