



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Charles J. Fuschillo Jr.

Senator Fuschillo's Statement to the Mta Opposing Service Cuts

CHARLES J. FUSCHILLO JR. March 2, 2010

| ISSUE: **MTA (METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY)**

Following is the statement Senator Fuschillo submitted to the MTA as part of its public hearing regarding proposed service cuts:

Dear Chairman Walder and members of the MTA Board,

My name is Charles Fuschillo. I am the state Senator for the eighth senatorial district on Long Island. I regret that I could not be here in person this evening to comment upon a critically important issue, the proposed 2010 MTA service reductions. Since the Legislature is in session, I am required to be in Albany.

As the ranking member of the Senate Transportation Committee, I am very interested and concerned about transportation issues on Long Island and across New York State. The financial problems and service-related issues facing the MTA are very serious and require our full attention.

I recognize that the Metropolitan Transportation Authority is, once again, facing a financial crisis and that the authority is required by law to have a balanced budget. The state budget is due one month from today, and while it's unclear whether that deadline will be met, it's clear that a lot of hard and painful choices will need to be made. Nevertheless, in regard to the issue before you tonight – the MTA's proposal to reduce transit and commuter rail services, as well as to reduce or eliminate free student MetroCard travel in New York City – I am not convinced that the MTA is on the right track.

In the interest of time, I will mainly confine my remarks to the MTA's plan to reduce Long Island Rail Road and Long Island Bus services. I believe that these proposals are unduly harsh, especially after last year's 10% fare increase and all the new taxes and increased fees that were part of last year's massive MTA financial assistance package.

While there have been recent news reports stating that new payroll tax, the centerpiece of the so-called MTA Bailout, isn't yielding as much as expected, which really isn't surprising since I and others stated from the beginning that imposing a payroll tax would hurt businesses and economic activity in the region during the worst economy since the Great Depression, I believe that Long Islanders have more than paid for the services the MTA now wants to cut.

According to State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli, businesses and employers in Nassau and Suffolk Counties are expected to pay \$122 million and \$108 million, or nearly \$230 million in payroll taxes in 2010. In return, the LIRR proposes to essentially eliminate service between Greenport and Ronkonkoma and to discontinue weekend service on the West Hempstead branch. As you should know, there is no alternate service between Greenport and Ronkonkoma. This hardly seems fair, especially for an authority whose mission is to promote regional mass transit. I should point out that none of these LIRR services are within my senatorial district. After being asked to contribute so much more last year, it seems that Long Island is getting a raw deal.

I'd also like to discuss the impact of some of the proposed service cuts that affect my district. Commuters have contacted me about the LIRR's proposal to combine several peak trains on the Babylon Branch. Peak trains are already overcrowded, with many commuters unable to find a seat. This change may make things unbearable for commuters who are now paying up \$274 for a monthly commutation ticket.

There are no alternative for some of the cuts that are being proposed for Long Island Bus. This is true for many of the 210 daily riders of the N95 Farmingdale line, which serves Farmingdale State College. Students depend on this bus service to get to and from campus. Also, there will be no substitute for the thousands who use the N87 and N88 bus lines during the summer to get to Jones Beach. As you undoubtedly know, Jones Beach is one of the crown jewels of New York. The MTA has to realize that cutting these services will leave some people without any travel alternatives.

I'm very concerned about the planned elimination of the N53, which serves as a shuttle service to the Merrick train station. I believe that shuttle services that serve downtown communities and train stations, such as the LIRR station in Merrick, show a worthwhile dedication to both the importance and viability of mass transit. I hope that the N53 service can be saved in some form.

Other service reductions that I would like to mention include the mid-day discontinuance of the N62 in South Freeport. People who use the N36 as an alternate service would spend additional 20 – 25 minutes travelling as a result of having to walk as much as a mile to get a bus.

Clearly, the MTA is in a tough financial spot. The service reductions that the MTA Board is being asked to approve are painful and will have a real human cost. The state is facing its own multi-billion budget deficit. I believe that the state's taxpayers are overburdened and cannot afford more taxes and fees, especially for the MTA, which will receive over \$1.5 billion annually from the revenues that were approved last year. In my opinion, the MTA must do more before considering these service reductions. Last week, MTA chairman Jay Walder announced that elimination of over 1,000 positions at the authority's agencies, including both union and non-union personnel. This effort to cut administrative payroll by 15% is expected to save \$50 million. Can the MTA look harder for management savings so that these cuts are taken off the table, once and for all? Is everyone at the MTA willing to sacrifice something so that core transportation services can be preserved? I certainly hope so.

My constituents on Long Island also hope so. Since last year, Long Islanders are paying higher fares, tolls, fees and taxes to benefit the MTA. We deserve – and have paid for - more, not less, from the MTA. The MTA must do more. The proposed MTA service cuts can't stand. Please revisit the issue and reject the proposed service actions.

I greatly appreciate the opportunity to speak to you. Thank you for your consideration. Good night.