

Testimony of
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(NYPTA)

At the Joint Hearing of the

Senate Standing Committee on Finance
&
Assembly Standing Committee on Ways and Means

Concerning the SFY 2016-17 Executive Budget Proposal
Relating to Transportation

Albany, NY

Wednesday, January 20, 2016

9:30 AM

Hearing Room B

Thank you, Chairman Farrell and Chairwoman Young, for giving the New York Public Transit Association (NYPTA) the opportunity to testify today about Governor Andrew Cuomo's proposed 2016-17 Executive Budget. My name is Bill Carpenter; I am the Chief Executive Officer for the Rochester Genesee Regional Transportation Authority and the Vice-President of NYPTA. NYPTA members include transit systems, private sector manufacturers and suppliers, state agencies and community advocates.

Transit's Role in Economic Growth

Communities throughout New York benefit from the services provided by more than 100 public transit systems. Our members serve urban and rural areas, enabling mobility and connections that keep our state moving. We know that the metropolitan New York City area cannot function without the high quality transit service provided by the MTA. And the same is true for cities and towns in upstate New York and throughout the state. Providing more mobility choices is a critical and in-demand need where I live and work in Rochester, here in Albany, in Ithaca, Binghamton and all across the state. Today, more than ever before, we need high quality transit service to allow our citizens to fully participate in economic opportunities.

Mobility choices provided by transit systems support many of the state's important programs – economic development, job growth, anti-poverty, housing, energy conservation and environmental protection. Well planned and thoughtful transit services are essential to moving people to jobs in cities and in expanding suburban areas, while also providing access to healthcare, to schools, and to colleges and universities. Transit provides our growing senior population and people with disabilities the freedom and choices they need to live their lives and participate in society.

Our member systems do this work every day. We employ thousands of people who drive buses, who maintain them, and who work together to market our services and make it more attractive to new markets. Transit ridership is growing in many communities and systems are responding by making services easier to use and understand. Innovative technologies are making fare payment easier, real time information applications are in many of our systems, along with customer features that making using buses and trains inviting and appealing. Our growing popularity is why we are asking for an appropriate investment in transit so we can provide more and better services to our communities.

The Governor's executive budget includes modest increases in transit operating aid. This assistance will allow transit systems to maintain current services, but it will not allow us to expand and meet customer expectations that support the State's economic development initiatives.

To allow transit systems to fully support the economic opportunities that our citizens deserve, NYPTA recommends an additional \$15 million in operating aid for upstate transit systems and \$5 million for downstate suburban county transit systems. A structural fix to Upstate funding is still needed so that future growth is not constrained.

Need for a Multi-Year Statewide Transit Capital Program

For far too long, the capital needs of upstate and downstate suburban transit systems have been an afterthought. All of us have diverted federal capital funding to subsidize operations. In essence, we have borrowed from tomorrow to pay for today. This is not sustainable and we are at a critical funding crossroad – the time to fix this and to invest in transit is now.

New York transit systems, from our largest member, the MTA, to our smallest member, in Watertown, have infrastructure that needs to be upgraded. Old buses and rail cars need to be replaced; rail track needs to be upgraded; facilities must be repaired, and communications equipment need modernization. The lack of consistent capital investment has led to worsening infrastructure conditions and unnecessary maintenance expenses. For example:

- The NFTA in Buffalo has 46% of its buses beyond their useful life; and miles of service between interruptions has worsened.
- Almost 60% of Broome County’s bus fleet is beyond its useful life, increasing maintenance costs.
- 20% of CDTA’s buses in Albany are beyond their useful life; these buses cost twice as much to maintain as younger buses.
- RGRTA in Rochester has a 40 year old decaying maintenance facility that needs to be replaced.
- CNYRTA in Syracuse and Nassau County have 20 year old CNG fueling facilities that must be replaced.

The Governor has committed \$8.3 billion to fund the MTA five-year capital program. His goal is to “transform the Metropolitan Transportation Authority and to dramatically improve the travel experience for millions of New Yorkers and visitors to the metropolitan region”. We support this initiative and the money to accomplish it.

Transit customers in upstate and downstate communities deserve the same transformation and we are asking for the same fully funded, multi-year capital program. Our systems need an additional investment of more than \$500 million over the next 5 years to bring our infrastructure up to a state of good repair. In total, our systems operate 3,000 buses and serve over 170 million customers each year. Together, we would rank as the 7th largest transit system in the nation.

The executive budget proposes a \$295 million capital program for Non-MTA transit systems as part of the proposed \$22 billion DOT five-year program. We thank the Governor for recognizing our work, but the proposed funding is not enough to address the infrastructure needs of our systems.

NYPTA recommends a state capital of investment of at least \$100 million per year in upstate and suburban downstate transit, to allow systems to modernize aging infrastructure. To achieve this level, and provide funding to these systems in proportion to state capital aid to the MTA, the 5-year program for Non-MTA transit should be increased from \$295 million to \$545 million.

Rural Transit Service

Transit systems in the rural parts of the upstate region are suffering from severe ridership loss as a result of the state’s change in the way that Medicaid transportation is arranged. The decline in riders and revenue on rural upstate systems has resulted in service reductions to the general public and it is threatening the viability of services to those who need them most.

NYPTA recommends that the state provide additional funding to rural transit systems so that essential services can be retained.

Conclusion

Transit service provides mobility for a growing customer base and it allows everyone to participate in the economic rebirth of our communities. NYPTA members appreciate the funding and support we receive, and we ask for consideration of the capital and operating needs of our transit systems. Increased investment in transit will result in better service and more cost effective delivery. This investment will also insure thousands of jobs for the state’s transit manufacturers and suppliers. A fully funded transit capital and operating plan guarantees that all New Yorkers have the mobility choices they want and need.

On behalf of NYPTA and RGRTA, I urge Governor Cuomo and the Legislature to support a better network of transit systems in New York State that can contribute to economic growth. NYPTA is committed to working with the Governor and all of you so that transit can continue to be a strong partner. Thank you.