



**TESTIMONY OF NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC ADVOCATE LETITIA JAMES  
BEFORE THE METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY ON  
PROPOSED MTA FARE INCREASES**

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CUNY - BROOKLYN COLLEGE**

I would first like to applaud the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's (MTA) continued fiscal discipline, which has helped to limit fare and toll increases to the equivalent of two percent a year, a figure that is below the level the MTA originally predicted. However, like many New Yorkers, I remain concerned that not enough is being done to find a new dedicated source of funding for the Authority. It is imperative that a long-term solution to funding is achieved that will ensure consistent funding to improve, expand and repair the MTA's aging infrastructure.

The first solution is implementing the commuter tax once again for those who work in New York City, but do not live here. The original tax was established in 1971 and equaled 0.45 percent of wages and salaries earned by commuters and 0.65 percent of income from self-employment. The New York City Independent Budget Office estimated in 2013 that if the State Legislature restored the commuter tax at its former rates effective on July 1, 2013, \$802 million would have been raised in 2014. This tax rate is a minimal burden for commuters given the fact that 2011 Census data indicates that among those working full-time in the city, the median earnings of commuters was \$78,000, compared with \$43,800 for city residents.

Next, as the Public Advocate for the City of New York, I commit to working with the MTA, the city and the state to increase direct contributions to the Authority. Over the last 25 years, the City's direct contribution to the MTA capital program has fallen significantly. In 1989, \$950 million dollars went to the Authority. In 2007, it was \$124 million dollars. The current five-year plan for the MTA assumes zero capital contributions from the State and discretionary funding for the MTA was cut by \$30 million this year. Clearly, there is a gap.

Moving to tolls, it is very frustrating to see another increase on the Verrazano Bridge. Staten Island is the borough least served by public transportation, which is why less than 30 percent of residents use public transportation. It is unacceptable to see an increase both for those who live on Staten Island and for those who live in south Brooklyn. The MTA's proposal also fails to provide relief for south Brooklyn residents who were not included in the plan that lowered the tolls for Staten Island.

I urge the MTA to consider these proposals and work with the State to ensure that revenue raised is not solely on the backs of hard-working New Yorkers. I stand ready to push for these measures because the status quo methods are not working.

Thank you for your time and consideration.