

September 26, 2008

Ravitch Commission on MTA Financing  
633 Third Avenue, 38th Floor  
New York, NY 10017



To: Commissioner Ravitch and Members of the Commission on MTA Financing  
Governor David Paterson

The Women's City Club of New York is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that has shaped public policy in many areas of contemporary concern since 1915.

We commend Governor Paterson's actions in establishing a commission to study ways to deal with the MTA's looming budget shortfalls, and in appointing Richard Ravitch as its chair. The Women's City Club recognizes the crucial role played by public transit in maintaining the economic vitality of our region and the well-being of its residents. Adequate funding must be found to ensure that current MTA facilities are brought to a state of good repair and that the highest priority needs for service expansion can be met. We believe that a broad-based, multi-pronged approach will be necessary to ensure that the ultimate funding measures are, taken together, equitable to all New Yorkers, across all neighborhoods and economic levels, as well as to commuters and businesses across the region.

As one source of funding, we continue to support the implementation of a pilot congestion pricing program, along the lines recommended by the New York City Traffic Congestion Mitigation Commission in January 2008. Such a program would not only improve traffic flow in the highly congested Central Business District of Manhattan, but would also provide sorely needed funds for mass transit improvements.

The Women's City Club has also long supported the imposition of tolls on the East River bridges, with the revenues to be used for the maintenance and repair of the crossings. We strongly recommend that this revenue approach be pursued at this time, if not as part of a congestion pricing program, then as a separate initiative.

In addition, we believe that whatever the initiatives recommended to provide the needed funding, the Commission should also propose ways to make the MTA's operating and capital finances more transparent and accountable. Events of the past year, including abrupt changes in MTA capital plans and multiple proposed fare increases, and most recently disturbing reports of possible abuse of employee benefit programs at the LIRR, have raised concerns about the MTA's financial credibility and responsibility. Public support for additional financing will be very hard to come by without additional safeguards and oversight.

We appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the Commission's deliberations on this critically important issue.

Sincerely,  
Ruth E. Acker, President  
Joan S. Freilich, Chair, Infrastructure Committee