

Opening

Good morning and thank you for having us here today. I'm Pat Foye, MTA Chairman and CEO. I'm joined today by Bob Foran, our Chief Financial Officer and Sarah Feinberg, Interim President of New York City Transit.

Before I begin, I'd like to thank Speaker Johnson and Chair Rodriguez both for the invitation and for their advocacy on behalf of our system. I also want to thank Speaker Johnson for his introduction to the newly confirmed Secretary of Transportation. And Chair Rodriguez, your regular appearances at our Board meetings and repeated calls for federal funding are much appreciated.

Since we last appeared before you in May at the height of the pandemic, much has changed. The COVID-19 virus has wreaked havoc on our agency on both a personal and financial level. Its impact on our budget far surpasses that of even the Great Depression, and the all too real human cost has been steep: to date, we've tragically lost more than 140 colleagues. We will never forget their service and dedication.

Keeping New York Moving

Despite these immense challenges, the hardworking and heroic MTA workforce has kept this city moving for essential workers and first responders during the height of the crisis, and now, during the recovery. All the while, our agencies have continued to show improvements in on-time performance and other metrics, with 88.6% of subway trains operating on time last year, the highest OTP in recent history.

On buses, the average extra time customers spent onboard decreased by 46 seconds on a 12-month average basis, and the equivalent metric measuring OTP increased by 5 percentage points to 77.4%. This progress was greatly helped by the City's installation of 16.4 new miles of bus lanes and busways. We're buoyed by the success and hope to see NYCDOT implement the rest of the 60 miles of bus lanes that Sarah asked for this past summer. We look forward to meeting with the new Commissioner, Hank Gutman, on this matter.

For our part, we're doing everything we can to maintain and expand on these improvements in performance while prioritizing safety at every turn. Throughout this once-in-a-hundred-year crisis, the MTA has been an industry leader in pandemic protocols, working in lockstep with top federal, state and local authorities to adapt our response and protect customers and our dedicated employees. That starts with our universal mask mandate launched back in April and our unparalleled round-the-clock disinfecting program – which 75% of riders said they strongly approve of in a recent customer survey.

Complementing these efforts are innovative new pilots and studies in fields ranging from air filtration systems to understanding aerosols. We've empowered riders by providing

real-time capacity tracking on buses and the railroads to help promote social distancing. PPE vending machines have been installed at select stations, along with mask dispensers on buses and hand sanitizer pumps systemwide. And, we created the regional Mask Force, distributing more than 6 million masks to customers who need them. Many of you and your colleagues have joined us for Mask Force events and we greatly appreciate your support, especially Chair Rodriguez, Councilmember Miller, and Councilmember Levin.

When it comes to managing the spread of COVID-19 among our workforce, we were the first transit agency in the nation to stand up our own on-site testing program, and now we're looking to expand it with coronavirus vaccines. But like the rest of the nation, the MTA is severely limited by the constrained levels of available vaccines. We want to get as many workers inoculated as possible, especially our men and women on the front lines; however, availability of supplies must improve first. The efforts of our heroic workers demand nothing less.

Prioritizing Safety

In the meantime, safety remains our number one priority as we continue taking action to protect the health and well-being of our customers and workforce. We're also focused on ensuring security of our system. Most concerningly, in recent weeks, we have seen a string of high-profile attacks on customers and our workforce. This is appalling and unacceptable.

The MTA is already proposing to strengthen state laws protecting employees against spitting incidents and assault, but what we really need is additional robust support from our partners at the NYPD. We have been in close contact with new Transit Bureau Chief Kathleen O'Reilly and are encouraged by her commitment to address these issues and increase police presence across our system.

Budget Impact / Federal Relief Efforts

The bottom line is we need customers to feel safe throughout the system, so that they will return as the city reopens. The MTA's finances will not be able to recover without them; before COVID, fare revenue generated for \$6 billion for our budget. Our ridership struggles over the last 11 months are well documented. Today we're serving roughly 30% of our pre-COVID base on the subways and 50% on buses. Never in the MTA's history have we experienced such a sustained drop in ridership and subsequent fare revenue on which we depend.

With no option for relief from the City and State-- who are also struggling financially-- we've had to rely on the federal government to stay afloat. The MTA received roughly \$8 billion in emergency aid last year between the CARES Act in March and the latest relief bill passed in December. Additionally, we were able to borrow another \$2.9 billion through the Federal Reserve's Municipal Liquidity Facility. These funds have been a

critical lifeline for the MTA and will help us get through 2021 while avoiding severe budget driven cuts to service and thousands of layoffs. We're grateful to Senate Majority Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi and the bipartisan New York delegation for their hard work and support.

But we're not out of the woods yet. We are still forecasting substantial out-year deficits through 2024. At our Board meeting this month, we will consider toll policy proposals after deciding in January to delay a scheduled vote on fare increases. We recognize that so many of our customers are suffering financially as a result of the pandemic, and we don't want to exacerbate the economic impact of this crisis – especially for essential workers, low-income residents and communities of color that rely on us. Without question it's the right thing to do, but it will have an impact on our already extremely fragile budget.

Internally, we have undertaken our own extensive cost-cutting measures. We're projected to save \$601 million in 2021 through significant reductions in overtime, major cuts in the use of consultants, and other non-personnel expense reductions– but it's a fraction of what's needed to address the lingering impact of the pandemic. Simply put, we will need billions more in additional federal relief to get through the next few years.

Thankfully there is reason for optimism on that front. Recent reports indicate that Senator Schumer expects the next COVID relief package will include at least \$30 billion for mass transit nationally, with a significant amount earmarked for the MTA. We're looking forward to continuing to work with him, Speaker Pelosi, newly confirmed Transportation Secretary Buttigieg and the Biden administration to protect our industry. We have long said that this is a national crisis that requires a national solution.

Capital Program / Spending

Beyond covering operating costs, federal support can help fund transformative and necessary capital projects that will strengthen our system for decades to come, like those outlined in our historic 2020-2024 Capital Program: the installation of modern signaling on six subway lines, 70 new ADA accessible stations, East Side Access, Penn Station Access and Second Avenue Subway Phase 2. But the capital plan has been mostly put on hold as a result of the pandemic and the resulting financial crisis.

The Biden administration can help us recover by accelerating the Central Business District Tolling program, which was needlessly delayed by the previous administration. The CBDT program will help us leverage \$15 billion for our capital plan. In addition, Governor Cuomo followed through on the state's commitment by including a \$3 billion contribution toward our capital plan in this year's state budget proposal. We need the city to definitively confirm its \$3 billion share.

These commitments together represent approximately 12% of the 2020-2024 Capital Plan and will fund the key projects I just mentioned a moment ago. We are eager to

pursue these critical projects for our city customers as soon as possible. One thing we know is that we will get past this global public health crisis and it's important that when we do, our system is not in a state of disrepair. It's why it's so important that the city serve as our partner and meet its commitment toward our Capital Plan.

Over the last year, MTA Construction and Development has proven that it can advance key projects within the new funding constraints, thanks in no small part to the leadership of Janno Lieber. In 2020 we accelerated \$2 billion in capital work and leveraged low ridership periods to work efficiently and deliver improvements for customers. To name a few examples, we opened a stunning new entrance at Penn Station, which for the first time gives Penn a visible identity on 7th Avenue. We completed the rollout of the OMNY fare payment system on subways and buses; installed new elevators at 11 stations systemwide; finished the L Train Tunnel Project on time and on budget; and implemented positive train control on both railroads by the federal deadline.

Additionally, we look forward to the Council's support and partnership on the soon-to-be-referred Zoning for Transit Accessibility proposal. This citywide zoning text amendment would provide an avenue for more private funding of ADA improvements, freeing up capital funding that can be allocated to additional accessibility projects.

Improving accessibility across the system in every borough is a top priority. Last week we announced the hiring of Quemuel Arroyo as the MTA's first-ever all agency chief accessibility officer. You are all probably familiar with Q. He served in a similar capacity for the city Department of Transportation. He knows the city and is respected for his work on behalf of those with disabilities. We're excited to welcome him aboard.

Conclusion

We want to build on the successes I've outlined here as much as possible to bring our system into the 21st century. As you all know, a robust MTA is the great equalizer in New York and the shot in the arm New York City needs to lead its economic recovery and that of the nation. We're eager to work with you and our partners at every level of government to make this happen. We're now happy to take your questions. Thank you.



TRANSPORT WORKERS UNION

OF GREATER NEW YORK • AFL-CIO • LOCAL 100

Tony Utano
President

Earl Phillips
Secretary Treasurer

LaTonya Crisp
Recording Secretary

Lynwood Whichard
Administrative VP

February 10, 2021

Dear Council Members,

COVID-19 has taken a terrible toll on the transit workforce!

More than 100 members of our union perished after becoming infected with the virus since our first fatality in late March of 2020. The majority of those who have died were employed in the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's bus and subway system, but some of our fallen heroes worked for private transportation companies like Big Bus Tours.

I don't think there is any dispute that the MTA was not adequately prepared, and it mishandled the health crisis in the early stages. Not only did the authority fail to provide masks, but it also initially told workers they couldn't wear their own masks if they had them.

The union successfully advocated and fought for numerous safety improvements and benefits, including rear-door boarding; face shields for subway conductors; a mask mandate for riders; COVID-19 testing at work location; and \$500,000 payments by the MTA to victims' families. But in too many cases, particularly in the early stages of the pandemic, the MTA was initially unable to bring about the necessary changes.

Through it all, however, transit workers kept doing their job. They stepped up for their city. They kept the subway trains and buses moving so essential workers could get to their jobs at hospitals, supermarkets, bodegas, pharmacies, fire houses, police precincts and more. They are heroes in every sense of the word!

Outrageously, the assaults and abuse that have so long plagued transit workers have continued. Thousands of transit workers are assaulted, harassed or otherwise abused every year. Here are some of the campaigns we are waging that the City Council can assist us with:

We have asked the NYPD Chief of Patrol to form a special unit to focus only on bus routes and Bus Operator safety - instead of leaving the job to individual precincts. A bus route may go through four or five different precincts. We need a centralized approach to deliver a uniformed presence on buses across precinct borders. We need greater accountability and a clear understanding of responsibility for reducing Bus Operator assaults and abuse. A dedicated unit would be a good first step.



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We want the MTA to drop its plan to close every token booth for up to 90 minutes a day. The MTA does not want to staff the booths when the on-duty Station Agents take their meal breaks during the morning, evening and overnight shifts. There wouldn't be a Station Agent in the booth to call the police or FDNY in an emergency; no Station Agent to buzz wheelchair users or parents with strollers through service gates; no Station Agent to serve as the "eyes and ears" of the system, complementing police efforts; and no Station Agent to provide directions or assistance with faulty turnstiles. The MTA tried to impose this service cut without public input in January but Local 100 won a court order requiring it to first hold public hearings as required by the Public Authorities Law.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anthony Utano".

Anthony Utano

President, Transportation Workers Union of Greater New York Local 100



PCAC

PERMANENT CITIZENS
ADVISORY COMMITTEE TO THE MTA

2 Broadway, 16th Floor, New York, NY 10004
(212) 878-7087 • mail@pcac.org

ANDREW ALBERT CHAIR and MTA BOARD MEMBER
RANDOLPH GLUCKSMAN FIRST VICE CHAIR and MTA BOARD MEMBER
MARILYN N. POTERSON SECOND VICE CHAIR

LISA DAGLIAN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
BRADLEY BRASHEARS PLANNING MANAGER
SHEILA BINESH TRANSPORTATION PLANNER

City Council Transportation Committee Hearing The MTA's Response to COVID-19 Testimony by Lisa Daglian, Executive Director, PCAC Wednesday, February 11, 2021

Greetings, my name is Lisa Daglian and I am the Executive Director of the Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA, PCAC. Thank you for holding this hearing today. We'd like to first express our appreciation to the transit workers who have kept the system running throughout the pandemic. We also recognize and mourn those whose lives were lost.

Hard to believe it's been a year since we were thrust into the vast unknown of COVID-19. The MTA kept service running throughout to allow essential workers to get where they needed to go so the rest of us could stay home. They've undertaken initiatives and implemented protocols – some more successful than others – to help keep us safe.

The MTA's fiscal resources have been devastated as a result. More federal funding is critical to emerging from the crisis, as is restarting the capital program. The city's \$3 billion is needed sooner than later to help kickstart it. Congestion pricing will hopefully pick it up from there.

Ridership continues to be low. In January, we released a white paper entitled [How the MTA can transition into the New Normal: Getting riders back on-board](#), which includes our recommendations on measures the MTA should take to increase rider confidence and get them back on transit. Additional funding is essential to moving the needle on these best practices.

In the past year we've learned a lot about how COVID-19 is spread and the best ways to contain it. Accepted theory in May no longer holds true today. Yet the subways are still closed overnight to regular riders, ostensibly for cleaning and disinfecting, though science tells us that's not the most effective way to stop the spread – and trains with people on them are still running.

It's time to restore 24/7 service. Tens of thousands must find other ways to get to work, or back home, or to get vaccines between 1 and 5am. For months we've been asking for metrics and milestones to guide when the system can reopen. We've heard nothing. We're big supporters of the bus network, but it isn't a substitute for the subways.

If people can go to football stadiums and dine in restaurants and soon attend NYPopUp events, they can certainly ride the subways overnight. We all look forward to restarting the economy and getting on with life. 24/7 subway service is an integral part of what will help us get there.



**Testimony of Carlos Castell Croke
Associate for NYC Programs
New York League of Conservation Voters**

**City Council Committee on Transportation
Oversight: MTA in the era of COVID-19
February 10, 2021**

Good afternoon, my name is Carlos Castell Croke and I am the Associate for New York City Programs at the New York League of Conservation Voters (NYLCV). NYLCV represents over 30,000 members in New York City and we are committed to advancing a sustainability agenda that will make our people, our neighborhoods, and our economy healthier and more resilient. I would like to thank Chair Rodriguez, Speaker Johnson, and all of the Council Members here for the opportunity to testify today.

New York City's extensive public transportation system is a point of pride for New Yorkers. Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) trains and buses provide an accessible and affordable way for New York City residents, tourists, and local workers to get around the city without the need for personal automobiles. The MTA is particularly important to working class New Yorkers for a reliable commute to and from work. The services that the MTA provides are also critical in helping to curb pollution and fight climate change by providing cleaner mass transportation alternatives to cars.

This hearing correctly focuses on the MTA in the era of COVID-19 because we all know that the past year has affected so many aspects of our daily lives, including the transportation network. While the suspension of overnight MTA service was implemented to provide a window for proper cleaning, this suspension has also been incredibly difficult on the working class, people of color, and especially our essential workers. Our transit system already underserved many of the communities where these New Yorkers reside, as transit deserts too often overlap with low income communities of color. In a recent state budget hearing, it was even revealed that the MTA has not saved any money from the overnight suspension. Therefore, we believe that keeping the overnight service suspension in place does more harm than good, especially as it can continue to encourage residents who relied on public transportation for years now to instead rely on personal vehicles.

In order to get more people out of dirty, dangerous and congestion-inducing personal vehicles and on to public transportation, we need to improve our mass transit system. In 2019, New York State authorized congestion pricing in a historic first that paves the way for a public transit renaissance. But that public transit renaissance, and our recovery from the pandemic, is conditional on using congestion pricing proceeds and other funding sources to ensure our public transit system functions at a high level of efficiency.

This is particularly relevant for our bus system, which has seen some improvements in recent years thanks to long-overdue investments in busways, bus-only lanes, bus lane camera enforcement, and traffic signal prioritization. Yet the system can and must be improved further, and more bus lane infrastructure, lane enforcement, and signal improvements will help to build trust with New Yorkers so that they feel like they can rely on our bus system instead of their personal vehicles. If we can improve our bus system before and during congestion pricing implementation, which we now expect to happen in 2022, we will realize congestion pricing's full potential to prioritize pedestrians and public transit riders.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.



Testimony of the Partnership for New York City

New York City Council Committee on Transportation

The MTA in the Era of COVID-19

February 10, 2021

Thank you, Chair Rodriguez and members of the committee, for the opportunity to submit testimony. Throughout the pandemic, our Transit Innovation Partnership (TIP) has worked with the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) and other transportation agencies to ensure that our system has access to every tool and technology available to keep workers and customers safe and mobile.

Public transit has worked hard to accommodate the travel needs of essential workers and will continue to do so during New York's recovery. This is despite the loss of 136 heroic MTA team members to COVID-19, whom we remember and mourn. We have been honored to help the MTA identify new ways to deal with pandemic conditions, make the system safer and provide more information to customers.

Even during this crisis, the MTA has been willing to evaluate promising new technologies. In July 2020, we joined with the MTA, the New York City Department of Transportation and other regional transit agencies to launch the COVID-19 Response Challenge, attracting proposals from nearly 200 companies from around the world. From October to December, transit agencies completed proofs of concept with eight of the most promising technologies, ranging from air filtration systems to micro mobility integration.

Supporting customer confidence as riders return to the transit system, we partnered with the MTA to roll out the world's first live digital subway map, built *pro bono* by Brooklyn design firm Work & Co. The map offers an online, real-time view of planned and unplanned service changes in digital format, including the physical location of trains, exact timetables for departures from each station and accessibility information such as current elevator and escalator status. It is available to the public at map.mta.info.

One area of concern as the MTA seeks to restore confidence in its system are criminal incidents that seem to be increasing, despite reduced ridership. As the economy reopens, it is important that the New York Police Department (NYPD) is authorized to aggressively protect passengers on subways, buses and in stations, especially from incidents of abuse and endangerment from mentally ill perpetrators.

To reduce crowding on buses, the city can increase traffic signal priority for buses and expand the network of dedicated, protected bus lanes. The NYPD can also expand its enforcement of

bus-lane violations and bike-lane violations – as bike lane blockages can result in bikes using the bus lane. Finally, the city should continue its coordination with the MTA for the planning of congestion pricing infrastructure, ensuring timely kickoff when the Biden administration provides approval.

The Transit Innovation Partnership is a joint venture of the MTA and the Partnership for New York City, established in 2018 to ensure that the public transit system has access to the tools required to operate a modern, safe and reliable transportation network. We welcome the opportunity to work with the City Council and other stakeholders to identify issues that can be resolved through this unique public-private partnership which is making New York City a global hub of transportation innovation.

Thank you.

New York City Council Committee on Transportation Hearing
February 10, 2021
Testimony of Eric McClure, Executive Director, StreetsPAC

New York City's transit system is the engine that has driven our economy for more than 100 years. And it's never been more important than it will be in rebuilding our economy as we recover from COVID-19.

As the pandemic gripped New York last spring, subway ridership plummeted by 90%, and it remains lower by 70%. Buses, which actually ran on time with fewer cars on the streets and no fare collection, are at just 50% of normal ridership.

Yet automobile traffic is back to nearly pre-pandemic levels. However, a car-led recovery is completely unsustainable, and anathema to the cleaner, greener future New York can only achieve with robust transit ridership.

To get New Yorkers back on transit, the MTA must restore 24/7 subway service. There is scant evidence that subways and buses have been a vector for the spread of COVID-19, nor that surface transmission is a significant factor. But shutting down the subways for overnight cleaning sends the public a message that they're somehow unsafe.

Sufficient cleaning can be accomplished while running subways around the clock, which is what's happening anyway, since trains continue to run without passengers between 1 a.m. and 5 a.m. Yet tens of thousands of New Yorkers, overwhelmingly frontline workers, people of color and residents of lower-income communities, are severely inconvenienced by the overnight shutdown.

Enhanced bus service is a very poor substitute, especially when you're trying to get to or from work at three in the morning. Or to COVID

vaccination sites, which are open through the night, even while subways are not.

We urge the Council to demand that the MTA immediately publish the metrics and timeline it will use to evaluate resumption of 24/7 subway service without any further delay. They've done that for restaurants, gyms, and schools, and must do the same for the most essential piece of our transportation network.

The city that never sleeps can't recover without a full recovery of our subway system, and the subways can't recover without a return to 24/7 service.

Eric McClure
Executive Director
StreetsPAC
17 Battery Place, Suite 204

New York, NY 10004
(646) 522-2589
www.streetspac.org





**Testimony of
Leo Asen, AARP New York**

**New York City Council
Committee on Transportation**

February 10, 2021

**City Hall (Remote)
New York, New York**

Contact: Kevin Jones | kjones@aarp.org | 212-407-3737

Good morning Chair Rodriguez, and members of the Committee on Transportation. My name is Leo Asen and I am a volunteer and President of AARP New York, which counts 750,000 members of the 50+ community in New York City. Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to testify at today's oversight hearing to discuss the State of the MTA in the era of COVID-19 and its impact on the 50+ community here in New York City.

Before offering my remarks, I would like to begin by thanking all of the MTA employees on behalf of AARP for their incredible work and tireless efforts throughout the pandemic to ensure that New York City's public transit system continues to provide critical transit services to New Yorkers every day. I would also like to acknowledge all of the MTA employees that have died from the COVID-19 crisis, and extend our deepest gratitude for their service to the City and its residents.

The MTA's network of subways, buses, and commuter rails is the lifeblood of New York City, and it is paramount for City and State leaders to ensure that the system provides safe, reliable, and efficient transit services to support the livelihoods of 50+ New Yorkers.

Prior to the pandemic, the MTA's system was not perfect.

The overwhelming majority of the City's subway stations remain inaccessible for people with disabilities and older adults with mobility issues. One study published by the New York City Comptroller found that only 24% of the subway's 472 stations were accessible, and the majority of neighborhoods that lack access to a single ADA accessible station are predominantly communities of color in the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens. Thousands of residents in these three boroughs also lack access to nearby public transit options entirely, essentially rendering their neighborhoods as "transit deserts."

The City's inaccessible subway stations and transit deserts have real impacts on the livelihoods of 50+ New Yorkers, especially for those who are disabled or have mobility issues. These deficiencies can limit access to vital opportunities for employment, healthcare, or other related services, as well as increase social isolation among older adults.

The MTA has made notable strides in the past few years to address these issues by passing the 2020-2024 Capital Plan, in which they prioritized ADA station accessibility projects, or launching the "New York City Transit – Fast Forward" Plan.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic has placed all of the MTA's critical infrastructure projects on pause and threatened to suspend them indefinitely due to the unprecedented revenue shortfalls that the agency has experienced for nearly a year.

In recent weeks, the MTA has expressed optimism for the financial future of the agency with new leadership in the federal government and a push to preserve public transit from both the Biden Administration and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer. As the MTA awaits additional stimulus funding and works to balance its projected revenue losses over the course of its recovery from the COVID-19 crisis, AARP New York calls on the agency to ensure that any actions taken to balance their budget are not at the expense of 50+ New Yorkers, especially individuals with disabilities.

AARP New York urges the MTA to continue avoiding any transit service cuts as a means to balance its budget, especially throughout the MTA's network of buses. Recent studies from transit advocates have found that New York City's bus ridership tends to be older and lower income, and any cuts to bus service could only worsen the disparities in access to quality and reliable transit services.

We also call upon the MTA to continue delaying the biennial fare increases until the end of the declared COVID-19 State of Emergency in New York State. We appreciate the MTA Board's decision last month to delay any fare increases for a short period in recognition of the hardship caused by the pandemic, and we encourage the MTA to continue to avoid imposing any fare hikes that would impact the agency's Reduced-Fare MetroCard program for older adults above the age of 65.

In the coming months, as the MTA is slated to receive additional stimulus funding and plans for their recovery from the COVID-19 crisis, we encourage the MTA to restore funding to the Capital Budget in order to achieve the goals outlined in the 2020-2024 Capital Plan. While we understand that the COVID-19 crisis will have a lasting impact on the MTA's ability to complete all of its projects outlined in the Capital Plan, we urge the agency to prioritize its ADA station accessibility projects in order to make the system accessible for all New Yorkers, regardless of ability.

As the MTA looks to utilize innovative technologies, such as new fare payment systems, journey planning applications, and real-time service updates to improve transit service for customers in the immediate recovery from the crisis and in the future, we call on the MTA to ensure that any new technology implemented across the transit system is easily accessible for older adults and/or individuals with disabilities.

Last, we call on the Mayor and City Council to fully fund the Fair Fares program in the budget for fiscal year 2022 (FY22). Despite the significant fiscal challenges facing the City's budget this year, the City must do everything in its power to avoid any further cuts and preserve the program in order to guarantee that thousands of low income New Yorkers still have the opportunity to access public transit amid the City's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify today. I am happy to provide additional information as needed.

Testimony of the Dr. Robyn R.M. Gershon, Clinical Professor, NYU School of Global Public Health
before
The New York City Council Committee on Transportation
February 10, 2021

Good morning Chairperson Rodriguez and all Council Members present. My name is Dr. Robyn R.M. Gershon and I am a Clinical Professor of Epidemiology at the New York University School of Global Public Health. As a public health disaster researcher, and having conducted more than a dozen large scale studies on the impact of disasters on workers and the general public, including the landmark World Trade Center Study on the tower evacuees, I am pleased to have this opportunity to submit testimony regarding the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) in the era of COVID-19.

In March, 2020, New York City (NYC) transit workers were suddenly thrust into the role of essential workers by continuing to report to work as usual during the COVID-19 pandemic. These employees provided a “pandemic lifeline” to NYC, making it possible for thousands of other essential workers to continue to commute, thereby enabling the city to keep functioning. While the full impact of this commitment on transit workers’ health and wellbeing is still unfolding, we know that this workforce, the largest in the US, with over 70K employees, experienced high rates of infection (15% reported in May, double the general population), high rates of hospitalizations, quarantine or home isolation of workers (>10K), and a large number of deaths, with 135 recorded MTA worker deaths as of January, 2021. Furthermore, throughout this ordeal, many frontline transit workers experienced verbal abuse and physical assault by riders over mask use, and others reported on-the-job stigmatization related to their race and ethnicity. At the same time, many transit workers mourned the loss of family members, friends, and co-workers.

To better understand the impact of the pandemic on this intensely affected workforce, my research team and I conducted a [pilot study](#) of TWU members in August, 2020. Working in close collaboration with the leadership of the Transport Workers Union (TWU) Local 100, we collected survey data from 645 TWU members. The demographics of our sample closely matched that of the TWU Local 100 membership in terms of gender (predominantly male), race and ethnicity (predominantly Black and Hispanic), and age (average 51 years). By August, 2020, just past the peak of the first wave of COVID-19 cases in NYC, we made the following key findings through our study:

- A large proportion of workers (24%) reported a history of COVID-19 infection. This was nearly double the rates first reported in March, 2020.
- Not surprisingly, high levels of fear and concern were reported: 90% were afraid of getting infected at work; nearly three-quarters (72%) were fearful of long-term health impacts of Covid-19 infection; 71% were fearful for their personal (physical) safety at work; 69% were concerned about being infected in the community; and a majority (76%) knew someone who had died of COVID-19.
- A large proportion, over 80%, reported feeling upset (e.g., felt nervous, anxious or on edge; had trouble sleeping or eating problems) because of the pandemic, with their most serious source of upset reported as “passengers not wearing masks.”

Yet, in spite of this high level of fear and concern, only approximately one-third of the sample said that they planned to take the COVID-19 vaccine when available, with roughly one-third definitely not intending to take the vaccine and a similar proportion as yet unsure. These high vaccine hesitancy rates are a concern, especially because multiple vaccinations may be needed to ensure effective immunity to all major strains.

Our survey did note some workplace improvements between the start of the pandemic and when our survey was conducted in late August. By August, roughly half of the participants said they were now aware of symptom monitoring at work and that some workers had been sent home because they had symptoms or because they may have been exposed at work. The availability of personal protective equipment, safety supplies, and implementation of new sanitation protocols were significantly improved in July/August 2020 compared to the time before the NYC Pause (March 22, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has been especially challenging to control because it is spread by multiple routes—most importantly, via infectious aerosols, and because it is spread by infected individuals who are asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic in as much as 50% of transmissions. This puts a heavy burden on the implementation of the hierarchy of controls in the workplace as outlined by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). While traditional essential frontline workers such as hospital workers can usually (although, as we saw at the height of the first wave of COVID-19, not always) rely on their employer for providing the necessary protective gear, supplies, training and safe work practice protocols to protect them from hazardous infectious agents, non-healthcare workplaces can be challenged to provide an equal level of protection to their non-traditional essential workers.

We have now seen the adverse effects in non-traditional essential workers of not providing equal protections necessary for maintaining a safe work environment. Many of these workers are employed in public facing jobs (transit, food chain, pharmacy, etc.). Many are members of racial/ethnic minority groups, and despite serving an indispensable role during the pandemic, many continued to earn low wages, receive substandard access to care, and had little or no workplace protections in the early days of the pandemic. This is a stark example of occupational health disparities because they did not have the same level of preparedness and worksite controls provided to other frontline workers such as healthcare, especially in the first few months of the pandemic. Interventions to address these disparities in transit and other essential workers are needed to reduce these health disparities.

Based on our understanding of the risks during the COVID-19 pandemic to date, these recommendations for improvement should be made to reduce risk in transit workers.

1. There should be a heightened awareness of the risks that transit workers face (both front-facing jobs and other jobs) during infectious disease outbreaks, especially respiratory bioevents, with concomitant increased situational awareness and mechanisms in place to support situational awareness.
2. Preparedness plans should include adequate stockpiles of effective NIOSH approved respirators, annual fit-testing of front-facing personnel, and training and education of all staff (with special emphasis on supervisory staff and leadership) on effective mask/respirator use, donning and doffing, and hand hygiene. Mask/respirator use should be mandatory. Physical distancing should be maintained as indicated and practices that support physical distancing at work (both for workers and co-workers

and workers and the public) should be maintained during the event. Policies should address leave for workers who need to be in home quarantine or isolation (and if adequate room is not available at home to prevent spread to family members, alternative arrangements must be made to allow for safe quarantine/isolation).

3. Policies that support the mental health and wellbeing of transit workers during and in the aftermath of disasters are essential.

4. In any pandemic, testing and tracing is key to controlling the spread of disease. Policies are needed to ensure that MTA is well-positioned with the NYC and NYS Departments of Health to rapidly scale-up necessary testing and tracing of workers.

5. Reasonable job accommodations are needed for those workers who may be at increased risk (either due to a pre-existing or current health condition, or other risk factors).

6. Security is paramount to ensure the physical safety of transit workers. The MTA should continue to work closely with law enforcement to review strategies to enhance protection of all transit workers during disasters. Mask usage of public transit riders must be strictly enforced, while at the same time, workers should not be placed in harm's way by overseeing this. A policy or protocol is needed on managing non-compliant members of the public in order to provide for optimal physical and mental health and wellbeing of workers.

7. Standard cleaning and sanitation protocols are needed for all buses, trains, stations and workplaces, both for normal operations and during bioevents.

8. A joint labor and management Emergency Management Committee should be formed. External experts can serve in an advisory capacity. This committee should be charged with developing policies, protocols, and plans to address the full range of potential disaster events, including bioevents. The MTA should be proactive and not reactive to all likely disaster scenarios.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit testimony. I would be happy to answer any additional questions the Committee may have. (Please contact Konstantine Tettonis, NYU Government Affairs, ke1249@nyu.edu.)

Testimony before New York City's Committee on Transportation, February 10, 2021

This testimony is from Alphecca Muttardy, Macroeconomist and Board Advisor for the Coalition for a National Infrastructure Bank. **I'm here to share information on new legislation in the U.S. Congress to create a National Infrastructure Bank (NIB), and to describe to you how that Bank can finance New York's transportation projects, including the physical and financial rehabilitation of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority.**

As laid out in [House Bill HR 6422](#), this National Infrastructure Bank would provide up to \$4-5 trillion in low interest loans to state and local governments all across America for: roads, bridges, mass transit and high speed rail, clean water, affordable housing and broadband, and more. That spending would create up to 25 million great-paying, permanent jobs – with training and healthcare benefits – and re-employ from among the millions of Americans who have permanently lost their jobs on account of the COVID pandemic. Finally the NIB would supercharge economic growth and improve finances for state and local governments, all without creating new Federal debt or deficits. So this Bill has a great chance of actually getting passed into law.

Here is what specifically the NIB can accomplish in the City and state of New York:

- **Completely fund all infrastructure projects** now receiving only limited funding from Federal, state, and local budgets. We have estimated that New York's share of NIB resources would amount to some \$322 billion over 10 years, and create up to 1.6 million great-paying jobs over this period.
- **Generally improve New York's roads, bridges, and mass transit systems** that last received a [report card grade of C-](#) from the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE). Improvements would include [full financing for the Gateway project](#), including the Hudson River Tunnel and North Portal Bridge, as well as High Speed Rail stretching all along the Northeast Corridor from Washington DC to Boston MA.
- **Specifically provide critical capital financing and financial relief to New York's Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA).** Under its Emergency Provisions, the NIB could lend, at very low interest rates, to [restructure MTA's \\$12 billion](#) in recent financial losses, finance new capital projects like the [Second avenue Subway](#) extension, and cover the Authority's backlog of deferred maintenance projects.
- **Moreover, fund water improvement projects which ASCE projects could cost New York \$37 billion over 10 years.** First priorities would be the elimination of all lead in state drinking water systems, that will need careful coordination with road improvements.
- **Build more Affordable Housing and Broadband**, to help lift up families and communities in distress. And,
- **Supercharge New York's economy, businesses, and local finances.** CNBC's 2019 Top States for Doing Business ranked New York's economy 27 in the nation; however, state and [city finances have been hit hard](#) in the COVID induced recession. New construction financed by this NIB will quickly improve the economy through new business growth, tourism restoration, and a strong recovery in state and city revenues.

Getting HR 6422 passed – to immediately finance the NY MTA and other important projects – will require broad grass-roots support at including from legislators like yourselves. Therefore, I ask the Transportation Committee to express its support for Res. 1432, a Resolution in the New York City Council, calling on our Federal government to create a \$4 trillion National Infrastructure Bank. Thank you.

My name is HP Schroer a veteran of World War II and director of UMEWE,a Veteran Advocacy organization that represents 12,000 veterans attending colleges in NY City.I want to thank Evelin Collado and Council member Ydnas Rodriguez for making this meeting possible.

Almost 5 years ago through the efforts of Chiam Deutsch,Bill Perkins, Erick Ulrich, the Mayor and Corey Johnson,Veterans attending college in the City were able to purchase MTA fares at ½ price. The only requirements were they had to be honorably discharged and attend Colleges in the City. Their income was not to be a factor in determining their eligibility.

Sadly, after 5 years less than 500 were able to purchase discounted fares. Why, because of income restrictions,imposed by Dept of Social Services...

To correct this injustice ,our organization has been fighting to get NY State to pass laws which would enable all Veterans,not just those going to college,to be eligible to purchase MTA fares at ½ price.

Mind full of the MTA financial difficulties and as Pat Foye is aware, there were 2 Bills created and supported by a majority from both parties which provided money to the MTA, for a veteran ½ fare discount. Not only did Bills A0074 and Bill S1287 do this,but the money could only be used for the discount and would not come from the MTA Budget.

For the 4 years I have appeared before the MTA, many board board members have personally endorsed UMEWE 's mission to establish a Veterans discount. Yet the Board itself, has not recommended the governor pass the Bills. WHY!!

I know the MTA Board fights like hell to get money to operate. Isn't it time you fight for those for those who for over 250 years have fought for you. While we appreciate the words "Thank you for your service" It's time for action. Stop making Veterans pay full fare. Ask the Governor to pass the bills.