



**TESTIMONY OF THE  
STRAPHANGERS CAMPAIGN  
BEFORE THE  
JOINT HEARING OF THE SENATE FINANCE AND  
ASSEMBLY WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEES  
REGARDING THE  
FISCAL YEAR 2018-2019 EXECUTIVE TRANSPORTATION BUDGET PROPOSAL  
January 25, 2018  
Albany, NY**

Good afternoon, my name is Jaqi Cohen and I am the Campaign Coordinator for the NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign. NYPIRG is a non-partisan, not-for-profit, research and advocacy organization. Consumer protection, environmental preservation, health care, higher education, mass transportation, and governmental reforms are our principal areas of concern. The Straphangers Campaign is a project of NYPIRG. Since 1979, the Straphangers Campaign has advocated on behalf of riders of public transport. We appreciate the opportunity to testify on the Governor's executive budget on transportation.

While we continue to review the executive budget, below are our recommendations on the Governor's proposed funding for mass transit programs:

**Funding Congestion Pricing and the Fix NYC Panel's Recommendations**

The Straphangers Campaign is a long-standing supporter of congestion pricing and were strong advocates of the proposal when it was last before the legislature in 2008. The difference between then and now is that decades of failure by the State to adequately invest in its single most important piece of infrastructure finally caught up with us. Doing so has put New York's future at grave risk.

The MTA's own performance measures illustrate the depth of the problem:<sup>1</sup>

- Subway on-time performance has fallen 26 percent between 1992 and 2016;
- New York's subway has the worst on-time performance of any major rapid transit system in the world, with just 65 percent of weekday trains reaching their destinations on time;
- In 2007, overall on-time performance was 90 percent on most lines, but a decade later it had dropped to 70 percent; and
- Subway ridership has climbed 77 percent since 1992, but during most of the same period spending on maintenance has remained unchanged.

The rapid decline of subway service has played a tremendous toll on the lives of New Yorkers. A recent report by the Comptroller of the City of New York found that subway delays have caused 74 percent of subway riders to be late for a work meeting, 65 percent to be late for childcare pickup or drop-off, and 13 percent to lose wages. Additionally, poor subway service

has only worsened New York City's ever growing congestion problem, prompting straphangers to seek other transit options above ground (such as taxis and for-hire vehicles).<sup>2</sup>

The Straphangers Campaign was pleased to see the reforms called for by Governor Cuomo's Fix NYC panel. In particular, the panel calls for a phased-in progressive congestion pricing plan, one that would raise dedicated and stable funding for New York's distressed transit system. **However, for congesting pricing in New York City to be a success, it is critical that the state invest in transit service improvements in this budget, prior to the phase-in of a pricing plan.** Cities with successful congestion pricing plans, such Stockholm and London, all rolled out transportation improvements in advance of enacting a zone pricing system to be able to accommodate for the influx of commuters who are dependent on transit.<sup>3</sup> Additional operational funds must be included in the FY2019 budget to increase overall capacity of the city's transit system, particularly across the City's bus network, to absorb the increase of transit riders due to congestion pricing and to ensure the plan's future success.

### **Funding New York City Transit's Capital Program**

The Governor's budget proposal does not seek to fund the critical long-term repairs and modernization efforts that New York City's transit system so desperately requires. Instead, it places the onus of funding these projects onto the City of New York, shifting the burden of fixing the transit system away from the State.

Over 40 percent of all New York State residents live within the five boroughs,<sup>4</sup> and over 8 million rides are taken on New York City's subways, buses, and paratransit each weekday.<sup>5</sup> While the City's subway system is its lifeblood, it is also an integral part of the commutes of thousands of New Yorkers traveling in to the City from its surrounding upstate and Long Island suburbs. Withdrawing the State's contribution towards future New York City Transit (NYCT) capital plans by requiring the City to pay for the entirety of Transit's capital budget is not only unrealistic, it is negligent to the millions of New Yorkers for whom subway, bus, and paratransit service is a lifeline. New York State is responsible for funding, operating, and appointing leadership to the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, which operates NYCT. **Particularly given the scope of the work needed to repair and modernize the subways, it is the responsibility of the State to continue to contribute its fair share towards future NYCT capital programs.**

### **Restoring Payroll Mobility Tax Replacement Funds**

**The Governor's budget continues to shortchange city riders by breaking a long-standing promise to cover lost revenue.** When revenue from the Payroll Mobility Tax (PMT), a large source of revenue for Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) operations, was cut in 2011, the Governor assured riders that any lost revenue from said reduction would be accounted for in an annual General Fund transfer, "dollar for dollar."<sup>6</sup> Until last year, the Governor has made good on this promise. Yet this year's budget once again includes a reduction of \$65 million, failing to fully replace funds lost due to payroll tax reductions.

The reduction in PMT replacement funds not only breaks a promise to riders, but comes during a "state of emergency" when New York City's subways need funding most. Additionally, if a progressive congestion pricing plan is to be a viable option for the City's future, additional funds to MTA operations must be added to expand transit service to absorb new ridership.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

---

<sup>1</sup> Brian M, et al. "How Politics and Bad Decisions Starved New York's Subways." The New York Times, November 18, 2017, see: [www.nytimes.com/2017/11/18/nyregion/new-york-subway-system-failure-delays.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/18/nyregion/new-york-subway-system-failure-delays.html).

<sup>2</sup> "The Human Cost of Subway Delays: A Survey of New York City Riders," Office of the New York City Comptroller. Page 5. July 2017.

<sup>3</sup> "Fix NYC Advisory Panel Report," Fix NYC Advisory Panel. Page 14. January 2018.

<sup>4</sup> "New York City Population," Department of New York City Planning. Accessed January, 2018. See: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/planning/data-maps/nyc-population/population-facts>.

<sup>5</sup> "Introduction to Subway Ridership," Metropolitan Transportation Authority. Accessed January, 2018. See: <http://web.mta.info/nyct/facts/ridership/>.

<sup>6</sup> Hamilton, Colby, "NY Governor Cuomo Signs MTA Tax Reduction Into Law," WNYC, December 12, 2011, see: <http://www.wnyc.org/story/283886-ny-governor-cuomo-signs-mta-tax-reduction-into-law/>.