

A report by Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA:



Rider = First Fare Payment

*On track towards more equitable
access to affordable transit*



December 2024



Rider-First Fare Payment

On track towards more equitable access to affordable transit

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Introduction

The Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA (PCAC) was founded with a mission of being the official voice of riders. Key to that is making recommendations on how the full MTA system can be more friendly and accessible to riders. One of the largest hurdles to accomplishing this task is a fair, simple, and rational fare system that keeps ticket prices affordable and easy to understand. It's a task that is complicated by the MTA's reliance on fares and tolls to cover almost 40% of its day-to-day operations¹.

In October 2023, PCAC made a series of recommendations for improving the MTA's fare policy in its report entitled [*Integrate, Simplify, and OMNYvate: On Track for Better MTA Fare Payment*](#)² that examined opportunities for enhancing the rider experience with the anticipated roll-out of the One Metro New York – OMNY – payment system throughout the MTA and region. The recommendations were predicated on an integrated system by 2025 that would allow seamless fare collection on the Long Island Rail Road, Metro-North, and New York City Transit.

Much has changed since the initial report release, but many circumstances remain the same. With the upcoming fare adjustment and biennial increase cycle slated for mid-2025, the commencement of congestion pricing, and affordability a key issue affecting all New Yorkers, the time is right to look at what can be done to improve the rider experience, enhance affordability, and make the best case for riders to get onto, or back onto, the fastest, most convenient transit option available to them.

What's Changed Since 2023

The Evolution of OMNY's Rollout

In May 2024, the MTA Board voted to remove integration of OMNY to the commuter railroads from Cubic's contract³. Instead, the MTA decided to continue using its highly popular TrainTime app for the railroads, under separate contract with Masabi, and will use in-house staff to integrate the two systems on the back end. Scheidt & Bachmann was selected to replace ticket vending machines. These updated contracts present new opportunities to integrate and unify railroad ticketing, making cross-railroad fare promotions more seamless than ever before.

CityTicket "Pilot" a Resounding Success

July marked one year since the MTA announced its 24/7 CityTicket pilot program⁴, allowing one way travel on the LIRR or Metro-North within New York City for a flat fare

¹ Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), *November Financial Plan Presentation* (November 2024) <https://new.mta.info/document/157911>

² Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA, *Integrate, Simplify, and OMNYvate: On Track for Better MTA Fare Payment* (October 5, 2024) <https://pcac.org/report/integrate-simplify-omnyvate/>

³ Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), *May 2024 MTA Board Action Items* (May 22, 2024) <https://new.mta.info/document/140621>

⁴ Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) Press Release, *MTA Announces Expansion of CityTicket to Peak Commuter Railroad Trains* (July 19, 2023) <https://new.mta.info/press-release/mta-announces-expansion-of-cityticket-peak-commuter-railroad-trains>



of \$5 during off-peak periods and \$7 during peak periods. Peak times vary between railroads, and transfers between the LIRR and Metro-North require the purchase of two CityTickets. For nearly two decades, PCAC has advocated for the creation of a single railroad ticket for travel within New York City that includes transfers to subways and buses.

IN 2023:

**1.5 MILLION
CityTickets Sold**

Generating **\$8.1 million** to support MTA operations

Source: MTA



What Hasn't Changed

No Joint Railroad-New York City Transit Pass Available

In 2023, there were **1.5 million CityTickets sold** – earning \$8.1 million in revenue to support MTA operations⁵. Despite explosive growth in CityTicket sales, there is no single ticket option that allows riders to access both the railroads and New York City Transit with included transfers. When the MTA launched the CityTicket pilot in 2023, they terminated sales of the “Atlantic Ticket,” which allowed LIRR riders traveling between Southeast Queens and Brooklyn to purchase a weekly railroad ticket and a MetroCard for \$60. During the MTA’s Fall 2023 “Customers Count” survey, both LIRR and Metro-North Riders respectively said that better fare incentives were the first and second items most likely to increase their overall satisfaction⁶.

LIRR AND METRO-NORTH RIDERS SAY:

**BETTER FARE INCENTIVES
RAISE RIDER SATISFACTION**

Source: In the MTA's Fall 2023 “Customers Count” Survey, LIRR and Metro-North riders Ranked “better fare incentives” as the first and second items most likely to increase their satisfaction

⁵ Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), *Minutes of the Regular Meeting Joint Long Island Rail Road and Metro-North Railroad Committees* (February 26, 2024) <https://new.mta.info/document/135266>

⁶ Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), *Fall 2023 Customers Count Survey Joint Railroad Committee Meeting January 2024* (January 29, 2024) <https://new.mta.info/document/131801>



Tens of Millions of Dollars Remain Held in Reserve in the OBTA

The Outer Borough Transportation Account (OBTA), created in conjunction with the Central Business District Tolling Program (congestion pricing) as part of the 2019 Traffic Mobility Act, remains in place but is underutilized. Funds are accrued through a charge on taxis and for-hire vehicles (FHV) within New York City south of 96th Street.

On an annual basis, under statute, the first \$300 million collected from the surcharge is invested in the Subway Action Plan. Additional collected funds, up to \$50 million annually, are reserved for the OBTA to improve transit in New York City outside of Manhattan. OBTA initiatives are approved by the three members of the Capital Program Review Board recommended by the Governor, State Senate Majority Leader, and Speaker of the State Assembly and appointed by the Governor⁷.

In December of 2023, OBTA funds were used to fund toll rebates on the Henry Hudson Bridge and Cross Bay Bridge⁸. The fund also supports a toll discount on the Verrazzano Narrows Bridge. While these residential rebates had already been approved, their implementation was delayed due to insufficient toll revenue during the COVID-19 pandemic. PCAC objected to the initial use of the funds for residential toll rebates and, in February of 2024, joined 15 other organizations in signing a letter⁹ calling for OBTA funds to be used to expand public transportation service and discounts beyond Manhattan, including through discounts on commuter railroad trips within the city, like those proposed in the New York State Senate's [FARES Act](#)¹⁰.

On April 30th, 2024, OBTA funds were approved for use to provide a 10% discount on monthly LIRR and Metro-North tickets within New York City¹¹. When Governor Hochul announced that congestion pricing would commence on January 5th, she directed the MTA to expand bus service along 15 local routes and eight express routes; six of the routes will be determined by the MTA express bus routes had been announced prior to

⁷ Public Authorities (PBA) CHAPTER 43-A, ARTICLE 5, TITLE 11, *New York city transportation assistance fund* <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/laws/PBA/1270-I>

⁸ Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) Press Release, *Governor Hochul Announces Toll Rebates Coming to Bronx Resident Users of the Henry Hudson Bridge and Queens Resident Users of the Cross Bay Bridge* (December 7, 2024) <https://new.mta.info/press-release/icymi-governor-hochul-announces-toll-rebates-coming-bronx-resident-users-of-henry>

⁹ *Letter to Governor Hochul RE: Outer Borough Transit Account Funds* (February 22, 2024) <https://www.nyipi.org/resource/letter-to-governor-hochul-re-outer-borough-transit-account-funds/>

¹⁰ Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA Press Release, *Riders Cheer Fare Discount Proposals in Senate One-House Budget* (March 12, 2024) <https://pcac.org/riders-cheer-fare-discount-proposals-in-senate-one-house-budget/>

¹¹ Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) Press Release, *MTA Approves Commuter Rail Discounts for the Bronx and Queens and More Express Bus Service for Brooklyn and Staten Island* (April 30, 2024) <https://new.mta.info/press-release/mta-approves-commuter-rail-discounts-bronx-and-queens-and-more-express-bus-service>



the Governor's pause on congestion pricing on June 5th, 2024. The remainder of the routes were determined by the MTA, costing \$8 million¹².

To date, \$5.28 million of annual OBTA revenue remains unallocated in addition to \$46 million in surplus funds from prior years¹³.

Recommendations

PCAC's recommendations are two-fold, broken down into legislative recommendations and actions for the MTA. All will improve the rider experience. They are guided by four additional core goals:

- ✓ *Enhancing affordability*
- ✓ *Improving fare collection*
- ✓ *Simplifying fare payment*
- ✓ *Addressing fare evasion*

Implementing the following recommendations will advance these goals, make the best case for transit over driving as the region continues to adapt to congestion pricing, and improve the rider experience.

Recommendations for the MTA

MTA-based recommendations are further broken into proposals that should be addressed during the upcoming fare adjustment process in Spring of 2025, and non-fare related proposals that could be taken up outside of the fare adjustment.

Fare Adjustment Items

After pausing them during the COVID-19 pandemic, the MTA resumed its biennial fare increases in July of 2023¹⁴. While increases to New York City Transit subway and bus fares, most recently from \$2.75 to \$2.90, tend to garner the most attention, the fare adjustment is also a time when new fare incentives are most likely to be introduced on subways, buses, the LIRR, and Metro-North.

To make new incentives possible, Albany will be required to provide supplemental funds that ensure the MTA's operating budget remains in the black. Once the fiscal implications are better understood, they may prove to be revenue neutral as has been

¹² Office of Governor Hochul Press Release, *Governor Hochul Announces Service Enhancements on 24 MTA Bus Routes in New York City* (December 17, 2024) <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-hochul-announces-service-enhancements-24-mta-bus-routes-new-york-city>

¹³ Streetsblog NYC, *State Pols Still Haven't Spent Millions Alloted for Transit as Congestion Pricing Looms* (April 30, 2024) <https://nyc.streetsblog.org/2024/04/30/state-pols-still-havent-spent-millions-alloted-for-transit-as-congestion-pricing-looms>

¹⁴ Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), *2023 Fare Change Materials* (July 19, 2023) <https://new.mta.info/document/115391>



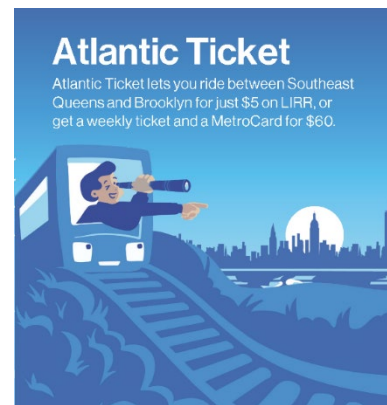
the case with past fare incentives like the Atlantic Ticket Weekly¹⁵. With that in mind, PCAC recommends the following fare adjustments.

Makes the best case for transit by addressing:

	Affordability	Fare collection	Fare payment	Fare evasion
<i>MTA Recommendations: Fare Adjustment Items</i>				
Create a weekly CityTicket with available transfers to New York City Transit subways and buses.	✓		✓	
Create a unified City Zone between both railroads	✓		✓	
Close the “mid-kid” gap on Family Fare	✓			
Introduce A.M. peak discounts for seniors, Medicare-eligible riders, and riders with disabilities	✓	✓	✓	✓

1. *Create a weekly CityTicket with available transfers to New York City Transit subways and buses.*

- ✓ *Enhances affordability*
- ✓ *Simplifies fare payment*



MTA riders don’t particularly care where the jurisdiction of one MTA operating agency begins and ends. The fare structure should reflect that by offering New Yorkers, particularly those living in subway deserts, tickets that make switching between services seamless. The MTA did this from 2018 to 2023 with the Atlantic Ticket, which offered riders a weekly LIRR ticket between Southeast Queens and Brooklyn and an unlimited weekly MetroCard for \$60¹⁶. Renewing and expanding upon the Atlantic Ticket will capitalize on the success the CityTicket has seen: 1.5 million tickets sold in 2023 alone that generated \$8.1 million to support MTA operations.

With \$12.4 million in annual Outer Borough Transportation Account revenue and \$46 million in surplus funds from prior years unallocated, coupled with CityTicket’s proven success, Governor Hochul and the Legislature should invest in a weekly CityTicket that includes transfers to New York City Transit subways and buses.

This would provide a viable alternative for New Yorkers in subway deserts who drive into the Central Business District and save hours for residents who already take transit. The Legislature or Mayor Adams and the New York City Council could further enhance

¹⁵ Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA, *Freedom Ticket II: Now, More than Ever!* (October 2021) <https://pcac.org/report/freedomticket/>

¹⁶ Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), *Set rail on the Atlantic* <https://new.mta.info/document/83571>



CityTickets' impact by [expanding Fair Fares to the commuter rails](#). The weekly CityTicket would cost \$25 million; \$40-50 million with free transfers to New York City Transit.

2. *Create a unified City Zone between both railroads.*

- ✓ *Enhances affordability*
- ✓ *Simplifies fare payment*

Today, the CityTicket offers intra-city travel for \$5 off-peak and \$7 peak, but on either the LIRR or Metro-North. While suburban riders can transfer from one railroad to another at Grand Central for a flat Combo Ticket fare of \$8 on top of their LIRR or Metro-North fare, irrespective of their destination, intra-city New York City riders must purchase two separate CityTickets¹⁷. Oftentimes riders using TVMs pay an even higher fare because the best fare available, in this case the CityTicket, is difficult to find on the TVMs.

One-Way Tickets

The Combo Ticket is not the best value for this particular trip. The total fare is lower if you buy two separate tickets, one from Jamaica to Grand Central and one from Grand Central to Fordham. You can use this trip planner to view the fare by planning these two trips separately, or call 511 for assistance.

① Combo Ticket
Valid until 4 AM tomorrow

\$16.25

This is a missed opportunity to encourage transit trips between points far in the city, such as the future Parkchester Metro-North stop and Jamaica, that would be inconvenient and time-consuming to travel between by subway or bus. Today's fare structure is inequitable for intra-city riders who pay more per mile than suburban riders.

The decoupling of OMNY from the railroads' payment system in favor of contracts with Masabi and Scheidt & Bachmann brings with it the ability to create a backend connection between LIRR and Metro-North ticketing. This backend connection can at last unify and improve railroad fare payment and realize OMNY's aspiration, "One Metro New York", even without Cubic as the railroads' vendor of choice.

When the MTA's new ticket vending machines and software are operable, a CityTicket that permits travel on both railroads across a unified City Zone for both railroads should be introduced. Such a ticket should also provide discounts for low-income, senior, disabled, and Medicare-eligible intra-city riders to align with the rest of the system.

Intra-City Railroad Riders Pay More to Travel Less

Trip	Cost (Peak)	Counties Traveled
Beacon – Grand Central Terminal	41 cents per mile	Dutchess to New York
Morris Heights – Grand Central Terminal	86 cents per mile	Bronx to New York
Queens Village – Penn Station	53 cents per mile	Queens to New York
Stony Brook – Penn Station	39 cents per mile	Suffolk to New York

Table 1: Cost per mile on the LIRR and Metro-North for intra-city versus suburban trips

¹⁷ Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), *Combo Ticket for LIRR and Metro-North Railroad*
<https://new.mta.info/fares/combo-ticket>



3. Close the ‘mid-kid’ gap on Family Fare
✓ Enhances affordability

Presently, the LIRR and Metro-North’s “Family Fare” promotion allows children between the ages of five and 11 to travel with a paying adult for one dollar¹⁸. Conversely, no discount of any kind is offered to children between the ages of 12 and 17, making transit an expensive alternative to driving for families with older children. In practice, it’s likely that many conductors cannot distinguish between an eleven and twelve-year-old rider and already provide the reduced fare outside of the advertised range. Expanding Family Fare or a similar benefit to include reduced fares for ‘mid-kids’ (twelve- to seventeen-year-olds) traveling with an adult would take the guess work out of trip planning for families and encourage more young people to familiarize themselves with the LIRR and Metro-North as they approach and surpass driving age. PCAC included a similar recommendation in its 2023 “OMNYvate” report¹⁹.

4. Introduce A.M. peak discounts for seniors, riders with disabilities, and Medicare-eligible riders
✓ Enhances affordability
✓ Improves fare collection
✓ Simplifies fare payment
✓ Addresses fare evasion

The A.M. peak period is the only time of day when seniors, riders with disabilities, and Medicare-eligible riders cannot use their half fare discount²⁰. This policy is a legacy of pre-pandemic days when commuters consistently packed morning peak trains. That is no longer the case. This window of ineligibility therefore no longer makes sense, particularly given that these riders can use their discount in the P.M. peak. In practice, many conductors already honor these groups’ discount in the A.M. peak, but the failure to make it official policy needlessly puts commuter rail riders in limbo and creates hurdles for transit-dependent groups to access the MTA. This recommendation is estimated to cost \$5-\$10 million.

Senior and Disabled/Medicare Riders Pay Double to Ride During the A.M. Peak

Trip	Off-Peak Cost	P.M. Peak Cost	A.M. Peak Cost
Hartsdale – Grand Central	\$6.50	\$6.50	\$13.25
Peekskill – Grand Central	\$9.00	\$9.00	\$18.25
Central Islip – Penn Station	\$10.25	\$10.25	\$20.50
Valley Stream – Penn Station	\$6.50	\$6.50	\$13.00

Table 2: LIRR and Metro-North ticket cost for senior, disabled, and Medicare riders

¹⁸ Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) *Group travel on LIRR and Metro-North*
<https://new.mta.info/fares/group-travel-on-lirr-and-metro-north>

¹⁹ Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA, *Integrate, Simplify, and OMNYvate: On Track for Better MTA Fare Payment* (October 5, 2024) <https://pcac.org/report/integrate-simplify-omnyvate/>

²⁰ Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), *Reduced-Fare program*
<https://new.mta.info/fares/reduced-fare>



Non-Fare MTA Items

PCAC recommends the following policies be implemented by the MTA.

MTA Recommendations: Non-Fare Items	Makes the best case for transit by addressing:			
	Affordability	Fare collection	Fare payment	Fare evasion
Establish a working group to harmonize railroad policies and operations	✓		✓	
Integrate West-of-Hudson, Hartford Line, Hudson Link, and Shore Line East ticketing and schedules into the TrainTime app		✓		✓
Automatically show and charge riders the best fare available to them	✓		✓	
Take advantage of the future back-end link between OMNY and TrainTime accounts to expand transfer options with fare incentives.	✓	✓	✓	
Integrate NYC Ferry, Lime Scooter, Citi Bike, and suburban transit agencies fare payment and schedules into The Official MTA App and OMNY	✓		✓	

1. Establish a working group to harmonize railroad policies and operations

- ✓ Enhances affordability
- ✓ Simplifies fare payment

With the opening of Grand Central Madison and work on Penn Station Access ongoing, the MTA's railroads are physically closer than ever before. However, several areas of inconsistency remain; most obviously, they include the railroads' dueling peak hours, fare zones, cross-honoring policies, and incoherent pricing formula.

When are peak fares charged on the LIRR and Metro-North?

Time	LIRR	Metro-North
AM Outbound	No peak period	6AM-9AM peak
AM Inbound	6AM-10AM peak	6AM-10AM peak
PM Outbound	4PM-8PM peak	4PM-8PM peak
PM Inbound	Off-peak	Off-peak

Table 3: Peak and off-peak times on the Long Island Rail Road and Metro-North

The MTA Board should establish a working group to begin to align these policies and release recommendations ahead of the next biennial fare adjustment in 2027, including recommendations on simplifying the fare structure overall. In the absence of MTA action, the Legislature should assemble such a group to resolve these issues.



2. *Integrate West-of-Hudson, Hartford Line, Shore Line East, and Hudson Link ticketing and schedules into the TrainTime app*
 - ✓ *Improves fare collection*
 - ✓ *Addresses fare evasion*

With NJ Transit as the operating agency for West-of-Hudson service, significant challenges exist to achieving a similar level of integration as the New Haven Line East-of-Hudson. Nevertheless, full integration of this service into TrainTime, even if ticketing is not immediately available as it is for Metro-North's East-of-Hudson service, remains a worthy and important goal.

Metro-North riders traveling to points beyond New Haven should be able to seamlessly transfer to CT Rail. Metro-North and the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CDOT) should work together to integrate schedule and payment options into TrainTime. With the Hartford Line surpassing pre-pandemic ridership²¹, facilitating these transfers will benefit riders as well as the bottom line for both Metro-North and CDOT.

Further integration will also help address fare evasion on the railroads. Unlike the TrainTime app, New Haven Line riders who do not have their ticket scanned on the CTrail eTix app are able to refund most of their fare even after their trip has started.

3. *Automatically show and charge riders the best fare available to them*
 - ✓ *Enhances affordability*

One of the most pernicious issues arising from the railroads' complicated fare structure is how easy it is for riders to overpay. Riders unfamiliar with the myriad fares offered by the railroads frequently pay more, particularly at ticket vending machines (TVMs) that bury some of the more affordable options. As an example, riders from Jamacia to Penn Station frequently pay \$11.25 at peak times and \$8.25 off-peak, as opposed to the CityTicket fare of \$7 peak or \$5 off-peak.

\$11.25 vs. \$7.00

PRICE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PEAK LIRR FARE FROM JAMACIA TO PENN AND PEAK LIRR CITYTICKET FARE

Source: MTA

PCAC included this recommendation in its 2023 "OMNYvate" report²². With new TVMs on order, now is the time for the MTA to improve the user interface and ensure that riders pay the best fare available to them. TrainTime app users should also be able to

²¹ CT Insider, *Ridership on the Hartford Line surpassed pre-pandemic levels* (January 4, 2024) <https://www.ctinsider.com/politics/article/ct-hartford-line-pre-pandemic-ridership-returns-18587872.php>

²² Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA, *Integrate, Simplify, and OMNYvate: On Track for Better MTA Fare Payment* (October 5, 2024) <https://pcac.org/report/integrate-simplify-omnyvate/>



view, and ideally purchase, all ticket options available on TVMs. In instances where integrating a certain ticket option into TrainTime is difficult short-term, such as MTA Away deals, TrainTime users should be made aware that a discounted option is available on a TVM.

4. *Take advantage of the future backend link between OMNY and TrainTime accounts to expand transfer options with fare incentives.*

- ✓ *Enhances affordability*
- ✓ *Improves fare collection*

The evolution of OMNY and TrainTime and decision to keep them on separate platforms means that railroad riders will eventually have the option of linking their OMNY and TrainTime App accounts. By creating incentives targeted at these riders, in addition to joint New York City Transit-railroad tickets, the MTA can increase OMNY usage and introduce TrainTime – and the railroads – to new users.

Such incentives could be seasonal, destination-based, or even targeted at specific employers and workers such as municipal employees, tradespeople, construction workers, or home health aides.

5. *Integrate NYC Ferry, Lime Scooter, Citi Bike, and suburban transit authorities scheduling and availability into The Official MTA App and payment into OMNY*

- ✓ *Enhances affordability*
- ✓ *Simplifies fare payment*

Released in 2024 after beta testing, The Official MTA App allows riders to navigate between, but not buy tickets for, New York City Transit subways and buses, the LIRR, Metro-North, NJ Transit, and PATH.

Integrating scheduling for New York City Transit and other transit and micromobility providers into MyMTA would offer riders a unique feature compared to rival apps, allowing them to transition between complementary modes more seamlessly, and creating the possibility of alerting riders to fare promotions between these services.



This would be enhanced by eventually integrating all transit and microtransit options into the OMNY system, allowing riders to benefit from transfers and deals for utilizing multiple modes and truly living up to the name “One Metro New York.” For example, Citi Bike riders who transfer from New York City Transit subways or buses could one day enjoy \$2.90 (or the current fare) off their bike ride.



PCAC first recommended integrating CitiBike into OMNY in its June 2022 “[Bike and Pedestrian Access Recommendations](#)”²³ With the evolution of OMNY and the creation of The Official MTA App, a backend connection between OMNY and other transit and last-mile providers is the logical next step. The future connection between The Official MTA App and OMNY should be the beginning of such integrations, not the end.

Including Hudson Link, NY Waterway Metro-North Train Connections, Clarkstown Mini-Trans, and Transport of Rockland would be transformative for West-of-Hudson MTA riders who today suffer from a dearth of transportation options and a confusing web of more than a half-dozen public and private transit providers. Worse yet, there is currently no platform that displays all local bus operators because Transport of Rockland does not appear on any transit apps.

Legislative Recommendations

There are a number of steps the Legislature can take to advance and improve the rider experience vis a vis fare payment as well. PCAC recommends the following items be taken up during the New York State budget process or legislative session. Some items may also be addressed at the New York City level.

	<i>Makes the best case for transit by addressing:</i>			
	Affordability	Fare collection	Fare payment	Fare evasion
<i>Legislative Recommendations:</i>				
Expand Fair Fares to the commuter railroads in New York City and 200% of the Federal Poverty Level			✓	✓
Provide CUNY students with free NYC Transit fares	✓		✓	✓
Form an integrated travel project task force to bring best practices to transit providers across New York State	✓	✓	✓	✓
Convene an interagency committee to develop a common intra- and interstate ticketing platform for commuter and regional rail providers	✓		✓	

1. *Expand Fair Fares to the commuter railroads in New York City and to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level*
 - ✓ *Simplifies fare payment*
 - ✓ *Addresses fare evasion*

²³ Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA, *Bike and Pedestrian Access Recommendations* (June 1, 2022) <https://pcac.org/report/bike-and-pedestrian-access-recommendations/>



Fair Fares is a program run by New York City that provides half price subway and bus fares to individuals and families earning up to 145% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). PCAC analysis found that expansion to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level would allow approximately 450,000 more New Yorkers to enroll in the program. At the current eligibility threshold, more than one in four residents are eligible for Fair Fares at census tracts near 70% of New York City's 39 commuter rail stations²⁴.

70%

OF NYC LIRR AND METRO-NORTH STATIONS ARE IN AREAS WHERE AT LEAST ONE-IN-FOUR RESIDENTS QUALIFY FOR FAIR FARES

Source: "Expanding Fair Fares to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level: Mapping equitable access to affordable transit for all"

Intra-City Railroad Trips Yield Massive Time Savings Compared to NYC Transit

Trip	Railroad (\$5-7)	NYCT (\$2.90)
St. Albans LIRR – East New York (Atlantic Ticket)	22 min	1 hour 2 min
Morris Park MNR (opening 2027) – Penn Station	25 min (est.)	1 hr 5 min
Woodlawn MNR – Grand Central	29 min	1 hr 7 min
Queens Village LIRR – Penn Station	36 min	1 hr 16 min
Rosedale LIRR – Atlantic Terminal (Atlantic Ticket)	36 min	1 hr 32 min

Table 4: Distance between locations adjacent to LIRR and Metro-North stations and railroad termini on respective railroads versus New York City Transit subways and buses

Expanding Fair Fares to the LIRR and Metro-North within New York City would provide more equitable access to affordable transit by allowing New Yorkers making 145% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) or less to shave hours off their commutes. Expanding Fair Fares to 200% of FPL is estimated to cost \$36 million according to the Community Service Society, while expansion to the commuter railroads within New York City is estimated to cost \$30-35 million.

PCAC's report, "[Expanding Fair Fares to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level: Mapping equitable access to affordable transit for all](#)," included a survey of income-based fare discount programs in the ten most populous U.S. cities that have such programs and found that New York City's Fair Fares Program is a national outlier in several areas:

²⁴ Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA, *Expanding Fair Fares to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level: Mapping equitable access to affordable transit for all* (June 2024)
<https://pcac.org/report/fairfares/>



NEW YORK IS:

ONE OF TWO

LARGE CITIES WHOSE INCOME-BASED FARE DISCOUNT PROGRAM DOESN'T APPLY TO COMMUTER RAIL

Source: "Expanding Fair Fares to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level: Mapping equitable access to affordable transit for all" survey of ten most populous cities with income-based fare discounts, eight of which have commuter rail

New York City is one of just two cities surveyed that does not offer an income-based fare discount program on its commuter rail services. Of the ten cities surveyed, eight have commuter rail systems operating in the same jurisdiction, six provide income-based fare discounts on commuter rail, and two, New York City and Washington D.C., do not.

Do Other Jurisdictions Offer Income-Based Fare Discounts on their Commuter and Regional Rail Services?

City - Transit Provider	Discount Offered	Eligibility Threshold	Includes Commuter Rail?	Poverty Rate*
NYC - MTA	50% off base fare	145% of FPL	No	18.3%
LA County - Metro	20 free rides per month	300% of FPL	Yes, MetroLink	13.9%
Austin - CapMetro	20% off base fare	200% of FPL	Yes	11.1%
Columbus - COTA	50% off base fare	200% of FPL	N/A	18.1%
San Francisco - Muni	50% off base fare	200% of FPL	Yes, CalTrain/BART	10.4%
Seattle - Sound Transit	Varies by mode	200% of FPL	Yes	10.1%
Denver - RTD	50% off base fare	185% of FPL	N/A	11.8%
Boston - MBTA	50% off base fare	200% of FPL	Yes	17.1%

Table 5: Survey of income-based fare discount programs at ten largest U.S. cities with such programs *American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates

Unlike the MTA, which operates New York City Transit, the LIRR, and Metro-North, Washington D.C.'s Metro does not manage the city's commuter rail services. Maryland Area Regional Commuter (MARC) has one stop – Union Station – within DC city limits, and Virginia Railway Express (VRE) has two. The LIRR and Metro-North have a combined 39 commuter rail stations within New York City (not counting termini or employee-only stations). It is also noteworthy that at 145% of the Federal Poverty Level, Fair Fares has the lowest eligibility, despite New York City having the highest poverty rate of the cities surveyed.



Beyond New York City Transit and the railroads, we encourage the Legislature to examine ways to continue to improve Access-A-Ride service, including fare capping and unlimited cards for Access-A-Ride users who currently do not have the benefits afforded to riders of the other MTA services or potentially expanding to the Fair Fares program to Access-A-Ride users over 64 years of age.

2. *Provide CUNY students with free New York City Transit fares*

- ✓ *Enhances affordability*
- ✓ *Simplifies fare payment*
- ✓ *Addresses fare evasion*

Just over 87% of CUNY's incoming Fall 2023 class attended New York City high schools²⁵. This means most CUNY students in New York City benefited from student MetroCards. It makes no sense that these benefits, newly expanded with the Student OMNYcard, end abruptly after high school.

This is a tragedy, particularly given that 56% of CUNY students have a household income below the New York City Poverty Line – but too high for Fair Fares – and 55% come from households where neither parent graduated from college, according to the CUNY's Fall 2023 Undergraduate Student Profile. Investing in free fares for CUNY students is a commonsense way to invest in New York City students seeking higher education.

Peer institutions in New York State and around the country already provide their students with free transit passes, generally either paid for by the school or through student activity fees.

CUNY OMNYcards would also help address fare evasion: in a recent survey of CUNY students conducted by the University Student Senate, 39% of students said they "hopped" the turnstiles or preferred not to disclose²⁶.

Since the New York City Department of Education and MTA unveiled the Student OMNYcard, which included expanded benefits such as four free rides per day and 24/7,

HALF

OF CUNY STUDENTS ARE FIRST GENERATION STUDENTS OR COME FROM HOUSEHOLDS BELOW THE NYC POVERTY LINE

Source: Fall 2023 Undergraduate Student Profile

87%

OF CUNY STUDENTS GOT FREE METROCARDS IN HIGH SCHOOL

almost none receive them at CUNY

Source: Fall 2023 Undergraduate Student Profile

²⁵ City University of New York (CUNY), *Fall 2023 Undergraduate Student Profile* (August 2024)

²⁶ University Student Senate (USS), *Free Metrocards for CUNY Survey* (2024)



365 availability, student ridership has increased 36%²⁷ – contributing to a drop in fare evasion. Providing similar benefits to CUNY students will do the same.

There are several proposals related to CUNY reform, perhaps most notably the *New Deal for CUNY*. Ensuring CUNY students have equitable access to affordable transit should be considered in tandem with the other investments.

3. *Develop an integrated travel project task force to simplify inter- and intra-state travel on New York State transit and lower administrative costs*

- ✓ *Enhances affordability*
- ✓ *Improves fare collection*
- ✓ *Simplifies fare payment*
- ✓ *Addresses fare evasion*

Across New York State, transit riders are hamstrung by a confusing web of payment platforms, reduced-fare programs, and transit schedules and providers. While Metro-North riders in Beacon can navigate to Metro-North service on Dutchess County Public Transit using their smartphone, Transport of Rockland riders in Newburgh are unable to view schedules on anything other than paper or online timetables available on Rockland County's website – much less see real-time information or use contactless pay.

These kinds of inconsistencies across jurisdictions make transit confusing to use for even the most seasoned riders and increase operational costs for transit authorities through duplicative services. In California, the state department of transportation joined other stakeholders to form the California Integrated Travel Project (Cal-ITP). Cal-ITP has three core goals: enabling contactless payments; automating customer discounts; and standardizing information for easy trip planning²⁸.

New York should follow suit to reap the benefits of an integrated and simplified statewide transit network. Doing so could reduce administrative costs for transit providers, and ultimately taxpayers, by automating enrollment in reduced-fare programs while simultaneously simplifying and improving the enrollment process for reduced-fare riders. A New York integrated travel project could also simplify fare payment and improve fare collection by shifting to contactless pay. Not only would this benefit transit riders who would no longer have to navigate of the matrix of proprietary apps and tickets that exist today among New York State transit providers, it would reduce opportunities for confrontation with train crews and bus operators.

4. *Convene an interagency committee to develop a common intra- and interstate ticketing platform for commuter and regional rail providers*

- ✓ *Enhances affordability*
- ✓ *Simplifies fare payment*

²⁷ Data.NY.gov, MTA Daily Ridership Data: Beginning 2020 https://data.ny.gov/Transportation/MTA-Daily-Ridership-Data-Beginning-2020/vxuj-8kew/about_data

²⁸ Cal-ITP, <https://www.calitp.org/>



In 1990, the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority (known today as “MTA Bridges and Tunnels”) and Port Authority of New York and New Jersey spearheaded an interagency committee tasked with developing the electronic toll collection system that became known as E-ZPass²⁹.

E-Z Pass is now the largest interoperable toll agency in the world, available across 20 states with more than 30 participating agencies and public authorities³⁰. All of these jurisdictions agree that asking drivers to enroll in each agency’s proprietary toll collection platform would be too onerous, yet this is exactly what we ask of transit riders.

In working to form an intra- and interstate ticketing platform for commuter and regional rail providers, the MTA can capitalize off the success of its popular TrainTime app – potentially creating a new revenue source, help riders in other jurisdictions who contend with software inferior to TrainTime, better integrate schedules of and facilitate transfers between regional transit providers, and promote transit ridership.

Conclusion

In the post-COVID era, transit in New York City and around the region faces profound challenges and exciting opportunities. Though OMNY’s evolution may not be what was originally planned, the fact remains that modernized fare payment technology creates vast opportunities to make our transit systems operate more seamlessly than ever before, irrespective of jurisdictional boundaries – putting riders first.

Riders need champions at all levels of government who will prioritize these issues, including at the MTA Board level. Currently, there are three non-voting rider representatives on the MTA Board who regularly raise the issue of fare integration and affordability, but they do not have a vote. The Rider Representation Act S.20A/A.923A (2023-24 session)³¹ would help give a voice to riders on the MTA Board and help advance the Rider-First Fare Agenda.

In the short-term, integrating various ticketing platforms and identifying funding to pilot fare incentives may be technologically or politically burdensome, but New York – and the millions of riders who depend on transit – can only gain by taking steps, however small, towards more seamless travel. In doing so, the region can make transit the best option for everyone– allowing riders and participating jurisdictions to reap the benefits of a region more closely connected than ever before.

²⁹ New York Times, *No-Stop Tolls: 3 States Agree To Automation* (April 4, 1991)
<https://www.nytimes.com/1991/04/04/nyregion/no-stop-tolls-3-states-agree-to-automation.html>

³⁰ E-ZPass Group, *About Us* <https://www.e-zpassag.com/about-us/overview>

³¹ The Rider Representation Act. New York State Senate, 2023
<https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/bills/2023/S20/amendment/A>



Appendix: Recommendations in Brief

Makes the best case for transit by addressing:

Category:	Affordability	Fare collection	Fare payment	Fare evasion
<i>MTA Recommendations: Fare Adjustment Items</i>				
Create a weekly CityTicket that includes transfers to New York City Transit subways and buses.	✓		✓	
Create a unified City Zone between both railroads	✓		✓	
Close the “mid-kid” gap on Family Fare	✓			
Introduce A.M. peak discounts for seniors, riders with disabilities, and Medicare-eligible riders	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>MTA Recommendations: Non-Fare Items</i>				
Establish a working group to harmonize railroad policies and operations	✓		✓	
Integrate West-of-Hudson, Hartford Line, Hudson Link, and Shore Line East ticketing and schedules into the TrainTime app		✓		✓
Automatically show and charge riders the best fare available to them	✓		✓	
Take advantage of the future back-end link between OMNY and TrainTime accounts to expand transfer options with fare incentives.	✓	✓	✓	
Integrate NYC Ferry, Lime Scooter, Citi Bike, and suburban transit agencies into The Official MTA App/payment system	✓		✓	
<i>Legislative Recommendations:</i>				
Expand Fair Fares to the commuter railroads in New York City and 200% of the Federal Poverty Level			✓	✓
Provide CUNY students with free NYC Transit fares	✓		✓	✓
Form an integrated travel project task force to bring best practices to transit providers across New York State	✓	✓	✓	✓
Convene an intra- and interagency committee to develop a common ticketing platform for commuter and regional rail providers	✓		✓	

About the Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA

Established in 1981, PCAC serves as the Official Voice for subway, bus, Long Island Rail Road, Metro-North, and Staten Island Rail riders.

PCAC is composed of three riders councils with members of the riding public recommended by regional elected officials and appointed by the Executive Chamber: the New York City Transit Riders Council, Long Island Rail Road Commuter Council, and the Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council.

Each council elects one non-voting board member to the MTA Board. The Rider Representation Act would provide these representatives with voting membership on the MTA Board for the first time.

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