

BRONX INDEPENDENT LIVING SERVICES · BROOKLYN CENTER FOR INDEPENDENCE OF THE DISABLED · CENTER FOR INDEPENDENCE OF THE DISABLED, NEW YORK · DISABILITY RIGHTS NEW YORK · DISABLED IN ACTION-METROPOLITAN NEW YORK · 504 DEMOCRATIC CLUB · HARLEM INDEPENDENT LIVING CENTER · MOBILIZATION FOR JUSTICE · NEW YORK LAWYERS FOR THE PUBLIC INTEREST · STATEN ISLAND CENTER FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING · UNITED SPINAL ASSOCIATION · YAD HACHAZAKAH-THE JEWISH DISABILITY EMPOWERMENT CENTER, INC.

November 26, 2018

Fernando Ferrer
Acting Chair, Metropolitan Transportation Authority
New York, N.Y. 10004

Re: Unfair Access-A-Ride fare hike

Dear Chair Ferrer:

As organizations that advocate for the rights of people with disabilities, we urge you to withdraw the MTA's proposal for an increase in the base fare to \$3 from \$2.75, which would negatively and disproportionately harm people with disabilities who use New York City's Access-A-Ride system.

In January 2017, the MTA board moved to prevent a similar disproportionate increase just before its vote. At the time, our groups praised Gov. Cuomo, Mayor de Blasio and the board for making the right decision by not balancing its budget on the backs of people who can least afford it.

This time, we urge you to avoid the last-minute scramble by preemptively withdrawing the base-fare increase proposal. While many of our groups oppose any fare hike, we all agree that if the fare does go up, it shouldn't hit people with disabilities and very poor people the hardest.

As it did in 2017, the MTA is considering two plans. Option 1 leaves the base fare at \$2.75, which would shield Access-A-Ride users and other low-income riders from a fare increase.

Option 2 would raise the base fare to \$3, a 9.1% increase for Access-A-Ride riders and a much higher percentage increase than other riders would pay. (Access-A-Ride riders pay the base fare and do not receive the benefit of any discounts whatsoever.) For example, riders who buy unlimited 7 or 30 Day Passes would pay much smaller increases than 9.1%—approximately 4.2% to 4.3%.

Simply put, the MTA is about to balance its budget on the backs of those who can least afford it. As the Daily News wrote in an editorial on Sunday, opposing an increase to a \$3 base fare: "The \$2.75 base fare should remain flat, otherwise the poor and Access-A-Ride users will suffer a 9.1% hike."

Disability groups on Access-A-Ride fare hike, November 26, 2018

An Access-A-Ride increase will cause real hardship for people with disabilities, who are disproportionately poor. As we wrote in 2017, the “poverty gap” in New York City between its 930,714 people with disabilities and other New Yorkers is wider in New York City than the rest of the state and the country, with 15% more living in poverty (and 18% in Manhattan) than their neighbors, according to the 2016 American Community Survey.

Thirty-five percent of people with disabilities are living below the federal poverty level, and 58% of individuals with disabilities in New York City are subsisting at or below 200% of the federal poverty level or below. Beyond that, there is an employment gap of 42% between people with disabilities and people who do not have disabilities; only 29% of people with disabilities are employed in New York City. Coming up with the extra cash for their rides will be a struggle for many Access-A-Ride riders.

In addition, Access-A-Ride is notoriously unreliable and often results in significant delays for its users, who do not have alternative forms of transportation for work, medical care, and social activities. The MTA is making efforts to improve Access-A-Ride service, including an innovative “on-demand” pilot test, which we hope the MTA will expand. But, unlike subway and bus riders, most Access-A-Ride riders must book the day before for a ride, and the erratic nature of the service deters many people from seeking increased employment opportunities. Until Access-A-Ride service is improved for all its riders, it’s particularly unfair to consider a fare hike.

People with disabilities should pay only their fair share, and this fare hike will impose a disproportionate burden on them. In 2017, you stood up for the equal rights of people with disabilities as part of a vision for a fairer, more equitable transit system. We urge you to again stand up for people with disabilities again and withdraw this unfair increase. Thank you.

Yours truly,

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Cc: MTA board members

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