

IRUM INSTITUTE FOR RATIONAL URBAN MOBILITY, INC.

Statement at New York City Council Committee on State & Federal Legislation Hearing on Recommendations of NYC Traffic Mitigation Commission --- March 24, 2008

The Institute for Rational Urban Mobility is a NYC-based not-for-profit corporation concerned with reducing motor vehicular congestion in dense urban places and improving public transportation. IRUM strongly supports legislation introduced by Governor David A. Paterson on March 21, 2008 that calls for enacting the recommendations of the NYC Traffic Mitigation Commission, and urges the Council to fully endorse this proposed legislation. Price is central to reducing traffic congestion and an \$8 fee to enter the Manhattan Central Business District (CBD) is the only practical way to move toward this goal. Furthermore, this legislation provides assurance that funds raised from this fee will be used to fund MTA's capital program. An important feature of the legislation is the addition of a representative of the City Council to the Capital Program Review Board, which has veto power over the MTA Capital Program, a much-needed reform.

While some members of the City Council and State Legislature have voiced concern that this fee will penalize large numbers of low income motorists, IRUM and other transport advocacy organizations dispute this assertion. IRUM does support legislation to establish an adjudication bureau, modeled after the successful ones operating in health care, environmental protection, parking violations and fare evasion, to process legitimate hardship exceptions that will be extremely small in number, and should be limited to no more than one percent of the 800,000 motorists who drive into the Manhattan CBD each weekday.

IRUM also supports passage of legislation that would fully fund MTA's 2008-2013 Capital Program. Much of this \$29.5 billion program is targeted toward maintaining the bus, subway and commuter rail system in a good state of repair. Program elements that allow system expansion are very narrowly limited in geographic extent, and IRUM recommends that projects like the first segment of the 2nd Avenue subway, and the LIRR East Side Access Project be funded by special tax benefit districts, similar to the one being used for the #7 subway extension. Funds generated by congestion fees come from motorists from the entire metropolitan area and should be directed toward projects that have system wide benefits.

Finally, IRUM urges MTA not to issue "revenue bonds" to pay for recurring renewal projects like track repairs and signal modernization. These projects should be funded by regular appropriations from the State Legislature and the City Council. MTA bus and rail services operate at a substantial deficit, and there is no "net revenue" to pay off these bonds. This subterfuge should be ended, removing MTA's staggering long term debt from the backs of transit riders. IRUM recommends that motor vehicles, whose unfettered use in dense urban areas results in substantial costs that burden society as a whole, should be the primary source of funds needed to retire this debt. Then MTA can increase service and offer more attractive fares. For example, it could greatly reduce the price of unlimited ride passes, which account for more than half of the trips using NYC buses and subways. For pass holders, each additional ride is free, the reason that ridership has soared in the years since these passes were introduced. MTA could also expand its CityTicket program for commuter rail lines within the city, remaking these operations into a Regional Rail system, with frequent service and integrated fares, shifting riders from overcrowded subway lines while improving service in the suburbs as well.

IRUM has recently completed a study of free transit in NYC, sponsored by famed labor mediator Theodore Kheel. The study found that free transit, paid for by very high cordon fees, would reduce traffic entering the Manhattan CBD by 31%. This would produce profound benefits to transit riders and motorists alike. The NYC Traffic Mitigation Commission's plan can demonstrate the feasibility of this vision. IRUM urges the City Council to provide global leadership in this age of planetary warming, recognize the economic, social and environmental costs of excessive auto use and attendant congestion in NYC, and approve the Commission's plan.

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