

STATEMENT ON SERVICE CUTS

MTA Board Meeting

March 24, 2010

Since December – when the MTA re-adopted the 2009 doomsday transit service cuts over a weekend – I have been asked scores of times, “What happened?”

Riders say to me: “Our fares went up in June and the state legislature passed a big transit subsidy bill in May. And while ridership is down a little, it’s still at record levels. So why are we facing greater crowding and longer waits on many subway lines and the loss or downsizing of dozens of bus routes?”

I tell riders the facts as I know them: The State cut \$143 million from the MTA’s budget to help balance theirs. And many of the special state taxes dedicated to transit are performing well below estimates in tough economic times.

But then riders ask: “Is the MTA doing all it can to protect service now?” What can I say but “No.” It is true you restored some bus routes; riders are grateful. All the subway cuts remain, as do 90% of the bus cuts. So, the cup is 1/10 full or 9/10’s empty.

The bottom line is that millions on subways and tens of thousands on buses will still have longer waits and more crowding.

As I stand here, you and I both know that many of the services proposed for cutting have long been on the endangered species list at New York City Transit.

And as I stand here, you refuse to use 10% of MTA federal stimulus money to help maintain service, like many other cities in the United State are doing.

You say the stimulus money only is a one-shot. But that’s the whole point. Congress and the President recognized it was in the national interest to help transit agencies maintain service through this troubled economy.

You say using stimulus money for service would be stealing capital funds to pay for operations. But it is not. Tell that to the transit systems that are opting to use these funds, like Chicago, Washington, D.C., Atlanta and Seattle.

And as I stand here, the MTA is planning to spend \$50 million in operating funds on capital projects. How can you direct operating funds to capital and thereby worsen service cuts at a time when the operating budget is badly pinched?

Deep cuts to service will only darken the climate for future capital investment. And you wonder why your credibility is so frayed with the riding public.

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