**Joint Railroad Committee Testimony**

**As the Railroads do Away with MTA Away**

Good morning, I’m Brian Fritsch, Associate Director of the Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA, PCAC.

Congratulations to both railroads on continued record breaking on-time performance numbers and ridership counts. Year-to-date ridership increases of 10% for LIRR and 6% for Metro-North over 2024 are huge steps in the right direction. Even if serving more customers is pushing both railroads overbudget, it's a very good problem to have.

What is less inspiring is seeing the railroads doing away with the MTA Away program—with little notice right at the start of summer—especially without a replacement already in place, though we were happy to hear that a new program is on its way for next year. To make the program even better in the future, incentivize transit usage, and bring new riders onboard, we strongly urge you to make the new packages available on TrainTime and consider offering trips that cross connect with the other railroad and NYCT.

The demise of MTA Away underscores an unfortunate trend more generally around the MTA, especially with the MetroCard being phased out for OMNY. Fewer fare options and features for riders at least in the short term while the changeover is in progress. The initial promise of OMNY was and should still be a more integrated and seamless system between the MTA’s service network and beyond, yet to date we’ve seen things become more fractured.

PCAC recently launched an OMNY survey taken by users across the MTA region with clear early results. Riders want to travel between transit and the railroads on one fare with one card or app. They – and we – want to see additional features like a weekly CityTicket with free transfers to subways and buses, in order to use the fastest mode of travel available, regardless of cost, to help whittle down commute times in the most burdened metro region in the country.

OMNY is a major change for every rider in the MTA region. Let’s make the transition as smooth and painless as most of their railroad rides have been lately. Thank you.