

**Testimony by  
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Joint Legislative Public Hearing  
2026 Executive Budget Proposal: Transportation  
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Thank you, Chair Krueger, Chair Pretlow, Chair Harckham, Chair Glick, and members of the Senate Finance and Assembly Ways and Means committees for the opportunity to weigh in on Governor Hochul's FY 2027 Executive Budget ("FY27 budget").

We laud the Governor's commitment to investment in transportation in New York City, as demonstrated by broad spending increases to the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) and other downstate transportation agencies. The FY27 budget doubles-down on its commitments to support the MTA's 2025-2029 capital plan, which include long-promised accessibility improvements to New York City's subway system. The Governor's plan highlights the continued roll-out of new subway fare gates and platform barriers, along with the expansion and improvements to transit centers including Penn Station, Jamaica Station, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue subway line. If made accessible, these expansions and enhancements will improve lives for all New Yorkers, including New Yorkers with disabilities.

That said, the Governor's plan needs to do much more for New Yorkers with disabilities, including by implementing the recommendations discussed below. And as with all issues affecting the disability community, people with disabilities must be involved *before* implementation, so that the voices of those most affected by the problems are considered when deciding on the solutions.

### **Metropolitan Transportation Authority**

The State contributes enormous funding to the MTA, and as such, is entitled to demand better services for all New Yorkers, and particularly for people with disabilities. The FY27 budget includes \$4.2 billion to be contributed to the 2025-2029 capital plan as well as \$8.6 billion in operating aid to be paid to the MTA. Such significant financial investment gives the State a say in how its money is spent.

## Subways

We support the Governor's continued commitment to the MTA's 2025-2029 capital plan, which includes significant and long-awaited accessibility improvements. However, while the capital plan promises to make at least 60 additional subway stations "accessible," the MTA's definition of accessibility does not go far enough for New Yorkers with disabilities. While elevator and other stair-free access is essential to get people with disabilities from the street to the platform, it doesn't mean much if large and dangerous gaps exist between platforms and trains, which make boarding subways enormously dangerous or outright impossible. Subway accessibility goes far beyond just elevators, and we urge the State to ensure that the MTA commits to a higher standard of accessibility than what it has committed to so far.

Further, the FY27 budget supports continued installation of platform edge barriers to guard against falling onto the tracks: 85 to be installed in 2026, to add to the 115 installed between 2024-2025. While the commitment to platform edge barriers is progress, these barriers are limited in their effectiveness. They are typically only available at certain sections of the platform, leaving large portions of the platform unprotected. At minimum, the MTA must install longer barriers throughout the platform to provide adequate protection.

More effective than platform edge barriers, however, are platform screen doors. Many transportation agencies around the world – and even New York's own JFK AirTrain, which is run by the Port Authority – currently have this important accessibility and safety feature that prevent passengers, especially blind and low-vision riders, from falling onto the tracks. They also prevent all passengers from being pushed in or falling into the tracks inadvertently. They save lives and prevent injuries.

We urge the MTA to commit to a plan to install platform screen doors in all new subway and other rail stations, including the extension of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue subway line and the new Jamaica, Penn Station, and Interborough Express stations. We also urge the MTA to install platform doors in all stations where they are technically feasible, especially when stations are undergoing alterations, renovations, rehabilitations, and construction, and subsequently installing such doors in all remaining subways and rail stations.

Finally, the MTA must engage riders with disabilities—including riders with visual, hearing, mobility, mental health, and cognitive disabilities—*before* installation of platform screen doors and edge barriers to address rider concerns and determine what works best for them.

All New Yorkers deserve a fully accessible subway system, and the MTA will need adequate funding to deliver on that promise. In addition to meeting its settlement obligations regarding elevator installation, the MTA must 1) fix the excessive gaps between subways and platforms, 2) add platform barriers and detectable warning surfaces on platform edges, 3) install wayfinding applications and surfaces to assist passengers who are blind and low-vision, and 4)

improve communication services, including visuals screens and clearer audio announcements on the trains and in the stations.

Elevator installation alone will not ensure that the subways are accessible for people with disabilities. A fully accessible train system would allow the vast majority of the nearly 1 million New Yorkers with disabilities who live, work, and thrive in New York City – in addition to all visitors with disabilities – to utilize traditional mass transit. Further, what benefits riders with disabilities also benefits all other riders including the elderly, people with small children, and delivery workers pushing carts, just to name a few.

### Buses

Due to the lack of accessible subway stations, a higher proportion of New Yorkers rely on the City's buses, which are ostensibly accessible. That said, people with disabilities continue to experience challenges with bus drivers failing to stop for them and to properly secure their wheelchairs.

Further, to the extent that the MTA implements efforts to speed up bus service and lower its costs, the needs of people with disabilities must be considered. While there are many ways to hasten buses, the MTA cannot be permitted to remove bus stops. Doing so will disproportionately harm people with disabilities, forcing them to travel further and often across additional lanes of dangerous traffic. Instead, the MTA must focus on methods such dedicated bus lanes and bus loading platforms to encourage speedier service.

Additionally, if buses are made free, or otherwise less expensive, those same cost-savings must be passed on to Access-A-Ride (AAR). This is in keeping with the MTA's past practices, including the recent fare-free bus pilot program which ran on select buses from 2023-2024. During the pilot program, AAR trips within a certain distance of the free bus lines were also not charged a fare. Therefore, if free buses extends City-wide, so must the benefit be extended to AAR.

### Access-A-Ride (AAR)

AAR serves people who, because of their disabilities, are unable to take subways or buses. By law, AAR must provide comparable service to subways and buses, but it is widely known that the service falls far short of that mandate. With approximately 195,000 users, AAR is a dysfunctional system: rides must be booked at least one day in advance (except for the lucky few who are part of an “on-demand” pilot), rides are chronically late, and riders often endure long, unpredictable, shared rides to get to their destination. We urge the State to take immediate action in the FY27 budget to improve the lives of thousands of New Yorkers with disabilities by addressing AAR’s litany of systemic issues.

The State can support AAR users through these key improvements: 1) streamlining the application process for paratransit riders by revoking the requirement that applicants endure arduous in-person eligibility assessments, and instead accepting proof of eligibility by treating healthcare providers, just as every other paratransit provider in the State currently does (see [A7766/S356](#)), 2) expanding the scope and size of the on-demand pilot – and removing the current caps and ride rationing (see [A1409/S833](#)), 3) extending the discounts available to subway and bus users – namely, the Reduced-Fare program and unlimited weekly and monthly cards – to AAR users, 4) enhancing transparency around AAR user satisfaction by providing more detailed performance data, including with respect to customer complaints and missed trips, and 5) providing data showing AAR trip speeds in the central business district now that the congestion pricing program has been operating for over a year.

Notably, recommendations 1 and 2 above would offer great savings to the MTA, through the reduction in spending needed to operate assessment centers and the much lower cost of on-demand rides compared to traditional AAR rides. Accordingly, we ask that the Legislature and the Governor endeavor to pass and sign into law bills A7766/S356 and A1409/S833.

### Congestion Pricing

NYLPI long supported the passage of the congestion pricing program, which has led to cleaner air for New Yorkers, and has funded transit accessibility improvements to the benefit the disability community. NYLPI, therefore, lauds the Legislature for passing congestion pricing and for ensuring that people with disabilities received an exemption in the law.

Disability advocates, however, continue to push for the improvement of the disability exemption to ensure the broadest possible coverage for people with disabilities. People with disabilities should be among the last people required to pay the toll, as most are unable to use the inaccessible subway system and thus are forced to use road transportation options such as AAR and privately-owned vehicles.

To improve the disability exemption, NYLPI and other disability advocates have made various recommendations to the MTA, including: 1) an app-based tracking program to travel with the person with disabilities, rather than requiring the person with disabilities to register a single vehicle to receive the exemption, thereby acknowledging that many people with disabilities travel in multiple vehicles, not just one, and 2) a remote application process, rather than needlessly burdening people with disabilities with in-person assessments.

Congestion pricing is a boon to the New York City region, but people with disabilities – who have long been shut out of the subway systems due to decades of delays on accessibility improvements – must not now be required to pay the toll.

## Additional Fiscal Savings for the MTA

As the MTA seeks funding to implement its subway improvement plans, it continues to waste money in litigation fees, paying high-priced lawyers to engage in stall tactics which ultimately just delay making desperately-needed accessibility improvements. We encourage the Legislature to call on the MTA to settle its various outstanding anti-discrimination lawsuits. Doing so will ensure that the MTA actually funnels its money into making the system accessible.

## For-Hire Vehicles and Autonomous Vehicles

As the for-hire vehicle (FHV) industry continues to expand, riders with disabilities remain systematically excluded. In New York City, there are more than 106,000 Taxi and Limousine Commission-licensed FHVs in operation, but only about 7% are wheelchair accessible. It's worse still outside the five boroughs, where Uber and Lyft frequently offer no wheelchair accessible vehicle (WAV) options at all. This shortage leads to longer waits, outright unavailability at major hubs, and apps that bury WAV options beneath premium, green and even pet services.

New York's electric vehicle (EV) transition further risks leaving people with disabilities behind because none of the growing EV fleet is accessible.

Finally, the efforts of large autonomous vehicle operators like Waymo to allow driverless FHVs to operate in New York State would similarly exacerbate accessibility disparities, if left unchecked. If autonomous vehicles come to New York, they must come for *all* New Yorkers, and the Legislature must mandate that they are accessible.

To build an accessible and sustainable FHV system, State leaders must adopt targeted reforms. The Legislature should enact a \$1 Statewide per-trip surcharge to fund accessible electric vehicles through the proposed Green Accessible Transition Authority (see [A6635/S5552A](#)). The State must collect and publish data on accessibility, pricing, service availability, and emissions, and require all electric for-hire vehicles to be fully wheelchair accessible. Regulators should also ensure WAVs are deployed where demand is highest and prohibit surge or algorithmic pricing on WAV trips.

Together, these measures – including the passage of A6635/S5552A – will advance New York's equity, mobility, and climate goals while ensuring riders with disabilities are not left behind in the zero-emissions transition.

## **NYC Ferry**

The FY27 budget will allocate \$640 million to non-MTA downstate transit services, including NYC Ferry. Members of the disability community have reported that NYC Ferry suffers from various accessibility issues, including lack of signage, particularly important for those who are Deaf and hearing impaired, as well as a lack of clear and accessible paths from street to landing. The State must ensure that NYC Ferry funding be used to abate such denials of access to people with disabilities.

## **The New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) and the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (the CLCPA)**

NYLPI further requests that the FY2027 budget meaningfully support the implementation of the CLCPA at the NYSDOT. In coalition with dozens of community organizations and thousands of concerned citizens surrounding highway expansions across the State, NYLPI has been advocating for NYSDOT's proper application of the CLCPA's greenhouse gas reduction and equity mandates.

We ask that the budget provide for positions at NYSDOT with expertise in the CLCPA to ensure that all vehicular infrastructure planning includes adequate implementation of the CLCPA across the NYDOT's portfolio. We further urge NYSDOT to require analysis of public transit *as part of* all environmental assessments conducted pursuant to SEQRA prior to infrastructure redesign to ensure that public transit's sustainability effects provide long term pollution and traffic congestion relief to impacted regions before the agency resorts to adding or expanding highway lanes.

NYLPI looks forward to continuing to work with the Legislature and the Governor to enact a budget and legislation that will materially advance disability and environmental justice for all New Yorkers.

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### About New York Lawyers for the Public Interest

For 50 years, New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI) has been a leading civil rights advocate for New Yorkers marginalized by race, poverty, disability, and immigration status. Through our community lawyering model, we bridge the gap between traditional civil legal services and civil rights, building strength and capacity for both individual solutions and long-term impact. Our work integrates the power of individual representation, impact litigation, and comprehensive organizing and policy campaigns. Guided by the priorities of our communities, we strive to achieve equality of opportunity and self-determination for people with disabilities, create equal access to health care, ensure immigrant opportunity, strengthen local nonprofits, and secure environmental justice for low-income communities of color.

### About NYLPI's Disability Justice Program

NYLPI's Disability Justice Program works to advance the civil rights of New Yorkers with disabilities. In the past several years alone, NYLPI disability advocates have represented thousands of individuals and won campaigns improving the lives of hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers. Our landmark victories include mandating that the MTA equitably provide its Access-A-Ride services to all applicants and riders with limited English proficiency. We have worked together with the MTA to bring about an "on demand" Access-A-Ride program and to enable New York's most indigent residents to obtain Fair Fare discounts when using Access-A-Ride. We recently filed a class action lawsuit seeking to permit all Access-A-Ride users to access the same discount programs available to all other MTA transit users, as well as a class action to remedy the enormous gaps between subway cars and subway platforms system-wide.

### About NYLPI's Environmental Justice Program

NYLPI's Environmental Justice Program fights environmental racism, works to eliminate the unfair burden of environmental hazards borne by low-income communities and communities of color, and seeks to create a more equitable and sustainable city. In partnership with community-based organizations, advocacy groups, and residents, our Environmental Justice team builds campaigns, launches litigation, and shapes policy.