



CITY OF NEW YORK

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

330 West 42nd Street, 26th floor New York, NY 10036
tel: 212-736-4536 fax: 212-947-9512
www.ManhattanCB4.org

JEAN-DANIEL NOLAND
Chair

ROBERT J. BENFATTO, JR., ESQ.
District Manager

January 12, 2009

Governor David A. Paterson
State Capitol
Albany, NY 12224

State Senator Thomas Duane
808 Legislative Office Building
Albany, NY 12247

Assembly Member Richard N. Gottfried
822 Legislative Office Building
Albany, NY 12248

State Assembly Member Linda B. Rosenthal
821 Legislative Office Building
Albany, NY 12248

Re: In support of Ravitch Commission Report for Financing MTA

Dear Elected Officials:

Manhattan Community Board 4 supports the recommendations of the Ravitch Commission Report to the Governor for financing and improving the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA). We believe rapid implementation of these recommendations -- with a few modifications as outlined below -- will reduce the projected fare increases and service reductions currently planned by the MTA and would help to create a more rational and predictable financing system, particularly for the long-term capital needs of the MTA. We are also pleased that the Mayor and Governor have supported the Commission recommendations and that Assembly Majority Leader Silver has called for quick legislative action.

The Ravitch Commission recommendations include the creation of two new sources of revenue for the MTA – 1) a new Regional Mobility Tax (RMT) of 1/3rd of 1% on wages paid in the twelve county MTA Commuter District; and 2) cashless tolls on the East River and Harlem River Bridges. The RMT is projected to raise an additional \$1.5 billion annually and the river crossing tolls an additional \$600 million. The Commission further recommends that, after the first year, the RMT be dedicated to a newly created MTA Capital Financing Authority and be used exclusively for funding MTA's capital

programs. The Commission also recommends future fare increases be automatic, bi-annually at the rate of inflation.

In addition to financing, the Commission also made programmatic and management recommendations. They proposed increasing Bus Rapid Transit lines, particularly to underserved areas and creating a subsidiary MTA Regional Bus Authority to bring together the fragmented bus services in the region. Lastly, the Commission makes recommendations for improved MTA management including appointment of MTA board members based on their relevant experience, providing full executive authority in the Chairman, requiring operating divisions to more fully cooperate in capital improvement projects, creating systems to expedite capital projects, and increasing public information and involvement in the budgeting process.

In addition to improving the overall MTA system, the proposed recommendations would also have a positive impact on community district 4. Specifically:

- CB4 is on record supporting an increase in Bus Rapid Transit, including on routes that would improve transit in our area, such as Eleventh Avenue to serve the developing Hudson Yards area;
- CB4 witnesses daily the need for a Regional Bus Authority that can coordinate the various private and public bus services. The lack of cooperation is partially responsible for the bus drop-off/pick-up, storage, routing, and parking that routinely overwhelm our community.
- CB4 has seen how major capital projects can miss important goals, exemplified most recently by the extension of the #7 line without the inclusion of a much needed 10th Avenue station. Management improvements focused on expediting projects and improving communications are most welcome.

Community Board 4 recommends that the tolling include traffic coming from Westchester i.e. the entrances from the Major Deagan Expressway and I 95 onto the Harlem River Drive, the Hudson River Drive and Exits 1 and 2 of the Cross Bronx Expressway. We are also concerned about the risk of “toll shopping” if the Harlem River bridges tolls are 60% less expensive than the East River bridges’ tolls. We would prefer to see information on usage of these bridges and potential impact on various income groups in order to better understand the reasoning behind the current proposals.

While we understand the logic involved in the proposed automatic inflation based fare increases, we question whether it will prove practical. As we witnessed this year, one of the major revenue sources for the MTA - taxes on real estate transactions – can have severe swings not correlated with the inflation rate. We are also concerned about automatic increases that don’t include a public hearing process where commissioners can hear the impact of their actions on users of the system. We feel the recommendation merits consideration, but that some modification should be considered.

Even with our concerns it is well past time for the MTA financing system to be reformed and improved and new revenue sources identified. The Ravitch Commission report recommendations provide an excellent first step toward a sound and sustainable plan.

Sincerely,



Jean-Daniel Noland
Chair
Manhattan
Community Board 4



Christine Berthet
Co-Chair
Transportation Planning
Committee



Jay Marcus
Co-Chair
Transportation Planning
Committee

c.c.

Speaker Christine Quinn
Council member Gale Brewer
Robert Yaro, Regional Plan Association
Elliot G. Sander, Ex. Director/CEO MTA