



ASSOCIATION OF COMMUTER RAIL EMPLOYEES

**TESTIMONY ON BEHALF OF
THE ASSOCIATION OF COMMUTER RAIL EMPLOYEES**

**TO THE SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON
CORPORATIONS, AUTHORITIES AND COMMISSIONS
AND THE SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION**

SEPTEMBER 29, 2021

Good afternoon Senate Chairs Comrie and Kennedy, and distinguished members of the New York State Senate Standing Committee on Corporations, Authorities and Commissions and the Senate Standing Committee on Transportation. I am Edward Valente, and I am here today to speak on behalf of the approximately 2,000 essential Metro-North Railroad operating craft employees represented by the Association of Commuter Rail Employees (“ACRE”). Our titles include Conductors, Engineers, Power Directors, Rail Traffic Controllers, Signalmen, Yardmasters, and Assistant Stationmasters, all united under one labor organization. We thank your committees for the opportunity to testify at this important hearing on the MTA in the aftermath of COVID-19 and its receipt of federal aid, as well as on the MTA Transformation Plan.

I will start by paying tribute to the essential workers who ensured continued commuter service throughout the entirety of the COVID-19 pandemic. ACRE members heeded the call – at great personal risk every day – in order to ensure that the trains continued to operate for the first responders, the health care professionals, other essential workers, and others as the economy began reopening. However, despite ACRE’s continued objections, basic COVID-19 protocols were difficult (if not

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impossible) to comply with due to a skeletal schedule, packing trains and precluding appropriate social distancing.

Turning towards the MTA Transformation plan: this effort was intended to consolidate sprawling bureaucratic departments with the hope and anticipation that the authority would be more efficient. However, from ACRE's perspective, there has been no downsizing except for public-facing service, and in contrast, we are faced with more bureaucracy than ever. It appears that most decisions are made at MTA HQ, so all levels of Metro-North management are completely handcuffed on matters of policy despite being our designated points of contact. Centralizing decision-making does not reduce inefficiencies if there is no corresponding reduction in the bureaucracy. Even the most routine, daily interfacing between ACRE and Metro-North often requires our counterparts in management to circle back to MTA HQ before they can provide us with a response.

In contrast, the MTA has directly eliminated service-side jobs. Cutting these service jobs directly translates to cutting customer satisfaction and commuter safety. For example, the Transformation Plan cut two Assistant Station Masters ("ASM") jobs. These workers provide a myriad of duties including, but not limited to: assisting customers during track changes or service disruptions, ensuring escalators are working properly, notifying the MTAPD of any intoxicated customers that pose a safety risk, and notifying the MTA police of any criminal activity. In fact, several years ago, an ASM saved someone's life by performing CPR on them.¹ Prior to these cuts, an ASM was dedicated to the north end access of Grand Central Terminal, and currently the ASMs do not have dedicated coverage, with ASMs expected to cover the

¹ CBS NY: *MTA Police, Metro-North Fire Brigade & Commuter Save Man's Life In Grand Central*
<https://newyork.cbslocal.com/2015/02/02/mta-police-metro-north-fire-brigade-member-commuter-credited-with-saving-mans-life-in-grand-central/>

main terminal and check in on the NEA when they have time. It is not in the best interest of patrons for the agency to reduce the number of service workers, and ACRE strongly urges the MTA to reduce inefficiencies and redundancies in its bureaucracy, rather than eliminating workers on the frontline.

In addition, ACRE has a number of proposals of our own that we see as a true transformation plan for Metro-North Railroad:

1. Expediting Metro-North's expansion in the east Bronx will seed new opportunities, and further encourage residents to ditch cars and congestion. In addition, the creation of a new line will lead to more job opportunities for the Railroad – conductors, engineers, rail traffic controllers, signal maintainers, and more – allowing us to service a growing transit need while continuing to prove that we are the best at what we do.
2. As President Rinaldi has often said, Metro-North is a regional railroad, and management should keep an open mind in order to remain ahead of the curve. It has been long talked about, but now is the time to consider expanding service to Albany. For all the economic upheaval wrought by the pandemic, easier access to the greater public transit network is an important antidote that would provide new lifelines and opportunities by linking our region together.
3. Even before expanding, Metro-North must meet the demands of ridership. For example, the Railroad is not running enough express trains to meet the demands of customers during “rush hour” service. ACRE has strongly advocated for increased service for months, and it is time management addresses this need rather than continuing to dig in its heels.

4. Finally, ACRE also believes that the MTA should be looking forward in regard to environmental impact upon the railroad. A massive storm on the evening of September 1, 2021, literally shut down the system, with much of Metro-North territory flooded. This weather-related disruption should be perceived as the norm, rather than the exception, and the agency must put a plan in place to address the various impacts of climate change upon its infrastructure.

In conclusion, ACRE looks forward to working closely with the MTA, Metro-North and, as always, the New York State Legislature to ensure that regional riders have a safe and efficient commuter experience, and that our membership is safe as they service the riding public. ACRE remains committed to a transformation that improves the quality of service our members provide to a growing number of riders. We believe that the future of public commuter rail transportation requires an alliance between the MTA, its employees, elected officials, and the public we all serve. With your assistance and oversight, we are committed to working with all railway stakeholders to continue to expand and improve the safe, efficient service the taxpayers and riding public expect and deserve.

I thank you for your time and consideration, and I look forward to answering any questions the panel may have.