**MTA Board Meeting Testimony**

**“The MTA’s Fiscal Cliff Is Real: Transit Must Be Funded Like the Essential Service It Is”**

**By: Lisa Daglian, Executive Director, PCAC**

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Good morning, I’m Lisa Daglian, Executive Director of the Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA, PCAC.

Today we’re getting a preview of Doomsday. Even though you won’t be voting on the budget today, the conversation about the hard choices start in earnest now. How big a fare hike are we looking at? What kind of service cuts will riders tolerate? With thousands of positions still unfilled coming off COVID, are layoffs even being considered? If the MTA doesn’t get financial relief, any and all of these could be on the table. And none are acceptable.

The Comptroller’s report released earlier this week confirmed that the MTA’s financial hole can’t be filled in any of the usual ways. The plan to save hundreds of millions of dollars by paying down debt and finding efficiencies is a start, but it won’t be enough. The situation is dire.

We’ve reached a transformative moment on how to fund the MTA. The agency relied significantly on riders and farebox revenue for operating funds pre-COVID; but with ridership hovering in the 60 percentile, it is clear that there is an urgent need for a new funding paradigm and new dedicated operating funding sources.

Our city, state and federal partners must step up and provide the MTA with direct, ongoing and sustainable funding support and increased subsidies. We pledge to work with you, our partners in advocacy and all our elected officials to make this the number one priority for the coming year.

Transit is indispensable to life in metropolitan areas – to our city and region’s way of life and economy – and it must be funded like the essential service it is. Transit is a critical driver of equity, providing access to education and jobs for millions of riders from all socioeconomic backgrounds.

Yet, the very system that moved essential workers during the pandemic and which was – and is – expected to operate for all who need it, when we need it, is on a precipice. The fiscal cliff is very real. Unlike this depiction from my favorite game show, the actual effects will be felt by people through the state – the tri-state area, the northeast corridor and beyond – whether or not they ride transit. We can’t afford to go off the cliff.