**Joint LIRR Metro-North Committee Testimony**

**Let’s Celebrate Transit Equity Day by Giving MTA Riders a Fare Budget**

**January 29, 2024**

Good morning. I’m Jack Connors, Research and Communications Associate at the Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA, PCAC. Happy birthday to Grand Central Madison, the largest train terminal constructed in North America in 67 years! It’s great to see the GCM/Penn split hit the 40/60 target for the first time. This is a clear indication that more and more riders are enjoying easier access to all that the East Side has to offer.

On February 4th – Rosa Parks’ birthday – we will mark Transit Equity Day, which is observed both as a celebration of the civil rights icon’s life and legacy and a national day of action to further the goal of providing frequent, reliable, accessible, and affordable public transportation as a civil right.

New York has taken leaps and bounds in that direction thanks to elected officials who treat transit like the essential public service that it is. Massive transit investment in last year’s budget thanks to Governor Hochul and the legislature, and fare policies like CityTicket, first imagined by PCAC, and the Fair Fares program, constitute concrete steps towards making our transit affordable and equitable for all New Yorkers.

However, there’s still more work to do to further the goal of transit equity on the LIRR and Metro-North. Historically, low-income communities of color have been excluded from the commuter rail network with its higher fares, a phenomenon documented by national thinktanks like [TransitCenter](https://transitcenter.org/new-video-the-legacy-of-racism-in-transit-how-we-got-here-and-what-to-do-about-it/). As a result, many residents of subway deserts like Southeast Queens are priced out of LIRR lines that run through their communities.

The MTA can right this by enacting a weekly CityTicket with optional transfers to subways and buses and encouraging the city to complement the Governor’s fare evasion forgiveness proposal by bringing Fair Fares to the commuter rails. Expanding the senior and disability/Medicare discount to the morning peak on the railroads would further open access. With commutation ticket sales recovering more slowly than non-commutation tickets, now is the time to ensure that our commuter railroads are working for all New Yorkers, including those who don’t have nine to five jobs. Put simply, MTA riders deserve a fare budget.

Thank you.