

Testimony of
The New York Public Transit Association
(NYPTA)
For the Public Hearing of the
Assembly Standing Committee on Transportation
Impact of the State Budget on Upstate Transit Systems
Albany, NY
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Hamilton Hearing Room B

Thank you, Chairman Gantt, and members of the Assembly Transportation Committee for giving the New York Public Transit Association (NYPTA) the opportunity to submit testimony before the Committee on the Impact of the State Budget on upstate transit systems.

NYPTA is a not-for-profit association representing public transit agencies throughout the State. Our members include public transit providers, private sector manufacturers and suppliers, state agencies, and community advocates.

Demand for Transit Service is Growing

Transit ridership is rising in many areas of the state and both the public and business communities are demanding more and better service. Adequate transit service is essential to ensuring the mobility that supports economic and community growth.

The Governor and Legislature have made reviving the New York economy a priority, with new business development emerging across the state. Our transit systems are building on this success by providing connections to jobs, education, recreation and health care. Demand for services is increasing and our work must continue with adequate resources provided for communities throughout the state.

New York transit systems are the lynch-pin for sustainable development and the mobility they provide is essential to the success of many state initiatives, including:

- Economic development and job growth
- Anti-poverty and affordable housing programs
- Sustainable communities and smart growth development
- Energy conservation and environmental protection

But the reviving economy, growth in ridership and changing travel markets are placing new demands on transit – to access new job locations, to address changing travel patterns, to meet the travel needs of millennials and a growing senior population, and implement new technology demanded by riders.

The demands for more transit service come from communities across upstate New York, as well as the downstate suburbs.

- In Buffalo, expanded service along Niagara Falls Boulevard will connect a growing suburb to downtown jobs and retail. Extension of the light rail system will spur new development.
- In Rochester, service is needed to support the growth of Monroe Community College and RIT, as well as the new del Lago casino and Maximus.
- The Capital region is being asked to provide more service to the growing high-tech and medical complexes, and help support the resurging downtowns in the region.
- Syracuse, Utica, Binghamton, Ithaca, Elmira and Glens Falls, as well as many downstate counties, all have demands for more service that cannot be met with existing resources.

To meet these needs, transit systems are working to innovate, transform and provide new solutions that help communities grow. Strategic investment and new funding opportunities are required to expand route networks and support additional services to meet these demands.

The annual funding need to expand transit services to address the new opportunities to provide connections to expanding businesses and better meet changing travel needs exceeds \$20 million.

Maintain Existing Essential Transit Services

As transit systems adapt to the challenges of a growing economy, the cost to provide existing services continues to increase, as annual expenses to operate the system rise with inflation. Transit systems have maximized their efficiency, but many expenses are beyond their control.

Predictable growth in operating support is necessary for upstate and downstate transit systems to continue essential services that are so important to millions of New Yorkers.

Many of our rural and small urban transit systems are struggling to maintain basic services in the wake of lost Medicaid ridership and revenues. NYPTA is working with its smaller systems to develop recommendations to preserve and improve transit service in these communities.

Impact of 2016-17 State Budget and 5-Year Transportation Capital Program

The transit industry appreciates the funding included in the 2016-17 state budget. This funding allows us to maintain services this year and begin to address the backlog of capital needs.

While the near-term funding is welcomed by all of us, the lack of growth in upstate transit resources is an issue that still needs to be addressed in the future - so that upstate transit systems can benefit from the same type of stable, growing state aid as downstate systems.

An important part of the budget agreement this year was the state's commitment to a \$395 million, 5-year capital program for non-MTA transit systems. NYPTA is thankful for the increased state investment in our systems.

This new funding will help transit systems across the state improve the condition of their infrastructure and continue to provide safe and reliable service. It will be used to replace over-age buses, rehabilitate deteriorating passenger and maintenance facilities, and implement new technology such as real time information and modern fare payment. To respond to ridership growth and new markets, some systems need to expand their bus fleets.

- In Buffalo, NFTA will use state capital aid to replace old transit buses and do much needed rehabilitation work on our 30 year old light rail track, tunnels, stations and other infrastructure.
- In Rochester, RTS will construct a new service building at its central campus and replace buses.
- CDTA will purchase buses and install new communication and fare equipment.
- CNYRTA must rehabilitate its 20 year old CNG fueling facility and replace old buses.
- Smaller upstate cities have fewer resources available, but urgent needs to replace over-age buses.

It is essential that this new state capital funding be delivered in a timely and predictable manner - to allow transit systems to efficiently plan their capital projects.

Conclusion

New York benefits in many ways from the more than 100 transit systems throughout the State. Increasing investment in transit infrastructure leads to improved conditions, safer and more reliable service, and lower operating costs. Increased investment creates and retains thousands of jobs in the state's transit manufacturing and supply industry.

NYPTA thanks you and the Committee for your past support of public transit. We are committed to working alongside the Governor and the Legislature to ensure that New York transit systems can meet the new demands for service and support sustainable economic growth in our communities across the state.