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News > Headline Stories

Access-A-Ride changes possible

BY **PETE DAVIS**

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Two Queens' legislators and one influential civic group are renewing their efforts that would allow Access-A-Ride vehicles to travel across the Queens/Nassau County border.

State Senator Frank Padavan said that he met with Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) Executive Director Elliot Sander recently, and the two agreed to have further discussions about the MTA changing its policy administratively.

"They should have done it a long time ago; the current system stinks," Padavan said. "We will do whatever we can to try to convince the MTA to make the changes to accommodate a large number of my constituents."

Padavan, along with Assemblymember Mark Weprin, have sponsored legislation each of the past two years that the state legislature has passed overwhelmingly allowing Access-A-Ride customers to travel up to five miles over the Queens/Nassau County border.

Weprin noted the need to change the policy, which currently requires customers to exit the Access-A-Ride vehicle at the Nassau line and wait for another vehicle to take them the rest of the way, because a number of doctors' offices and hospitals are located in the affected areas.

"We have been trying to point out that this particular area is in a unique position because of the large amount of seniors and disabled people," Weprin said. "We are looking to fill a need for a lot of disabled customers that are being left out in the cold."

However, last year Governor Eliot Spitzer, and in the previous year then-Governor George Pataki, vetoed the bill sponsored by Padavan and Weprin saying that the bill only dealt with a small population area and it was not fair to change the law in this one spot and not in other areas customers could benefit from it.

Padavan said that if the MTA did not act to change its policy administratively, he would again renew his efforts at the state level when the new legislative session begins to have it changed.

The Queens Civic Congress (QCC), which represents a coalition of 100 civic and other community organizations throughout the borough, recently released a statement in support of that legislation.

“I wanted to do something to turn the heat up on the governor,” said QCC President Corey Bearak.