



# Queens Civic Congress

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:  
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2003

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## **Testimony to MTA Queens Public Hearing February 19, 2003**

Delivered by Tina Chan, Vice President and Chair, Transportation Committee

The Queens Civic Congress, a coalition of over 100 civic, community, cooperative and tenant organizations in the borough of Queens, thanks the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) for this hearing and the opportunity to make clear no need exists to raise any fare on our buses and subways, and existing service levels must be maintained. The Queens Civic Congress also questions the need to close 128 part-time and 49 full-time token booths. The MTA failed to make the case for any fare increase or any token booth closings. Unfortunately too many both at this public authority and in higher office, as well as some pundits and commentators gloss over changes in finances made over the last few years that further shift the burden of funding many initiatives always funded by state, federal and city tax levy on those who use the system.

As many know, the Queens Civic Congress - well before the election - questioned the need for a fare hike in a letter to the Governor, dated September 19, 2002. We all recall the strong and strident denials about any need and any plans to hike the bus and subway fare. On behalf of the Queens Civic Congress, I had urged that the Governor direct his "appointees on the Board of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority to hold the line on transit fare through at least 2004."

The Congress finds the system financing of the City's transit system by both the MTA and the state grossly unfair to residents of the City. Frankly, the funding scheme discriminates. Just as New York State needs to address the inequity in its financing of New York City's public schools, the discriminatory funding of the City's transit system as operated by the MTA disproportionately calls on New York City residents and commuters to pay more than non-city residents. Under the current financing scheme for mass transit, a fare hike represents nothing less than a very regressive tax hike in excess of \$750 on many New Yorkers who struggle to make ends meet.

- next page, please -

**Queens Civic Congress testimony to the MTA, February 19, 2003, page two of three**

Let's look at the facts:

- \*New York City accounts for 84% of all state riders moved by some form of mass transit;
- \*New York City buses and subways receive only 63% of state transit aid, an annual shortfall of \$325 million, equivalent to about \$0.35 cents in the cost of the \$1.50 fare;
- \*The LIRR and MetroNorth move only five percent of all state riders;
- \*The LIRR and MetroNorth combined receive 23% of state transit aid, an annual windfall of \$275 million.
- \*Bus and subway fare generate from \$2.0-2.1 billion annually since the 1997 fare hike;
- \*New York City contributes \$300 million annually to MTA operations, including
  - \$158 million to match NYS aid;
  - \$67.6 to maintain LIRR and MetroNorth stations within the five boroughs;
  - \$45 million for student bus and subway fare passes;
  - 13.8 million for reduced fare cards for seniors;
  - 17.2 million for reduced fare cards for the disabled;
- \*Since 1996 subway ridership increased 29% but service increased only 11%;
- \*Since 1996 bus ridership increased 50% but service increase only 27%;
- \*NYC transit riders fares pay 60% of operating costs; this compares to 54% for MetroNorth; 44% for LIRR, 37% for PATH (in 2000) and 48% for New Jersey Transit (in 2000); nationally this compares to 44% for Chicago, 41% for Philadelphia, 32% for Los Angeles and Miami-Dade, and 29% for Boston (in 2000).

The shift in financing, particularly a greater reliance on MTA consumers to pay for projects previously funded by the state, raises a real question about the role of the MTA. The role ought not to be to take the elected Governor (and State Legislature) off the hook for funding mass transit projects. In fact, the MTA has done just that. The decision to shift toll proceeds (toll revenues dedicated to transit operations will decline in 2004 from \$430 million to \$124 million) to debt service and increase debt to fund projects reflect irresponsible actions aimed solely to bail out those responsible for putting up the dollars needed. The fare box increasingly pays for debt service increasing from 11% (\$692 million ) in 1998 to 23% (the projected \$1.2 billion ) in 2004 of total debt service. No fare revenue should be used for debt service. Further, the MTA's increasingly uses outside consultants to on project rather than rely on its in-house and very competent engineering staff. Federal funding should be sought for the security-related projects.

An investment in New York City mass transit means more than repairs, new cars and buses and routes, it means a stable, affordable fare that encourages mass transit and provides an affordable means for workers and visitors to get around. New Yorkers look to our Governor and Mayor who make the appointments to the MTA board and the MTA board members -- to show leadership and a commitment – NOW! – to hold the line of transit fares.

Many seniors travel on the subways at night and off-peak hours, and they are fearful of being alone. They find the MTA NYC Transit advice to call 911 to summon help is useless. This poses risks, for example, in case of sudden illness. Seniors worry that this cutback forecasts the beginning of the end of all token booths; they perceive that as a diminution of their quality of life.

**Queens Civic Congress testimony to the MTA, February 19, 2003, page three of three**

Safety remains a serious concern. The Queens elderly use the subway underpasses – as encouraged – to avoid the potentially fatal traffic on Queens Boulevard. But many seniors -- and others, too – would rather cross the boulevard than enter an unattended subway station.

MetroCard machines break down and can never do what token clerks already do: provide large amounts of change, correct MetroCard errors, give travel information, warn riders of service interruptions and help during emergencies.

In closing, the Queens Civic Congress questions any need for a fare hike when this agency effectively controlled by the Governor runs a surplus and the agency and the state continue to discriminate in favor of wealthier suburban commuters in the apportionment of fare subsidies and transit and transportation revenues. Similarly, the Queens Civic Congress questions the plans to shutdown token booths that provide a core service and safety to the public that uses the system.

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The entire Queens Civic Congress Platform may be viewed on the internet at:

The next Queens Civic Congress meeting, takes place Monday, February 24 at the Union Plaza Nursing Home.

**Queens Civic Congress Members**

Assoc. of Old Forest Hills Bayside Hills Civic Assoc. Bayswater Civic Assoc. Bay Terrace Community Alliance  
Beachside Bungalow Preservation Assoc. Bellaire/Belvill Civic Assoc. Belle Harbor Property Owners Bellerose-  
Commonwealth Civic Assoc. Bellerose-Hillside Civic Assoc. Bell Park Manor-Terrace Community Council Bowne  
Park Civic Assoc. Briarwood Community Assoc. Cambria Heights Civic Assoc. College Point Civic Taxpayers  
Assoc. COMET Concerned Citizens of Laurelton Creedmoor Civic Assoc. Doug-Bay Manor Civic Assoc.  
Douglaston Civic Assoc. Douglas Manor Assoc East Flushing Civic Assoc. Federation of Laurelton Block  
Associations Floral Park Community Council Flushing on the Hill Civic Assoc. Flushing Heights Civic  
Assoc. Flushing Suburban Civic Assoc. Forest Hills Chamber of Commerce Forest Hills Community & Civic  
Assoc. Forest Hills Crescents Assoc. Forest Hills-Van Court Assoc. Fresh Meadows Homeowners Assoc.  
Georgetown Mews Glen Oaks Village Owners Greater Whitestone Taxpayers Civic Association Harding Heights  
Civic Assoc. Harrison Place/Sunnyside Gardens Hillcrest Estates Civic Assoc. Hilltop Village Co-op #4 Hollis  
Hills Civic Assoc. Holliswood Civic Assoc. Hollis Park Gardens Assoc. Holly Civic Assoc. Howard Beach Civic  
Forum Hunters Point Community Coalition Hyde Park Gardens Jackson Heights Beautification Group Jamaica  
Estates Assoc. Jamaica Hill Community Assoc. Joint Community Council College Point Juniper Park Civic  
Assoc. Kew Forest Neighborhood Civic Assoc. Kew Gardens Civic Assoc. Kew Gardens Hills Civic Assoc.  
Kissena Park Civic Assoc. Little Neck Bay Civic Assoc. Little Neck Community Assoc. Little Neck Pines Assoc.  
Locust Manor Neighborhood Civic Assoc. Lost Community Civic Assoc. Malba Civic Association Middle Village  
Property Owners Mitchell-Linden Civic Assoc. 97 Place Block Assoc. Newtown Civic Assoc. North Bellerose  
Civic Assoc. North Flushing Civic Assoc North Hills Estates Civic Assoc. North Queens Homeowners Civic  
Assoc. North Star Civic Assoc. Norwood Neighborhood Association Oakland Terrace/Gardens Council Off  
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Assoc. Queens Community Civic Corp. Queens Village Civic Assoc. Ramblersville-Hawtree Civic Assoc.  
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Committee Rockaway Beach Civic Assoc. Rocky Hill Civic Assoc. Rosedale Civic Assoc. Royal Ranch  
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Coalition of Block Associations South Ozone Park West Civic Assoc. Springfield/Rosedale Community Assoc.  
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Hillcrest Waldheim Neighborhood Assoc. Wayanda Civic Assoc. West Cunningham Park Civic Assoc.  
Westmoreland Assoc. Woodside Community Council