



MTA Fare Hike Hearing Testimony 12/03/20

My name is Eric Adams and I am the Brooklyn Borough President, representing the roughly 2.6 million people who call Brooklyn home. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on this vitally important issue. As we are all very aware, our public transit system is in crisis. With a \$15.9 billion projected deficit through 2024 and uncertainty in Washington, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) is facing perhaps the greatest challenge in its history. The current MTA so-called “Doomsday” budget proposes up to 40 percent cuts to subway and bus service and up to 50 percent cuts to commuter rail service. According to one recent report by the Rudin Center for Transportation at New York University and Applesseed, an economic analysis firm, these hits to our transit system could cost the New York area as many as 450,000 jobs and \$50 billion in lost earnings.

The situation is dire, no doubt about it, but we must not balance the budget of our transit system on the backs of riders. We should first utilize solutions that don’t impose additional burdens on New Yorkers, many of whom are already struggling with the economic devastation inflicted by COVID-19.

The numbers are daunting: According to a report from the New School Center for NYC Affairs, in the New York City metropolitan area from mid-July to late September, 16.1 percent of households reported that they often or sometimes did not have enough to eat over the prior seven days, and 23.5 percent of renter households reported that they were not caught up on the previous month’s rent. Black and Latino households have much higher rates of food and housing insecurity and nearly a third of households with incomes below \$50,000 are food and housing insecure.

These base fare increases on our city’s subways and buses will have a seriously damaging effect on low-income riders with tight budgets, for whom even a small change in the cost of getting to work can have real impact. A 2016 survey by Community Service Society (CSS) showed that one in four low-income New Yorkers regularly could not afford subway and bus fares. Not only would draconian service and labor cuts adversely affect our city’s ability to recover from the economic effects of the pandemic, it would also devastate the families of thousands of hard-working, dedicated transit workers.

These workers are mostly Black, Brown, and working-class New Yorkers, who always seem to be first in line for government cuts. They are also the workers who risked their lives to keep the subways running and ensured first responders could continue to get to and from their jobs at hospitals, nursing homes, precincts, and fire stations to protect us at the height of the pandemic. We cannot additionally burden other frontline and essential workers who are dependent upon our

transit system to get to grocery stores, hospitals, and schools, to keep our residents healthy, fed, educated, in order for us to weather this pandemic and economic recession.

Raising base subway and bus fares should be the very last option we consider.

Instead, we should first push to fast-track the implementation of Central Business District Tolling, better known as congestion pricing, which has been projected to raise up to \$1 billion annually in fees for the MTA and will pave the way for a \$15 billion bond issue by the agency. With a new administration about to take office in Washington, the federal obstacles that have been impeding this otherwise achievable goal could be eliminated. After January 20th, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) approval and guidance will likely be forthcoming under a President Biden, clearing the way for this essential program.

We must also demand that the federal government do more to assist our transit system in the pending stimulus package. New York City is the economic engine of the nation and our transit system is the grease that allows that engine to function. This is not a local or state issue, but rather a matter of national significance. In 2018, the New York metropolitan area accounted for \$1.772 trillion in gross domestic product (GDP), the largest GDP of any metro area in the United States by more than half a trillion dollars, and a GDP that was roughly equivalent to that of Canada. In short, the New York City metropolitan area is the engine of the United States economy, and the lifeblood of that economy is our city and regional transit network.

Lastly, it is crucial that we do everything we can to ensure that our subways and buses remain again a safe and attractive transportation option for New Yorkers. Increasing base fares will only undermine this critical goal. Ridership is now at approximately 30 percent of pre-pandemic levels and even a best-case scenario projects that ridership will not reach 90 percent of pre-pandemic levels before 2024. Promoting a safe return to ridership and restoring confidence in our public transit system, which has been one of my primary missions in our recovery effort, is key to boosting farebox revenue.

As our city struggles to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, we must marshal every effort to ensure that our public transit comes back stronger and better than before.

With millions of New Yorkers' lives and livelihoods depending on the outcome, we can't afford to get this wrong.

Thank you.