



State Senate & State Assembly Joint Budget Hearing: Transportation

Public Testimony: The 2022 Executive Budget

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January 26, 2021

Thank you, Senator Krueger, Assemblymember Weinstein, and esteemed colleagues for the opportunity to testify before you today. I am Lauren Bailey, Director of Climate Policy for Tri-State Transportation Campaign, a 27-year-old organization dedicated to improving people's lives by expanding their access to transit and clean transportation options in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut.

Despite the massive disruption to the daily patterns of our lives over the past year, transportation continues to be New York State's highest greenhouse gas-emitting sector. The air pollution that our transportation system of cars, buses and trucks sends into the air each day is now proven to worsen the effects and lethality of COVID-19, adding another threat to communities that have been historically and consistently harmed by these emissions.¹ Reducing our state's reliance on fossil fuels by protecting and expanding public transit and accelerating vehicle electrification are necessary and feasible steps to meet our climate goals--and will be key elements of our state's successful recovery from this pandemic.

Despite our short-term challenges, New York's transportation system must continue to evolve, and our public transit must be top priority. Transit vehicle electrification is going to take time and energy; implementation continue without delay if we hope to meet our statutory goals outlined in the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act. We appreciate that the executive budget proposal includes the second year of \$20 million bus electrification funding for the five largest transportation authorities outside of the MTA, and encourage the legislature to support this funding and continue to pursue legislation to electrify the entire state's transit systems.

Additionally, we are hopeful that the executive budget proposal to align utility infrastructure projects with MTA capital construction will help electrification efforts as well. However, electrification doesn't just stop with our buses. We encourage the legislature to also pursue opportunities to eliminate New Yorkers' dependence on fossil fuels overall, including equitable installation of electric vehicle charging stations across New York State and electrifying the trucking industry. Rolling out this technology to all communities will assist in the widespread, equitable adoption of electric vehicles and improve air quality for communities living near our state's highways and ports.

¹ <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/news/hsph-in-the-news/air-pollution-linked-with-higher-covid-19-death-rates/>



Throughout this impossible year, our transportation authorities have done what they do best: keep people moving. The almost 10 percent cut in operating aid to all upstate authorities, along with the much higher cuts to downstate and MTA, are breathtaking, totaling \$1 billion in reductions in state operating assistance overall. These cuts, which come on top of the dramatic freefall in MTA revenue derived from ridership, put millions of riders in a precarious position. Riders deserve to know if the state operating assistance cuts are the result of revenue shortfalls. Riders and taxpayers deserve to know, did the state's take of the payroll, petroleum, and other tax source decline, leading to this budget hole, or is this a deliberate raid, despite sufficient revenues from sources traditionally dedicated to the MTA? The legislature is poised to find these answers.

We acknowledge that without knowing if there will be additional federal relief funds, many of these numbers are not set in stone, casting doubt on the reliability of transit operations. In a time when essential workers and transit-dependent New Yorkers rely on our systems to safely get to work, groceries, and medical appointments, these aid cuts mean more crowded buses, riskier conditions for operators, and a worsening lack of faith in transit. We encourage the legislature to reverse these budget cuts in ongoing conversations.

The MTA's financial distress has been well documented and discussed. I would like to touch on a few key items, not least of which is the MTA's mounting future debt burdens. Currently, Comptroller DiNapoli estimates that in 2021 the MTA will be paying 19 cents on each dollar it receives on debt service.² Much of this is paying for past crises, which they are still digging out of. Meanwhile, due to delays in federal emergency relief funding, the MTA was forced to take out an additional \$3.4 billion dollars in loans from the federal municipal liquidity facility to make it through the budget year without enacting untenable service cuts. If the MTA receives sufficient federal funding, we encourage the legislature to hold the MTA accountable to paying this debt as expediently as possible. If these recent loans are not treated as an emergency bridge loan and swiftly re-paid, they will de facto become yet another debt placed on the backs of riders.

Next, we support the decision of the MTA Board to delay the proposed fare hikes. We encourage you to suggest the Board adopt a metric to further delay these hikes rather than an unknown timeline. Riders would sleep easier at night knowing that a fare increase will not be discussed until the pandemic is under control.

Meanwhile, we encourage you to push for the renewal of 24-7 subway service. Our organization has conducted thorough research, with our colleagues in public health, and found no indication

² <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-10-13/new-york-mta-debt-may-reach-suffocating-levels-dinapoli-says>

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of transit contributing significantly to the spread of COVID-19. As science has gained more understanding of the spread of coronavirus, we have learned surface transmission is negligible. The overnight closures do not save the MTA one penny in spending, nor does the ongoing hygiene theatre of disinfecting the train cars have any measurable benefit to protecting riders' or operators' health. With a virus transmitted predominantly through the air, this emphasis on surface cleaning cannot continue to be attributed to virus prevention. Many of the MTA's peer systems have been successful in increased sanitation while maintaining their operating hours to the benefit of riders, which brings into question the necessity of this overnight closing and effort. Since vaccine clinics are slated to be open 24 hours, it is all the more urgent that frontline shift workers, primarily low-income and people of color who are mostly transit-dependent, have access to transit to be able to have access to the life-saving vaccine.

Transportation continues to be an essential service we provide to all New Yorkers, as well as an industry with enormous potential for contributing to New York's economic recovery and clean, green future. We look forward to what the legislature will accomplish to make transit and the entire transportation network cleaner, safer, and more efficient for everyone. Thank you.