



The Council of the City of New York

For Immediate Release

Monday, October 16, 2017

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Council Members Rosenthal, Rodriguez Join Elected Officials and Advocates in Call for Independent Commission to Study Runaway MTA Costs

NEW YORK -- Elected officials and advocacy organizations gathered today on the steps of City Hall to call for the creation of an independent commission to study cost reform at the MTA.

The call stems from independent research which shows that the MTA has [by far the highest transit construction costs](#) in the world, spending many times more than other global cities for similar projects. The independent commission sought by the elected officials would be tasked with studying the cause of these outsized costs and proposing reforms to address them.

The group pointed to the urgency of addressing this issue now, as New Yorkers consider the \$836 million sought by the MTA to make emergency repairs and the over \$8 billion more requested to make long-term fixes.

"New York City simply cannot afford to keep spending more and getting less," said **Council Member Helen Rosenthal**, Chair of the Council's Committee on Contracts. "This isn't about cutting costs for the sake of cutting costs, it's about making sure we're able to meet the transportation needs of New Yorkers in the 21st century."

"Without meaningful cost reform, it will be impossible for New York to meet the current crisis in service--let alone achieve critical long term goals like making the system fully accessible or expanding service into transit deserts," Rosenthal continued.

"New Yorkers deserve a modern and efficient subway system," said **Council Member Ydanis Rodriguez**, chair of the Council's Committee on Transportation. "The alternative is the current MTA crisis resulting in severe delays, derailments, and costing New Yorkers their wages."

"We must take a look at the reasons why it's costing us more and taking us longer to make improvements in New York City compared to other major cities with similarly complex transit systems. More cost effective work will contribute to upgrading our 100 year old signal system sooner than the year 2045 and accelerate accessibility projects, making our subway system more equitable for all New Yorkers," Rodriguez said.

In August, Council Members Rosenthal and Rodriguez wrote a letter to MTA Chair Joe Lhota calling for the creation of such a commission. They also wrote an [op-ed](#) publicly

outlining the need for cost reform at the MTA. The MTA has not responded to their request for an independent commission.

"When he was appointed by Governor Cuomo in June, Chairman Lhota promised a top to bottom review of the MTA organization," said **David Bragdon, Executive Director of TransitCenter**. "A candid analysis would have been a strong start to addressing the exorbitant subway construction costs in New York that are two to four times as high as in other developed cities. But despite Chair Lhota's promise, apparently there *are* sacred cows. Continued denial lowers the odds for a successful long-range subway recovery."

"At a time when the state is not doing all it should and the MTA's misplaced priorities are becoming more evident, any ideas to help solve the current subway crisis are welcome," said **State Senator Michael Gianaris**. "New Yorkers rely heavily on our mass transit system and we must insist the MTA do better with the resources it has."

The MTA's outsized spending has been the case for projects both big and small. The MTA keeps breaking its own record for the most expensive subway extension in world history. While Paris, for instance, was recently able to build a new line for \$370 million per mile, Phase I of the Second Avenue subway cost \$2.7 *billion* per mile. Meanwhile, the cost of elevator installations has ballooned such that the MTA does not even include them when undergoing station renovations.

"Any lasting solution for the deterioration of our transit system has to include new revenue to finance repairs and a guarantee that the public is getting good value for the investment we're making," said **John Raskin, Executive Director of the Riders Alliance**. "Taxpayers, car drivers and transit riders will be more willing to fund our vital public transit system when we feel confident that the money is used efficiently and that it will result in real improvements for transit riders. Thanks to Council Members Rosenthal and Rodriguez for pushing to make sure our transit spending is as strategic and efficient as possible."

"If we want to have a high functioning mass transit system where delays, signal malfunctions, and other breakdowns are not commonplace, we must find a way to control costs," said **Assemblyman Robert Carroll**. "The MTA currently has the twin problem of lacking the necessary funding to do major capital improvements to modernize its infrastructure and mismanaging the funds that have been allocated, causing projects to cost far more than they should. Not only have the costs of the new Second Avenue Subway been astounding, but rather pedestrian improvements like elevators balloon to sums that are unimaginable. In my district, the MTA has estimated that the installation of three elevators at the 7th Avenue stop on the F line would exceed \$30 Million Dollars. I join the New York City Council in calling for the creation of this commission to deal with this critical matter. If we do not properly manage the resources of the MTA we will never achieve the high functioning mass transit system that our city deserves."

"It's imperative for New York City to take control of its transit destiny," said **Paul Steely White, Executive Director of Transportation Alternatives**. "If our transit system is to meet the basic transportation needs of all New Yorkers, as well as welcome new riders, common sense projects must not be cost prohibitive. Transportation Alternatives applauds Council Members Rodriguez and Rosenthal on their leadership on this important issue."

"Whether it's our theater, shopping, or even bagels, New York City is rightfully at the top of many world's greatest lists," said **Council Member Dan Garodnick**. "But when it comes to our transit construction costs -- the highest on the planet -- something needs to be done. We must ensure that New Yorkers' tax dollars are spent effectively as we maintain, repair, and expand our subway system. Cost reform is a key step towards having a truly great city for generations to come."

"It is our responsibility to ensure that the commuters of New York City have the access to

quality and safe transportation," said **Council Member Carlos Menchaca**. "We have seen the cost of a single ride rise to \$2.75, roughly doubling in the last two decades, but with a decline of offered services. When we are spending nearly \$3 billion per mile to expand our subway, about ten times as much as comparable countries pay, it is time to create an independent voice with regards to spending our taxpayer dollars. When we create this independent commission, it is important that the workers of the MTA and their subcontractors are treated fairly, and not taken advantage of as we look to reign in costs. We can and must provide quality and safe transportation at a reasonable cost, and we can do so while still fulfilling our responsibility to treat workers fairly."

"The MTA's capital construction costs are outrageous when compared to those of peer systems," said **Council Member Barry S. Grodenchik**. "Many other cities manage to build at lower costs, making it clear that the MTA's system needs reform. The taxpayers and fare payers are continually being asked to contribute more; they deserve to know that the money is going to be spent in a fiscally responsible way."

"For too long, riders have had to bear the brunt of rising fare costs while being forced to accept the declining state of our mass transit system," said **Council Member Margaret Chin**. "We deserve an effective, reliable transit system that addresses our fundamental needs as a growing, diverse City. An independent commission would identify reforms that allow the MTA to manage taxpayer dollars efficiently, and prevent the State and MTA from passing the buck to our City's taxpayers. I join my Council colleagues and fellow New Yorkers to demand meaningful cost reform now."

The MTA's next board meeting is scheduled for October 25 at 10:00AM at the MTA Board Room, 2 Broadway, 20th Floor.

UPDATE: After this morning's press conference, Council Members Rosenthal and Rodriguez found in their mailbox a [letter mailed last week](#) by MTA Chairman Joseph Lhota. This came in response to their August 10th letter calling for an independent commission to study the MTA's capital costs.

Strikingly, the MTA's letter makes no mention of the call for an independent commission. Rather, the letter offers some potential factors for the MTA's extremely high capital construction costs and outlines some of the internal organizational changes the agency has announced in recent months.

"An independent and transparent commission to study the MTA's capital costs is necessary to deliver the real reform straphangers are counting on," said Council Members Rosenthal and Rodriguez. "Chairman Lhota's letter did not address this call, but the investigation of the potential factors the MTA laid out is exactly the role an independent body could play. We appreciate the MTA's offer to work with us on cost reform and hope they will support an independent commission to further their efforts."

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