



NEW YORK STATE SENATE
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Kellner, Duane Bill Would Put the Brakes on MTA Plan to Hike Access-A-Ride Fare to \$5

*Legislation would bar transit authority from charging paratransit users
more than riders who can access regular transit system.*

Gathering in front of VISIONS Selis Manor, home to hundreds of New Yorkers with disabilities, **Assembly Member Micah Z. Kellner** (D-WFP, Manhattan) and **State Senator Thomas K. Duane** (D-WFP, Manhattan) were joined by **New York City Comptroller William C. Thompson, Jr.**, **Manhattan Borough President Scott M. Stringer**, and advocates to announce legislation that would prohibit local transit authorities, like the Metropolitan Transportation Authority New York City Transit (MTA NYCT), from charging more for paratransit services than for regular transit services that are often inaccessible to riders with disabilities.

Last November, the MTA unveiled its 2009-10 budget, which includes an up to 25% proposed fare increase from \$2 to as much as \$2.50 for New York City Transit subways and non-express busses. It also includes a separate 150% proposed increase for Access-A-Ride – which provides paratransit for people with disabilities who are unable to use public bus or subway service for some or all of their trips – raising those fares from \$2 to as much as \$5. A \$5 base fare equates to a \$10 round-trip for Access-A-Ride users, who do not have the option of buying fares in bulk as able-bodied commuters do, cutting down on costs by buying daily, weekly, or monthly Metrocards.

“If the MTA proposed charging higher fares based on race or gender there would outrage. Discriminating against people with disabilities is no different. Rather than keeping the promises made in their written contract with the City of New York never to raise the Access-A-Ride fare above the regular fare, the MTA proposes to leave riders with disabilities stranded,” said **Assembly Member Micah Z. Kellner**.

“While we are all sensitive to the MTA’s dire fiscal circumstances, it is by no means acceptable for the authority to balance its budget on the backs of people with disabilities. The current standard of fare equity is the minimum a just society should expect. People with disabilities should not have to pay more than -- let alone twice as much as -- other transit users to get to and from their daily appointments. Placing a disproportionate burden on paratransit users is unconscionable,” said **State Senator Thomas K. Duane**.

“I’m here today to commend and support the legislation introduced by State Senator Tom Duane and Assembly Member Micah Kellner to mandate that Access-A-Ride fares be set no higher than base subway and bus fares. If this legislative change were implemented today, it would mean that a one-way Access-A-Ride fare could cost no more than \$2. People with disabilities are among the most economically vulnerable New Yorkers. Most simply cannot afford other transportation options. Particularly during these tough economic times, we must not place a greater burden on people with disabilities,” said **New York City Comptroller William C. Thompson, Jr.**

“Access-A-Ride is the only service available to transport the frail elderly and those with severe disabilities to where they need to go, be that an appointment with a doctor or a visit with a friend. One significant reason why these New Yorkers rely so heavily on Access-A-Ride is that the MTA has not invested in full accessibility for our transit system. Of the 468 subway stations in the five boroughs, just over 60 have elevators and much of the time even these are in a state of disrepair,” said **Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer.**

“In 1993 the MTA and the City of New York signed a contract in which the City agreed to pay one third of the costs of operating Access-a-Ride if the MTA agreed never to raise the Access-a-Ride fare above the mass transit fare. Access-a-Ride passengers were specifically named in the contract as a third party with the right to sue to enforce the contract should either party breach the agreement. The MTA and City officials are aware of this and of the fact that they will be stopped by a court if they continue pushing this proposal but continue to threaten Access-a-Ride users with the harshest fare increases ever imposed by transit on anyone in the City. We won’t let it happen,” said **James Weisman, Senior Vice-President and General Counsel of the United Spinal Association.**

“Many of our members, people living with multiple sclerosis in the five boroughs, are dependent on Access-A-Ride because of the city’s virtually inaccessible subway system. Access-A-Ride is an inferior mode of transportation compared to the subway. Requiring people with disabilities, most who are living on fixed incomes, to pay double the current fare for travel throughout New York City unfairly demands they pay more for a system which already fails to meet their needs. For these reasons, the NYC Chapter of the National MS Society strongly supports the legislation proposed by Assembly Member Kellner and Senator Duane,” said **PJ Weiner of the NYC Chapter of the National MS Society.**

“The paratransit fare should be whatever the base bus and subway fare is across the entire MTA system, including Long Island and Westchester, since the MTA runs those systems, too. People are already paying double because we cannot use half-fare cards or discounts on Access-A-Ride, as we should be able to. We need more accessible subways, better subway elevators, more bus service, and better express buses so we can use those options instead of expensive Access-A-Ride. Some people are not able to use mass transit, however accessible it is,” said **Jean Ryan, Vice-President for Public Affairs, Disabled In Action of Metropolitan NY.**

“It is outrageous that the MTA is proposing that persons with disabilities and senior citizens pay more than other citizens for transportation service. Our community often relies on Access-A-Ride because they have few other transportation options, particularly when the MTA

is also proposing to eliminate bus routes and reducing subway service. We applaud Assembly Member Kellner and Senator Duane for their bill to seek fairness for our community,” said **Marvin Wasserman, Executive Director of Brooklyn Center for Independence of the Disabled.**

“The Kellner/Duane bill will serve all New York State paratransit riders. The relationship between paratransit and base fares varies widely across the state; paratransit users in Albany are fighting to keep their fare at the base rate, in Buffalo riders are charged double the base rate, and the Rochester Genesee Regional Transit Authority, which serves nine counties, charges paratransit riders based on the distance of the trip -- well more than the base fare,” said **Edith Prentiss, President of the 504 Democratic Club of New York City.**

BACKGROUND

In a Memorandum of Understanding between the City of New York and the Metropolitan Transit Authority signed on May 28, 1993, during the Dinkins Administration, it was agreed that the MTA would charge Access-A-Ride users the same fare as regular mass transit riders of New York City Transit and that future increases would be on par. Article 5, Section 1 of that agreement reads: “An increase in the Paratransit fare to equal an increase approved by the MTA Board in the non-discounted one-fare trip on non-express mass transit may be implemented by NYCTA.” In December of 2008, the MTA adopted its Final Proposed 2009 Budget. In it there are two proposals. Proposal 1 increases the Base Pay-Per-Ride MetroCard Fare from \$2.00 to \$2.50 and the Paratransit Fare from \$2.00 to \$5.00. Proposal 2 increases the Base Pay-Per-Ride MetroCard Fare from \$2.00 to \$2.25 and the Paratransit Fare from \$2.00 to \$4.50. Both are in violation of the 1993 MOU. As the MOU names paratransit riders as a party to this agreement, they have the right to sue if the contract is violated. The Kellner/Duane bill will help to ensure that riders do not need to undertake legal action to protect their rights and enforce this agreement by clearly enshrining the principle of fare equity for riders with disabilities in state law.