

Environmental Defense Fund
Natural Resources Defense Council
NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign
Regional Plan Association
Transportation Alternatives
Tri-State Transportation Campaign
Women's City Club of New York

April 22, 2008

Hon. David Paterson
Governor
Executive Chambers
State Capitol
Albany, New York 12224

Dear Governor Paterson:

We write to ask for your leadership to win measures this legislative session that would tackle congestion in the downstate metropolitan area.

Our groups believe that New York can still agree on ways to effectively take on traffic jams and fund decent and affordable mass transit. After months of intense debate over our congestion woes, it should not end just leaving drivers stuck in traffic and transit riders crushed like sardines. New Yorkers deserve better.

We are heartened by your appointment of a blue ribbon panel – headed by Richard Ravitch – to consider ways to meet the financial needs of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority in difficult fiscal times. By our calculation, the MTA faces an astonishing \$17.5 billion deficit in a proposed \$29.5 billion five-year capital program. We look forward to working with the panel.

Our groups believe a package of congestion busting reforms could be adopted in this session. These include winning state legislation to give New York City:

- **a tool it needs to make buses go faster.** New York City has the slowest bus speeds in America; it takes more time to go on the M-15 from Harlem to City Hall than to travel on Amtrak from New York to Philadelphia. It doesn't have to be this way. The experience in other cities show camera enforcement is the most effective way to speed up pokey buses, especially when coupled with other "bus rapid transit" strategies. The City has submitted legislation that would authorize bus-mounted camera enforcement on a pilot basis on five upcoming "bus rapid transit" lines. This measure has stalled over privacy concerns, but these can and should be addressed.

- **residential parking permits.** A study in 2007 by the advocacy group Transportation Alternatives showed that 45% of cars on the streets of Park Slope, Brooklyn were cars cruising for parking spots. As originally envisioned by the City, this permit system would be designed to discourage all day parking by commuters who use neighborhood as a parking lot. Assembly Member Jim Brennan has offered his version of ways to ensure both a neighborhood and citywide perspective. Originally proposed by the City as part of its congestion pricing legislation, it still should be enacted separately.
- **a more effective way to enforce traffic violations.** New York City has proposed to deter drivers from blocking an intersection, through increasing the fine and allowing traffic enforcement agents to issue tickets to be mailed later by entering a license plate number into a handheld device. Currently, only police officers and a small number of enforcement agents can issue summonses, which must be given out at the scene. Authorizing all agents (there are currently 2,800) to issue tickets would sharply increase enforcement.

Our groups also suggest that a detailed environmental review of all the options for reducing congestion in downstate New York begin now. In view of its compressed time schedule to complete its report, the State Traffic Mitigation Commission was not able to undertake a traditional study under the State Environmental Quality Review Act. Now that the federal deadline for the Urban Partnership Agreement grant has passed, there is time for a full SEQRA study of the range of options, including the Commission's proposal; a modified congestion pricing plan (for example, with exemptions for medical necessity and other changes raised by legislators); tolling the East River Bridges; encouraging ride sharing; mandated car pooling; and restricting driving on certain days based on license plate numbers. Such a review could give all the interested parties – including the next Mayor – a set of agreed upon facts about the menu of options.

We also believe that there should be a study investigating downstate freight movement and methods to reduce its impacts on communities and help the downstate region plan for a future growth in truck traffic. Truck traffic is the fastest growing portion of traffic in New York City and State. Steadily rising truck volumes will increasingly impose a range of negative impacts on the state's communities – air and noise pollution, damaged infrastructure, community impacts in urban neighborhoods, traffic congestion on many major highways and increased danger to pedestrians and drivers. Such a study could look at the potential for a downstate truck network to improve goods movement throughout the region, investigate ways to better capitalize on satellite distribution centers outside of New York City, and map out potential investments in rail and barge freight capacity to help alleviate the impact of trucks on roads and bridges, and to improve significantly and integrate the freight rail system on the east side of the Hudson River in downstate New York with the national freight rail system.

These state actions would greatly complement New York City's current congestion-busting measures, including: cutting down on City-issued parking permits; adding more traffic enforcement agents; increasing the price of metered on-street parking; and making New York a better and safer place for pedestrians and cyclists.

Our groups believe that there is consensus in Albany about the scope of New York City's traffic dilemma. We urge you to win these changes by the end of the 2008 session.

Sincerely,

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