

ADVISORY COMMITTEE TO THE MTA

Letter from the Chairs

Dear Riders,

In the years since our city, region, country and planet were overtaken by the COVID-19 pandemic, we've seen just how essential our transit system truly is. As much of our world shut down, the backbone of our region—our subways, buses, and trains—never stopped supporting the essential workers, including the subway, bus, LIRR, Metro-North and Staten Island Railway employees, who support us. We extend our sincerest thoughts and wishes to those who endured the many challenges brought on by the pandemic, including to the transit workers and riders who lost their lives.

Throughout the pandemic, the PCAC and Councils continued to be the voice of riders, working nonstop with fellow advocates, good-government groups, elected officials, the business community and public, and the MTA to fight for federal relief funds to keep fares affordable and service running; ensure riders were kept safe in the face of COVID and increasing crime; and get riders back on board.

"Since the pandemic changed commuting patterns for many LIRR riders, the LIRRCC and PCAC worked to make sure train service continued to work for riders. We're proud to have successfully fought for fare discount options like the 10% discount off monthly tickets, the 20-trip commuter rail ticket at a 20% and a like the pandemic changed commuting patterns for many LIRR riders, the

discount and expanded City Ticket for travel within New York City. After thousands of LIRR riders found their hard-earned money trapped in commuter benefits accounts like WageWorks, LIRRCC pursued the issue at the federal level to help riders more flexibly access their own commuting funds. We heard riders' concerns about safety and cleanliness conditions at Penn Station and continue to work for an improved Penn Station experience. LIRR riders have much to be excited about with major projects like East Side Access and Third Track completion on the horizon, and LIRRCC and PCAC will continue to fight for commuters' issues to be front and center." – Gerard Bringmann, Chair of LIRRCC and PCAC



"Metro-North riders faced many challenges in 2020 and 2021, from the COVID pandemic to the devastation caused by Hurricane Ida. MNRCC advocated throughout the pandemic to restore service to pre-pandemic levels, including putting the 'rush' back in 'rush hour' by bringing back more

express trains. As Penn Station Access progresses, MNRCC is excited to represent riders from four new Metro-North stations in the Bronx. We'll continue to work with the MTA to ensure that our transit system is resilient and prepared to face the threat of extreme weather, hoping to avoid the service outage too many Metro-North riders experienced from storms in the summer of 2021." – Randy Glucksman, Chair of MNRCC



"Riders around the five boroughs saw firsthand the importance of keeping our transit system running throughout the pandemic, especially as many of us never stopped relying on our trains and buses. As ridership plummeted through the darkest days of COVID, steadily increasing in the years since,

NYCTRC has fought to keep our subways and buses safe and reliable. We fought to bring back overnight subway service while maintaining cleaning and safety protocols across the transit system, because our 24/7 transit system is the backbone of our city and region. Riders can count on us to fight for the funding the MTA needs to keep running, and for improved accessibility options, a reimagined bus network, expanded fare discount programs — like PCAC's Freedom Ticket proposal — and other pressing issues as they arise."

- Andrew Albert, Chair of NYCTRC

As 2022 continues to unfold and new challenges emerge, the PCAC will be front and center, advocating and fighting for the reliable, accessible, and equitable transit system MTA riders, and our region, deserve.



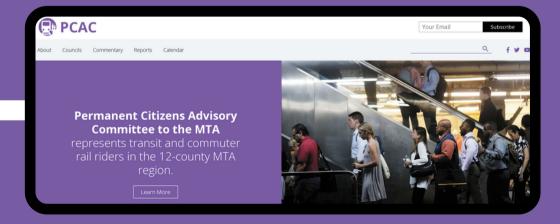
Onwards and upwards, Lisa Daglian PCAC Executive Director



Highlights

In 2020 and 2021, we:

- Fought for federal and state funding to #SaveTransit
- Called for better MTA transparency and open data legislation
- Recommended ways the MTA can help bring riders back on board
- Advocated for bringing back 24/7 Subway service, while maintaining COVID-19 cleaning and safety protocols
- Highlighted the need for better safety across the transit system
- Provided input on and celebrated the Queens and Bronx Bus Redesigns
- Detailed ways the MTA can bring more affordable fares to riders, including our Freedom Ticket proposal for lower LIRR and Metro-North fares within the city and transfers to subways and buses
- Advocated for a more accessible transit system, including through Zoning for Accessibility
- Called for a better and safer Penn Station
- Launched our brand new website!





Fighting for Funding

As the pandemic dramatically reduced transit ridership, taking with it farebox revenue that supports the system, PCAC ramped up collaborations with our partners in advocacy on both the local and national levels. Working together to stave off some of the more devastating long-term impacts to riders, PCAC joined a national coalition of 70-likeminded organizations to work on issues including bringing in federal funding; maintaining service levels; ensuring sufficient staffing and operations; and increasing equity, both during and due to the pandemic.

With this coalition, we wrote and signed onto letters to the federal government; garnered attention from the media about the need for increased federal support and the potentially devastating impacts on riders without it; joined in social media campaigns; participated in town halls and other public meetings; and conducted outreach to riders and other stakeholders to make them aware of the dire consequences of not receiving relief funding. These efforts paid off and the federal government came through with more than \$14 billion in funding for the MTA to help maintain service and operations, eliminating the need for unimaginable service cuts and unaffordable fare hikes that would have come at the height of the pandemic.







We consistently called for federal funding to fill the tremendous void left due to a significant shortfall in fare revenue. This critically needed funding relief was first made available through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) ACT and then through the Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions (HEROES) Act, without which there would be serious national implications:

"It's critical the MTA emerge from this crisis ready to serve riders and support the region's recovery; with nearly 10% of the U.S. GDP, as the region's economy goes, so goes the nation's fiscal health. But the MTA can't sustain itself without substantial support – the kind that only the federal government can provide. On May 6th, the MTA asked Congress for an additional \$3.9 billion in funding and on Friday, the House voted to support that ask through the HEROES legislation. We thank them. These emergency funds are an investment in the future health of the region and the millions of riders who rely on the very transit system that will ultimately allow us to get back in business and looking forward to a new normal."

- PCAC Testimony to the MTA Board: MTA Needs the HEROES Legislation!

May 20, 2020.





Over the months, and in collaboration with the MTA, local and national advocacy organizations and elected officials across New York City and state, PCAC continued its push for financial support for the MTA in the longer term, demanding the agency's fair share from the <u>Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.</u> Thanks to Senator Chuck Schumer and his colleagues, the MTA secured \$10 billion, a significant opportunity to reduce financial uncertainty for capital expenditures and create a foundation for strengthening the system's resiliency, accessibility, and all around critical infrastructure investments.

"This funding will be a game-changer for subway, bus, Metro-North, and LIRR riders. And while we wait with our fingers crossed for even more funding from Build Back Better, let's get a head start and use the infrastructure bill to speed up the capital plan, or risk having costs go up even more. With this funding and smart, bold and focused implementation, we're optimistic that you will truly be able to Build Back Better."

- PCAC Testimony to the MTA Capital Program Oversight Committee: Infrastructure Funding. November 15, 2021.

Closer to home, congestion pricing with few exemptions is another critical source of MTA capital budget support for which PCAC has fiercely fought. As it moves through the federal approval process, congestion pricing will not just be a highly effective tool for fighting climate change and congestion, but will also add a substantial, reliable capital funding source for the MTA that will benefit the entire region. It will also benefit those who drive in the congestion zone, including emergency vehicles and delivery people – and bus riders will see gains in travel speed with fewer cars on the road.

"Congestion pricing will help us avoid a grim reality for the MTA's future. Federal emergency funding will dry up sooner than we are prepared for, and without a long-term strategy like congestion pricing, everyday subway, bus, and commuter rail riders will take the hit. The billion dollars bonded to \$15 billion dollars brought in annually by congestion pricing are more than just crucial: they will be the lifeblood of the entire New York City metropolitan area."

<u>Testimony at the MTA Public Meeting on Congestion Pricing - Northern NYC</u>
 Suburbs. October 5, 2021.





"As advocates for the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) and the [millions of] daily riders who use the system, we urge you to ensure that the MTA is protected with a full federal aid package of at least \$4B as requested by the MTA in emergency operating support in response to the COVID-19 crisis."

- <u>Joint Transit Advocates Letter to the New York Congressional Delegation: The MTA Needs at least \$4 Billion in Federal Funds. March 18, 2020.</u>

Improving Transparency

PCAC has emphasized the importance of transparency throughout all aspects of the MTA, including funding and financing; the reintroduction of overnight service; police-related data; and data sharing among the different MTA entities — as well as the need to develop an effective open data portal following passage of Open Data legislation, thanks to Senator Comrie. In particular, an improved publicly-available capital projects dashboard is essential to ensure public trust:

"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."

- PCAC MTA Board Testimony: Infrastructure and Transparency. Nov. 17, 2021.

PCAC also has advocated for making public the analysis prepared by McKinsey & Company regarding the impacts of COVID-19 on the agency. Its projections are the source of much of the MTA's decision-making, yet no one has seen the actual report.

Getting Riders Back On Board

The MTA's fiscal future depends on riders returning to the system. PCAC has been committed to ensuring the return of riders since the start of the pandemic by championing a transit system that is safe, reliable, equitable, and more accessible. We've done this through reports, testimony, op-eds, and our daily advocacy work.

Report: How the MTA can Transition into the New Normal

In our January 2021 report, How the MTA can transition into the new normal: Getting Riders Back On-Board, PCAC identified both the challenges and strategies for encouraging people to get back on board the railroads, buses and subway. The report detailed steps the MTA could take to encourage riders to return to the system — and highlighted those it was already undertaking while acknowledging the need for additional federal funding—based on reviews and research from systems around the globe, broken down into specific areas including:

- 1 Transparency and Communication
- 2 Making the Cleaning and Disinfecting Regime Public
- 3 Capacity Control and Social Distancing
- 4 Enhanced Mask Distributions
- 5 Rider Return Campaign
- 6 Encouraging Spread Out Ridership
- 7 Improving Bus Service

How the MTA can transition into the New Normal

Getting Riders Back On-Board



Permanent Citizens
Advisory Committee

January 2021 | pcac.org

COVID Safety

PCAC highlighted some of the tactics other systems used and that the MTA should consider, including continuing those it was adopting to keep stations, trains, and touchpoints sanitized. These tactics included increasing signage on subway and railroad property to encourage social distancing; making masks available throughout the system; enforcing mask compliance; as well as both the testing of improved ventilation and its expansion throughout the system. PCAC fought throughout the pandemic for a clean and safe transit system, including through joining the MTA's Mask Force to distribute thousands of masks.

"We hope that the last weeks and months have provided the agency with good information and data about the effectiveness of its cleaning initiatives and use of innovative technologies like UV-C and antimicrobials, and that the MTA will continue to explore how to maintain the cleanest system possible. Importantly, we hope it will use that data to plan a path forward to resumption of 24/7 service."

- PCAC Testimony to the MTA Board: Reopening and the MTA. June 24, 2020.









Return of Overnight Service

When early concerns about maintaining the system in the face of COVID-19 led the MTA to shut down subway service overnight, PCAC fought to restore overnight service. It quickly became clear that transit was not a major spreader of COVID-19, but that the absence of late-night service substantially compromised the transportation needs of essential workers and other riders. PCAC encouraged the MTA to thoroughly evaluate ridership and public health metrics as well as effective strategies that would allow 24/7 subway service to be reinstated, including pushing to first restore service between 4:00 and 5:00 AM when many essential workers commute.

"Lisa Daglian, executive director of the Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee at the MTA, said Cuomo and state health officials should consider scaling back the hours of the closure — or at least explain to the public why the 1 a.m. to 5 a.m. shutdown is necessary. "These are challenging times," she said. "But something must be done to accommodate the increasing number of riders who need to get where they're going early or who are leaving work late."

- NY Daily News, Sep 14, 2020, "NYC early-shift workers stranded by subway's nightly closures for COVID cleanings."

Crime and Police Deployment

PCAC has long endorsed data-driven police deployment, a position that was amplified in early 2021 with the MTA's call for an additional 1,000 police officers, as well as mental health services, not long after the NYPD commissioner's initial approval of more police officers spurred by an uptick in underground crime.

"Not only is it important to keep riders safe by multiple daily cleanings of subway cars and stations, but it is also important to keep riders safe from those who would do them harm. Having a visible police presence will do that, as would additional mental health services and sufficient housing available for those who need it."

- NYCTRC Statement: Safety on the Subway. February 16, 2021.

Bronx Bus Redesign

PCAC celebrated the MTA's return to preparing and finalizing the Bronx Bus Network redesign, which will help make bus service in the Bronx faster and more reliable starting in June 2022. The Bronx underwent a thorough evaluation and reimagining of bus service that is efficient and responsive to the needs of riders, many of whom live in subway deserts and depend heavily on buses to get them around the region. PCAC staff participated in numerous redesign workshops to hear rider concerns and to help formulate workable solutions.

"The current redesign will strengthen mobility around the borough, with Automated Bus Lane Enforcement, protected bus lanes, TSP, east-west connection priority corridors, and increased frequencies. New busways on high-traffic streets like Fordham Road, East 149th and 181st Streets will also be key to speeding up routes that Bronx riders depend on."

- <u>PCAC Testimony to the MTA New York City Transit Committee: Infrastructure and Bus Connections. November 15, 2021.</u>





More Affordable Fares

PCAC has long fought for more affordable fares and ticket types for riders on all forms of transit. In 2020, our call for more affordable options became even more vital as transit ridership dropped across all of the MTA's operating agencies and it became clear that incentives would be needed to draw them back on board. PCAC and LIRRCC were instrumental in calling for commuter rail discounts, including a 10% reduction in monthly tickets and a 20-trip ticket at a 20% discount—which became reality when the MTA Board announced new ticket options in December 2021— as a more flexible option for hybrid commuters. PCAC also supports the expanded City Ticket \$5 off-peak commuter rail fare within NYC as a step towards the full Freedom Ticket concept, which includes transfers to subways and buses.

PCAC also strongly supports expanding the Fair Fares program, which brings half-price MetroCards to low-income New Yorkers, and has called for increasing funding for the program and expanding eligibility to the New York City poverty level instead of the federal poverty level.

"'Now is the time to start an aggressive campaign to let people know about Fair Fares, how to apply, to make it easy for people to prove their eligibility,' said Lisa Daglian, executive director of the Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA."

amNY, July 14, 2021, "Halfway there: NYC restores discounted 'Fair Fares'
 funding to only half of pre-pandemic level."



Report: Freedom Ticket Phase II: Now, More than Ever!

In the fall of 2021, PCAC continued to fight for Freedom Ticket expansion beyond the success of the NYCTRC-inspired Atlantic Ticket Field Study for Brooklyn and Southeast Queens riders. Implemented by the LIRR in 2018, the Atlantic Ticket pilot program provides discounted \$5 one-way fares at ten LIRR stations, with a weekly \$60 option that includes a weekly MetroCard. Thousands of Southeast Queens riders have reduced their once 2+ hour commutes to as little as 45 minutes with Atlantic Ticket. In the Phase II report, PCAC called for expansion to all city commuter rail stations, with free transfers, and for discounted fares for suburban riders to help get them back on board.

MTA's Outer Borough Transportation Account (OBTA) is a more modest plan for lower fares, but one that PCAC has argued should be used to support Freedom Ticket, which offers a better discount across both railroads and includes subway or bus transfers.

PCAC organized multiple rallies and events with elected officials, transit advocates, and local leaders and led a social media push to call for #FreedomTicketNow!





"The MTA must find ways to attract commuters back, attract new riders, and better accommodate regional essential workers in the changing paradigm. Reducing long travel times and providing a more equitable regional fare structure [with Freedom Ticket] will:

- Help regional riders and essential workers travel more affordably and efficiently.
- Fill empty commuter rail seats with fare-paying riders.
- Support regional economic recovery efforts.
- Attract drivers out of their cars in time for congestion pricing implementation, reducing roadway congestion and CO2 emissions."
- Freedom Ticket Phase II: Now, More than Ever!





OMNY Rollout

PCAC also has welcomed another critical fare-based solution for encouraging people to use the transit system, One Metro New York (OMNY), but continues to call for reduced fare options including senior and disabled fares to be expeditiously transitioned to the new system. The MTA Board voted to include OMNY in its pilot fare programs with a weekly fare capping pilot to allow subway and bus riders to ride for free after paying for their first 12 trips in a week. PCAC looks forward to OMNY's expansion to LIRR and Metro-North as a way to more seamlessly implement additional fare discount options including transfers.

"'Fare capping is absolutely a program whose time has come, and it's going to benefit so many riders,' said Lisa Daglian, the executive director of the Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the M.T.A., a watchdog group. 'It levels the playing field.'"

- New York Times, Dec. 13, 2021, "To Win Riders Back, M.T.A. to Offer Free Rides for 'Tap-and-Go' Customers."



Building A More Accessible and Equitable Transit System

PCAC has long fought for a more accessible transit system, and especially since the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed into law. Sadly, in 2021, Edith Prentiss, a longtime NYCTRC member and fierce warrior for the disabled, passed away. Her relentless advocacy will remain an enduring model.

PCAC joined the recently created LIRR and MNR Accessibility Task Forces, and continued to work with the NYC Transit Advisory Committee for Transit Accessibility (ACTA), to improve accessibility for NYC Transit, Long Island Rail Road and Metro-North riders.

While the MTA continues to make progress, it is far from a fully accessible system. With less than a third of subway stations currently accessible, PCAC has called for the agency to prioritize accessibility more significantly in its capital program and for stations to be rehabilitated at a faster pace, including the Mets-Willets Point Station.

PCAC also advocated for Zoning for Accessibility (ZFA), a citywide zoning strategy to make more stations accessible while reducing the MTA's financial burden. ZFA is already being used to make multiple stations in Manhattan and Queens accessible, and we look forward to seeing its long-term impacts citywide.

"The Capital Program includes so many critical accessibility improvements that could make our transit system the best option for thousands more New Yorkers. With more funding for accessibility improvements on the horizon thanks to congestion pricing – and city and state funding in the capital plan – a transit system that works for everyone is closer than ever."

- <u>PCAC Testimony to the MTA Capital Program Oversight Committee: Mets-Willets Point Accessibility. October 18, 2021.</u>



Penn Station Access and Penn Station Improvements

The Penn Station Access project will help bring a more integrated, accessible, equitable and inviting public transit system to the Bronx; PCAC looks forward to the day when its riders will benefit from rail service — for the first time, in many communities — and initiatives such as Freedom Ticket. The four new Metro-North stations in the Bronx will reinvigorate the region's economy, offer fairer service to those who have long lived in subway deserts, and encourage transit ridership. PCAC appreciates Senator Schumer's work to include funding for the Penn Station Access and East River Tunnels projects in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill, which will help fast-track these critical projects.

"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 your life! Commuter rail will finally be in the reach of east Bronx riders, many of whom don't live anywhere near a subway."

- PCAC Testimony: Support of Penn Station Access Project. June 15, 2021.

PCAC has also long called for a better and more user-friendly Penn Station for the riders who pass through every day and supports Governor Hochul's plans for the transit improvements included in the scope of work, noting that they should not be held up as the future of the larger plan is being debated.

"A more inviting and user-friendly Penn Station is good for riders and good for the region, and we're glad that Governor Hochul is moving improvements to the top of the list. Long Island Rail Road and Metro-North commuters deserve a world class train hall – including West-of-Hudson riders who now come in via NJTransit and the new riders who will soon come in when Penn Access is complete."

- PCAC Statement: Plans for the New Penn Station. November 3, 2021.





In Remembrance

Edith Prentiss



Edith Prentiss was a tremendous force in the world of disability rights through her roles on many civic, political, and other advocacy organizations, including serving as 1st Vice President of Disabled in Action. During her 14 years as a member of NYCTRC, she remained an unyielding champion on

behalf of the disabled. She was tough but also big-hearted and generous, advocating for greater accessibility to maximize independence and dignity for the disability community. Always well-prepared, she spoke up and maintained pressure to ensure that the mobility-impaired could access subway, buses, or the railroads — whether it was the need to reduce platform gaps or increase subway station elevators and ramps, or to benefit from accessible art.

"She fought for elevators, ramps. She was interested in the gaps between platforms and trains," said Andrew Albert, chairperson of the NYC Transit Riders Council.

Lisa Daglian, of the Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA remarked that "A lot of the issues that she raised, because she experienced them, led to better changes," adding "better changes and a better experience for all riders."

We miss her dearly and will continue to honor her memory through our ongoing efforts advocating for riders and improving accessibility for all. PCAC lost a great advocate for better public transit for all when Edith Prentiss passed away.

Orrin Getz



Orrin Getz was a fierce advocate for Metro-North riders and served as MNRCC's Vice Chair; he sadly passed away in March 2022 during the development of this report. He fought to improve the daily commutes of Metro-North riders, advocating for improved service, especially for West-of-Hudson riders.

Orrin was a long-time resident of Clarkstown, NY, and had a long history of transit advocacy. He was a member of the New Jersey Association of Railroad Passengers (NJ-ARP), where he received the NJ-ARP Advocate for Rail Transit award twice, and was a member of the Empire State Passengers Association (ESPA) and the National Association of Rail Passengers (NARP). He will be greatly missed, and his advocacy work leaves a lasting legacy.

Mark Epstein



We continue to miss our friend and colleague Mark Epstein, who was chair of the LIRRCC when he passed away in June 2020. His work to improve his Long Island neighbors' commutes focused on issues of great importance to them, like on-time performance, safety, and parking. As a frequent LIRR commuter, these are the

topics about which he cared deeply as well. His dedication and advocacy were exemplary. Please see the <u>PCAC 2019 Annual Report</u> for more details on Chair Epstein's LIRRCC legacy.

Comings and Goings

Ellyn Shannon, Associate Director

After 18 years of outstanding work at the PCAC, Ms. Shannon retired from her position as Associate Director in 2020. Her thoughtful leadership and understanding of the MTA's capital and operational needs allowed the organization to present recommendations on an array of items, including the need for improved performance metrics; fare equity considerations; and the MTA's efforts regarding transit-oriented development (TOD). She was a great advocate for public transit in the region and an important voice in highlighting the essential role the MTA plays in New York's economy. Her considerable contributions will continue to make an impact both within and outside the PCAC.

Deborah Morrison, Administrative Assistant

Ms. Morrison joined the PCAC in 1998 after serving several years with MTA's Real Estate Department. After 22 years of dedicated service to the PCAC and Councils, Ms. Morrison retired in 2020, leaving behind an impressive legacy. Her impeccable people skills and sincerity in all that she pursued brought great value to the organization.

Sheila Binesh, Transportation Planner

Ms. Binesh joined the PCAC in 2018 and was instrumental in boosting the PCAC's social media presence and supporting the staff and Councils with technical and planning assistance. Before her departure in early 2021, Ms. Binesh authored the "Getting Riders Back On Board" report, detailing best practices regarding the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic for the MTA to consider.

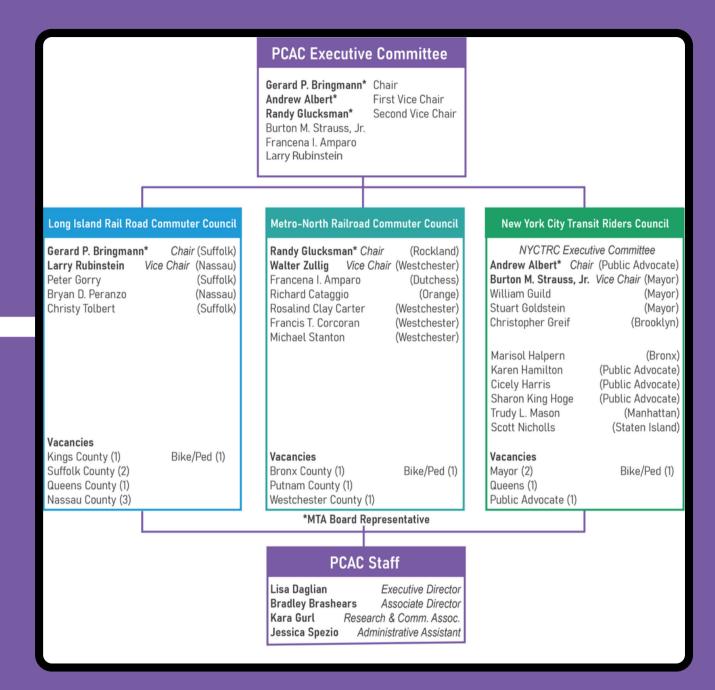
Kara Gurl, Research and Communications Associate

Ms. Gurl joined the PCAC in September 2021. With her background in communications, advocacy, and urban planning, she strives to foster a more equitable transit system by ensuring that MTA riders have a voice in planning and policy decisions.

Jessica Spezio, Administrative Assistant

Prior to joining the PCAC in 2021, Ms. Spezio was an MTA/NYC Transit train conductor for over two years; before that, she served as an Administrative Assistant at AIG. As a conductor, she enjoyed providing an essential service to New Yorkers and brings her experiences and expertise to the PCAC and Councils.

Credits



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