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Assemblymember 90th District

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Public Comment in Opposition to Proposed Bee-Line Fare Increase
Statement of NYS Assemblymember Shelley Mayer (90th AD- Yonkers)
January 8, 2015

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed Bee-Line bus fare increase. As the Assemblymember representing most of the City of Yonkers, I am profoundly concerned about the potential impact of *any* proposed Bee-Line fare increase on riders within my district and across Westchester. As you know, Yonkers residents are incredibly dependent on the Bee-Line for transportation. In fact, according to the American Community Survey, more than twenty-five percent of Yonkers residents rely on public transportation to get to work, which makes this service especially important to me. For many of my constituents, the Bee-Line represents their only way to get to work – in fact, sixty-two percent of all bus passengers do not own or otherwise have access to a car. Many of these workers are lower-wage workers struggling to meet expenses. While their salaries have remained stagnant at best, Bee-Line fares have, unfortunately, increased regularly. Bee-Line riders, who are among Westchester County’s lowest-paid workers -- with median incomes hovering close to \$25,000, cannot be expected to shoulder additional fare increases. It is time the County made public bus service a centerpiece, not an afterthought, of our economic growth strategy. Therefore, I oppose any fare increase, and urge additional investment in service, capital expenditures and greater attention to rider needs in the future.

Today, I make three recommendations. First of all, I urge that you reject any fare increase without demonstrated evidence that it is financially necessary for the Bee-Line system independent of the MTA. Second, I urge a thoughtful review of the “coupling” of Bee-Line fares to the MTA’s fare structure in the future. I strongly suggest that there be a careful analysis of whether Bee-Line fare decisions should be made independently of the MTA process and with far greater public input than the single hearing that was scheduled on this issue. My understanding is that because Bee-Line uses a Metro Card that functions on both Bee-Line and MTA providers, Westchester County has decided that the Bee-Line fare must follow the MTA’s rate structure. Given the advanced technology that the Metro-card presents, it is important to assess the value of an independent Westchester-based analysis of service needs, revenue, capital demands and customer comments. I suggest that such a review is necessary and will provide information that will inform future service and fare decisions.

Finally, as an essential engine in Westchester’s economy as it recovers from the recession, I believe the County should expand its investment in bus service and make it a priority of capital spending. According to a 2013 survey, seventy-two percent of Bee-Line riders reported that travel to or from work was the primary purpose of their use of the bus. This is a year over year increase from sixty-one percent in 2003. According to published reports, between 2006 and 2012, ridership on the two principal bus routes serving Empire City at Yonkers Raceway rose by 49 percent – an increase of about 1.55 million annual riders, or about 4,250 additional riders per day. Similarly Ridge Hill has required additional bus service for both customers and employees, and expanded bus service has continued to result in increased ridership and economic growth. Economic activity in Yonkers and throughout Westchester has been – and will continue to be - dependent on expanded investment in public transportation. But services are still inadequate, both from a business and individual rider perspective, and additional capital investment must be made to meet the service demands.

In sum, on behalf of Yonkers residents and all Westchester residents who use our critical Bee-Line public bus service, I urge you to reject the proposed fare increases, to review whether we can de-couple the MTA/Bee-Line fare process, and to invest further in Bee-Line service and infrastructure. I pledge to do my part at the state level to increase the investment in public bus service throughout our County. It is the right thing to do for the residents of Westchester and for the economy of our region.