



PCAC

PERMANENT CITIZENS
ADVISORY COMMITTEE TO THE MTA

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City Council Preliminary Budget Hearing – Transportation and Infrastructure
Testimony of Lisa Daglian
Executive Director
Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA (PCAC)
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Good afternoon, my name is Lisa Daglian, Executive Director of the Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA, PCAC. PCAC was created by the state legislature in 1981 to be *The Official Voice of Riders* on subways, buses, the LIRR, Metro-North, and Staten Island Railway.

Voting Rider Representation on the MTA Board:

As the coordinating body for three rider councils, our mission is to give subway, bus, and commuter rail riders a voice in the formulation and implementation of MTA policy, to hold the MTA Board and MTA management accountable to riders, and to advocate on their behalf as we are doing today. Under authorizing legislation, each of the three rider councils has a non-voting seat on the MTA Board. This year, one of our priorities is changing that dynamic to give these board members a vote and to add an additional independent member recommended by the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities, with input from the disability community. That legislation, S.20A/A.923A, is sponsored by Senator Gounardes and Assemblymember Dinowitz.

Transit Investment and Service:

What a difference a year makes! Last year we were staring down an abysmal funding abyss that put into peril the very transit system that millions of New Yorkers rely on every day. Thanks to the Governor and state legislature – along with your voices and those of our colleagues in advocacy – the MTA's operating budget is on stable footing for the next five years. The huge deficit that would have led to devastating cuts in bus, subway, and rail service, or crippling fare increases was staved off. Now we have the opportunity to make important improvements in advance of congestion pricing.

We have already seen investment in service frequency off-peak and on weekends on the 1, 6, C, G, J, M, N and R, and the addition of five fare-free bus routes across the city. We're eagerly awaiting the Brooklyn and Queens Bus Network Redesigns to modernize moving around within and across the boroughs. In this year's One House bills, both the Senate and Assembly have included \$90 million funding for additional bus service and fare free bus routes.

Bus Lanes:

But adding service can only go so far without protected bus lanes and busways to clear through the traffic. Buses are the engine of equity around our city, and the city has a unique ability to improve this part of our transit system. But it has fallen down in its legal obligation to install the mandated number of miles – achieving just 9.6 miles, or 19-percent, of the required miles of protected bus lanes to-date. ACE will help move buses – which currently move slower than a chicken can run, in many cases – but it will not take the place of dedicated bus lanes to allow them to get riders where they want to go more expeditiously.

We strongly support Speaker Adams’s proposed legislation to require DOT to maintain a capital tracker of its Street Plan projects with monthly updates to connect the plan to tangible projects and their status.

Fair Fares:

We also commend the Council’s continued support for expanding Fair Fares eligibility to 200% of the federal poverty level, following expansion to 120% in the current budget. Raising the eligibility threshold to 200% of the FPL would better reflect the high cost of living in New York City and ensure that many more New Yorkers in need can afford the fare. We applauded the increase from 100% of the FPL as a drop in the bucket, but recognize that every drop helps fill the bucket. An increase to 200% would mean so much to so many and make Fair Fares even fairer. It would also require an increase in the baselined funds – but we suggest going even farther than the \$127.5 million that’s been discussed.

We strongly support expanding Fair Fares to the Long Island Rail Road and Metro-North in New York City, which should be included in the city’s increased baselined funds. We support the proposal to encourage eligible fare evaders to enroll in Fair Fares – including on the railroads.

The FARES Act:

Expanding Fair Fares to commuter rails in New York City would allow riders who have access to the LIRR and Metro-North, but not a subway, to ride at half the cost of a City Ticket. Expanding City Ticket to include a weekly option, with transfers to subways and buses and funded via the Outer Borough Transit Account, would increase access even further, and we are thrilled that the Senate included the proposal in their One-House. In addition, we applaud their inclusion of extending discounts for seniors, disabled and Medicare-eligible riders on commuter rails to the morning peak, the only time those discounts are not currently accepted. We hope that you will join in supporting the FARES Act proposals that will bring more affordable, accessible and equitable transit to riders around the city, and region.

Access to transit is access to opportunity. As we continue to recover from the pandemic, it is crucial that we prioritize the needs of transit riders and invest in the infrastructure that makes it all possible. That means ensuring that congestion pricing gets over the finish line and that critical funding is in place for our vital transit system. We’re so close!

Public transit is essential to the success and vitality of New York City, connecting millions of New Yorkers to their jobs, schools, and communities. With more investment in the MTA for better service, even more riders will discover that transit is truly the best, safest, and most reliable way to get around. Thank you.