



Queens Civic Congress

P.O. Box 238, Flushing, NY 11363 (718) 343-6779 fax: (718) 225-2818
www.queensciviccongress.org queensciviccongr@aol.com

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Corey Bearak

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Contact:
Corey Bearak
(718) 343-6779

Testimony to MTA Queens Public Hearing

January 20, 2009

Presented by Kathy Masi, Vice President, Queens Civic Congress
co-Chair, Transportation Committee (Glendale Civic)

Queens Civic Congress, a coalition of over 110 civic, community, cooperative, tenant and other organizations in the borough of Queens, thanks the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) for this hearing and the opportunity to make clear NO need exists to raise any fares or cut our transit services, and existing service levels must be maintained and IMPROVED. A statute may require the MTA to propose hikes but everyone knows what's really needed. Plain and simple, those who stepped back or stepped away when it came to resourcing transit must return to the fold and honor their obligations to the public and, especially, we straphangers. That means the feds, Albany, the City and a business sector that, despite current economic straits, benefits greatly from transit. And it means no phony reliance on taxing our free bridge crossings.

Queens Civic Congress welcomes the recent foray to Albany one week ago today by the MTA board. Similar "visits" to City Hall and to Washington also make sense. The Albany "statement" helps to shed light on changes in finances made over the last decade that further shifted the burden of funding many initiatives always funded by state, federal and city tax levy onto those who use the system. Many pundits and commentators too often glossed over how transit got shortchanged if not outright robbed of support over the years. The changes in Washington, including at the highest level earlier today, and the continued growth in influence of our Members of Congress and our senior U.S. Senator offer a window of opportunity to resource transit. And let's not just stop at the stimulus plan; let's make sure before looking to fund the big glossy stuff, we first lock in federal funding to get the track signals modernized. Despite the difficult fiscal situation, New York State and City must do their part. When we testified in November 2007, we noted the minuscule aid New York City provides (barely 4% of NYC Transit's operating budget). Innovative ways exist to resource the state and city to provide stable annual contributions to the transit system that empower the MTA to keep the fares reasonable, if not reduced. We need that approach – reduced fares and service increases – to induce more people to eschew any reliance on cars – something very hard to do living in Queens.

Queens Civic Congress finds financing of the City's transit system by both the MTA and the state grossly unfair to residents of the City. Frankly, this funding scheme discriminates. It disproportionately calls on New York City residents and commuters to pay more than non-city residents. [Note: this testimony with hyperlinks will be emailed to MTA staff.]

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Investing in transit means more than repairs, new cars and buses and routes; it means a stable, affordable fare that encourages mass transit use and provides an affordable means for workers and visitors to get around. Under the current financing scheme for mass transit, a fare hike represents nothing less than a very regressive tax hike on many New Yorkers who struggle to make ends meet. For more two years, Queens Civic Congress promoted specific [revenue](#) measures to provide additional support for mass transit.

In [past testimonies](#), Queens Civic [Congress](#) and others noted the discordant variance in funding for mass transit when the City accounts for nearly seven out of every eight state riders moved by some form of mass transit. The ridership continues to increase without a concomitant investment by government at ALL levels. This has to change.

The MTA, with Federal, State, and City assistance, must end the shifting in financing transit projects to the farebox. MTA consumers ought not to pay for projects previously funded by the state (and city). In our 2007 [testimony](#), we noted that “This raises a real question about the role of the MTA. The role ought not to be to take the elected Governor (and State Legislature) off the hook for funding mass transit projects. In fact, the prior leadership of MTA had done just that. The fare box increasingly pays for debt service; this must end. No fare revenue should be used for debt service.” Queens Civic Congress expresses the hope that the board's visit to Albany represents just the start of of an advocacy effort by the MTA's leaders to move not just the state but city hall, D.C. and business to do their parts.

Queens Civic Congress also uses this occasion to urge the MTA to recognize some of the draconian measures that must go along with the fare hikes, including the outrageous doubling of the Access-A-Ride fare and eliminating the full toll reimbursement for Rockaways and Broad Channel residents to access the mainland; that intraborough route really should not be subject to a toll. And stop discriminating in favor of wealthier suburban commuters in the apportionment of fare subsidies and transit and transportation revenues.

Queens Civic Congress questions any need for hikes when creditable resources exist to support MTA operations and projects. Focus on this priority: Stability of resources. Queens Civic Congress stands ready to support MTA board members act as transit advocates instead of as apologists who allow the responsible elected officials to shirk their duties.

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Queens Civic Congress Members

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