

Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum
Testimony for the MTA Hearing on Proposed Fare Increase
Thursday, November 8, 2007

I'm here to draw a line in the sand.

All New Yorkers, who use our subways and buses, can't afford another fare hike. They couldn't afford the last hike. Many families live paycheck to paycheck. A fare increase will stretch their budgets unfairly. It is imperative that the Metropolitan Transit Authority exhausts every other option before asking hardworking New Yorkers to cover the cost.

The fare hike proposal is especially insulting considering – despite past increases- the ongoing service breakdowns straphangers continue to contend with due to problems caused by rainstorms.

More New Yorkers are using mass transit and they deserve better service. The MTA's only answer has been to hit riders with fare increases and services cuts. The MTA must stop thinking that every time there is a budget shortfall the solution is to raise fares. Many state lawmakers recently opposed this fare hike and gave strong indications that the MTA would get additional funding in the next budget. So why not wait and negotiate in the next budget?

If we are heading toward a recession, the people who need the subway most will suffer the most. A fare increase like this adds up, and it takes away dollars from those who need it most. Low-income New Yorkers will have a harder time making ends meet, middle-class families will struggle to save for the future, and seniors on a fixed income will have to make sacrifices to supplement the increased transportation costs.

Let's think about it: The MTA relies more heavily on its riders to subsidize the system than other cities. Many of these other cities are far less dependent on transit but are subsidized to a greater degree by the federal government. Considering New York City is a major cog in the country's economic machine, perhaps the MTA should also do more to lobby for increased federal funding. The MTA should be focusing on fiscally responsible planning so that fare increases are the last resort, not the first choice.