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Disabled In Action Testimony for the Joint Legislative Hearing on Transportation
Jean Ryan, President
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Disabled In Action of Metropolitan NY is a grassroots, all-volunteer nonprofit organization which was begun in 1970. DIA consists mostly of people with disabilities and we are run by people with all kinds of disabilities. We work for civil rights of people with disabilities because civil rights are human rights. Often we work on transportation issues because we need to get places like everyone else – to work, school, social activities, and medical care.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION IS THE LIFEBLOOD OF NEW YORK CITY AND SUBURBS

We support the MTA Capital Plan for 2025-2029 and Full Funding for it

We support the MTA Capital Plan for 2025-2029 and request that the New York State Legislature fund it both for big new and recent projects such as the 2nd Avenue Subway and IBX as well as fund other ongoing projects like replacement and upgrades of old equipment that often breaks down and can be dangerous and cause even more difficulty in getting around New York City and the surrounding areas that the MTA serves. The subway signal system, express buses and local buses and new subway station elevators and signage are some of the many projects that need funding in this Capital Plan.

The IBX plan might sound like a frill but no one should have to spend a great deal of extra time going to Manhattan on their way between Queens and Brooklyn! Big transportation projects have proven to drive economic activity, new housing, new commercial ventures, and population growth near them. People like to have reliable and close transportation options. All paths do not have to lead to Manhattan.

We support many kinds of Transportation Communication, Notifications, and Wayfinding

People with disabilities especially need platform, train, and sidewalk level notification of elevator outages so we can plan other ways to try to reach our destinations in subways, buses, and on commuter railroads. We need notification in several forms so that people with hearing loss and vision loss will be equally served. No one should miss their stop on a train or bus because they cannot see or hear an announcement or a sign. We need ongoing robust planning and building of subway station elevators. We need easier and more accessible ways to find our way around complicated stations with more than one subway line with innovations such as Navilens and electronic signage with a voice element as well as easily read visual information for sighted people and people with cognitive disabilities. We need tactile wayfinding in stations. Buses need visual and reliable auditory announcements. All these innovations and more can also help the many residents and visitors to New York City and surrounding areas get around the subway system better and also to navigate the bus and commuter railroad systems.

Any wayfinding work needs to be thought of from the point of view of someone going there for the first time so that they do not get lost or confused while trying to navigate the system. Too often, planners who know the system inside and out do not realize what it is like for someone with a cognitive or sensory disability or someone who is elderly or who does not speak English. Our area is full of immigrants who are part of our vibrant future. Future Einsteins and Picassos and musical geniuses need to know easy ways to get around. Tourists who are not familiar with our transportation system need to get around and transportation communication is very important in guiding them to see all parts of our city.

The Gap Problem must be solved

The gap problem needs to be solved so wheelchair users do not get stuck on gaps between platforms and subways and commuter trains and so people do not fall through the gaps onto the tracks below. The gap problem keeps most wheelchair users out of the subway and commuter train systems. We are not safe so naturally we do not want to put ourselves in harms way. Just because a system is old does not mean it cannot be made safe and easy to navigate.

Safety

Safety and the perception of safety is important. Barriers in subway stations can prevent people from being pushed or accidentally falling onto the tracks, but they cannot impede people with disabilities from getting onto or off the trains. Another aspect of safety is replacing old equipment and modernizing it *before* it falls apart and causes breakdowns, derailments, slow speeds, or fires, among other problems. This Capital Plan of 2025-2029 plans to do just that and we are in favor of it.

Express Buses

Every day, many thousands of people in New York City depend on express buses to get to work, school, medical care, and social activities, but the lifts on the express buses are complicated, finicky, and difficult to use. Instead of the lifts helping wheelchair users and other people with mobility disabilities get into and out of express buses, the lifts and difficult-to-move seats *keep wheelchair users from using the express buses!* DIA supports the search and development of a low-floor ramp bus that would require minimal help from the drivers and would actually make riding express buses a reality for wheelchair users and people with mobility problems. It should not take 20 minutes to an hour to maybe get on the bus or have to wait for 2 more buses or be taken off the express bus by the New York Fire Department. The MTA needs new express buses, but they need ones that *everyone* can use.

In summary, we ask that the New York State Legislature fund the MTA Capital Plan for 2025-2029. We also support the testimonies of Reinvent Albany and the PCAC organizations.