



ASSOCIATION OF COMMUTER RAIL EMPLOYEES

**TESTIMONY ON BEHALF OF
THE ASSOCIATION OF COMMUTER RAIL EMPLOYEES**

**TO THE SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON
TRANSPORTATION
AND THE SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON
CORPORATIONS, AUTHORITIES AND COMMISSIONS**

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MAY 7, 2021

Good afternoon Senate Chairs Kennedy and Comrie, and distinguished members of the New York State Senate Standing Committee on Transportation and the Senate Standing Committee on Corporations, Authorities and Commissions. I am Edward Valente, and I am here today to speak on behalf of the approximately 1,600 essential Metro-North Railroad operating craft employees represented by the Association of Commuter Rail Employees (“ACRE”). Our titles include Conductors, Engineers, Power Directors, Rail Traffic Controllers, Signalmen, Yardmasters, and Stationmasters, all united under one labor organization.

ACRE works with the MTA and Metro-North management to build and operate what is universally recognized as the premier commuter railroad in America. Our members are also essential workers: throughout the entirety of the COVID-19 pandemic, ACRE members have heeded the call – at great personal risk – in order to ensure that the trains continued to operate so that first responders and health care professionals had the transportation required to fight back against the pandemic. And now, we are ready to face the state’s imminent

re-opening, and our team looks forward to working with the Railroad in all capacities to facilitate this process. To this end, we thank your committees for the opportunity to testify at this important hearing on the MTA's infrastructure.

Among the major projects expanding the footprint of public transit throughout the City, Penn Station Access is a critical infrastructure project which, when completed, will function as the gateway to Penn Station for the commuters Metro-North carries from the Bronx and beyond. ACRE strongly supports Penn Station Access. Specifically, this new link will bring the Metro-North New Haven Line service down Amtrak's Hellgate line, through the East River Tunnel into Penn Station. This project will also lead to an important expansion of our service in transit-starved communities in the Bronx, with four new Metro-North stations (Hunts Point, Parkchester, Morris Park, and Co-Op City) proposed on the route.

Expanding the Metro-North footprint in the east Bronx will seed economic opportunities in these communities through easier access to the greater public transit network, and it will further encourage residents to ditch cars and congestion. In addition, the creation of a new line will lead to more job opportunities for the Railroad – conductors, engineers, rail traffic controllers, signal maintainers, and more – allowing us to service a growing transit need while continuing to prove that we are the best at what we do.

While we look forward to this future, in the short term we must focus on the imminent reopening of the state and city. More and more commuters are returning to their workplaces, while restaurants are increasing their capacity and entertainment venues are reopening their doors. However, the Metro-North service schedule has

lagged behind both LIRR and the subways, which have both returned to a robust service schedule. In addition to a more efficient service and improved social distancing (as people are spread out across a larger number of trains), restoration of a pre-pandemic schedule sends a highly visible signal that New York is back in business. In this new era of high mobility, remote work, and video conferences, if people believe our transit system is neither safe nor efficient, it will only encourage them to leave the metropolitan region. ACRE thus strongly encourages Metro-North to formally take steps towards a restoration to pre-pandemic service levels.

ACRE is committed to improving the quality of service our members provide to a growing number of riders. We believe that the future of public commuter rail transportation requires an alliance between the MTA, its employees, elected officials, and the public we all serve. With your assistance and oversight, we are committed to working with all railway stakeholders to continue to expand and improve the safe, efficient service the taxpayers and riding public expect and deserve.

I thank you for your time and consideration, and I look forward to answering any questions the panel may have.