



**New York City Environmental Justice Alliance Testimony to the
Senate Standing Committee on Corporations, Authorities & Commissions
Senate Standing Committee on Transportation
Public Hearing**

February 19th, 2019

Good Afternoon. My name is Renae Reynolds, and I am here to testify on behalf of the New York City Environmental Justice Alliance (NYC-EJA). Founded in 1991, NYC-EJA is a non-profit citywide membership network linking grassroots organizations from low-income neighborhoods and communities of color in their struggle for environmental justice. NYC-EJA empowers its member organizations to advocate for improved environmental conditions and against inequitable environmental burdens.

Through our efforts, member organizations coalesce around specific common issues that threaten the ability of low-income communities and communities of color to thrive, and coordinate campaigns designed to affect City and State policies – including transportation policies that directly impact these communities. Our members represent the 75% of low-income New Yorker's of color, who rely on MTA buses, and 66% that rely on subway service to get around the city. As such, access, reliability and affordability of public transportation are paramount in our organizations advocacy.

For too long the MTA has operated in a state of disfunction, and communities that rely on the system as the main mode of transportation across the city continue to bare the brunt of that disfunction. All of this, while also being unduly blamed for fiscal shortfalls through negative rhetoric around fare beating, which seeks to demonize and criminalize those most in need.

On the heels of a public transportation crisis that forced Governor Cuomo to declare a state of emergency, riders just recently confronted the threat of another fare hike. Community outrage helped to dissuade the MTA from raising fares. However, we are well aware that given recent reports of a shortfall in the States budget and continued financial struggles within the authority, we will soon have to confront the threat of rising costs to take a train or bus to get to school or work again. Something has got to give, and it cannot be the wallets of commuters, they have already been bled dry.

Annually, the MTA receives approximately \$16 billion dollars in revenue through fares, tolls, taxes and other revenue streams, which then go toward their labor costs, purchasing equipment and exorbitant debt. Yet, critical maintenance needs have been placed on the back burner or

deprioritize in favor of splashier capital projects like the upgrades at Fulton Street, or the Second Avenue Extension, while more than half of subway stations remain inaccessible to the disabled. A recent article in the New York Times cited that about 3,500 residents of Co-op city in the Bronx, who have difficulty walking live up to an hour walk away from the nearest accessibly subway stations. This shouldn't be any commuters reality.

Since 2012, New Yorkers have paid three fare hikes, yet and still service has grown more and more abhorrent, leaving commuters stranded on platforms loosing precious time and money, adding to their mounting stress and impacting their financial stability. Slower and unreliable public transportation leads to longer commutes, less room for error, lateness to work, job opportunities, critical appointments and less family time. According to a recent report, over 90 percent of morning commutes were plagued by signal problems that cause subway delays.

The call for MTA reformation has been a long time coming. Reports uncovering data mismanagement exemplify the need for more oversight of the agency, to ensure that rather than fudging their statistics the MTA can be held accountable to uphold better standards of transparency. It is imperative that measures to reform the authority are informed by principles of equity and inclusion. Measures should not result in a concentration of power in the Governors Office, but rather aim to strike a balance of power between the State, local government and the people the authority serves. Responsibility and accountability should be shared equally between the State-led authority and its cities, if the State expects to see increased financial contributions from the City of New York.

There must also be collaborative efforts to develop a sustainable revenue stream that supports the implementation of the Fast Forward plan. Aside from the structural reforms needed to redistribute power more equitably, the MTA and State elected officials need to work together to pass a comprehensive congestion pricing package, which would generate an additional \$1.7 billion dollars towards funding the Fast Forward plan and upgrade the subways signal system. It is the most progressive and equitable way to generate new funds for MTA and we need to see leadership from our State Government to enact congestion pricing rather than allowing MTA to dip into the pockets of subway and bus riders, while labeling commuters who cannot afford the price as fare evadors.

Additionally, we applaud the MTA's Bus Action Plan and we are encouraged by MTA's proposal to transition to a zero-emissions fleet by 2040. As the plan progresses, we urge the MTA to equitably distribute these new vehicles, prioritizing communities of color such as South Bronx, Northern Manhattan, and North Brooklyn, who suffer from the highest concentrations of diesel-combustion pollution and related negative health consequences.

Public transportation is the life blood of New York City, it connects our communities to the vital services the need, to jobs and to each other, therefore it should work effectively to keep this city moving without causing undue burdens onto those who not only rely on it, but support it the most and those are the communities of color and low income residents who are the MTA's primary customers. We thank the State Senate for holding this hearing and elevating the importance of an equitable and accountable MTA.