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Groups Sound Alarm on Looming L-Train Shutdown

“L-pocalypse” Response Must Include Plan to Protect Health and Quality of Life for Low-Income New Yorkers and Communities of Color, and a Climate Action Plan to Address the Root Cause of the Shutdown

Brooklyn, NY – Standing before a countdown clock that showed only 299 days remaining before the MTA shuts down the L train for 15 months, a diverse mix of community representatives and policy advocates sounded an urgent alarm today to insist the MTA, Mayor de Blasio and Governor Cuomo present a final and fair mitigation plan that prioritizes the needs of disproportionately impacted New Yorkers, including low-income neighborhoods and communities of color, and more robust action to address the growing impacts of climate change.

Approximately 400,000 passengers ride the L train daily, including an estimated 225,000 who will need to find alternative ways to travel between Brooklyn and Manhattan during the 15 month closure of the Canarsie tunnel to repair damage caused by Superstorm Sandy. The MTA expects that the majority of these riders will switch to other trains, while up to 15% will take public buses. The L train shutdown and the surge of displaced straphangers are expected to create still more confusion and delays in New York’s already reeling transit system. Studies have shown that low-wage workers living outside transit-rich Manhattan already have some of the longest commutes in the nation. They are likely to bear the brunt of the L train shutdown.

With less than 10 months to go until the shutdown, the MTA and New York City Department of Transportation have yet to release a final mitigation plan or take the needed steps to ensure affected communities know about it.

The MTA has presented some mitigation strategies, including shuttle bus routes and increased service on some alternative subway lines, but the advocates highlighted that much more is still needed before the clock runs out and the L train stops running. Advocates also called on both the City and State governments to take more urgent and robust actions to tackle the underlying cause of the subway shutdown - climate change.

The MTA and DOT cannot finalize and release their plan until New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio determines where and when to prioritize bus service over private cars and trucks on city streets in Brooklyn and Manhattan and over the Williamsburg Bridge. Last month, 12 state and local elected officials, including Borough Presidents Eric Adams and Gale Brewer, wrote to the mayor, requesting that he give buses 24/7 priority along proposed MTA shuttle routes during the L train shutdown.

“Low-income neighborhoods and communities of color face the pain of losing a vitally important transit connection, then the added injury of more traffic and increased air pollution,” said **Eddie Bautista, Executive Director, [New York City Environmental Justice Alliance \(NYC-EJA\)](#)**. “We understand the need for shuttle buses, but we also need the MTA to clearly explain a comprehensive plan to mitigate these negative impacts equitably and protect our communities’ public health and quality of life. The mitigation plan should prioritize cleaner, newer buses during the shutdown”

“Our community suffers from some of the highest rates of asthma in the city, and adding 200 diesel buses threatens to make that problem worse,” said **Leslie Velasquez, Program Manager, El Puente**. “We understand the need for shuttle buses, but given MTA’s visionary commitment of zero emissions buses by 2040, they can make a down payment on this promise by committing all 60 electric buses slated to be purchased will be deployed as part of the L train mitigation shuttle service. The MTA should also commit to prioritizing electric bus purchases in future procurement rounds, rather than continue to purchase fossil fuel burning buses.

“The L Train is the main transportation link for communities in both Manhattan and Brooklyn, so the City and the MTA need to prioritize 24/7 busways, free shuttle boarding and transfers, ADA-compliant at-level boarding, and protected bike lanes on both 13th Street in Manhattan and Grand Street in Brooklyn in order to ensure that all New Yorkers can depend on reliable transportation options to ease the disruption during the shutdown,” said **Erwin Figueroa, Senior Organizer, Transportation Alternatives**.

“The L train is the backbone of immigrant and working class Bushwick, but flooding our neighborhood with dirty diesel buses is the wrong way to replace it,” said **Gloria Tobar, Community Member at Make the Road NY**. “MTA’s measure of success should be about more than moving large volumes of people across the bridge, it should also recognize the existing economic and health burdens on certain communities and avoid exacerbating those burdens.”

“The pending L-pocalypse demonstrates once again that our transit system is broken and is in desperate need of an overhaul,” said **Alex Matthiessen, Campaign Director, Move NY**. “Sadly, there will be more Superstorm Sandys and we need to not only expedite our switch away from the fossil fuels that are the cause of such mega-storms but to invest in the system that the vast majority of New Yorkers rely on to get around. With the MTA’s newly released ‘Fast Forward’ program for modernizing our subway system, we finally have a plan that can get the

job done. But we'll need a package of funding built around the Fix NYC congestion pricing proposal, which will generate \$1.6 billion a year in funding. Only then will be able to have a reliable system that New Yorkers can count on – whether or not future Sandys knock on our door.”

“Communities along the L line are 24/7 neighborhoods, so the City should implement its traffic plans 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and the MTA must be able provide shuttle bus service that is seamless, efficient and reliable whenever riders need to ride, so buses must have 24/7 priority,” said **Danny Pearlstein, Policy & Communications Director, Riders Alliance.**

“Nothing can truly replicate the L Train, but in order to come close, and to prevent the worst case scenario of frustrated riders clogging roads in for-hire vehicles and the hours-long commutes that would result, we have to prioritize buses on our streets, which includes adding new bus routes, implementing a 24/7 busway, and limiting the Williamsburg Bridge to vehicles with 3 or more occupants,” said **Liam Blank, Advocacy and Policy Manager, Tri-State Transportation Campaign.**

“The L-train shutdown is a direct result of climate change spurred on by fossil fuel addiction. The MTA is a State-led authority and as such we must call into account Governor Cuomo’s lack of action,” said **Patrick Houston, Campaigns Organizer, New York Communities for Change and Coalition Member, NY Renews.** “The Governor must pass the NY Renews platform, including the Climate and Community Protection Act (A8270A / S7971A), to aggressively reduce greenhouse gas emissions from all sectors and direct public investments to frontline communities. He must also make polluters pay for the true cost of their emissions and reinvest the billions of dollars in revenue into clean energy, transit, frontline communities, job creation, and more.”

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