

February 6, 2025

New York State Assembly Committee on Transportation

Dear Chairperson Magnarelli and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York (CIDNY), I am submitting this testimony regarding the New York State budget for transportation. As an organization dedicated to promoting the rights and independence of individuals with disabilities, we urge the Assembly to prioritize policies and funding that address critical gaps in transportation accessibility.

Accessible transportation is not merely a convenience; it is a lifeline for people with disabilities to access employment, healthcare, education, voting sites, and community participation. The following recommendations are essential to ensuring equitable transportation services across New York State:

First, CIDNY supports Assembly Bill A574, introduced by Assemblymember Steck, which would require accessible buses to be available within a three-mile radius of any bus line operated by the authority or its subsidiaries. Expanding access to accessible buses would provide greater mobility to individuals who currently face significant barriers to transportation.

Additionally, we urge the Assembly to mandate counties to expand paratransit services beyond the minimum requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Currently, paratransit service is only required within $\frac{3}{4}$ mile of fixed-route bus lines. This limited range leaves many people with disabilities stranded and isolated, particularly in areas where bus routes are limited. Expanding paratransit coverage would address unemployment, lack of access to medical care, and social isolation—issues disproportionately impacting the disability community. Paratransit must be recognized as an essential service, not merely an afterthought.

CIDNY also supports Senate Bill S226, sponsored by Senator Hoylman-Sigal, which would require the registration of bicycles with electric assist used for commercial purposes and impose liability on employers for violations. Members of the disability community have shared troubling accounts of injuries caused by commercial e-bikes, often with no recourse for reporting or accountability. Requiring registration and holding employers accountable for violations would enhance safety for pedestrians, particularly those with disabilities.

Additionally, CIDNY urges the passage of Assembly Bill A1252, introduced by Assemblymember Dinowitz, and its Senate counterpart S486, sponsored by Senator Comrie, to extend and expand the on-demand E-Hail Paratransit Pilot Program. This program has been transformative for many New Yorkers with disabilities, offering the flexibility and reliability that traditional Access-A-Ride services lack. The legislation would ensure fares align with standard MTA base fares, hours match bus and subway schedules, and trip restrictions are lifted. By expanding this program, the State can provide timely, reliable, and equitable transportation options for people with disabilities.

We also support Senate Bill S356, introduced by Senator Cooney, which would allow individuals applying for paratransit recertification to submit documentation from licensed healthcare providers instead of undergoing in-person assessments. In-person assessments are costly and burdensome, particularly for individuals with progressive or permanent disabilities. This bill would streamline the recertification process while respecting the dignity and time of people with disabilities. We recommend additional provisions to ensure consistency with ADA principles and urge the MTA to provide transparency regarding the costs and necessity of assessment centers.

Lastly, CIDNY supports Assembly Bill A10454, sponsored by Assemblymember Gonzalez-Rojas, and Senate Bill S9528, sponsored by Senator Salazar, which would establish a for-hire vehicle improvement surcharge. This surcharge would fund grants, vehicle retrofitting, and infrastructure development to improve accessibility within the for-hire vehicle industry. With limited wheelchair-accessible vehicles currently available, this bill is critical to enhancing mobility and independence for New Yorkers with disabilities.

We appreciate the Assembly's commitment to addressing transportation inequities and urge you to prioritize these legislative initiatives in this year's budget. Expanding accessible transportation options will not only promote independence and inclusion for individuals with disabilities but also strengthen our communities as a whole.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to working with you to advance these critical measures.

Sincerely,

Anna Humphrey

Transportation and Voting Community Organizer

Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York (CIDNY)