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Testimony for New York City Council hearing on Molinari Class Ferries

Hello my name is Michael Arvanites, State Senator Diane Savino apologies for not being here to deliver this testimony in person; the Senator is in Albany at a special session of the State Senate confirming a new chief of the MTA amongst other issues. The Senator has a special affinity for the Staten Island Ferry and would be remiss to let an opportunity such as this pass without commenting, so I will be presenting testimony on her behalf.

Chairman Liu, our thanks for conducting this hearing and for your continued vigilance to advocate for all mass transit and especially Staten Island's only non-vehicular inter-borough transit option. While the focus of this hearing is on the new Molinari Class boats, I also would like to also focus on some general state of ferry service in 2009 aspects.

Recently, there has been a call for the return of cars on the ferries. I commend Councilman Mitchell for his work on this and agree that this service should be implemented. However, it is also equally, if not more important, that the Molinari class vehicles are well-maintained. Riders enjoy the large size and layout of the boats, however, because they are often out of service, and must be replaced by smaller and/or outdated versions.

As I mentioned before, I am also presenting testimony from a survey of the ferry service that our office conducted earlier this summer. I have provided a copy of the report and its results to each committee member here today.

The information from the report was culled from the 2,500 report card surveys handed out over three days during rush hour by our office. We received 546 responses or 21%. The suggestions and comments in the report come directly from the daily riders of the Staten Island Ferry.

Overall, riders were generally satisfied with the service; however there are certain areas that necessitate improvement.

By far the highest request was for retail in the terminals. Since the Whitehall ferry terminal fire in 1991, there has been a lack of retail in the terminals, especially since the construction of the new terminals, which was completed four years ago.

Another common request was for more frequent service, including a 9:15 am boat during weekdays, as well as night and weekend half hour service. Legislation to accomplish that was

passed overwhelmingly by this Council in 2003, mandating 24 hour 1/2 minimum service. Unfortunately, this was vetoed by Mayor Bloomberg.

In addition, riders requested a "Quiet Zone" where loud music, noise, or talking would be limited or prohibited. Staten Islanders have the longest average commute in the nation and deserve the opportunity to have that commute be as normal as possible; a quiet deck would go a long way towards accomplishing that goal.

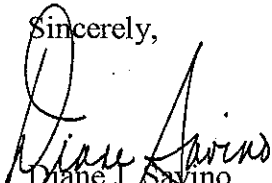
Another main concern was security in and around the terminals. According to police reports, this Sunday, an off-duty firefighter was assaulted by three individuals after immediately leaving the Whitehall terminal. While the terminals themselves are well lit and usually well-patrolled, the surrounding areas in Manhattan and especially the bus ramps leading to the St. George Terminal in Staten Island are, to quote survey takers, "not well lighted, are disgustingly filthy, have homeless...people lurking around smoking on the 'smoke free' ramps soliciting change." Security on the bus ramps received a "C" rating of 2.15, out of a 4.0 grade scale, in our report.

Finally, better coordination between the MTA and DOT was also requested. According to one of the ferry riders, "The 1 train and W sit on the tracks UNTIL it is certain that we have missed the ferry! Coordinate this!"

Senator Savino introduced a bill last year calling for the appointment of a regional coordinator for mass transit, this would facilitate the coordination of inter model cross jurisdictional transit hubs such as the two ferry terminals.

Senator Savino will keep advocating for ferry riders and, if past prologue, so will her colleagues that are assembled here today. Thank you for giving the opportunity for me to share Senator Savino's Ferry Report with you and for giving ferry riders this venue and your time.

Sincerely,



Diane J. Savino
23rd District

**JAMES C. DE SIMONE
COO, STATEN ISLAND FERRY DIVISION
NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION**

**HEARING BEFORE CITY COUNCIL
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION
SEPTEMBER 10, 2009**

Good morning, I am James De Simone, Chief Operating Officer of the New York City Department of Transportation (DOT) Staten Island Ferry Division and with me here today is David Woloch, Deputy Commissioner of External Affairs; and John Collins, Director of Ferry Engineering. Thank you for inviting us here today to testify at this hearing regarding the operation of New York City's newest class of ferryboats.

The Staten Island Ferry is the City's most reliable and economical form of mass transit. In operation 24-hours a day, 365 days a year, free of charge for all users, it transports over 20 million riders annually. The City has operated the Ferry since 1905, and it is the largest passenger ferry system in the United States. Given its scope and record of operation, I am especially proud to be here today to discuss the current operations of the Staten Island Ferry, which, if I may say, is the most efficient in the nation.

As you are aware, I joined DOT in May 2004, following the tragic accident involving the Ferryboat ANDREW J. BARBERI in October 2003. Since that time, we moved forward with aggressive enhancements, including an organizational restructuring of the Staten Island Ferry to more closely reflect that of a traditional maritime operation. In the weeks that followed the October 2003 accident DOT hired the Global Maritime and Transportation School (GMATS) of the United States Merchant Marine Academy to review ferry operations and make recommendations for safety enhancements. Overall GMATS found the Staten Island Ferry to be a safe operation and its recommendations were intended to enhance safety and efficiency by taking advantage of the more recent innovations in the maritime industry. All of the GMATS recommendations have been addressed, most significantly putting a Safety Management System (SMS) in place. And, the three recommendations of the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), which included implementation of SMS, have been satisfied and formally closed. SMS is an internationally recognized program of protocols and procedures which standardizes and records all functions and operating procedures,

modeled on the International Safety Management Code, and in October 2005 the American Bureau of Shipping, on behalf of the United States Coast Guard, issued a document of voluntary compliance to DOT attesting to the compliance and formal certification of this safety management system. It is my understanding that DOT is the only marine operator in the United States today to have voluntarily complied with this rigorous international safety regime.

Additionally, we have hired significant numbers of new employees and developed and implemented;

- broad-based professional training programs for our staff;
- operational and procedural enhancements;
- an up-to-date, comprehensive computer-based maintenance and inventory control system, transitioned from a manual, paper-based maintenance and inventory system;
- a U.S. Coast Guard mandated and approved “Combined Vessel and Facility Security Plan” in accordance with the requirements of the Maritime Transportation Security Act of 2002;
- a U.S. Coast Guard mandated and approved “Non Tank Vessel Oil Spill Response Plan” in accordance with the requirements of Oil Pollution Act of 1990;
- an EPA-mandated program to meet the requirements of the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit program.
- an agreement with the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey that implemented an exhaust emissions reduction program for the entire fleet of ferryboats – making the Staten Island Ferry fleet one of the cleanest in the nation.

We have also accepted and commissioned two new modern state-of-the-art ferry terminals; and accepted delivery of and commissioned three newly-constructed ferry boats, which is the subject of today’s hearing.

Over a century ago, the City of New York (City) commissioned five new ferryboats, each one named after a borough, and the Staten Island Ferry as we know it today was born. From time to time ever since, the City has contracted to construct new ferryboats to maintain a state of good repair and to benefit from enhanced safety and the efficiencies of new technologies. In September 2001, DOT awarded a \$120m contract to the Marinette Marine Group for the construction of three new ferryboats. These ferryboats were to replace the

aging "Kennedy Class" ferryboats which were constructed in the mid 1960s and approaching 40 years of age at the time.

The procurement process for these vessels began in the mid-1990s and included among other things a demand forecast, preliminary designs and a propulsion trade-off study, all of which led to specifications which were ultimately included in a competitive bid process for a three-vessel construction contract. During this procurement process, a decision was made, based in part on the propulsion trade-off study, that the vessels would be fitted with conventional rudders (which direct the course of the vessel) and propellers driven by a diesel electric power plant. The power plant configuration included redundancy with three main diesel electric propulsion generators fitted in the engine room and four independent propulsion drive units powered by variable speed AC motors, with two drive units on each end of the ferryboat powering a single propeller.

As required by federal regulations, the vessels were designed and constructed to United States Coast Guard (USCG) standards, which are among the most stringent and rigorous in the world today. Additionally, at DOT's behest and on a strictly voluntary basis, the vessels were also designed and constructed to the highest classification standards of the American Bureau of Shipping (ABS). To satisfy the design and construction standards of the USCG and ABS, all design proposals required pre-approval, all phases of construction were subject to inspection and survey, and all machinery and component parts required approval by these agencies. Prior to delivery to owners, the vessels were subject to thorough inspection, testing, dock trials and sea trials to ensure they met the high standards of these agencies and were subsequently issued Certificates of Inspection by the USCG and Classification Certificates by the ABS.

In September 2004, the first of these three ferryboats, GUY V. MOLINARI, was delivered to the Ferry Maintenance Facility at St. George on Staten Island. Following successful completion of specified owner acceptance protocols, the vessel was formally accepted by the City. During the following 18 months, SEN JOHN J. MARCHI and SPIRIT OF AMERICA were delivered and accepted by the City. Ultimately, all three vessels were commissioned and placed into passenger service between February 2005 and April 2006.

The vessels, not unlike their predecessors and most newly constructed vessels, have been subject to what we in the industry refer to as “teething problems.” New ships are not manufactured on assembly lines, but are instead custom built for each and every owner and, therefore, each class of vessel tends to manifest its own unique issues during the first several years of service. The design, control and propulsion system issues thus far experienced with the Molinari Class ferries are not uncommon for newly constructed ships and have been experienced by the U.S. Military, commercial tanker and cruise ship operators, as well as other passenger ferry systems, such as Washington State Ferries.

The Molinari Class is truly one-of-a-kind. The basic design of a double-ended ferry essentially involves the joining of two stern sections which, in and of itself, presents challenges and complications in terms of hull design, vessel control systems and a variety of other elements. In addition, although considered to be extremely efficient and flexible from a technical standpoint, the use of variable speed AC motors to power the drive system comes with its own set of complexities. Make no mistake about it, the Molinari Class vessels are complex and sophisticated vessels and reflective of current technology.

From the outset, issues were encountered with the drive systems and ship service generators which required DOT to work very closely with the shipbuilder, propulsion drive manufacturer (Siemens) and the ship service generator manufacturer (Caterpillar) to provide that the systems were reliable and that the City got what it was paying for. Accordingly, modifications were made to the power plant management software, drive system components and the ship service generators, all at no cost to the City and with extended warranties.

The USCG and ABS were and continue to be intimately involved in addressing these issues every step of the way. DOT cannot operate these vessels unless these two agencies authorize us to do so. In addition to being subject to quarterly and annual inspections by the USCG and under what is referred to as continuous survey by the ABS, anytime a piece of critical equipment fails or otherwise malfunctions, these agencies must be notified immediately and a no-sail deficiency is issued by USCG. Before the vessel can be returned to service a full investigation is conducted, the underlying root cause identified, corrective action taken, and a

report submitted, and then and only then will the USCG and ABS consider authorizing the vessel to return to service. Such is the process we are currently undergoing as a result of the recent hard landing that occurred July 1, 2009, involving the ferryboat SEN. JOHN J. MARCHI. In regard to the incident itself, we are pleased with the manner in which the crew conducted themselves. They took appropriate actions and followed official protocols, minimizing consequences.

The process of integrating the new vessels into the Staten Island Ferry fleet has been a major undertaking which we have all taken very seriously at DOT. We have taken a very conservative approach with these vessels, essentially removing a vessel from service anytime a drive unit tripped or another aspect of the vessel's redundancy failed, even when by regulation we could have continued to operate in passenger service. This is because as professional operators we always want to try to ascertain the root cause of any particular issue and fully understand it from an objective and technical standpoint and, hopefully, prevent a recurrence. In addition, there were and will continue to be instances when systems fail and the vessels must be removed from service for repair, but these instances are trending less frequent. In fact, for the fiscal year just ending GUY V. MOLINARI was available for passenger service 95% of the time, SEN JOHN J. MARCHI 93% of the time and SPIRIT OF AMERICA 99% of the time. This compares to ANDREW J. BARBERI's availability 97.5% of the time and SAMUEL I. NEWHOUSE 90% of the time. This data represents the amount of time the vessels were actually available for use in passenger service and not out of service for unanticipated or reactive repairs.

Our goal is to provide safe and efficient transportation for the traveling public. To this end, we will continue to refine the operation of these vessels and take whatever actions necessary to provide that they operate in a safe and reliable manner. Functioning under an extremely heavy regulatory scheme, we take very seriously regulatory mandates as well as industry standards for ferryboat operations, even further strengthening our commitment to the safety and efficiency of our vessels. Again, thank you for inviting us here today, and at this time we would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

Testimony of John Luisi

1. Never name ferryboats after extant individuals – Lt. Nick Lia, Fr. Vincent Capodanno
2. Overhang at South Ferry should cover commuters heading to trains
3. Clean seats on boats
4. Identity should be worn by private security at lower level pick-up area in St. George
5. Pick-up should be allowed at west side of St. George ferry terminal to reduce conflict with buses and cabs
6. Half hour service should be extended on weekends past 7p.m. to encourage North Shore economic development and discourage car use
7. Cars on ferries are a stupid election-year idea
8. Cover grated area on lower-level boarding ramp at Whitehall to allow and encourage lower-level disembarking
9. Reduce abuse of cyclists on boat and in boarding area, install signage on both sides to guide cyclists
10. Expand bike racks on boat – one rack is above a trap door
11. Get rid of Ken Dashow video in Manhattan terminal – it's obnoxious and ineffective
12. Sell newspapers on board vessels
13. Recycling bins for bottles and cans should be on boats
14. Post subway and bus maps more frequently and prominently on boats (or provide a map to where the maps are located)
15. Place Metrocard machines on boats to allow people to buy or refill their cards while on board
16. Have a clock in Whitehall. The zipper doesn't always work, and if we have to read ads encouraging us to move to Jersey City in order to see what time it is, we just might move
17. Have a countdown clock that works – "Next ferry departs in ____ minutes" and make it accurate to include "modified schedule"
18. Announce late service prior to when we should be boarding, not after
19. Make announcements on traffic radio stations when service is on a so-called "modified" schedule
20. Make Wi-Fi available in terminals and on boats
21. Put electronic information kiosks inside terminal and on boats focusing on tourism/spending opportunities in multiple languages
22. Get rid of fish tanks in SI terminal. The fish are all dying, and they're in the way
23. Eliminate the "dead zone" for cell service between Governor's and Ellis Islands
24. Hold any meeting having to do with ferries or ferry service on Staten Island

OPENING STATEMENT OF JOHN C. LIU

SEPTEMBER 10, 2009

TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE HEARING

- OVERSIGHT: THE NEW MOLINARI-CLASS VESSELS: FERRIES OR LEMONS?
- TODAY, WE WILL EXAMINE THE NEW MOLINARI-CLASS FERRIES THAT STARTED TO ENTER SERVICE IN 2005 AND WERE TO BRING A NEW ERA OF RELIABLE FERRY SERVICE FOR STATEN ISLANDERS
- INSTEAD OF BEING RELIABLE, ALL THREE NEW FERRIES, THE MOLINARI, THE MARCHI AND THE SPIRIT OF AMERICA HAVE EXPERIENCED MANY PROBLEMS THAT HAVE KEPT THEM OUT OF SERVICE FOR SIGNIFICANT AMOUNTS OF TIME
- A 2007 NEWS REPORT ON THE MOLINARI, WHICH HAD JUST BEEN IN SERVICE SINCE 2005, WAS OUT OF SERVICE ALMOST 40% OF THE TIME.
- THIS IS UNACCEPTABLE. IMAGINE IF YOU BOUGHT A NEW CAR AND IT WAS AT THE SHOP 40% OF THE TIME. YOU WOULD PROBABLY BE ABLE TO GET A NEW CAR UNDER THE STATE'S LEMON LAW.
- UNLIKE A CAR, WHICH MAY JUST SERVE A FEW PEOPLE, OVER 65,000 PEOPLE EVERY DAY RIDE THE STATEN ISLAND FERRY, WHICH IS PROBABLY STATEN ISLAND'S MOST IMPORTANT LINK TO THE REST OF THE CITY.
- WHEN THE FERRY IS NOT OPERATING, THOUSANDS OF STATEN ISLANDERS, WHO HAVE LIMITED MASS TRANSIT OPTIONS, ARE AFFECTED.
- IN ONE OF THE LAST EPISODES WITH MECHANICAL PROBLEMS ON THE MARCHI, PEOPLE WERE NOT ONLY WERE PEOPLE INCONVENIENCED, BUT MANY GOT HURT WHEN THE MARCHI CRASHED INTO THE ST. GEORGE TERMINAL SLIP AFTER LOSING POWER.
- I APPLAUD MY STATEN ISLAND COLLEAGUES, CM MITCHELL, MINORITY LEADER ODDO AND COMMITTEE MEMBER CM IGNIZIO FOR ASKING FOR THIS IMPORTANT HEARING.
- INTRODUCE COUNCIL MEMBERS
- STATEN ISLAND CMS OPENING STATEMENTS
- CALL FIRST WITNESS.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: John Luisi

Address: 110 Belmont Place

I represent: Ferry Riders Comm. + Candidate for

Address: Borough President

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 9/10/09

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Michael Arcanites

Address: _____

I represent: State Senator Diane Savino

Address: 36 Richmond Terrace

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: JAMES DeSIMONE, CAPTAIN

Address: _____

I represent: DOT

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: DAVID WOLOCH, DEPUTY COMMISSIONER

Address: _____

I represent: DOT

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: JOHN COLLINS, Director of FERRY ENGR.

Address: _____

I represent: DOT

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 09/009

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: J. FRED RODRIGUEZ

Address: BOX 164 STATEN ISLAND, NY 10301

I represent: FERRY RIDER'S COMMITTEE

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms