**Testimony in Support of Penn Station Access Project**

**Penn Station Access Eminent Domain Hybrid Public Hearing**

**By Lisa Daglian Executive Director, PCAC**

**June 22, 2022**

Good evening. My name is Lisa Daglian and I am the Executive Director of the Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA, PCAC. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Penn Station Access is a long time in the making, and we’re thrilled it’s coming to fruition. We appreciate Senator Schumer’s help in bringing it closer to reality. Penn Access will involve the construction of four new ADA-accessible Metro-North stations in the eastern Bronx at Hunts Point, Parkchester-Van Nest, Morris Park, and Co-op City, include infrastructure improvements along the route, and add new train service on the New Haven line to Penn Station. Today’s Eminent Domain Hearing is another step in the process of finally bringing rail access – and new opportunities – to residents who for too long have only been able to look at trains go by without stopping.  Eminent Domain is an unfortunate aspect of the project, but it is one that is apparently key to unlocking the next steps, and therefore we support the progress it will bring. We hope there will be appropriate financial renumeration to the parties involved.

Penn Access offers a chance to equitably expand transit options to underserved areas and populations. In the case of Co-op City riders, it will shave an hour each way off their commutes. That’s substantial enough to change lives. Commuter rail will finally be in the reach of east Bronx riders, many of whom don’t live anywhere near a subway. It’s important to ensure that it’s financially within their reach. To truly make this new transit option equitable and move people out of express buses and cars, it is crucial that the MTA embraces expanding city commuter rail fare discounts with transfers to subways and buses. It could be an expansion of Freedom Ticket or the pilot City Ticket program, to include transfers, but the draw of discounts – especially as congestion pricing comes online – will be key to enticing riders onboard.

Penn Station Access – especially when coupled with fare discounts – will support local and regional economic growth and expand access to job centers, local educational and medical institutions, and commercial and retail centers, along with bringing new opportunities for reverse commuting. While not in the scope, we also support consideration of a stop in Queens to further expand the reach of the new service.

Penn Access will also increase our transit network’s redundancy and connectivity, allowing people to transfer more easily and get around the region from the Penn Station hub – similar to what the East Side Access project will do for those traveling to and from Grand Central.

We are pleased to support this project, including the progress that Eminent Domain brings with it; to call for implementation of expanded city commuter rail fare discounts, with transfers to subways and buses; and to encourage further review of a future Queens stop. Thank you!