

**Remarks by
Thomas F. Prendergast
President, MTA New York City Transit
at an Oversight Hearing before the
Council of the City of New York's
Committee on Transportation
December 6, 2011 – 10:00 a.m.
250 Broadway – Hearing Room, 16th Floor**

Good morning Chairperson Vacca and members of the Committee on Transportation. I am Tom Prendergast, President of MTA New York City Transit. I am joined here today by Carmen Bianco, Senior Vice President for NYC Transit's Department of Subways, and Darryl Irick, Senior Vice President for the Department of Buses and President, MTA Bus Company and Long Island Bus. These gentlemen should be very familiar to you as both of them appeared before this committee just last month. We are here today to discuss the topic of "*MTA Readiness for Winter 2011-2012.*"

When we appeared before this body for more than four hours last January, you were understandably very unhappy with our performance, as you were with the performance of other City operating agencies, for what was inarguably an inadequate response to the December 26, 2010 blizzard. As I stated at the time, we were immensely disappointed with ourselves in not being able to provide New Yorkers with all that they deserved during that extreme weather emergency. We were clearly not fully prepared for the unprecedented conditions generated by an exceptional storm. However, we immediately began the process of review and change that was required to address our shortcomings, and we have continued to work in that vein over the past year to further improve our winter storm performance. Many of the changes that we were able to quickly execute were tested with great success during subsequent snow storms in January and February. They were recently tested again during Hurricane Irene and the first winter snow storm of this season which occurred just before Halloween. The changes we enacted immediately include:

- Appointment of an Emergency Coordinator to facilitate MTA-wide storm response coordination and information sharing;
- Establishment of situation rooms to manage storm response activities;
- Adoption of procedures for preemptive curtailment of service when conditions render normal service untenable;
- Designation of dedicated customer advocates to ensure the well-being of customers on immobilized vehicles;
- Improvements in procedures to deliver more detailed and reliable bus service status information on the mta.info website;
- Improvements in bus operating procedures for evaluating and responding to degraded road conditions.

Our internal agency review was followed by a rigorous all-agency analysis and review. That effort concluded this summer with the issuance of a written report, "*MTA Storm Performance Review*" which can be accessed at www.mta.info via the "Transparency" link under Board Materials/June 2011. Hard copies of the report were forwarded to both Chairman Vacca and Speaker Quinn back in June, along with a point-by-point response to the observations and recommendations they offered in correspondence dated May 5th, with specific references to actions and recommendations embodied in the report.

For those of you who may not have had the opportunity to review this report, this MTA-wide effort expanded upon the initial review and findings of each MTA agency with additional lines of internal as well as external inquiry. The guiding objective of the all-agency review was to identify a course of action that could improve MTA performance in future storms, incorporating lessons learned from the December storm and other storms, along with international good practices in storm management. The report provides a factual overview of key events that occurred during the December storm and is structured according to the four phases of a storm event:

- Storm tracking and readiness, when an approaching storm is monitored and the appropriate response is formulated;
- Mobilization, when storm procedures are activated, staff and other resources are pre-positioned to respond, and customers are informed of potential service disruptions;
- Execution, when the storm arrives, snow and ice clearing commence, operations are adapted to suit conditions and customers are updated on service status;
- Recovery, when the storm concludes, snow and ice clearing continue, operations are restored, and customers are updated on service recovery.

The study assesses the performance of NYC Transit and each of the other MTA agencies through the four phases of the December storm, highlighting areas of strength and opportunities for improvement. Based on these performance evaluations, the report presents a series of recommendations, applicable across the MTA agencies. These recommendations address operations, customer communications, staffing and equipment and are designed to foster improved storm performance in the future. Based on the agency-wide recommendations, a customized action plan for each MTA agency is presented in an appendix to the report, taking into consideration the unique challenges each agency faced during the snowstorm, as well as the unique strengths and shortcomings in the performance of each. NYC Transit has individual action plans for NYC Transit Subways, Buses and Paratransit services, and these plans have guided our continued efforts over the past several months to improve our extreme weather readiness. I'd now like to take a few moments to provide you with a status update on some key elements of our agency action plans.

With respect to Subways, the 2011/2012 Winter Operations Plan was completed early last month. It includes the new Plan V alert level which encompasses procedures for controlled service curtailment; you will recall that this new alert level was established immediately following the December 2010 storm and implemented for the first time

during the subsequent January 2011 storm. Our Department of Subways has specific guidelines in place as to when alert levels should be declared relative to the forecasted storm arrival. It's also worth noting that the Rail Control Center will now call the Winter Operations Plan seven days a week instead of five, including holidays. In addition, we have a plan in place to protect critical infrastructure by continually monitoring the allocation of resources and making adjustments according to need and actual conditions. We also have improved protocols for using work trains and snow-fighting equipment to transport staff around the subway network.

Moreover, we've reorganized the command and control structure to re-centralize operating responsibilities across the entire subway network, and, as mentioned earlier, Subways has introduced a centralized Incident Command Center for coordinated field management of storm conditions and other significant operating events. This structure supported the successful shutdown of the system during Hurricane Irene. And, very importantly, we have procedures for managing stuck trains, and for all significant operating events, the Rail Control Center has a dedicated "Customer Advocate" whose sole responsibility is to focus on customer safety and security. Finally, Subways has been periodically conducting "table-top" exercises since February 2011 for all types of operating events: power outages, hurricanes, etc; the first 2011-2012 winter operations table-top was conducted on November 15.

There are also many improvements on which Subways is continuing to work, including the implementation of a mass-call system to facilitate a more rapid mobilization of hourly staff. An Emergency Notification System has been installed and tested, and Subways personnel are currently completing forms to update personal contact information, such as phone numbers and email addresses. We expect to begin data input shortly. In addition, we are revamping the staff training curriculum to incorporate crisis management techniques. We are also working on a number of equipment improvements, including completing the procurement of eight new snow throwers and expanding remote monitoring of infrastructure heaters, such as those on switches and the third rail.

Turning to Buses, an enhanced 2011-2012 Winter Operations Manual has been issued to employees across the MTA's bus operations. Similar to Subways, it includes a new alert level which provides for controlled service curtailment and establishes guidelines as to when to declare alert levels relative to the forecasted storm arrival. In addition, Buses has met with the Sanitation Department on several occasions in table-top exercises, and a revised set of priority plowing routes has been established, in conjunction with Sanitation, to facilitate the clearing of priority bus routes to the extent possible. Arrangements have also been made for sharing real-time plowing information via transit representatives at the City's Office of Emergency Management Emergency Operations Center. As in past years, Sanitation will be providing salt to the MTA's bus operations, and, as a back-up, Buses will also be able to get salt from MTA Bridges and Tunnels. This year, the City vendor responsible for clearing bus stops will also be represented in OEM during activations of the Emergency Operations Center, providing another connection to help facilitate safe continuation or resumption of service.

Like our Department of Subways, Buses has introduced a centralized situation room for coordinated management of storms and other significant events affecting our operations and has been conducting its own table-top exercises in anticipation of the upcoming winter since early September. In addition, Buses has completed and successfully tested what we refer to as a "snow desk" application that automates the process of monitoring immobilized buses. Also, there is now a protocol for a senior-level manager to be assigned to the situation room at all times to advocate for customers who are on immobilized buses. Very importantly with regard to staffing, we've established protocols to minimize exposure to personnel shortages during the holidays, including holding over hourly and supervisory staff as needed, and deploying additional staffing from depots and support departments as required.

In the area of equipment, we now have a consistent policy for tire chaining, based upon the specific conditions or forecasts. This policy requires chaining of the articulated fleet when the severity and speed of the storm warrant, while also taking into consideration the service area of the buses. Whenever possible, articulated buses scheduled to be in service overnight are to be replaced with 40-foot standard buses, and all buses to be in service overnight, regardless of type, will be sent into service with chains – again, as conditions warrant. Other key equipment that we have in place includes tow trucks, front loaders, and snow fighters. In addition, we equip our road trucks and other road support vehicles with salt, shovels, and straps to respond to immobilized vehicles.

We are also continuing to consider other equipment, including a bus with a sand spreader, which could assist our low-floor buses. Finally, we are continuing to advance the installation of GPS tracking on buses; as we've previously advised you, our plans include expansion of the Bus Time pilot currently on the B63 route to bus routes across Staten Island on or around the first of the new year.

With respect to our Access-A-Ride paratransit service, we have developed a dashboard storm monitoring system to track immobilized vehicles and customers, OEM notifications and trip cancellations on a half-hourly basis. We have also coordinated a procedure with OEM and City first-responders for rescuing customers on immobilized vehicles or those who develop medical needs during storms. Also in place is a new paratransit-specific Storm Action Plan that includes processes for curtailing all non-medically essential service; this plan was tested earlier this year during storms in January and February, as well as during Hurricane Irene. In addition, procedures have been developed for deploying extra unassigned vans to enhance the ability of the Command Center to maintain service during storm events. Procedures are also now in place for 24-hour staffing of the Command Center to provide the continuous coverage needed during storms. Paratransit equipment needs are also being addressed. Tire snow chains have been purchased to outfit ten percent of the fleet in accordance with the Paratransit action plan, and protocols have been developed for deploying only vans during storm operations, as they handle better in snow than sedans.

Additional paratransit improvements are underway. We are continuing to work towards the launch of an Interactive Voice Response customer calling system for Access-A-Ride

customers to aid in communicating service suspensions by the end of next summer. And, we're in the process of developing proposals to introduce new customer communications channels, such as e-mail.

I'd now like to discuss how the MTA is addressing a key agency-wide failing during the 2010 blizzard – the lack of MTA-wide response coordination and information sharing. Since the beginning of the year, MTA Headquarters has taken a more active coordinating role during significant weather events. As mentioned earlier, an emergency coordinator position has been established, and that individual is responsible for coordinating emergency response during a storm or other event for all MTA agencies. The emergency coordinator participates in activations of the Emergency Operations Center at the NYC Office of Emergency Management and works with other MTA agency staff assigned to the Emergency Operations Center during emergencies and in planning and after-action reviews with the MTA Agencies and OEM.

Within the MTA, the Chairman, the Chief Operating Officer, the agency Presidents, the new emergency coordinator and other headquarter executives conduct frequent calls during all natural hazard emergencies to ensure region-wide situational awareness and operational awareness, and to facilitate sharing of resources both within the MTA and with agencies outside the MTA family. Employee availability and communication strategies are also part of the agenda on these calls.

These new procedures, in effect since January, have succeeded in enhancing MTA's response to a variety of emergencies, including the January and February winter storms earlier this year and Hurricane Irene during the summer. In the Emergency Operations Center of OEM, MTA has the ability to reach out quickly to the various City agencies and to respond to those agencies. The MTA headquarter representative working with OEM has direct access to headquarter executives, as well as the agency Presidents, facilitating faster responses to certain situations. For instance, MTA's bus operations and Bridges and Tunnels now work with other agencies with tow trucks through a Tow Truck Task Force established by OEM to quickly assist one another.

For the first time, MTA is conducting periodic all-agency winter storm executive communications and decision-making exercises to practice the communications activities and decision-making that must take place during winter storms and other emergencies. Participants will include MTA Executive Director Joe Lhota, as well as other top headquarter and agency executives. Among the discussion topics are immobilized trains and buses, curtailment or suspension of service and potential evacuations - all difficult issues that may have to be addressed over the coming months.

Additionally, to enhance our communications with customers, MTA has taken steps to insure its communications systems function well during any type of emergency. The IT group monitors web site traffic, and if need be, can quickly modify the site to ensure adequate capacity for all of our customers using the internet to access our service information. It's worth noting, however, that because we have enhanced our capacity, we did not need to take this step during Hurricane Irene, and we believe we have adequate

capacity to accommodate all "hits" during winter storms. Our current website design allows us to quickly post and modify service information for all MTA agencies. In addition, we have developed a special weather page that becomes the mta.info homepage during weather-related events affecting our operations. Consistent with the City Council's request, that page provides links to 311, AirTrain, PATH, etc. We consistently provide the press with timely updates, send email alerts to subscribers and also now use social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, to reach out to customers.

Moreover, the MTA now partners with New York State DOT to provide current service information for all MTA agencies by telephone using 511. The 511 system provides our customers with one easy-to-remember phone number to access all MTA transportation information. In addition, the MTA now has protocols in place for providing 311 with service status updates and alternative transportation options; enabling 311 and 911 to direct MTA service inquiries to the appropriate MTA communication channels; and enabling the MTA to track MTA-related 311 and 911 complaints during storms and other significant operating events.

As you can see, we've accomplished much in a relatively short period and are well on the way to accomplishing more. We have a comprehensive, well thought-out action plan, and we're steadily moving towards the goals established to optimize our response to severe storm conditions, as well as other emergency situations. I'd like to take this opportunity to personally thank the Transportation Committee and the Council as a whole for your in-depth review of this critical matter and the thought and effort that went into your recommendations. I'd like to close my remarks by acknowledging the commitment and consistent effort of the men and women of NYC Transit who work tirelessly (and often heroically) to keep New York City moving as safely and comfortably as possible, even during times of crisis. Make no mistake about it, we are acutely aware that public transit always has and likely always will be judged by the mantra, "You're only as good as your last rush hour or snow storm." We're now available to answer any questions you may have.

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Carmen Bianca

Address: SVP Dept of Subways

I represent: MTA NYCTransit

Address: _____

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Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 12/6/11

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Tom Prandrost

Address: Resident MTA NYCTransit

I represent: _____

Address: 2 Broadway

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Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

Name: Daryl Patrick (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: Senior Vice President of the Department of Buses

I represent: President MTA Bus

Address: 2 Broadway

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