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65th Assembly District

**Opposition to MTA Cuts to Services for Vulnerable New Yorkers
and Elimination of X90 Express Bus Service**

Testimony of Assembly Member Micah Z. Kellner
Submitted to the Metropolitan Transit Authority
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My name is Micah Z. Kellner and I represent the 65th Assembly District in Manhattan, including parts of the Upper East Side, Yorkville, and Roosevelt Island. Although I cannot be here in person due to the legislative session in Albany, I appreciate the opportunity to submit this testimony.

While I am sensitive to the fiscal situation of the MTA and appreciate the authority's responsibility to live within its means, I am resolutely opposed to some of the choices that have been made that place an undue burden on our most vulnerable riders, as well as decisions to eliminate routes like the X90 in my district, for which there is no reasonable alternative.

Proposed Service Reductions to Access-A-Ride

It is fundamentally troubling that the MTA intends to implement \$40 million in cuts to Access-A-Ride. The paratransit rider experience is already unacceptably poor for the over 100,000 registered New Yorkers who rely on it, and the January 21st Memorandum, "2010 Access-A-Ride (AAR) Service-Related Changes," suggests that the MTA intends to strip away service until only the bare minimum of the federal legal requirement is left.

The MTA says it will provide "feeder service to and from fixed-route transit" in place of door-to-door service for approximately 4% of its trips (about 290,000 trips per year). How this will be implemented is unknown. No information about the criteria the MTA will use for determining which riders must use feeder service has been made available to date. It is difficult to envision how any set of criteria will fairly manage this change since the paratransit system is, by definition, restricted to those unable to easily make use of our regular mass transit system. My worst fear is that people with disabilities, who may have underlying chronic conditions, could be stranded in severe weather conditions at bus stops or train stations with non-working escalators or elevators, and will suffer medical consequences. Implementing these kinds of significant changes involves more than a cold accounting of route efficiency; rather, it involves serious attention and consideration to these sorts of real-life consequences. The complete absence of any explanation of the criteria for placing passengers into the feeder systems or of what fail-safes will exist to protect the health and well-being of these riders suggests that the MTA has not thought this through.

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Also of concern is the MTA's intention to find further savings through denying service to its passengers who have conditional eligibility for extreme weather conditions. Presently, the MTA has given these passengers seasonally eligibility, but now intends to move to a "trip-by-trip" system. The MTA estimates this service reduction will result in a denial of 26,000 trips per year (approximately 0.35% of all trips). It is stunning that in the January 21st memorandum, NYC Transit President Thomas A. Prendergast writes that the MTA intends, quite literally, to rely on the weather forecast to determine if a passenger would be eligible for a trip.

As anyone who is familiar with the scheduling headaches involved in booking an Access-A-Ride trip knows, passengers usually request trips far in advance—if possible many days in advance—in order to be sure that they can secure a trip when they need to travel. Weather forecasts are, as we all know, best guesses as to the actual weather on some future date. I can think of no other word besides "unethical" to describe a policy which, by its design, would allow a person with a chronic medical condition to be put in harms way because of an inaccurate weather report.

Last spring, I submitted a proposal to the MTA urging NYC Transit to institute a debit card system for paratransit riders that Access-A-Ride could cut costs where the biggest waste lies—out of control contracts with service providers. The Independent Budget Office has released numerous reports that demonstrate that the value of contracts are the fastest growing expense, with the 2005 value at \$144 million and the projected 2010 value at over \$350 million. Since 80% of Access-A-Ride users are ambulatory, those users could immediately make use of taxis through a debit card system. While the average cost of an Access-A-Ride trip was \$56 in 2007, we all know the average cost of a taxi ride to be far less. My proposal has been estimated by the City of New York to bring \$50 million in savings to the Access-A-Ride program. It is worth noting that this is \$10 million more through a service *enhancement* than the MTA plans to achieve service reductions.

I have had many productive meetings with the MTA about my proposal, and I am pleased that the authority is taking a close look at a proposal by the livery car industry to integrate a debit card system that would work for that industry and Access-A-Ride. I urge the MTA to move quickly to develop these ideas into workable models that can be quickly implemented. While I was pleased to see taxi service and a prepaid card system mentioned in the January 21st memorandum, enhancing the experience of people with severe disabilities and chronic conditions should be our priority, even while we look to save money for the system.

Proposed Elimination of Free Student Metrocard Program

The decision to end free student travel is deeply troubling. The MTA first reported a \$214 million shortfall to maintain this program, but then declared that amount insufficient when the Governor committed to securing this amount.

What is becoming clear is that \$214 million does not represent the amount of money the Student Metrocard program actually costs, but rather the amount the MTA stands to gain if the program ceases to exist. I am troubled that the MTA is using the threat of eliminating the Student Metrocard program as a means of shaking down the state government for greater overall funds.

It is no secret that we are in a severe budget crisis and that difficult choices must be made. But it is the right and responsibility of policy makers to determine priorities in such times. The MTA should accept the state's offer of \$214 million to preserve the Student Metrocard Program, and cease threatening to eliminate it unless the entire budget shortfall can be repaired.

More than half a million students rely on full and partial fare Metrocards, and our children should not be made pawns in an agency's bargaining process.

Proposed Elimination of X90 Bus Line

The cumulative effect of the service reductions in my district will pose a significant hardship to my constituents, who already experience some of the most overcrowded conditions in all five boroughs: the N and R trains will run less frequently on Saturdays and Sundays, as will the F train on Sundays, while the M6 and M30 bus lines are slated for complete elimination. The M6 bus elimination alone will divert 4,370 weekday and 6,250 weekend customers to the M5, M7, and M20 lines or to the crowded 4/5/6 Lexington Avenue subway line. Discontinuing the M30 bus, which runs only on weekday peak hours, diverts 1,220 riders to the M72 or the M31.

These are tough times, and I understand that these difficult decisions are being made system-wide.

I shall focus my comments on the elimination of the X90 express bus, for which there is no reasonable alternative to passengers. The X90 runs from Yorkville to Lower Manhattan and only operates during peak morning and evening hours. The MTA has indicated transportation alternatives for riders displaced by the elimination of the X90: the M15 Limited and the Lexington subway line. These "alternatives" are so unreasonable as to be absurd.

Both of these so-called alternatives are, in fact, quite a distance from where X90 riders live in Yorkville, and where the X90 bus stops are located. But most egregiously, these "alternatives" are hopelessly overcrowded. The capacity-bursting on the M15 Limited bus and the Lexington subway line are both broadly acknowledged by the MTA. This overcrowding is the rationale behind the planned implementation of Select Bus Service on First and Second Avenues and the construction of the Second Avenue Subway line.

Since the X90 is a rush hour-only service, the MTA is asking the 620 men and women who rely on this express bus to make their daily commute, to instead use the M15 Limited bus and the 4/5/6 Lexington Avenue subway line at peak hours, when they are already most congested. This will simply not work.

I strongly urge the MTA to reconsider its plan to eliminate the X90, not just for the sake of its 620 users, but also for those who rely on the M15 Limited bus and the Lexington Avenue subway line, who will also be negatively impacted.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today.