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MTA Board Testimony – MTA Budget, East River Tunnels, Bronx Bus Redesign & Fare Pilot Programs **By Lisa Daglian, PCAC Executive Director** **December 15, 2021**

Good morning, I'm Lisa Daglian, Executive Director of the Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA, PCAC. What a December to remember for transit and for transit riders: announcement of the agreement that will move Penn Access forward and finally bring commuter rail to the northeast Bronx, coupled with critical repairs to the East River Tunnels that will keep Long Island Rail Road, Amtrak and, eventually, Metro-North, trains running through those Sandy-damaged portals, thanks to Senator Schumer; newly designed Bronx bus routes that take into account the needs of the borough's riders; new discount fare pilot programs on commuter rails and on subways, buses and Staten Island rail that will save riders time and money; and the adoption of a budget that will hold fares flat, at least for now. Only Freedom Ticket could make it better!

The budget you'll be voting on also tells the tale of red ink down the tracks, however, and we know that the federal funding through the CARES Act, CRRSAA and ARPA will only take us through 2024, 2025 without service cuts. We appreciate that Governor Hochul has made that commitment to riders; it's also a commitment to our region's recovery. The best way to get riders back onboard is by providing safe, equitable, reliable and affordable service. Waiting at a bus stop or on a subway platform for 20 minutes or more – or for an hour between Metro-North or LIRR trains – is a sure way to drive riders to other modes of travel, including driving. That's the wrong message to send as congestion pricing hearings continue. We need all the support we can get at home, and in Washington.

We also appreciate that we won't see fare hikes for at least the next six months. That should help light a fire and spur ridership. However, trying to squeeze \$17 million from riders in mid-2022 would be like throwing water on that fire. Surely the MTA or state can find \$17 million to keep fares where they are through the end of the year, at least. Ongoing, sustainable operating funding will keep us from having this same Groundhog's Day conversation, and we are committed to working with you and our elected officials to find a way to pay for transit: the essential service that keeps our essential workers, and our region, moving.

Thank you.