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Testimony to the MTA Board: Infrastructure and Transparency By Kara Gurl, PCAC Research & Communications Associate November 17, 2021

Good morning! I'm Kara Gurl, Research & Communications Associate at the Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA (PCAC).

Riders have gotten some amazing news so far this month: From the bipartisan infrastructure bill to no fare hikes or service cuts for the foreseeable future, we know that a stronger regional transit system is well on its way.

Media coverage of the news shows that of course, riders are glad that they don't have to pay more. But some, including fiscal watchdogs, are wary and feel that this is just delaying the inevitable fare increase they know will come sooner rather than later. Too many riders still don't know where their money is going, especially if they don't see better service and a welcoming, accessible environment. The infrastructure bill is a huge step towards a better transit system in the future, but riders also need to see a better system now: both through small investments they'll see on their daily commutes, and through continuing service improvements.

The MTA has to look towards the future and fight for long-term, sustainable operating funding that will keep fares low for years to come, while being transparent and showing riders that the money they hear will be invested in the MTA is going to good use.

We in this room may understand the nuances of capital versus operating funds, farebox recovery ratios, and federal versus local investments, but riders shouldn't have to. Riders should be able to easily see in a visualized dashboard what tangible improvements are coming their way: the projects that are being funded; their costs and timelines; progress updates along the way; and most importantly, how they'll benefit riders. This can and should be done through a more robust and transparent Capital Program Dashboard, which we hope you'll update now that Senator Comrie's MTA Open Data Law is here to stay, thanks to Governor Hochul.

Riders want more reliable and efficient service, a cleaner and safer transit system, and visible improvements to the stations they visit every day. The best way to tell them that these major infrastructure investments will directly benefit them, is to be transparent and show them through projects they'll feel the benefits of every day, both immediately and in the future.

Thank you.