**MTA Board Meeting Testimony**

**Improve Weekend Service to Embrace New Travel Dynamics**

**April 27, 2022**

Good morning! I’m Kara Gurl, Research and Communications Associate at the Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA, PCAC.

It’s encouraging to see subway ridership bounce back quickly after the horrifying attack at 36th Street earlier this month. But weekday ridership has been plateauing for months since before this incident, struggling to climb past 59% of pre-pandemic ridership.

It’s clear that the MTA, city, and state need to come to terms with the region’s new travel dynamics. Bringing the region’s workforce back to a pre-pandemic, commuting-5-days-a-week model is slipping from reality. Like it or not, we’ve entered a new era where hybrid work means that many people only commute during rush hour a few days a week. Even the McKinsey best-case forecast shows a long way to go before ridership comes close to pre-pandemic levels, particularly if service continues as usual.

Weekend ridership, on the other hand, paints a completely different picture. Especially as the weather has improved, weekend ridership has reached closer to 70% of pre-pandemic levels. This pattern holds true for Metro-North and the Long Island Rail Road as well, posing a great opportunity for the MTA to position itself as the fastest and easiest way to get around the region this summer. But if you’ve taken the subway on a weekend recently—which we hope you all have—you’ll find overcrowded platforms and cars, unexpected service changes, and long waits on many lines. Whether they’re going to spend time with friends, running errands, or going to work, people want and need to rely on transit over the weekend and overnight. Waiting 18 minutes for a train is going to drive people away, rather than to, transit. Better service will help the MTA’s bottom line by getting more riders on board and showing current riders they made the right choice.

By improving weekend and off-peak service, there’s no doubt that weekend ridership will continue to surpass weekdays in coming closer to pre-pandemic levels. This doesn’t mean we should cut weekday rush hour service, or any service, for that matter. We’re confident that you can find a way to balance complex maintenance schedules with the need for more frequent and reliable weekend service. We’ll continue to fight for the operating funding necessary to make this possible. Thank you.