



PCAC

PERMANENT CITIZENS
ADVISORY COMMITTEE TO THE MTA

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City Council Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure Preliminary Budget Hearing March 19, 2025

Testimony by
Lisa Daglian, Executive Director

Good afternoon, my name is Lisa Daglian, Executive Director of the Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA, PCAC. Created by the state legislature in 1981, PCAC is *The Official Voice of Riders* on subways, buses, the LIRR, Metro-North, and Staten Island Railway.

Thank you for holding this hearing today. As we anticipate the state budget in the coming weeks, much remains uncertain. What isn't uncertain is the overwhelming need for investment in our vital transit network. The MTA has made no secret about the importance of funding the 2025-2029 Capital Plan. It's critical that the \$68.5 billion plan be fully funded to bring the hundred-and-twenty-year-old system into a State of Good Repair, with upgraded signals and substations; accessibility and station improvements; new buses and train cars; resiliency enhancements; and a host of less prominent but equally important projects that will keep riders rolling for the next hundred-and-twenty-years. Our quality of life and way of life depend on a fully functional transit network. We know that finding the funding will be challenging, which is why we have come up with a [couple dozen ideas](#) that we have shared with our elected leaders in Albany.

Fair Fares:

We greatly appreciate and commend the Council's continued support for expanding Fair Fares eligibility to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level, following expansion to 145% 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. In fact, our [analysis](#) shows over 415,000 more New Yorkers would be eligible for the program, including 160,000 regular commuters. An increase to 200% would mean so much to so many – particularly workers making or near the minimum wage who are largely transit dependent – and make Fair Fares even fairer. It would also require an increase in the baselined funds, though we know there are still unused funds in the current annual allocation.

We strongly support legislation carried by Senator Comrie (S.3887A) and Assembly Member González-Rojas that would expand Fair Fares to the Long Island Rail Road and Metro-North in New York City, also for inclusion in the city's increased baselined funds. 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 CityTicket.

The Rider-First Fare Agenda:

In addition to expanding Fair Fares, expanding CityTicket to include a weekly option with transfers to subways and buses would increase access even further, and we are thrilled that the Senate again included the proposal (S.4411/A.6646) in their One-House Budget Resolution. We also 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 (S.4435/A.5384). We thank Senator Comrie and Assembly Members Alvarez and Seawright for carrying these legislative priorities, respectively, and hope you will join us by supporting them to help bring riders more equitable access to affordable transit around the city and region.

Buses:

Bus riders in the Central Business District and beyond are already seeing the benefits of congestion pricing with increased bus speeds (drivers, too). Automated Camera Enforcement, taking over for the ABLE program, is helping clear the way of obstructive vehicles, and few who get a first ticket receive a second. Recidivism continues to drop as fines rise. The “Block the Box” legislation proposed at the state level should also help clear the road for bus riders. But these should add value to the bus lanes and busways the city is creating. Unfortunately, the city has fallen down in its legal obligation to install the mandated number of miles – achieving just 13.5 miles in 2024, far short of the mandated 30 miles —a pattern we’ve seen repeatedly since the Streets Plan began.

We strongly support 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. We urge Mayor Adams and the Council to work together to end the hiring freeze at DOT so the agency has the staff needed to meet the legal mandate created by the Streets Plan and to make it easier, not harder, for DOT to build bus lanes – particularly in our city’s subway deserts.

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 to change 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, the Rider Representation Act (S.20A/A.923A), is sponsored by Senator Gounardes and Assemblymember Dinowitz.

Investing in Public Transit is Investing in Our Region

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.