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Testimony to the MTA, Tuesday, March 2, 2010

Submitted by ATU Local 1056, Daneek Miller, President/ Business Agent

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) Budget proposal for FY'2011 and to share the concerns of ATU Local 1056 regarding the future policies, planning and finances of the MTA. Local 1056 represents drivers and mechanics who work for MTA New York City Transit's Queens bus division. Last week, our local took ads to urge the public to speak out, stating "There the MTA goes again! This time they want to reduce and eliminate bus service throughout Queens. We cannot let these harmful cuts stand at a time when MTA management takes care of folks at top and perpetuates wasteful policies, practices and projects." That's right. Based on our experience and knowledge of the MTA system, we participate in today's hearing to make clear NO need exists to raise any fares or cut our transit services, and existing service levels must be maintained. Local 1056 recognizes some of the revenue concerns currently facing the agency but those who run the agency have long failed to look inside their house at outside contracting, particularly of professional services and administrative bloating that permeates the agency. Deal with these honestly and forthrightly before you look at core services for which everyday folk rely on the MTA to provide their affordable transit services.

The ATU has requested that the State Legislature incisively review the MTA capital budget, its poor policy decisions such as the regional bus private lines take over coupling attempts and general absence of oversight and accountability. All of these remains components of a recipe for disaster and worked to undermine one of a very few growth industries in our economy – public transportation. Public transportation remains key to economic growth. No doubt certain folks in real estate and development recognize that in their push for a Far West Side station between Javits and Times Square.



*Representing Employees of the
Queens Division, who safely Operate
and Maintain Buses for MTA New
York City Transit.*

*Serving the communities of Queens,
Manhattan, and the Bronx since
January 23rd, 1935.*

And that kind of mindset to benefit those at the top appears to permeate throughout the MTA. The current MTA Capital budget emphasizes expansion over preservation and maintenance of existing service. New lines that may increase capacity or address other concerns ought to be funded by the beneficiaries of those services rather than existing sources of general capital funding.

Initiatives such as the #7 line expansion, 2nd Avenue and East Side Access, Fulton, must take a back seat to capital needs that address existing service. This includes modernized bus terminals to meet existing ridership capacities. It also includes a better bus replacement schedule for Queens with too many old buses.

The MTA must focus on better use of its bus lines to serve intra-borough needs rather than just funneling riders to subways and rail. Better planning will increase utilization of some under capacity routes.

Emphasis on such schemes as Regional Bus which really provides cover for a subterfuge to reduce overall bus services citywide and in Queens especially, when we need to improve, if not expand service, takes precious time away from planning to improve services. Local 1056 strongly recommends that the State Legislature increase its MTA oversight in regard to Regional Bus schemes, including a cost/ benefit analysis.

The MTA and legislators need to exercise more oversight over the capital program, and also look at its reliance on outside consulting services.

The State needs to move on the Forensic Accounting review of the MTA operations.

The agency must seize this opportunity to review how it contracts out, including for professional services.

MTA continues to handle its legal services in an unnecessarily costly and inefficient manner. An example includes its farming out of worker's compensation matters, and other legal matters.

Similar wasteful practices exist elsewhere in the MTA and its subsidiaries.

The MTA must also re-think the megaprojects in the capital program before imposing any cuts to existing bus and subway service. This includes adopting the City Council's proposal to apply \$90 million in unused federal stimulus monies to cover operations.

In addition, it makes sense, as the Council also recommended, to apply some \$50 million in funds currently allocated to pay-as-you-go capital to avert service cuts.

The bottom line is public transportation cannot be viewed as just a private sector, market driven service. It is the economic and social hub of our society and the lifeline of all our citizens, and no reasonable person or entity can support proposed service cuts.

The ATU Local 1056 also urges the MTA, state and city to seek and obtain more federal stimulus and other funding for transit. Our local is working with concerned residents, our elected, our brothers and sisters in labor and our International to effect this assistance from Congress, and strongly advocates the need for dedicated funding.

The financing of the City's transit system by both the MTA and the city and the state are 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.

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. It remains absolutely imperative that the MTA and the City and State officials who appoint the MTA board and all of our elected remember the plight of our fellow working stiffs. Others have described reasonable revenue measure to the extent they prove necessary and ATU Local 1056 pledges to be part of any reasonable conversation that involve fairness and equity.

Thank you.