**MTA Joint LIRR / Metro-North Railroad Committee Meeting Testimony**

 **“Strides Toward a Seamless and Integrated**

**Regional Rail Network”**

**Delivered by Liam Blank, Associate Director**

 **December 19, 2022**

Good morning. I’m Liam Blank, the new Associate Director of the Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA (PCAC).

We applaud the Long Island Rail Road for making great progress on Grand Central Madison, which will provide riders to and from Long Island with direct access to East Midtown. We’re also encouraged by Metro-North Railroad’s latest advancements on the Penn Station Access project, which will connect Westchester County and the Bronx with Penn Station. The new Combo Ticket that allows an add-on between railroad trips is a testament to the interconnectivity that the expansion projects will bring. We were also thrilled by the announcement at the New NY Panel about expansion of City Ticket to cover all commuter rail trips at the same low fare, regardless of time or day, within New York City. Of course, PCAC will continue to advocate for Freedom Ticket, which would be a weekly ticket option with transfers to buses and subways.

On their own, these projects will improve rail accessibility and affordability for a greater share of the region’s residents. Together, they represent one giant leap toward the gold standard – an integrated regional rail network that provides easy access for all residents of New York City and its surrounding suburbs. Achieving this goal means continuing to prioritize and invest in projects that make transit a seamless experience for its riders.

More trust from the public can later translate to greater investment from the State. That is achievable with more transparency about project timelines. For example, although Grand Central Madison is nearing completion, we still don’t know exactly when it’s set to open to the public. We understand that these projects are complex and require a lot of planning and preparation, but it is important that we know when they will be finished so we can ensure accountability and riders can prepare for the upcoming service changes.

I appreciate having the opportunity to speak before you today. The work that you are doing is essential in improving public transit for millions of people living in our region — and we encourage you to continue your efforts toward making transit safer, faster, cleaner and more affordable than ever before. Thank you.